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THE IMAGE OF THE MADONNA IN
A SELECTION OF NOVELS BY
HENRY JAMES

by

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—abstract—

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the thematic significance of various female characters in a selection of novels by Henry James. In the world James creates, characters will often idealize a central female character by being conscious of her in terms of a specific archetypal image, the Madonna. The Jamesian heroine is repeatedly understood by other characters in relation to various art forms—portraits, religious icons, even architectural structures—that are either direct or implied representations of the Virgin. The affiliation of a woman with works of art suggests, however, an attempt to attribute to a human being the beauty and permanence of art, and so gives rise to an illusion of sublimity that no human being can hope to sustain. The attempt to apotheosize woman beyond the range of her human capabilities fails to account for her humanity. Consequently, as an alternative to whatever psychological predispositions cause man to idealize woman, James affirms through the course of his novels the need to recognize a woman's humanity and the realistic framework within which life must be lived.

In the 1877 edition of The American, the characterization of Claire de Cintr  introduces the

problem of how the idealization of a woman may deny her a full involvement with life. Claire becomes wholly synonymous with a work of art in the thoughts of other characters. She is denied a human identity, and becomes purely a sublime image, the vera ikon. The development of each of James's later heroines involves the quest of a central female character away from the possibility of apotheosis. Each of the later heroines pursues not an affiliation with the sublime, but rather the experiences and fulfilments of life.

In The Portrait of a Lady, The Princess Casamassima, and The Spoils of Poynton, this quest condemns the Jamesian heroine to a life of sorrows and disillusionments. However, The Wings of the Dove heralds the final phase of James's career as he moves towards substantiating the humanity of a central female character. The novels of the "major phase" delineate how the recognition of a woman's humanity is instrumental in the fulfilment and the success of marriage. In The Golden Bowl, art and life are forcibly disassociated by iconoclasm. The quest for life becomes, finally, a confrontation with evil, but the sorrows of human experience are counterbalanced by the consummate love and marriage the Jamesian heroine ultimately shares with a male figure fully conscious of both her limitations and her possibilities as a human being.

A final chapter concludes this study with a brief investigation of several critical works on James which, though relevant to the study of James's use of imagery in general, fail to account for the significance of the Madonna image both for James and his art.

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And finally, I send my love and my appreciation to the very patient one, who has stayed by my side, and whose dreams have been my strength when all else had seemed to fail.

—b.

—to those who will remember
that these are but little words
and that we are all but little
people

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—chapter 1: introduction

While first reading The Ambassadors by Henry James, I was impressed with how Lambert Strether's initiation into European life involved in part his sensitivity to Europe as a "museum" incorporating the various plastic arts. James seemed to intend that Strether's formative sensitivity to the visual arts, the stage, and even architectural structures be a dynamic force in Strether's development as the central consciousness of the novel. Strether's understanding of European life seemed to depend upon his capacity to see and comprehend the various art forms associated with other individuals, particularly Chad Newsome and Marie de Vionnet, as if each derived certain characteristics from the nature and meaning of a distinguishing art form.

Since my initial reading of The Ambassadors, the focus of my study has been on the possibility that an aesthete-observer, a Jamesian character whose preoccupation is essentially with art, may misperceive and treat another human being as a work of art. Any correlation between art and life undoubtedly has profound implications. For James, the equation

of a human being with any work of art fails to take into account the limitations of human existence. Certainly the quality of permanence in art often implies an antidote to the pressures of human mortality, as for centuries, in fact, religious icons have remained an enormous source of consolation for many individuals. However, while the beauty of art may be its freedom from the demands of time, for James art is not life. Art merely imitates what life affirms: the organic vitality and continuity of human existence. The aesthete-observer, who in an act of perception conjoins art and life by imputing to a human being the permanence or status of a work of art, fails to realize that, unlike art, the beauty of life may be its originality, its transience, and its cruel mutability.

In James's fiction, characters continually seem to misperceive the significance of one another. Should, for example, a male character view a female character as a possession rather than as a person, the result will be a denial of what, for James, is a necessary condition of life: a conscious recognition of her private freedoms and her natural status as a unique human being. The result will be to see her only as something very like an objet d'art—a static artifact understood only as an object of possession. Should,

on the other hand, a male character elevate a female character to the position of an aesthetic ideal, the result will be just as damning. Such a view would allow for her possibilities as an ethereal image, imputing to her perhaps the quintessence of the sublime, but denying her the passion, the needs, and the limitations of her humanity. This thesis examines James's quest to affirm the humanity of his heroines as an alternative to such misconceptions in the world he creates. My enquiry is as to how, in a selection of James's major novels, a central female character may become affiliated with works of art in the minds of other characters, and whether or not she finally transcends this confusion and is consciously recognized as a human being.

In her association with the various art forms, each of James's heroines is, in the novels I have selected, a recollection of a specific archetypal image: the Madonna. James invokes the presence of the Madonna image by associating female characters with religious icons that are either direct or implied representations of the Virgin. Though at present this study does not intend to attempt a complete descriptive survey of the Madonna image, I will examine several instances of the image to explore the psychological significance of the archetype for certain characters

in the novels selected. My emphasis will be based upon a "method of interpretation which arises from synthesis rather than analysis,"¹ that is, an examination of what James may intend to convey by his use of the Madonna image in any given situation. Mythologically, the Madonna represents a woman whose sublimity and sanctity suffer apparent human complications—the foremost being, perhaps, the virginal birth and the subsequent loss of her divine Son. Her devoted patience through her life of sorrows seems then to be a recurrent motif adopted by James in characterizing many of his heroines. For, like the Madonna, many central female characters are forced by a series of complications to suffer enormous losses. Some become self-sacrificial and often even subjectively lifeless. The treatment of this aspect of my study will center upon The American. However, James's commitment to the Madonna image is evident through the middle years of his career in The Portrait of a Lady, The Princess Casamassima, and The Spoils of Poynton, and becomes a controlling force in the novels of the "major phase."

The writing of The Wings of the Dove initiated a substantial progression in which the Jamesian heroine is developed through the novels of the "major phase" towards becoming a realistic human being consciously

1. Erwin Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Arts (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1955), p.32.

recognized by a principal male character. The central question of The Wings of the Dove becomes how human mortality complicates the apotheosis of Milly Theale. Though falsely elevated by those around her in life, through her death, she reiterates the fate of Claire de Cintr  in The American. She becomes a sublime image, sanctifying the devout humanitarianism of her life, but unattainable for Merton Densher, finally, in any form apart from his memory of her. However, Lambert Strether's pilgrimage to Europe in The Ambassadors furthers the progression subsequent to his confrontation with Marie de Vionnet in the cathedral Notre Dame. Strether's sensibility disassociates Madame de Vionnet from the iconic cathedral, and she becomes for him substantially alive and a fallible human being. Still, in acting as her "ambassador" to Chad Newsome in the final chapters of the novel, Strether sacrifices any fulfilment he might share with Marie de Vionnet in marriage. The recognition of her sublime affiliation and yet her human credibility is, for Strether, sufficient in itself. The fulfilment of a woman through marriage then becomes the subject of James's final complete novel: The Golden Bowl. Like the religious icon from which the novel's title is derived, Maggie Verver undergoes an iconoclastic transformation from her

identity as an innocent "Princess" to that of a mature wife and mother. Furthermore, her humanity—with its passions and limitations—is consciously recognized by the Prince Amerigo with whom she shares at the conclusion of the novel the potential fulfilment of love and marriage.

Little or no critical attention has been previously offered to substantiate James's use of the Madonna image in the novels, nor the progression of the "major phase" novels towards defining the role of the Jamesian heroine in a workable marriage. Before concluding then, this deficiency will be taken into account along with an investigation of specific critical studies most closely addressed to this thesis. Two major critical works on James's use of imagery have been published, but each remains inadequate in failing to acknowledge the force of the Madonna image in the characterizations of the Jamesian heroine. With this in mind, I propose to comment on Robert L. Gale's The Caught Image: Figurative Language in the Fiction of Henry James and Alexander Holder-Barell's Development of Imagery and Its Functional Significance in Henry James, along with some brief remarks on Viola Hopkins Winner's Henry James and the Visual Arts.

—chapter 2: the vera ikon

Image as conceived and given form by an artist is the essence of the visual arts. Though many definitions of the term have been offered throughout the history of art, here, the understanding of "image" will be restricted to the psychological representations or imitations, invoked by a former perception, which persist even when the sensory stimulus is withdrawn, or which appear when the stimulus is absent. Certain images may then also acquire a symbolic significance, just as dreams, for example, may acquire a "wider 'unconscious' aspect that is never precisely or fully explained."² As religious icons perhaps best exemplify in art, image may become, therefore, the means through which a human being can explore the range of human consciousness to the very threshold, if not beyond the limitations, of the human mind.

The nature of artistic expression demands that the psychic activation of an image be elaborated or shaped into a concrete form as a finished composition. For the initial "idea" or inspiration for a work of

2. Carl G. Jung, Man and His Symbols (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964), p. 4.

art lacks objectivity prior to the purgation of the artist's creative energy within a particular medium, that is, as a canvas, the lines of a poem, or even a novel. Furthermore, while the inspiration of an image may be mythological, the objective representation of that image must be contemporaneous or translated into the language of the present. Otherwise a work of art lacks meaning for anyone but the artist himself. Image is therefore but a prior condition to the seemingly antithetical actualization of thought as an "object." But should the external creation then lose its affiliation with the original "idea" in its conception, a dialectic may evolve between art as image and art as object. Art as image alone lacks a substantial form, but the appreciation of simply an art object is a form of idolatry that lacks a sensitivity to what that object intends to represent. Recalling Plato's dissertations on a conceptual realm of ideas, what the artist creates is an imitation of reality, not life itself, but a representation of life.

Insofar as Henry James is considered the master of the American school of realism in fiction, his career exemplifies an aesthetic quest towards resolving how an archetypal image may have a substantial and "realistic" significance or meaning in what was historically an age

of uncertainty and multiplicity. The focus of this quest was, for James, the Madonna—"the highest energy ever known to man, the creator of four-fifths of his noblest art, exercising vastly more attraction over the human mind than all the steam-engines and dynamos ever dreamed of; and yet this energy was unknown to the American mind. An American Madonna would never command."³ The Madonna seems to have become central to James's fiction as he looked for her presence as a substantial human reality. With the approach of the twentieth century, the Madonna became relevant for James only insofar as her image was incorporated in a physically credible human being, in the context of what he knew to be real. Her true force was finally not as an image or an icon in the realm of aesthetic endeavour, but rather as a woman in the realm of mortal life.

The state of mind that seeks to preserve the Madonna as merely an aesthetic idea or a metaphysical concept is explored in such shorter works by Henry James as "The Madonna of the Future." In this early short story, the artist Theobald is inspired to paint a mythological subject—the Madonna—as he perceives the Marian image in Signora Serafin. However, his inspiration fails to become a tangible form. Theobald lacks the capacity

3. Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (New York: Modern Library, 1931), p. 385.

to express the Madonna consciously. His canvas remains an empty piece of cloth. Furthermore, the authenticity of the image becomes questionable as, like the narrator of the story, the reader is forced to acknowledge that Theobald's Madonna is a mutable human being—Signora Serafin—who at the time of the story is effete, decayed, and aged well beyond her original beauty. Theobald's apotheosis of Signora Serafin as a seraph, as timeless and incorruptible, is a beautiful illusion that fails to allow for her temporal humanity. Preoccupied with aesthetic ideals, Theobald fails to understand the harsh reality of human existence as at best an impermanent condition.

The reality of Signora Serafin's humanity is further apparent in her "involvement" with yet another artist, a sculptor of "tiny cats and monkeys." Theobald's rival is wholly unscrupulous with respect to both his art and the Signora, but even his understanding of reality is more conducive to survival than Theobald's illusions. Signora Serafin is finally not Raphael's "Madonna in a Chair," nor even the false "Madonna della Seggiola" that Mrs. Coventry wears over her breast; she is a human being. She is not a religious icon, preserved from time, protected from change, but is tainted

as a woman by the temporal corporeality of her human existence. When forced finally to confront the knowledge of human mortality, Theobald perishes. Having dedicated his life to a romantic illusion, he is betrayed by actuality. His image of the Signora dissolves. The confusion of life with an aesthetic ideal becomes, then, a dangerous fantasy elevating a human being beyond the range of human possibility. It is because she is a woman that Signora Serafin is incapable of fulfilling Theobald's conception of her. For the realist, the artist must confront life, not attempt to escape from it. The Madonna of the future will have to be more than a tempting illusion; she will have to be real.

Henry James's preoccupation with the humanity of his heroines is most profoundly evident, during the early years of his career, in the 1877 edition of The American. The American involves the relationship of a central female character, Claire de Cintr , with Christopher Newman. As Claire is initially perceived by Newman, she is very much like a museum-piece or an objet d'art that Newman hopes to procure from the Bellegarde family to complement his enormous success as an American financier. She is to become the "beautiful woman perched on the pile, like a statue on a monument."⁴

4. Henry James, The American (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962), p. 35; subsequent references are in the text.

However, she is driven by a complex of forces to rebuke Newman's marriage proposals finally, and seeks refuge in a Carmelite convent where she becomes essentially lifeless as Sister Veronica. Her position at the conclusion of the novel is not as the "statue on a monument," or even as a woman, but rather as a sublime image. Her final reality is metaphysical rather than corporeal; her possibilities as a woman are lost forever.

As the central female character in The American, Claire de Cintr  is the European marital possibility for a naive American travelling abroad, Christopher Newman. Newman hopes to acquire, during his European excursion, a collection of art works. However, his appreciation of art is somewhat questionable. In the opening paragraph of the novel, he contemplates Murillo's "beautiful moon-borne Madonna," but his sensitivity to art is such that "he had often admired the copy much more than the original" (I,2), and he immediately contracts No mie Nioche, a lady-copyist, to paint him an imitation of the Murillo. His sensitivity to art is then repeated in his appreciation of Claire. He is conscious of Claire only as an imitation of his own conceptual ideal of what his future wife must be like. He fails to realize that her beauty may be her originality and her vitality

apart from his own ideal. He fails to see her as a human being, fallible and frail; he sees only a mere reflection of his own illusion of her.

The impulse motivating Newman's affection for Claire is his naive sense of acquiring her as a possession. Upon his departure from America, Newman's consciousness of what justifies his own existence is based upon the immensity of his wealth: "what he had been placed in the world for was, to his own perception, simply to wrest a fortune, the bigger the better, from defiant opportunity. This idea completely filled his horizon and satisfied his imagination" (II,20). To this naive American then, Claire de Cintr  is analogous to the copy of Murillo's Madonna that he hopes to obtain from No mie Nioche. Both are approached with more or less the same patronizing attitude, characterized by the infamous French solicitation, "Combien?", one of the first foreign words Newman is capable of understanding. Both Claire and the Murillo copy may be seemingly acquired for a specified amount of money. What Newman foolishly sees in Claire is not so much a woman as yet another imitation, another objet d'art. She becomes and remains throughout almost the entire novel the "admired object" of his love, "a very expensive article, as he would have said, and one which a man with

an ambition to have everything about him of the best would find highly agreeable to possess" (IX,117).

To the extent that Claire de Cintr  is understood by Christopher Newman as an art object, she is identified, at various points of the novel, as purely inanimate form. She is like the white flower, scented with "gold-coloured silk," in Madame de Bellegarde's tapestry. She is like a statue that has "'failed as stone.'" She is a portrait, a novel, an "instrument" through which Newman hopes to be interpreted to the world. But though she seems to Newman the "dream realized," she is yet merely an illusion both invoked and fulfilled by his own egocentric imagination. Claire is perhaps best understood by the image of the "partially-filled disc of the moon" (VII,102). Newman completes that disc in his own imagination. He fails to realize that Claire requires, like any human being, an organic fulfilment through, for her, the natural course of a symbolic lunar cycle—so intimately related to her womanly capabilities. He fails to realize that she is an individual separate from himself. He sees her only as an object of self-aggrandizement, and, as Mrs. Tristram's association of Claire with Desdemona from Shakespeare's Othello seems finally to suggest, a man's passion for a woman-

as-object is ultimately, in the blind attempt to possess her, to destroy her.

Aside from Newman's consciousness of Claire, she remains a unique and vital human being. Beneath the illusion of perfection that Newman imposes upon her, Claire maintains her private needs and feelings. Like the Madonna, she is, as Valentin de Bellegarde suggests, "'half a grand dame and half an angel; a mixture of pride and humility, of the eagle and the dove'" (VIII, 105). But even more importantly, she is a woman. She is capable of sustaining, finally, neither Newman's illusion of her perfection, nor the role of a human asset to be either won or lost. She is simply a young woman seeking to be free from the effete and repressive conventions of her aristocratic heritage. Perhaps her hopes to escape her dilemma in Europe by fleeing to America with Christopher Newman would be simply to accept his inane conception of her, to accept a false image of herself that, as a reflection of Newman's narcissism and egotistical idealism, would seem to allow for few imperfections. Perhaps she would in effect be consenting to her identification as the fairy-tale princess "Florabella," and the illusion of living, finally, in the "Land of the Pink Sky." But such hopes are, nevertheless, relatively short-lived. She realizes

that she is not Florabella. Indeed, she is more like a natural and a mutable flower. She is not simply the "instrument" destined to serve complaisantly between the conceit of Christopher Newman and the external world, but has very real personal needs and a private sense of capability. She needs more than her freedom from Europe; she needs freedom in the sense of being recognized as a separate human being with a tangible personality of her own. This is so apparent that, at a critical point in the novel, during the stormy isolation of an evening in the Bellegarde residence, she must affirm, upon sitting at the piano, her own private sphere of existence by insisting to Newman: "'I have not been playing for you; I have been playing for myself'" (XIII,178).

As merely the emanation of either Christopher Newman's dreams or the will of Madame de Bellegarde, Claire de Cintr   is like a subjectively lifeless imitation of a woman, valid only insofar as she remains an exact copy of what the ego-consciousness of either rival force imagines her to be. Consequently, as a vital human being demanding that she no longer be circumscribed by the desires of those around her, Claire becomes elusive and remote. Aware that the Bellegardes have forsaken their faith to Newman by promoting the marriage proposals

of Lord Deepmere, she is no longer able to conform to Newman's conception of her as a static commodity. She is obviously no longer for sale. Still, she acts out of human compassion by refusing to confront Newman with the cruel reality of his having been dispossessed, but in so doing, creates a void between the American and herself. By refusing to satisfy his entreaty: "'Come; what's the mystery?...Clear it up. I don't like mysteries.'" (XVI,224), she becomes herself mysterious and unknown. For Newman, she becomes, in fact, like Blake's Enitharmon, the incomplete "spiritual form of space,"⁵ now permanently the "partially-filled disc of the moon." For subsequently, what is for James an essential element of femininity—an allegiance with Nature—no longer has a place in his portrayal of Claire. Newman can love Claire only as a plastic object, and, if motivated by merely his desire to possess her, such a love is essentially destructive. He seems unable to recognize her private humanity to the extent that she must insist upon it, and failing to realize his mistake even then, he loses her. He seems unable to transform her, in his own thoughts, from a static objet d'art into a human being, and then, perhaps, a woman truly inseparable from his

5. Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake (Princeton: Princeton University Pr., 1947), p.261.

imagination. Rather he sustains his own false image of her. And the moment she is no longer a mirror, but shows a light of her own, she becomes, for Newman, the mystery of woman as Space—the outermost phenomenon that man has been unable to transform as he is capable of so doing in the natural world. Insofar as Newman has failed to recognize and love Claire as a human being, he has caused her to assert her own personality and thus become the "tyranny which the idea of unbounded space exerts upon the mind,"⁶ a star forever beyond the grasp of Newman's egocentric/geocentric consciousness. Nothing seems more appropriate, finally, than her own sense of discomposure: "'the sight of those cold stars gives one a sense of frost'" (XVI, 225).

Parallel to Newman's pursuit of Claire de Cintr  in The American are the romantic experiences of Valentin de Bellegarde. But whereas Newman pursues Claire as a fulfilment of his "ideal," Valentin adores the heartless and vulgar No mie Nioche. What is significant is that this Valentin, or perhaps this Valentine, dies at the very point of Newman's dissolution with Claire. He dies in a duel, in a matter of honour with Stanislas Kapp, the effect of which serves to suggest an inverse relationship between No mie Nioche and Claire. As

6. Frye, p. 261.

suggested earlier, Mlle. Nioche is a copyist, associated with art as imitation, and she covets money as a means of advancing "dans le monde." On the other hand, Claire's beauty is her originality, and she is forced, finally, to move "out of the world." The inverse parallel is further apparent insofar as the "fallen Enitharmon in Blake is typically the mistress of chivalry, spiritually inviolate because wrapped up in herself in a way which makes devotion to her a teasing mockery, a frustration of life to be expressed in murder,"⁷ all of which serves to suggest Claire's destiny as Blake's "Queen of Heaven," as a sublime image not unlike the Regina Coeli.

Throughout The American, it is readily apparent that Claire de Cintr   is intended to be seen as sharing a certain intimacy with the Madonna. In her denial of the objective world then, she sacrifices her life for an aesthetic idea; she forsakes her human involvements and dedicates herself through penance and suffering to the Virgin. Her desire for "safety" seems to require that she remain forever in a Carmelite convent where "'I shall give no more pain and suspect no more evil'" (XX,284). The choice she makes is irrevocable, and its ultimate effect is that, for Christopher Newman,

7. Frye, p. 263.

her life comes to an end. Newman perceives her sacrifice as a kind of death, a living-death, a lifetime in the convent on Rue d'Enfer, in Hell, "where the days and years of the future would pile themselves above her like the huge immovable slab of a tomb" (XXVI,363). Her tragic life is redeemed only as a condition of her moving out of the world. She is tangible, finally, only as an idea. She becomes in a sense pure symbol, pure quintessence. In the convent on Rue d'Enfer, her final identity is as Sister Veronica—the vera ikon—the "true image."⁸

The effect of Claire's sacrifice is significant beyond her physical disaffiliation from the external world. She remains a psychic image for Newman, no longer a false illusion emanating from his egocentric consciousness, but an "idea," perhaps at best subconscious, but with a profound effect nevertheless. Her commitment to the Madonna seems to prompt Newman's resolution to forsake his power of vengeance—the death-bed letter of M. de Bellegarde—and "let the Bellegardes go." Furthermore, the significance of this occurring as it does in Notre Dame seems to consolidate Newman's

8. According to religious scholars, the name "Veronica" was applied erroneously to the compassionate woman who aided Christ on His way to Calvary—the name being in fact a compound of vera and ikon, and referring to the likeness of Christ itself. Cf. The Holy Bible, ed. Rev. J. P. O'Connell (Chicago: The Catholic Press, 1955), p. 242.

image of Claire with this architectural image of the Madonna, the cathedral of "Our Lady." Either image before him is one of human compassion, be it Claire de Cintr  as Sister Veronica, or the Madonna as man's gentle intercessor before Divine Justice. Both ask that Newman suffer his loss and his anguish with forgiveness for the Bellegardes. Thus what inspired his European quest is reaffirmed in Notre Dame. Immediately before leaving America, he was arrested by a similar revelation to forsake the possibility of vengeance on a business associate in an affair involving the loss of sixty thousand dollars. Then as now, he felt "'a mortal disgust for the thing I was going to do'" (II,22). But his loss now is not simply a monetary abstraction. He has lost the love of a human being. Claire de Cintr  is no longer to be seen, nor heard, nor spoken to. Indeed, no longer tangible or physically substantial in any given form, she may be known and loved not as a woman finally, but as purely an idea, as the vera ikon.

—chapter 3: the mater dolorosa

On March 26, 1870, Henry James was travelling in Italy when he heard news from America concerning the death of his beloved cousin, Minny Temple. After hoping to be reunited with her that very spring as her escort through Europe, James met the news of her death with a pathetic sense of disappointment, anguish, and frustration. The loss undoubtedly had a solemn effect on the formative sensibility of the young artist. At the time, his letters to his mother and his brother, William, recall both the futile sorrows of Minny's life and the unconditional love James had always felt for her. Though her future seemed dim, the loss was nevertheless irreparable. Even many years later in the writing of the Autobiography, Minny's death is recalled as a sudden end, as the defeat of innocence: "Much as this cherished companion's presence among us had represented for William and myself—and it is on his behalf I especially speak—her death made a mark that must stand here for a too waiting conclusion. We felt it together as the end of our youth."⁹ Even in

9. Henry James, Henry James: Autobiography, ed., F.W. Dupee (New York: Criterion Books, Inc., 1956), p. 544.

his later years, then, the consideration of Minny's death as a kind of watershed marking the end of innocence suggests an ostensible development in James's preoccupation with the humanity of a sublime female image. As far as biographical considerations will allow, Minny Temple became for James—as Claire de Cintré became for Christopher Newman—no longer a physical reality, but rather a preternatural force in James's understanding of art and the possibilities of life. She seems to have recalled to James's mind that force fundamentally preserved and epitomized through the history of Christian thought as the Madonna.

The intimacy Henry James shared with Minny Temple survived beyond her death in the artist's imagination. She remained as "a steady unfaltering luminary of the mind rather than as a flickering wasting earth-stifled lamp."¹⁰ Indeed, the occurrence of her death seems to have awakened in James his understanding of a dimension of reality apart from that which is immediately present and physically substantial. Insofar as her presence was not as a living human being, Minny became James's most cherished memory, an ethereal image. Again, "her image will preside in my intellect...the more I think of her the more perfectly satisfied I am to have

10. From a letter to his brother, William, quoted in part in Leon Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1953), p. 325.

her translated from this changing realm of fact to the steady realm of thought. There she may bloom more radiant than our eyes will avail to contemplate"; and further still, "I could shed tears of joy far more copious than any tears of sorrow when I think of her feverish earthly lot exchanged for this serene promotion into pure fellowship with our memories, thoughts, and fancies."¹¹ Like Theobald's Madonna or Claire de Cintr , Minny Temple became for James an incorruptible idea. Her "serene promotion" was a form of redemption. For since she was an invalid for most of her life, Minny's health seems to have been an enormous source of frustration for her. Like The Assumption of the Madonna then, Minny's death becomes the means of resolving the tragic sorrows and disappointments of her life: "It's hard to believe that she is not seeing greater things now....No one who ever knew her can have failed to look at her future as a sadly insoluble problem—and we almost had imagination enough to say, to murmur at least, that life—poor narrow life—contained no place for her."¹²

That Minny Temple may have been a creative force motivating a particular perspective in James's fiction

11. Edel, HJ: The Untried Years, p.325.

12. Leon Edel, ed., The Selected Letters of Henry James (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1955), p. 35.

is a possibility deserving at least modest consideration. In "The Madonna of the Future," for example, James and his principal male character seem to share a common fate. Theobald's Madonna and James's Minny Temple are both in a sense destroyed by the corporeality of human existence. Each woman is then preserved as an idea by the artist. However, as merely a psychic recollection, the artist's image requires expression through a specific medium. Theobald's canvas is barren; James's career as a novelist is yet incipient. The parallel is further apparent insofar as James wrote a prophetic letter to his mother, by way of response to Minny's death, that underscores precisely the dilemma Theobald must also later confront: "Time for you at home will have begun to melt away the hardness of thought of her being in the future a simple memory of the mind—a mere pulsation of the heart: to me as yet it seems perfectly inadmissible."¹³ But unlike Theobald, James did not remain artistically impotent. Rather, Minny Temple became a series of portraits through several of the novels and tales. She seems to have inspired a distinct paradigm from which James drew such characterizations as Isabel Archer, Milly Theory, and Milly Theale. She seems to have typified

13. Edel, Selected Letters, pp. 34-35.

for James the American innocent in quest of experience and knowledge, in quest of life, and suffering its many disappointments and sorrows.

The prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2: 34-35) foretold that the Blessed Virgin would become a mother of sorrows: "'thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'" Subsequently, the Madonna did suffer the crucifixion of her divine Son, and yet lived in spite of the grief and the anguish of her loss. Only through The Assumption of her virginal body into Heaven is her tragic life of sorrows justified. She is preserved from the physical corruption of death, and is sanctified as an eternal image of perfect devotion and sublime patience. Her life as the Mater Dolorosa then, which seems strikingly similar to James's conception of Minny Temple's brief existence, may be that aspect of the Madonna image that best typifies and explains the characterizations of several Jamesian heroines during the middle years of his career. Unlike The American or The Wings of the Dove, the novels published between 1877 and 1902 are, on the whole, not concerned with the imminent death of a central female character, but rather explore the necessity of living in the face of the seemingly indifferent agonies of human existence. While Claire

de Cintré and Milly Theale both in a sense escape life, James does not allow for this possibility during the middle years of his career. Several novels selected from this period—The Portrait of a Lady (1881), The Princess Casamassima (1886), and The Spoils of Poynton (1897)—dramatize James's continued concern with the female heroine, not as visibly progressing towards the conscious recognition of her humanity perhaps, but as suffering patiently, and yet expectantly.

Though The Wings of the Dove is most widely acclaimed as "James's fictional portrait of his vivid young cousin, Minnie Temple,"¹⁴ some critical attention has suggested that The Portrait of a Lady was also motivated by the same impulse. When the novel began serial publication in Macmillan's Magazine and the Atlantic Monthly in 1880, James's good friend, Grace Norton, was the first to remark of a certain degree of similarity between Isabel Archer and Minny Temple in a letter she wrote to the author. James replied with the suggestion that perhaps the principal indebtedness to his cousin was to be found rather in a central male character, Ralph Touchett. However, Leon Edel accounts for this reversal of roles by suggesting a parallel between

14. Jean Kimball, "The Abyss and The Wings of the Dove: the Image as Revelation," from Tony Tanner, ed., Henry James: Modern Judgements (London: Macmillan & Co., 1968), p. 266.

The Portrait of a Lady and a very early short story entitled "Longstaff's Marriage." Edel proposes a significant association between the name Archer and the name of the heroine in the short story: Diana. Furthermore, like Ralph Touchett, Longstaff is ill and apparently dying of consumption. However, Diana's refusal to marry Longstaff effects a complete recovery for him. Subsequently, it is Diana who falls ill. Longstaff agrees to marry her on her death-bed, but she weakens and dies. Edel suggests that in The Portrait of a Lady James may have discarded the improbability of Longstaff's recovery while maintaining a reversal of roles—Ralph Touchett dying as a recollection of Minny Temple, while Isabel Archer lives beyond his death. Perhaps then, Edel is more convinced than most critics that Minny Temple became, "nine years after her death, the heroine of The Portrait of a Lady."¹⁵ But whether Isabel Archer either directly or indirectly reflects the life of Minny Temple, she does conform to the paradigm of youth and innocence confronting life, and suffering, in her experiences, the pain and sorrows foreshadowed mythologically by the Mater Dolorosa.

The Portrait of a Lady describes the fortunes of an innocent American "orphan" in quest of life

15. Edel, HJ: The Untried Years, p.331.

amidst separate European landscapes, Gardencourt and Rome, and their respective custodians, Ralph Touchett and Gilbert Osmond. The pattern of the novel is essentially cyclical insofar as Isabel first experiences Europe in Gardencourt, descends both geographically and metaphorically to Rome, and then returns finally to Gardencourt in the final chapters of the novel. Furthermore, this very general paradigm is supplemented throughout the novel with recurrent images of rising and falling, ascent and descent. These concur with the thematic significance Isabel acquires rising as a sublime image sustained by the adoration and offerings of Ralph Touchett, or descending beneath the freedom and dignity of a human being as an objet d'art possessed and controlled by Gilbert Osmond. However, either perspective of Isabel fails to recognize her humanity. Only by returning to Rome at the close of the novel does she suggest a possible justification for her archetypal affiliation with the Madonna, that is, in how her experiences lead her to affirm a conscious resolution to save Pansy Osmond from the tyranny of her father.

Isabel Archer expresses in the initial chapters of The Portrait of a Lady an urge to "live." She rejects the temptations of Gardencourt by refusing to accept

either the marriage proposal of Europe's Lord Warburton or that of an American financier, Caspar Goodwood, who follows her from Albany. Though each proposal represents a form of security, each likewise would seem to imply that Isabel forsake her passion for life, that she accept what would result in merely a continuation of her innocence. Furthermore, each suitor exhibits a strikingly similar preconception of Isabel's femininity that assumes she would willingly resign herself through marriage to the will of a man. And though the somewhat irreverent feminism of Henrietta Stackpole may not be a major force in the development of Isabel's sensibility, still, the young American reveals a natural determination to be independent that contradicts the intentions of either Warburton or Goodwood. She maintains, especially with respect to Warburton, that:

She herself was a character—she shouldn't help being aware of that...What she felt was that a territorial, a political, a social magnate had conceived the design of drawing her into the system in which he rather invidiously lived and moved. A certain instinct, not imperious, but persuasive, told her to resist—murmured to her that virtually she¹⁶ had a system and an orbit of her own.

16. Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1956), p. 94; subsequent references are in the text.

The Portrait of a Lady involves Isabel Archer's quest for the experiences she hopes will define this "orbit of her own." Her quest is for an identity. Rather than accept a conventual position of safety from the world—so very evident in the nun-like Misses Molyneux at Lockleigh—Isabel realizes that to live is to confront for herself the actualities of human existence. She is not without a certain degree of reservation, but as Ralph Touchett reflects: "'You've told me the great thing: that the world interests you and that you want to throw yourself into it'" (XV,132). Unfortunately, however, she never seems to escape the iconic significance of the novel's title. Though she asserts a kind of independence in her rejections of Warburton and Goodwood, still, her quest for life is shaped by Ralph Touchett. The imminent death of Ralph's father, Daniel Touchett, prompts the young invalid—more and more becoming a "prisoner" to his own health—to disown one-half of his inheritance in order to allow Isabel the freedom from the financial necessity of marriage. The impulse behind Ralph's altruism is unquestionably his selfless love for the young American. But he lacks the foresight to realize that his gift of freedom may, in fact, become Isabel's greatest danger. He accepts the responsibility, however

unwisely, of doing exactly what his name suggests he might, that is, of "touching up" the original "portrait" that James himself has introduced in the novel's title as a defining characteristic of Isabel Archer.

In attempting to assure Isabel's financial requirements in life, Ralph Touchett believes he has elevated her above the vulgar concerns of common humanity. Through his offering, he proposes that she may live apart from the world that he himself knows, as an invalid, to be repressive, frustrating, and corrupt. He attempts to impute to her the permanence and the privilege of a work of art—a freedom from the tragedies, the mutability, and the pathos of a deprived world. In creating a position for her above the mundane, he offers her a "chance" to fulfill her imagination, and by proxy, therefore his own. With words that recall the poetry of a Romantic poet likewise tormented by the thought of mortality, Ralph Touchett envelops Isabel's newly acquired fortune with images suggesting its preternatural significance:

'Don't question your conscience so much—it will get out of tune like a strummed piano. Keep it for great occasions. Don't try so much to form your character—it's like trying to pull open a tight, tender young rose.

Live as you like best, and your
 character will take care of
 itself....Put back your watch.
 Diet your fever. Spread your wings;
 rise above the ground.' (XXI, 189)

The sense in which Ralph Touchett attempts to transform Isabel Archer into a sublime image, charged with the responsibility of affirming by proxy the life he cannot live himself, becomes, finally, Isabel's greatest source of harm. Though conceived of as an act of charity, the gift of wealth he delegates to the young American endangers rather than subsidizes her freedom. Foolishly believing that money will protect Isabel from the pain and the suffering of life, Ralph fails to foresee the very allurements her fortune assumes in the eye of Serena Merle. Isabel's wealth becomes the temptation that Madame Merle acts upon in prostituting Isabel to Gilbert Osmond, and thus the very means setting her quest for life in motion becomes as well the source of her exploitation. James does not allow for Isabel's apotheosis as a work of art or as a sublime image without subjecting Ralph's misconception to an important qualification. If Isabel is an icon, she is, as Mrs. Touchett suggests, like a "'Cimabue Madonna'" (XX, 179). Cimabue's Byzantine icons of the Madonna express foreboding intimations of sorrow in the face

of the Virgin mother. This important characteristic of Cimbue's art suggests, beyond Isabel's solemnity at the time of Daniel Touchett's death, the tragic future of Ralph's naive inspiration. The discrepancy between the intent of Ralph's idea and its effect becomes immense. Rather than protecting her, Isabel's wealth supersedes her humanity as she becomes enthralled by the concupiscence of Gilbert Osmond. Osmond sees her not as a sublime image but as an objet d'art. Money for James will allow for many things, but it will not buy time or immortality. Money will not protect Isabel from the dangers of human existence, the knowledge of evil, nor finally death.

Of all the characters in The Portrait of a Lady, Ralph Touchett is most injured by Isabel's marriage to Gilbert Osmond. What Ralph sees in Osmond is "'the incarnation of taste...He judges and measures, approves and condemns, altogether by that.'" (XXXIV,286). Suffering the frustrations of his increasingly fragile health, Ralph must further confront the apparent futility of his inspiration and his hopes for Isabel. The possibilities he had consciously put before his cousin become, to his mind, meaningless. He understands her marriage only as the dissolution of her prospects in life, and perhaps even more significantly, as the

dissolution of his own:

'I had amused myself with planning out a high destiny for you. There was nothing of this sort in it. You were not to come down so easily and so soon....You seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue—to be, sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men. Suddenly someone tosses up a faded rosebud—a missile that never should have reached you—and straight you drop to the ground. It hurts me...hurts me as if I had fallen myself.' (XXXIV, 285)

What Ralph has mistaken Isabel for is a mediatrix between his own fragile grasp on life and the unknown abyss of death. As if he himself has wished to escape the knowledge of human mortality, he has looked to Isabel as a source of consolation, as a sublime image in a human form, as a Madonna to comfort the final years of his life. What he has failed to allow for is Isabel's fallibility. What he creates is a beautiful illusion that, as a woman, Isabel is incapable of sustaining.

The marriage of Isabel Archer to Gilbert Osmond epitomizes James's concern for the possible misconception by a man for a woman, not by her being vaulted towards the ethereal, but by her being likened to and possessed as an objet d'art. Though Gilbert Osmond is initially portrayed as an artist, this claim is subject to an important

qualification. He is rather a "collector" of art objects. His appreciation of the arts requires something more than a detached respect; he requires and demands possession. He recognizes nothing appreciable beyond his own collection; his understanding of the validity of religious icons is subjective rather than conceptual. For example, he is blind to the aesthetic perpetuity of St. Peter's in Rome—thinking only that since he has failed to fulfill his great desire to be himself the Pope, "'It's too large; it makes one feel like an atom'" (XXVII,247). Osmond is, in fact, a kind of Machiavellian proselyte, living in solitude with "'his old curtains and crucifixes'" (XXIV, 215). His collection of art objects is motivated not by an overzealous devotion to the creative endeavours of mankind, but rather by his regard for the monetary value of his possessions. Indeed, in her final interview with Osmond, Isabel interrupts him copying the "drawing of an antique coin" (LI,436) in his private study. Here, the act of imitation is again a yearning for possession that reveals how Osmond's preoccupations with art are profoundly mercenary. Still, though self-conscious and wholly autocratic, Osmond becomes for Isabel a "specimen apart" during their initial acquaintance. She is deceived by his superficial detachment from life, and

like Ralph Touchett, she creates a romantic illusion. She imputes to Osmond the charm and the romance of a stoic hero, who, with his superior ideals, has wilfully removed himself from the world.

Through initially Ralph Touchett's compassionate intentions, and then finally her own misguided enchantment with Osmond, Isabel is ultimately absorbed into his Urizenic domain. Following their marriage, she is treated by Osmond as merely a kind of artifact, a highly valuable piece, acquired as a part of his "collection of choice objects," and wholly subject to his own control. His acquisition of Isabel is anticipated only once before in his clandestine assemblage of religious icons, and a seemingly facile statement of self-regard, by Osmond to Isabel, serves as a prophecy of the cloistered fate she will share with his other possessions: "The events of my life have been absolutely unperceived by anyone save myself; getting an old silver crucifix at a bargain (I've never bought anything dear, of course), or discovering as I once did, a sketch by Correggio on a panel daubed over by some inspired idiot'" (XXIV,223). Like Osmond's Correggio, Isabel is finally circumscribed and segregated from life in Osmond's "house of darkness" in Rome.

Since it is a Correggio icon that Osmond discovers

to have been touched over by the likes of a Ralph Touchett, perhaps some further inquiry into the significance of Correggio's art, as it is apparent in The Portrait of a Lady, will assist an understanding of the novel. In his characterization of Isabel Archer, James has clearly intended that she be like a work of art in the minds of his two principal male characters. But each misconception undoubtedly has separate implications. While Osmond misperceives and treats Isabel as if she were a piece in his collection of art objects, her seclusion from the world is then set against the presence of yet another Correggio icon in the novel, an icon independent of private ownership that, significantly enough, the emancipated Henrietta Stackpole serves to identify in the Uffizi in Florence. This latter Correggio seems to represent Ralph Touchett's hopes for Isabel as these are reflected in Miss Stackpole's similar dedication for the young American. But even as a beautiful idea expressed through the medium of art, "the Virgin kneeling down before the sacred infant, who lies in a litter of straw, and clapping her hands to him while he delightedly laughs and crows" (XLIV, 375), is yet an ideal that has not been, nor likely ever will be, fulfilled in Isabel's lifetime. Rather than a portrait of joy, her life with Gilbert Osmond is

characterized by pain and sterility—not by the coming of the Messiah, but rather by the tragic death of her infant son. Thus, by invoking separate icons by the same artist, James depicts on the one hand how Isabel may be possessed as an objet d'art by Gilbert Osmond, or on the other, how she represents a sublime image for Ralph Touchett. In either case, however, she is treated as one might respond to a work of art, and not as a woman, not as a vulnerable human being undergoing enormous trials of sorrow.

Prior to her self-banishment to America, Madame Merle reveals to Isabel Ralph Touchett's role in promoting her quest for life. This knowledge determines Isabel's defiance of Osmond's pernicious control as she awakens to a love for her devoted cousin. She conceives of a return to Gardencourt as a necessary pilgrimage, a means of acknowledging the beauty of Ralph's intentions regardless of their effect. Moving across a wasted and barren European landscape, Isabel completes the cycle of her misfortunes: "Gardencourt had been her starting-point, and to those muffled chambers it was at least a temporary solution to return. She had gone forth in her strength; she would come back in her weakness, and if the place had been a rest to her before, it would be a sanctuary now" (LIII,457). Indeed, Gardencourt seems,

finally, much like a convent removed from the struggles of humanity. Here, at last, Isabel and Ralph are mutually penitent and forgiving; here, they confirm their love for one another. But the intimacy they share is supernal rather than physical. Ralph dies reaffirming his unconditional devotion that, throughout the novel, has failed to recognize Isabel's obviously fallible humanity, and has allowed only for her sublimity. Rather than finally seeing a woman, he sees a Madonna still. He implores that she remain at Gardencourt, and failing that to remember: "'that if you've been hated you've also been loved. Ah but, Isabel—adored!'" (LIV,471).

Isabel's return to Gardencourt is an awakening to a dimension of reality that is ethereal rather than empirically present. This is perhaps best characterized by her capacity to sense the "ghost" or the spirit that the house incorporates. The condition necessary for this experience is that she "should live to suffer enough," and as a vision then, "she saw his white face—his kind eyes; then she saw there was nothing. She was not afraid; she was only sure" (LV,472). Having been forced through her initiation into European life to accept a knowledge of evil, she now accepts a vision of redemption. The Christ-like circumstances of Ralph's death inspire confidence rather than lamentation. And

insofar as she has conceded to the futility of her life with Osmond, her return to Rome illustrates how Isabel's faith grows not from the possibilities of her own existence, but from her capacity to look beyond her own sorrowful life to that of the young and innocent Pansy Osmond.

One of the final implications of the novel is that Pansy Osmond is undoubtedly following in Isabel's footsteps, and will likely share her tragic destiny cloistered among Osmond's art objects. Indeed, the suggestion is that if Gilbert Osmond "regarded his daughter as a precious work of art it was natural he should be more and more careful about the finishing touches" (L,435). Conscious of Pansy's dilemma, Isabel is not susceptible to any temptation to escape Osmond forever. In fact, in the same garden, seated on the very "rustic bench" that six years before had supported her rejection of Lord Warburton's marriage proposal, she now likewise rebukes Caspar Goodwood's ominous seizure, the kiss that was "like white lightning," and returns to Rome on a "very straight path." She begins the human cycle anew—the implication being, however, that she has known the dark night of the soul, experienced the Pentecostal spirit of Gardencourt, and returns to Rome understanding a moral obligation to

suffer personal sacrifice and dedicate her life to Pansy Osmond's future.

In returning to Rome, Isabel Archer affirms, perhaps, the Madonna image that inspired Ralph Touchett's original conception of her. She leaves Gardencourt now not as a false image however, but as truly a figure of patience and consolation, offering herself as a mediatrix between Pansy and the sinister dictates of her father. She returns to Rome to fulfill her obligation to Pansy as a "'guardian angel'" (XLVI,393), and to protect Pansy's innocence from Osmond's egotism that lies "hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers" (XLVI,353). Isabel returns as an answer to Pansy's urgent pleas for assistance in the hope that she may marry her counterpart in the natural world, Mr. Rosier. She returns as if Pansy's pleas for an intercessor were, after all, not so wrongly expressed "as if she were praying to the Madonna" (XLV,385).

The question of The Portrait of a Lady becomes finally whether the association between Isabel Archer and the Madonna has in fact a certain validity. A sublime female figure is not necessarily a human impossibility. However, if Isabel's final identity is as a Madonna figure, her acceptance of that identity is not imposed upon her, but arises out of her conscious awareness

of the need for an intercessor between the innocence of Pansy and the malevolence of Osmond. Her self-sacrifice has a tangible alternative that she herself freely rejects. Whether she will ever substantiate her own humanity apart from Osmond's collection of art objects remains, at the conclusion of the novel, a matter for speculation. One is left merely with the sense that Isabel incorporates the "key to patience" (LV,482), which as James suggests is a "characteristic characterization of Isabel,"¹⁷ but this, unfortunately, does not alleviate the mystery of Isabel's future.

The Portrait of a Lady is conclusive, only insofar as one may accept self-sacrifice as the greatest possibility in life. The Portrait of a Lady depicts a woman's quest for life as tragic, as a trial of sorrows, but abandons the problem of her resolution with a man, through a meaningful love and marriage, to future works.

The Princess Casamassima, published in 1886, lacks the creative intensity and the symmetry of The Portrait of a Lady, but yet involves the association of a central female character with religious icons and images propounded by a male aesthete-observer. Likely the force of James's memory of his beloved cousin, Minny

17. F. O. Matthiessen & K. B. Murdock, eds., The Notebooks of Henry James (New York: Oxford U. Pr., 1961), p. 18.

Temple, was insignificant in his conception of The Princess Casamassima, and yet, certain fundamental allusions to Minny's life are still apparent. For example, Rose Muniment, is an invalid, though this is central perhaps only insofar as she serves to highlight the potential vitality a woman may enjoy when free from the frustrations of illness. Similarly, Amanda Pynsent is often referred to as "Pinnie," and Millicent Henning is yet another "Milly," but again, neither character can be considered as central to the novel. The principal female character is Christina Light, who, since the publication of Roderick Hudson in 1876, has become the wayward Princess Casamassima. And aside from the rather loose translation of "Casamassima" into "Temple," she seems to have little in common with James's cousin. Christina does recall to Hyacinth Robinson's mind a certain, undefined memory of an icon, but the association is typical of the somewhat questionable sensibility of the young revolutionary, for whom each of the women with whom he is acquainted becomes iconic. Perhaps the confusion or uncertainty of James's objectives in The Princess Casamassima was a result of the author's concern with the critical disdain being directed towards The Bostonians, written as a companion-piece with The Princess Casa-

massima, but apart from this, this confusion may be intended as a characteristic of Hyacinth's fallible perceptions. As an aspiring artist in quest of an understanding of beauty, Hyacinth adores the capricious Christina as an aesthetic ideal. But the image he creates is once again an illusion contradicted, finally, by actuality. His adoration of her then becomes futile, and ultimately destructive.

If only through the connotations of her name, Christina Light is an ideal possibility of how a woman may be perceived as a sublime image by a male aesthete-observer. But she is, however, too perfect, too ideal, perhaps too "blinding" a possibility to be at all humanly credible. Her sublimity is purely the result of Hyacinth's perceptions of her, and his ostensible yearning for a muse. She seems to his eye a perfect work of art:

That head, where two or three diamond stars glittered in the thick, delicate hair which defined its shape, suggested to Hyacinth something antique and celebrated, something he had admired of old—the memory was vague—in a statue, in a picture, in a museum. Purity of line and form, of cheek and chin and lip and brow, a colour that seemed to live and glow, a radiance of grace and eminence and success—these things were seated in triumph in the face of the Princess, and her visitor, as he held himself in

his chair trembling with the revelation, questioned whether she were really of the same substance with the humanity he had hitherto known.¹⁸

The Princess Casamassima represents for Hyacinth the ideal to which he dedicates all his energies. But he fails to comprehend the possible unreality of her "glitter," and that he may, in fact, be seeing only what he needs or wants to see. As Lyall Powers suggests, "we never quite see the Princess as a sharply defined objective entity: it is Hyacinth's perception of her that we must see clearly. She is a fairy princess in his eyes, and redolent of all the good things for which the artistic soul of Hyacinth hungrily yearns."¹⁹ Like Ralph Touchett, Hyacinth is condemned from the moment of his birth to a life of frustrations. The mystery of his aristocratic antecedents creates, for Hyacinth, a feeling of alienation, especially with respect to his vulgar affiliations with the workers in the anarchist movement of London's "underworld" finally. The Princess represents, then, a quality of life Hyacinth has never known, but which he has an instinctive longing to know. Indeed, his stay at Medley

18. Henry James, The Princess Casamassima (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 148; subsequent references are in the text.

19. Lyall H. Powers, Henry James and the Naturalist Movement (Lansing: Michigan State U. Pr., 1971), p. 104.

with Christina is like a return to Paradise for the young artist. His love imputes to the Princess the beauty and sublimity of angels, but he fails to realize that, beneath the illusion he himself creates, Christina is capable of deceit, betrayal, and condemnation. He sees a perfect work of art, but not a human being.

During Hyacinth's excursion across the European continent, he awakens to the aesthetic permanence of art and culture, "not the idea of how the society that surrounded him should be destroyed; it was more the sense of the wonderful, precious things it had produced, of the fabric of beauty and power it had raised" (XXIX,321). Even the French Revolution he conceives of as a "sunrise out of a sea of blood...the spirit of creation...not the spirit of destruction" (XXX, 331). Consequently, the effect of his European experiences is an immense shift away from his intimacy with the London "underworld" of revolution and anarchism. However, just as he appears to be convinced of a certain justification to social inequality, he is forced to confront the commitment of his beautiful Princess to the anarchist cause of Paul Muniment and the mysterious Hoffendahl. Upon his return to London, he discovers the Princess has given up many of her priceless treasures and has taken a cottage in Madeira

Crescent. However, his initial shock is soon alleviated by the pleasure of intimacy he shares with Christina in Madeira Crescent, an intimacy becoming, in fact, "almost as if he were married to his hostess" (XXXVIII, 411). But the unreality of both her attention for Hyacinth and her dedication to London's proletariat soon becomes apparent. Her cottage in Madeira Crescent connotes the superficiality of her commitments—being "ornamented by a glass case containing stuffed birds and surmounted by an alabaster Cupid" (XXXIII, 353), and filled with wax flowers, florid antimacassars, sentimental engravings, and "prismatic glass pendants attached to everything." But rather than comprehending the illusion of Christina's attention for him, and her revolutionary undertakings, Hyacinth propagates it. He feels "an extraordinary charm...in this mixture of liberty and humility—in seeing a creature capable socially of immeasurable flights sit dove-like and with folded wings" (XXXVIII, 411). He fails to realize that her involvement with the poor in London is an affectation, a temporary preoccupation of a disenchanted "princess" suffering merely the pangs of ennui. He attributes to her the selfless need to make her sacrifices and rejects any consideration that "she was capable of returning to the Prince someday as an effect of her not daring to

face the loss of luxury" (XXXIII,358). He is unable to understand her superficiality and to realize, as the less gullible Paul Muniment later does, that she "'will go back!'" (XLVI,502). Instead he dotes on the magnificence and the beauty he sees in her. Though she becomes so very capricious and false, he remains devoted to her. Even suffering her betrayal, a fate he shares with the Prince, he maintains his illusions of her. The Prince condemns her as the "Devil"; Hyacinth remains true to her "'Simply because there's no one in the world and has never been anyone in the world like you'" (XLV,495). And therefore, as Hyacinth has conceived of his intimacy with her as with a dove at rest, so too is she lost as a dove in flight, leaving him forever "with the beat of great white wings."

The dissolution of Hyacinth's "marriage" to the Princess Casamassima impels him, finally, towards suicide. Insofar as his devotion for her is a form of unrequited love, she becomes the final frustration in his life. He has been warned by five other characters in the novel—Millicent Henning, Paul Muniment, Anastasius Vetch, Captain Sholto, and Madame Grandoni—of her potential danger to him. But their warnings go unheeded. True to a romantic sensibility that invokes Keats during his stay

at Medley, Hyacinth refuses to confront reality. Though his image of the Princess becomes so unquestionably false, he refuses to accept his betrayal. Frustration carried to its ultimate extreme is death. He ends the vicious futility of his life by turning his pistol upon his own heart and firing.

Any study of The Princess Casamassima deserves one final consideration. If the Princess Casamassima is Christina Light, then her counterpart is, as Leon Edel suggests, Lady Aurora. Though Edel does not explore the implications of his suggestion beyond attributing to Lady Aurora "the true gift of kindness,"²⁰ the distinction between the two seems vital. Lady Aurora Langrish is yet another Jamesian portrait of endurance and suffering. She is aristocratic, but descends among the poor where, like the Madonna, she is intimately associated with a Rose—the young invalid who initially suggests to Hyacinth that Lady Aurora's name is the "'most beautiful of all.'" As her name suggests, Lady Aurora is the human representation of a spirit of redemption; she is the "'morning or dawn.'" Though at first sharing a great companionship with Christina, Lady Aurora easily transcends the Princess in her sublime wisdom and her understanding, in the "thoroughness of her knowledge and her capacity to

20. Leon Edel, Henry James: The Middle Years (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1962), p. 188.

answer any question it could come into the Princess's extemporizing head to ask" (XXXVIII,410). Furthermore, Lady Aurora has, beyond any other character, a sense of how Christina's pose and her overzealous attempts at revolution are "'going too far'" (XXXVIII,413). But her plea to Christina that the Princess take a more realistic approach to social change is condemned rather than rewarded. Her request spurs the Princess even further ahead, and causes, in fact, Lady Aurora's own tragic loss of whatever affiliation she might have shared with Paul Muniment. Unlike Hyacinth, however, she is not driven to see only futility. "Paul Muniment didn't care for her, but she was capable of considering that it might be her duty to regulate her life by the very advice that made an abyss between them" (XLII,465). Though she too seems defeated by the indifferent agonies of human existence, she has the strength to continue nevertheless. In a novel of enormous complexity then, Lady Aurora is the one redeeming study that prevents The Princess Casamassima from descending into brutal naturalism. Though completely without any effect on the unfortunate Hyacinth, Lady Aurora is the true heroine of the novel: "a sunrise out of a sea of blood...the spirit of creation."

Following a disastrous career as a playwright,

terminated by the opening night catastrophe of Guy Domville, James returned to his former medium and wrote two novels—The Spoils of Poynton and What Maisie Knew—both published in 1897. Both novels are considered by many critics to herald the triumph of the "major phase" novels. Each work is again directed towards the study of a central female character, a study that James himself reflects "became and remained that of her understanding."²¹ Each work maintains James's concern for a singular female "type" in quest of life, and delineates her struggle to affirm her humanity in the eyes of those around her.

In The Spoils of Poynton, the significance of Poynton's "things" is apparent at the very outset of the novel insofar as these objets d'art are the focus of what is in effect a holy war between Mrs. Gereth and the Brigstocks, a struggle which, for Mrs. Gereth is undertaken to prevent the advent of vulgarity and barbarism—so very evident at Waterbath—to Poynton. The iconic significance of the Poynton collection is apparent insofar as the very center, or as Owen Gereth suggests, the "gem" of Mrs. Gereth's assemblage of religious icons and art works is the Maltese cross. Furthermore,

21. Henry James, The Art of the Novel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 128.

it is significant that Fleda Vetch, the central female character, is most closely associated with the Maltese cross. For it is finally the suffering implied by the image of Christ, that any crucifix intends to recollect, that Fleda must ultimately concede to. The central question of The Spoils of Poynton becomes, once again, that of continuing to live in the face of personal loss and the cruel sorrows of human existence.

James's infatuation with the cyclical pattern of human existence is again apparent in the ascent and fall of his central female character suggested through repeated images of a bird in flight. Indeed, Fleda Vetch is severally described as such. Her consciousness of being the subject of Owen Gereth's love first gives her "wings that she felt herself flutter in the air."²² Subsequently, her awareness that Mona Brigstock has abused her character is likewise then a "sudden drop in her great flight" (XIV, 118). And finally, her fall is complete at the time of Owen Gereth's silent withdrawal from her life in his return to Waterbath after seeing her for the last time: "it gave her for the time a deep sense of failure, the sense of

22. Henry James, The Spoils of Poynton (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), p. 76; subsequent references are in the text.

a drop from a height at which she had all things beneath her. She had nothing beneath her now; she herself was at the bottom of the heap" (XVII,142).

As Alexander Holder-Barell suggests, each image seems to "stress the tragic fate of her intentions," that Fleda's "heroism has all been for nothing."²³ But there is also the sense that Fleda is not so much a tragic heroine as she is a victim of her own belief in the false significance attributed to her by Mrs. Gereth. Fleda assumes the role of a kind of moral judiciary in the battle for Poynton's "things." Fleda is not like Satan, whose banishment from Heaven began as just such an example of what Holder-Barell sees in Fleda as a kind of "obdurate Pride." Rather, Fleda is more like an unfallen Eve, a Jamesian naif. Indeed, if like Satan, she confronts a vision of Hell at the conclusion of the novel, surely this identification would seem to detract from the possibilities that life has yet to offer her. Again, her circumstances are more like Eve's after her banishment from Eden. In a final image of ascent that Holder-Barell fails to take into account at all, undoubtedly Fleda's query,

23. Alexander Holder-Barell, The Development of Imagery and Its Functional Significance in Henry James's Novels (Basel, Switz.: Francke Verlag Bern, 1959) p.131.

"'Is there an up-train?'" (XXII,192), concludes the novel not with a sense of complete futility, but rather with the hope of reconcilliation with life. Her final revelation seems to be that she must confront life and discover her significance as a human being, and not as an administrator of Poynton's "things."

The sense in which The Spoils of Poynton is a study of how static objets d'art supersede the vitality of life is apparent insofar as even the possibility of a love between Fleda and Owen Gereth occurs neither at Poynton nor its satellite Ricks, but on Raphael Road. In the absence of the Poynton collection, Fleda's relations with Gereth become a momentary reality. But Owen's avowal of love is interrupted, somewhat melodramatically perhaps, by the two contrary interjections—"Your mother!" and "Mrs. Brigstock!"—which recall the representative contraries in the struggle to possess Poynton's "things." Individual personalities seem insignificant apart from functioning within the desire of either Mrs. Gereth or the Brigstocks to control the Poynton collection. This is true to the extent that Fleda Vetch, rather than having a tangible validity as a human being, becomes synonymous, in the minds of those most preoccupied with the Poynton collection, with a means of owning the implacable assemblage.

Apart from any other character in The Spoils of Poynton, Fleda Vetch shows an ability to appreciate a reality to the Poynton collection beyond the actual control of it. For in the despoliation of Poynton by the removal of its most valuable objects to Ricks, Fleda emulates Lady Aurora in The Princess Casamassima by seeing that Mrs. Gereth "'has gone too far'" (VIII, 63). Just as Christina carries an ideal to its destructive extreme, so too does Mrs. Gereth. Fleda responds to the transplantation of Poynton to Ricks as a kind of disembodiment in which the "stolen" objects seem to "suffer like chopped limbs" (VII, 57). Completely unselfish, Fleda shows neither the possessive greed of the Brigstocks nor the aesthetic idolatry of Mrs. Gereth. Rather she characterizes a capacity to comprehend that, apart from Poynton's "things" and whoever controls them, Mrs. Gereth "was herself the great piece in the gallery" (VII, 54). She sees that beyond the objective reality of the Poynton collection is a lifetime of endeavour. Similarly, upon the return of Poynton's "spoils," Fleda is again unique in apprehending an unknown significance in Ricks. Unlike Mrs. Gereth, she senses in Ricks a "'kind of fourth dimension,'" a primordial image of Owen Gereth's "maiden aunt" whose spirit, like the Mater Dolorosa, reflects a "'great accepted pain'" (XXI, 180).

The power of Fleda's imagination enabling her to appreciate a human context to both the Poynton collection and Ricks suggests a significance with respect to her instinctive attempts—occurring at various points of the novel—to disassociate herself from the Poynton collection. Only as separate from these objets d'art will she ever be recognized as a human being with a meaning and a validity of her own; only then, will she anticipate the humanity affirmed in Maggie Verver in The Golden Bowl. However, her understanding and her ability to substantiate her own humanity seem vague and ineffectual. Though endowed with imagination, though an artist, she maintains, as James makes clear, a severely limited sensibility. No sooner does her imagination awaken to what the Poynton collection truly represents, than she returns to Poynton on Gereth's invitation in search of an object she might carry away with her—even the Maltese cross, the very center of the collection. Though formerly condemning Mrs. Gereth's despoliation of Poynton, she herself would destroy the collection. But perhaps even more dramatic still, she seems to suffer the loss of Owen Gereth with much less consequence than she does the burning of Poynton. She seems, finally, more concerned with the possibility of obtaining one

of Poynton's "things" than she is with what she has lost in the love of a human being.

The icon Fleda Vetch returns to Poynton to obtain as her own would likely have been the Maltese cross. No other piece in the Poynton collection is explicitly described. However, the burning of Poynton makes a fundamental Jamesian demand: that she not seek consolation for her sorrowful life in a religious icon, but rather look to life itself as a possible source of fulfilment. Certainly life is a struggle, but like the Mater Dolorosa, and like Owen Gereth's maiden aunt, Fleda too must accept her pain and her losses. As her own final query suggests, she is not without hope. Her life has yet many possibilities. But, for James, these possibilities will not depend upon the presence of a sublime image, a religious icon, or a Maltese cross, suggesting, perhaps, redemption in another sphere of existence. Rather, the hope of her future will depend upon her own substantial humanity. As his career moved towards the novels of the "major phase," James seems to have become concerned not with what a human being can expect after life, but rather with what we must make of life itself.

—chapter 4: "the madonna of the future"

The quest to affirm the humanity of the Jamesian heroine and the possibilities she shares with a man in the consummate human relationship of marriage is completed in James's final three complete novels: The Wings of the Dove (1902), The Ambassadors (1903), and The Golden Bowl (1904). Thus far in this selection of novels by Henry James, the resolution of life's sorrows has seemed to be a condition of another world, or at least removed from the contextual exigencies of life itself. Like the mythological Mater Dolorosa, or James's own Minny Temple, the Jamesian heroine falls short of experiencing fulfilment as a temporal human reality. Each central female character aspires to live, but in pursuing life, each suffers only life's many disappointments. The progression of these final three novels involves a pattern moving beyond sorrow and disappointment, a pattern in which the Jamesian heroine is first understood only as something like a religious icon, but who becomes, subsequently, a human being in the eye of a male aesthete-observer. She is ultimately recognized and understood as a woman, with the further suggestion being that, as a result of

this recognition and understanding, she is capable of fulfilling her true purpose in life as a wife and a mother.

In The Wings of the Dove, this progression is initiated as a query into the actual physical credibility of a woman who seems to have an intimate affiliation with the archetypal image of the Madonna. Considering that this novel has been critically acclaimed as inspired by James's memory of Minny Temple, the association of Milly Theale with James's cousin needs little justification here. As James himself perceived Minny Temple after her untimely death, he created Milly Theale in such a way that Milly's fate is ultimately very similar to The Assumption of the Virgin or the sublime elevation of Claire de Cintr  at the conclusion of The American.

The controlling image of The Wings of the Dove is derived from the novel's title. Milly Theale is repeatedly associated with a "dove." The source of this image is undoubtedly Christian, but its significance is perhaps more profound than has been previously acknowledged. Lyall Powers seems to consolidate a recurrent critical attitude: "It is perfectly clear... that if [James] did not intend Milly...to equal the Paraclete, he did intend [her] to resemble

a paraclete—his own favourite, Minny Temple."²⁴ However, the question of Milly Theale's humanity does seem analogous to the myth of "the Paraclete" in Genesis I, insofar as her attempts to be recognized as a woman recall the enactment of the Holy Spirit of the Lord descending as a dove over the void of creation and giving the Earth a tangible form. As Genesis I delineates, the creation of humanity involved a progression moving from defining first the ethereal realm of light to defining, finally, the objective reality of man. Such an analogy to James's own progression towards defining the humanity of a woman through the novels of the "major phase" was likely no mere coincidence. Furthermore, in the history of Christian art, the earliest visual representations of the Holy Ghost are typified simply by rays of light. This then later evolved into portraying the Holy Spirit as a dove. But further still, "up to the eleventh century, the dove is alone the appointed symbol of the Holy Ghost...after that period, the dove shared that honour with the man."²⁵ This progression was away from the more allegorical

24. Lyall H. Powers, Henry James: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), p. 85.

25. Adolphe N. Didron, Christian Iconography: The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages, Vol. I (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1851), p. 403.

representations to those with a more explicit human context. Therefore, James's conception of the "dove" as the controlling image associated with the central female character in the first of the novels of the "major phase" has a mythological and a historical legitimacy symptomatic, perhaps, of James's own quest to substantiate the humanity of a woman as the "realistic" means of fulfilling life, love, and marriage.

Apart from the creation of man, Christian mythology describes yet another instance in which the Holy Spirit of the Lord appears as a dove which may illustrate further the significance of James's use of the image. As described in the Apocrypha, the designation of the Virgin Mary's earthly companion depended upon the presence of a dove as a sign indicating to whom the Virgin should be betrothed. Several accounts of the Virgin's betrothal to Joseph deviate in particular as to whether a dove blossomed forth from Joseph's staff, or merely descended from Heaven, but the version with which James would have likely been most familiar in his travels abroad is the former: "In several fresco paintings, in various miniatures of manuscripts, and particularly among the Italians, a white dove, the Holy Ghost, is seen escaping from the flowering staff carried by St. Joseph at the time of his marriage

with the Virgin."²⁶ But this myth also underwent a progression subsequent to its original documentation in the Protovangelium or Book of James which is dated as early as the third century. The miraculous elements of the event became redefined in order to suggest a more realistic authenticity in the Virgin's betrothal. As George Every suggests in Christian Mythology, the Syriac account of the legend interprets the myth as an actual occurrence:

In the Syriac the miraculous element is greatly reduced. The meeting is indeed held by an angel's order, but it is of men belonging to the royal house of David. The dove is a Temple dove, who perched on Joseph's staff and then on his head.²⁷

In The Wings of the Dove, the possibility of Milly Theale's marriage to Merton Densher repeatedly invokes in the mind of Kate Croy the image of a dove, which seems, then, to be possibly an allusion to this myth. However, for James, the possibility of Milly's fulfilment through marriage depends upon the recognition of her fragile humanity, and not upon the recognition of his heroine as even a "Temple dove."

26. Didron, p. 446.

27. George Every, Christian Mythology (London: Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1970), p. 78.

The title of The Wings of the Dove immediately suggests the likelihood that a central female character will represent a sublime reality in the thoughts of other characters. Our introduction to Milly Theale affirms this possibility through the eye of Susan Stringham for whom Milly embodies a sublime aura seeming to ask of Susan Stringham "some assistance, some devotion to render."²⁸ Though somewhat vague in her consciousness of Milly, Susan considers her link with the young American to be an effect of the "culture" from which her "friend had been starved" (V,74). What Milly seems to lack most is a human context in her life. In America, she seems to have existed in a vacuum, having lost "almost every human appendage" (V,72), and, like the Madonna, is neglected and misunderstood by the American consciousness. But as an artist, as a writer of short stories, Susan Shepherd recognizes Milly's sublimity. The two become great companions, and share one another's company in a trip abroad. For Milly, this excursion represents a quest for life and experience. But as a naive American innocent, Milly is—like Isabel

28. Henry James, The Wings of the Dove (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965), p. 71; subsequent references are in the text.

Archer—susceptible to the temptations and the dangers that Europe represents for James. What Susan Stringham perceives as Milly's elevation above humanity is ominously dependent upon a sense of dedication she alone feels for the young American. Others prove not quite so sensitive, and one anticipates the naive "touch" of a Ralph Touchett:

She was positively afraid of what she might do to her, and to avoid that, to avoid it with piety and passion, to do, rather, nothing at all, to leave her untouched because no touch one could apply, however light, however just, however earnest and anxious, would be half good enough, would be anything but an ugly smutch upon perfection.
(V,76)

Milly's quest for life begins as a symbolic descent from an Alpine vertex. She looks down over the "kingdoms of the earth" with the resolution to live. Though Mrs. Stringham is struck by the idea that Milly may be contemplating suicide, quite the reverse is true: "It would be a question of taking full in the face the whole assault of life" (VI,186). But her descent is into the realm of Maud Lowder, the powerful and tenacious "Britannia of the Market Place." Here, once again, the freedom and the dignity of a human

being are superseded by a hunger for wealth, the power of acquiring it, and an observance of effete conventions. Here, Milly's sublimity is appreciated not as a condition of her humanity, but rather as a condition of her monetary distinction above the vulgar and the mundane.

The allurement of Milly's immense fortune impels Kate Croy, perhaps enacting the lessons of her aunt, to conceive of a "beautiful idea." She foresees in Milly a means of securing her own future marital prospects with Merton Densher, who falls short of Aunt Maud's expectations of what Kate's husband must be like. Kate hopes that Densher will, by marrying Milly, inherit the young American's fortune after her imminent death. She takes possession of Milly's confidence, and, though perhaps naively believing she is involving Milly in life, in effect, she ruthlessly exploits and victimizes the innocent American.

Though it is Kate Croy who initially identifies Milly by the image of a "dove," Kate's understanding of her own image is distinguished by her inability to see what the image may truly represent. For Kate, the image is tainted by her own preoccupation with money: "'She's a dove...and one doesn't think of doves as bejewelled. Yet they suit her to the ground'"

(XXVIII,337). She fails to realize that, apart from her own preoccupations and ambition, what the dove image may represent, as it does at that point for Merton Densher, is the innocence and sublimity of Milly's soul. Any devotion Kate affects for the young American is thus completely the opposite of Susan Stringham's selfless dedication. Kate's concern for Milly is motivated only by her pursuit of Milly's wealth as a means to her own ends. Her devotion is finally not a result of the possibilities Kate foresees in Milly's life, but rather a result of the possibilities she foresees in Milly's death.

Insofar as one of the major considerations of The Wings of the Dove is the question of Milly's impending death, her equation with the Bronzino portrait at Matcham elucidates what, for James, is the discrepancy between art and life. Art represents ideals. It embodies a kind of permanence unknown to life, but art is also static. Life is at best imperfect, a temporal condition, but life has a vibrancy and an exhilaration unknown to art. Each impression of Milly Theale at Lancaster Gate is either that of a princess, an angel, or a dove. Like a work of art, she is looked upon as an ideal. She is perceived as one might perceive an icon. In Lord Mark's equation of her with the Bronzino, she would

seem to have accomplished a form of immortality, but an immortality that is characterized as essentially lifeless. The Bronzino becomes her own reflection: "a very great personage—only unaccompanied by a joy. And she was dead, dead, dead" (XI,144). The equation fails to allow for the sense of life, the sense of humanity, that she pursues. But the humanity that she longs for shall remain unacknowledged, as if according to her own prophetic observation: "'I shall never be better than this'" (XI,144).

Throughout The Wings of the Dove, Milly Theale never wholly escapes her false apotheosis as an icon or a work of art. Susan Stringham remains convinced that Milly is a princess; Kate Croy continues to treat her as one might treat an objet d'art to be sold on an auction block. Neither character seems to realize that Milly is a woman. But perhaps worse still, Milly's own compliance with the misconceptions and the apparent needs of other characters undermines her own pursuit of life. She fails to realize that to be human requires a limit to her selflessness, that to be human is to make certain demands at times. Rather, insofar as she is conceived of as a Byzantine princess by Susan Stringham, Milly accepts the role of a "caged Byzantine... pacing through the queer, long-drawn, almost sinister

delay of night" (XIII,167). Insofar as she is conceived of as a dove by Kate Croy, there is little doubt that she is aware of her own dilemma, being in fact conscious that "That was what was the matter with her. She was a dove" (XV,184). But rather than rebel against these misconceptions, she accepts them. Indeed, being a dove becomes an "inspiration: she found herself accepting as the right one...the name so given her" (XV,184). Rather than pursuing the quest for life as she had initially resolved to do, she decides that "She would have to be clear as to how a dove would act" (XV,185).

Milly's initial act according to her newly acquired resolve is an avoidance of her London physician, Sir Luke Strett. Insofar as Luke Strett alone is fully conscious of the severity of her illness, so too, is he aware of her humanity. Unlike any other character in the novel, he understands Milly as a woman whose life, rather than sharing the permanence of a work of art, will soon cease. Furthermore, rather than being fascinated with the possibilities of her death, he demands that she "live," that she leave London. In all, what Luke Strett seems to represent for Milly, and what she can no longer finally accept, is the truth of her own mortality. He recalls, in fact, Saint Luke

the Evangelist, the patron saint of artists, who was also a doctor, who alone is considered to have understood and painted on a piece of parchment the "true image" of the Madonna, and whose Gospels delineate not only the marriage of the Virgin, but also almost the entire breadth of her existence as a human being.

Milly describes her avoidance of Luke Strett with a seemingly facile inquiry: "What was it in short but Byzantine?" (XV,186). What slowly becomes apparent, however, is that she accepts completely her identification or role as something like a Byzantine icon to avoid her own confrontation with death. Rather than accepting the knowledge of mortality that Luke Strett represents, she retreats to the National Gallery where, for the first time, she seeks an affiliation with Europe's "'pictures and things,'" where her wish is merely to escape, to "lose myself here!" (XVI,187). She forsakes her quest for life. She submits to living in the Palazzo Leporelli in Venice—"a painted idol, a solemn puppet hung about with decorations"—where she herself is the "priestess of the worship" (XXIV,284). No longer either able or concerned enough to struggle for her humanity, she accepts her absorption into a "Veronese picture, as near as can be" (XXVIII,329).

While among the lady-copyists in the National

Gallery, Milly is conscious of being unlikely to buy an "imitation" but her fear that she might "excite the expectation of purchase" is genuinely prophetic. For her denial of Sir Luke Strett is juxtaposed with her "purchase" of the attentions of Merton Densher whom she meets by chance in the National Gallery with Kate Croy. Merton Densher's role in acting out the demoniac intentions of Kate's "idea" suggests how Densher's own sensibility is merely an imitation of Kate's, and how his concern for Milly is a cruel affectation. However, his development as a character is enormous. His shifting involvement with Milly and his understanding of her become, in fact, the controlling subject of the entire second half of the novel.

Though previously having met Milly Theale in New York on a business trip, Merton Densher is initially insensitive to her passion for life. She is for him simply "a mere little American, a cheap exotic, imported almost wholesale" (VII,110). His love for Kate Croy is his main preoccupation, but he lacks the money to bargain for Kate on London's "Market Place" of marriage, and she refuses to accept his interrogative: "'Will you take me just as I am?'" (XVIII,207). He is therefore driven to accept Kate's "idea" of exploiting

Milly for the purpose of inheriting her fortune. However, his acquaintance with the young American has a dynamic effect on his sensibility. She becomes for him more than a "cheap exotic" but his understanding of her is yet not exaggerated in the development of his realistic eye: "the princess, the angel, the star were muffled over, ever so lightly and brightly, with the little American girl who had been so kind to him in New York" (XXVI,309). His increasingly apparent recognition and feeling for her humanity are complemented, moreover, by the development of his own sense of human values, his own ethical stance, apart from Kate's utilitarianism. In sealing his demoniac pact with Kate, he transcends her power over him—the bargaining power of her own virginity. His demand that she "come to his rooms" becomes, rather than his commitment to her, a knowledge of the "idea he had made her accept" (XXIX,347). Consequently, as separate from Kate, he may no longer justify his wilful deception of Milly through Kate's unscrupulous moral standards. He is forced to confront his own conscience, his own evil, and the reality of the depraved and malicious illusions in which he himself has participated and been the major force of deceit. He sees that what has been involved is not an immutable

art object, but a dying human being:

He had not only never been near the facts of her condition—which had been such a blessing to him; he had not only, with all the world, hovered outside an impenetrable ring fence, within which there reigned a kind of expensive vagueness, made up of smiles and silences and beautiful fictions and priceless arrangements, all strained to breaking; but he had also, with everyone else, as he now felt, actively fostered suppressions which were in the direct interest of everyone's good manner, everyone's pity, everyone's really quite generous ideal. It was a conspiracy of silence, as the cliche went, to which no one made an exemption, the great smudge of mortality across the picture, the shadow of pain and horror, finding in no quarter a surface of spirit or of speech that consented to reflect it. 'The mere aesthetic instinct of mankind—!' (XXXIII, 388)

For James, life is not to conceal oneself in what Densher terms a "conscious fool's paradise" (XXXIII, 388), but rather is to confront what is real. The knowledge of human mortality—of life as at best a temporal condition—is finally the true understanding of Milly's humanity. The attempt to keep the truth from her, as both her protection and the protection of others, has been to deny her the very possibility she once had pursued. The quest for life is, by definition, a confrontation with death.

The knowledge Merton Densher shares with Luke Strett is now apparent in the communion they feel as "one man of the world to another" (XXXII,395). Both characters are now conscious of Milly's humanity. Undoubtedly Densher fails to realize the full effect of his affiliations with Milly, but having seen "within the impenetrable ring fence" at least entails that he will no longer participate in Kate Croy's "dreadful game." Though Milly is dying, he refuses to return to her at the Palazzo Leporelli and deny that he has betrayed her. For, apart from what Kate maintains as the insignificance of deceiving a dying woman, Densher asserts a personal condition of honour: "'I wouldn't have made my denial, in such conditions, only to take it back afterwards'" (XXXIII,404). His return to London marks an enormous shift away from the conspiracy he had shared and sealed in a physical act with Kate Croy in Venice. He returns to his initial position with respect to the possibility of their marriage: "'Something has snapped, has broken in me, and here I am. It's as I am that you must have me'" (XXXIV,419). But since Kate refuses to be moved from their original pact, and since Densher yet lacks the capacity to recognize consciously what his involvement with Milly has entailed, he is again dominated by Kate's profound

control over him. He has come to understand the mortal condition of life, but he has yet to discover that his involvement with Milly Theale has entailed a love transcending her actual physical presence. Through her death, Milly becomes physically insubstantial, but remains a psychic image in Densher's memory. As the prodigious Kate Croy must make apparent to Densher, "'she died for you then that you might understand her'" (XXXVIII,456), and the significance of her death becomes Christ-like. She becomes like the vera ikon a "true image." She becomes Densher's bride in the realm of thought, in a "marriage of true minds." Again, as Kate makes apparent: "'Her memory's your love. You want no other'" (XXXVIII,456). The immortality that life had denied her, she achieves as an everlasting, however lifeless, idea or thought. As a dove that yearned to descend into life and to discover there the fulfilment of her humanity, she likewise reascends into the unknown, as according to her own prophecy:

'!Since I've lived all these years as if I were dead, I shall die, no doubt, as if I were alive—which will happen to be as you want me. So you see...you'll never really know where I am. Except indeed when I'm gone; and then you'll only know where I'm not.' (IX,132)

The union of Milly Theale and Merton Densher at the conclusion of The Wings of the Dove is perhaps not unlike the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph. But the "marriage of true minds" is yet an ideal and perhaps not the greatest human possibility. It fails to account for the passions and the necessities of human reality. Certainly James himself must have been conscious of this insofar as he too, like Merton Densher, fails to marry after the death of his beloved Minny Temple. However, The Wings of the Dove seems ultimately to represent, as did the biblical dove perched upon Joseph's staff, a "sign" that the marriage of a sublime female figure is, in fact, possible. Consequently, the progression towards substantiating the humanity of the Jamesian heroine proceeds in The Ambassadors. As its title suggests, the second novel of the "major phase" serves as a point of mediation between the more profoundly entitled The Wings of the Dove and James's last complete novel, The Golden Bowl. The Ambassadors explores the human credibility of a woman whose affiliation is directly with the vera ikon in the mind of Lambert Strether. Strether's pilgrimage to Europe is epitomized by his conscious recognition of Marie de Vionnet who becomes for him more than a human manifestation of a sublime image. She becomes a woman as well.

The positional metaphor of Lambert Strether in Europe is a typical Jamesian motif in which a character is set at a point of vacillation between two dynamic poles of existence. One is the force of America as it is established prior to the action of the novel. This force incorporates the unseen and yet vital influence of Woollett and an enormously successful American financier, Mrs. Newsome. Mrs. Newsome represents the materialistic world of wealth and power, and though Strether never seems wholly committed to her, still, her influence is apparent through Waymarsh, and, late in the novel, Sarah Pocock. The other is the force of Europe. This force is characterized by the initially mysterious Marie de Vionnet. Madame de Vionnet is both associated with and comes to personify a living manifestation of the Madonna. She is also the focal center of European life in The Ambassadors and represents the ideal propriety of European conventions. She commands as her ambassadors to Strether, Maria Gostrey, Jeanne de Vionnet, and Chad Newsome. Furthermore, she becomes the main concern of Strether's consciousness through the course of the novel as he begins to understand her not as an icon or an ideal untouched by humanity, but as a woman wholly committed to the necessities of life.

Lambert Strether's understanding of Marie de Vionnet involves a substantial progression. His initial impressions of her consist of the preconceptions he has shared with Mrs. Newsome that she is the "hideous" subjugator of Chad's independence. But through first the intimations of Maria Gostrey, and second the impression Strether himself acknowledges with respect to Chad's apparent "sharp rupture of identity...a case of transformation unsurpassed,"²⁹ Strether is prompted away from his fixed preconceptions. He applauds rather than condemns Chad's apparent change. He is prompted towards discovering the mysterious force behind Chad's transfiguration. This then involves his introduction to Madame de Vionnet through first his impressions of her home. Strether's understanding of what the objective properties of Madame de Vionnet represent causes him to be impressed with a certain "spell of transmission," that is, with how her possessions seems timeless, and unencumbered by her subjective control. Indeed, a sense of freedom and harmony envelops her home, with Marie de Vionnet herself at its center. Here, rather than being struck with the thought of a vicious "collector" or a dreadful huntress, Strether is forced to acknowledge:

29. Henry James, The Ambassadors (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960), pp. 89-90; subsequent references are in the text.

...the air of supreme respectability,
 the consciousness, small, still,
 reserved, but none the less distinct and
 diffused, of private honour...Everything
 in fine made her immeasurably new, and
 nothing so new as the old house and
 the old objects. (Bk.6:I,160)

The impression Strether acquires of Madame de Vionnet from the "old house" becomes "the sense of her rare unlikeness to the women he had known" (Bk.6:I,160). His doubts as to the validity of his mission to "save" Chad for Mrs. Newsome are then only to be further confounded by his introduction to Jeanne de Vionnet, whose beauty and innocence serve as yet another distinction in Strether's consciousness of Marie de Vionnet. Rather than seeming to require redemption, Chad becomes to Strether's mind a great success in the mainstream of life. But Strether's confusion as to with whom his loyalties lie is brief. The conclusion of his interview with Marie de Vionnet is characterized by his prophetic comment and his commitment to the European lady: "'I'll save you if I can'" (Bk.6:I,167).

In The Ambassadors, Lambert Strether reveals how one of the aspirations of humanity is to share the permanence and immortality of art. He is in quest of a metaphysical reality free from the temporal condition

of mutability. This quest is apparent through the course of Strether's attendance at Gloriani's garden-party. Strether's sensation of Gloriani's garden is the "sense of a great convent, a convent of missions, famous for he scarce knew what" (Bk.5:I,128). His initiation is into the endeavour of art to affirm the viability of human existence beyond the span of a single lifetime. He is struck, momentarily, by the esthetic counterpart to his own life. He perceives in Gloriani, an artist/sculptor, not only a man subjectively successful and powerful, but also an eternal image, an archetypal "idea" free from the pressures of time:

With the genius in his eyes, his manners on his lips, his long career behind him and his honours and rewards all around, the great artist, in the course of a single sustained look and a few words of delight at receiving him, affected our friend as a dazzling prodigy of type. Strether had seen in museums...the work of his hand...all of which was more than enough to crown him, for his guest, with the light, with the romance, of glory. Strether in contact with that element as he had never yet so intimately been, had the consciousness of opening to it, for the happy instant, all the windows of his mind....He was to remember again repeatedly the medal-like Italian face, in which every line was an artist's own, in which time had told only as tone and consecration. (Bk.5: I,127)

This image of permanence then becomes for Strether "a test of his own stuff" (Bk.5:I,128). He becomes self-conscious, feels that he is old, and that he has "missed" life. But the image is his own illusion. Confounded by the "beautiful" superficialities of Gloriani's garden-party, Strether fails to see what is real beneath the facade and the conventions of European life. His famous entreaty to Little Bilham to "'Live all you can'" (Bk.5:II,142) suggests, perhaps, Strether's own frustrations that are his particular vulnerability in his need for permanence, but also his inability to accept his own mortality as well. Though, as Little Bilham suggests immediately thereafter, Strether might most want to be like Gloriani, the middle-aged American aspires to be like the youthful Chad Newsome. What he wants is to share the permanence of art. What he wants is unadulterated beauty, a "virtuous attachment" between Chad and Jeanne de Vionnet. What he fails to see in Gloriani's garden is the hidden knowledge of evil, the hidden mortal reality of life. What he simply sees, and what his European acquaintances readily protect him from seeing beyond, is a veneer of appearances. He sees European life as

ideal, as art, but fails to recognize the "smudge of mortality"—the great human reality within the "impenetrable ring fence."³⁰

Strether's development as the central consciousness of The Ambassadors involves his awakening to the discrepancy between art and life. The quest for beauty becomes, ultimately, a quest to affirm the humanity of Marie de Vionnet. Smitten by his sense of alienation from Europe and life, Strether enters the cathedral Notre Dame "hoping to escape" the self-consciousness and the apparent futility of his European mission. Sensitive once more to the permanence of the cathedral's art, he moves within the focus of the shrine and is impressed by the mysterious quiet of his surroundings, as if Notre Dame were somehow removed from the external world of time. It is then, within this monument to "Our Lady," that Strether "sees" the form of a woman. Neither prostrate nor bowed in submission to the Gothic structure, she is, to Strether's mind, simply "strangely fixed" and immobile. From Strether's viewpoint she becomes visionary:

She was not a wandering alien, keeping back more than she gave, but one of the familiar, the intimate, the fortunate, for whom these dealings had a method and a meaning. She reminded our friend—

30. James, The Wings of the Dove, p. 338.

since it was the way of nine-tenths of his current impressions to act as recalls of things imagined—of some fine firm concentrated heroine of an old story, something he had heard, read, something that, had he had a hand for drama, he himself might have written, renewing her courage, renewing her clearness, in splendidly-protected meditation. (Bk.7:I,192-93)

What Strether "sees" in Notre Dame is perfectly clear. He sees a human manifestation of what Christopher Newman experienced as a psychic image, the vera ikon, in this same cathedral in The American. One need not be overly explicit in suggesting that this "heroine of an old story...renewing her clearness, in splendidly-protected meditation" alludes, in fact, to Claire de Cintre', nor that the author with a "hand for drama" is James himself—The American having actually been produced as a play in 1891. But whereas Newman's conception of the vera ikon is as merely a lifeless psychic image, for Strether, the "true image" of the Madonna does not remain "strangely fixed," but comes to life. The image of the Madonna does not remain ethereal as a condition of thought, but is incorporated in a living human form. And unlike Claire, the female figure Strether sees is not to be protected from time as an eternal image. Indeed, though Strether's "impression

absolutely required that she should be young," the human representation of the vera ikon is now at least in no sense youthful—being, in fact, Marie de Vionnet.

As the vera ikon incorporated in a human form, alive beyond the realm of memory, what Marie de Vionnet seeks in Strether is a meaningful alliance with the objective world. She requires an "ambassador," a mediator to assist her own attempts to affirm her humanity. And although Strether is initially characterized as a Jamesian naif, the development of his consciousness is towards that of an artist, towards that of understanding art as modulated by factual realities. He must reconcile for himself, therefore, the permanence of art with the mortal reality of life. He easily recognizes Marie de Vionnet's intimate affiliation with Notre Dame, but is forced to confront, beyond her sublimity, her humanity—a complication he himself has felt the force of—the mortality of human existence. As if he were an artist then, he offers her the willingness to serve between an ideal and actuality, between her sublime affiliations with the Madonna and her requirements as a human being:

Help, strength, peace, a sublime support—
she hadn't found so much of these things

as that the amount wouldn't be sensibly greater for any scrap his appearance of faith in her might enable her to feel in her hand. Every little, in a long strain helped, and if he had happened to affect her as a firm object she could hold on by, he wouldn't jerk himself out of her reach....It was to this he made up his mind; he had made it up, that is, to give her a sign. The sign would be that—though it was her own affair—he understood; the sign would be that—though it was her own affair—she was free to clutch. Since she took him for a firm object... he would do his best to be one. (Bk.7: I,196)

On entering Notre Dame, Strether offers a "copper-piece" to an "inverterate blind beggar" as an act of charity. In so doing, he himself is empowered with a capacity to "see." He not only realizes Marie de Vionnet's validity as a sublime recollection of the Madonna, but also her humanity. He then willingly adopts a ministerial, apostolic role for her, surrendering his previous self-consciousness in what is now his mission to affirm the physical credibility of an archetypal image. And just as Christopher Newman must finally sacrifice his hope for vengeance on the Bellegarde family in adhering to what his name ultimately connotes, the "Christ-of-her," so too must Strether accept that "The golden nail she had driven in pierced

a good inch deeper" (Bk.7:I,204).

The ambassadorial mission of Lambert Strether between art and life is reaffirmed in the Lambinet sequence in which once again recollection and actuality fuse. This sequence is initiated by the "only adventure of his life in connexion with the purchase of a work of art" (Bk.11:III,353), his appreciation of a "certain small Lambinet" in a Boston art dealer's shop on Tremont Street, an event occurring prior to the action of the novel. Though Strether fails to obtain the Lambinet in Boston, he yet maintains a psychic image of the landscape in the painting. Then the Lambinet landscape as a work of art becomes the landscape as fact while Strether journeys across rural France. He literally steps inside the original setting: "it was all there, in short—it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet" (Bk.11:III,354). But Strether's image of the Lambinet, as he recalls it in the dim Boston studio, is arrested by "exactly the right thing...wanted in the picture" (Bk.11:III,360-61). This is the presence of a man and a woman in a boat on the river, who, like Marie de Vionnet in Notre Dame, "were expert, familiar, frequent...They knew how to do it, he vaguely felt—and it made them but the more idyllic" (Bk.11:III,361). The suggestion is that

what the work of art lacked was a sense of humanity, a human perspective within the landscape. However, upon the identification of the two human figures as Chad and Marie de Vionnet, the idyllic harmony dissolves. The illusions and the vagueness of their relationship quickly fall away. Strether not only sees beyond Tremont Street's illusion of the Lambinet painting, he also realizes, beyond the "performance" of Chad and Marie de Vionnet, the common humanity of their "affair."

Strether's awareness of the dependence of the aesthetic upon the substantial realities of life elicits finally his understanding of the vacuous foundation to his appreciation of Chad. Strether's impressions of Chad have been throughout mistaken. He has looked up to Chad and failed to see that Chad is built on superficialities, lies, and gives only the illusion of a transformation. Indeed, Chad is, in effect, what Sarah Pocock easily recognizes as what is finally "hideous" in Europe—a false image created by and sustained through Marie de Vionnet's own sublimity. Furthermore, insofar as Chad's true "genius" is represented by the advertising position available to him upon his return to America, it becomes apparent that he has, in fact, been advertising himself throughout the novel,

to which end—as Strether perceives—he has ruthlessly used Marie de Vionnet, only to reject her when the value of the image she creates for him is inefficacious:

...it was like a chill in the air to him, it was almost appalling, that a creature so fine could be, by mysterious forces, a creature so exploited. For at the end of all things they were mysterious; she had made Chad what he was—so why could she think she had made him infinite? She had made him better, she had made him best, she had made him anything one would; but it came to our friend that he was none the less only Chad. Strether had the sense that he, a little, had made him too; his high appreciation had, as it were, consecrated her work...the real coercion was to see a man ineffably adored. (Bk.12:II,379-80)

This false adoration of Chad is however an essential touch to James's portrayal of Marie de Vionnet. Though a reflection of the Madonna, Marie de Vionnet is yet a living human being. Unlike Claire de Cintr  , she is unable to suffer patiently the position of the vera ikon. Her decision is for life—objectified first by Chad and then by Strether. She clings to both, afraid, as Strether suggests, "'for your life'" (Bk.12:II,380). But though she is rejected by Chad, she is redeemed from the futility and the meaninglessness of her struggle for life by the recognition and the commitment of faith Strether offers her. He affirms

not only an appreciation of her archetypal significance, but an appreciation of her humanity as well. He sees the "passion, mature, abysmal, pitiful, she represented... the possibilities she betrayed...visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet" (Bk.12:II,380). As a living recollection of the vera ikon, she is betrayed by the complications of her humanity, but, unlike Claire de Cintr  , she is not lifeless. She is bricked over "'only up to her chin.... She can breathe'" (Bk.10:I,306).

Though Strether is himself an object of endearment for Marie de Vionnet, he forsakes his love for her in enacting once more his role as her ambassador by carrying a final plea for her to Chad. Strether accepts what he has come to "see" as sufficient; he accepts the recognition of beauty not as the permanence of art, but as the living human form. He is finally unable to marry Maria Gostrey because it is precisely the objective marriage he has sacrificed in his relationship with Marie de Vionnet. The marriage Merton Densher was at best partially conscious of—the "marriage of true minds"—Strether fully acknowledges as a form of fulfillment for his love for Marie de Vionnet. Indeed,

his final words to her are in fact his avowal: "'Ah but you've had me!' he declared...with an emphasis that made an end" (Bk.12:II,382).

The development of the Jamesian heroine as a physically credible human being reaches a point of expectancy in The Ambassadors. Marie de Vionnet is consciously recognized as a human being by Lambert Strether, but he sacrifices the possibility of marriage with her. However, the possibility of a realistic and procreative union between a man and a woman becomes the subject of James's last complete novel: The Golden Bowl. In The Golden Bowl, art and life are at last forcibly disassociated. The humanity of Maggie Verver is affirmed as a result of the iconoclastic fate she shares with the religious icon designated as a central image by the name it shares with the novel's title.

The concept of "iconoclasm" refers very generally to "image breaking," and is derived from a historical period known as the "Iconoclastic Controversy." In the history of Christianity, the use of religious pictures and objects was an early feature in religious worship. However, after the fifth century, these icons came to be associated with superstitions, and, as the

Iconoclasts maintained, "were often worshipped for themselves, as distinguished from worship of the person or ideal the picture was intended to recall or symbolize."³¹ The "Iconoclastic Controversy" was, therefore, a period of extreme opposition to the use of religious icons because of this concern. In its Christian context, iconoclasm is especially associated with the termination of the First Golden Age of the Byzantine Empire. Initiated by Leo III in 726, the iconoclastic doctrine entailed the destruction of religious icons, crosses, and stored reliquaries, and flourished until as late as 843. As the final contention of this thesis then, presumably The Golden Bowl reaffirms the iconoclastic ideology, and completes the progression of the "major phase" novels by affirming the humanity of the Jamesian heroine through the destruction of an icon that serves as a central image in the life of Maggie Verver.

The superstitious veneration of a religious icon is most apparent in James's portrayal of the Prince Amerigo in The Golden Bowl. As a central male character, the Prince equates Maggie Verver with the "Golden Bowl" discovered by Charlotte Stant in

31. John Ives Sewall, A History of Western Art (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1953), p. 283.

a small shop on Bloomsbury Street in London. Undoubtedly Byzantine as a surviving relic of a "lost art," this gold-leafed crystal chalice is considered by the Prince to be inseparable from his future happiness with Maggie, the Princess. That the bowl is cracked beneath its golden facade prompts the Prince to reject its possibility as a gift for Maggie on the eve of his marriage to her. His response to the bowl is a form of idolatry that does not allow for imperfection in the icon. He reacts to the crack with a significant attitude: "'Per Dio, I'm superstitious! A crack is a crack—and an omen's an omen.'" ³² What the Prince must have as a romantic aesthete-observer, as an idealist, and furthermore, what the fairy-tale motif implies, is the elevation of love beyond its human context, a love and a marriage that must in no sense allow for imperfection.

Amerigo's marriage to Maggie Verver is, in the traditional sense, an "arranged" marriage. As a condition that Maggie "'wasn't born to know evil'" (IV,66), the Prince is acquired by Adam Verver as one might acquire a "museum-piece." As yet another Jamesian collector, Adam Verver is likely not intended to

32. Henry James, The Golden Bowl (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963), p. 92; subsequent references are in the text.

represent any kind of immorality, but perhaps merely an insufficiency of knowledge, an inability to foresee the possible effects of his good intentions. Unconscious of the Prince as a fallible human being capable of betraying his daughter, the naive American financier literally buys Amerigo as:

'a part of his collection...one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are few others like you—you belong to a class about which everything is known. You're what they call a morceau de musee.' (I,23)

Furthermore, it is even as perhaps another acquisition in his collection that Verver marries Charlotte Stant. He reduces her from an energetic "huntress" enjoying complete freedom to his domesticated bird encaged within "bars richly gilt, but firm" (XXXV,421). Yet his greatest effect is on his own daughter, Maggie. Though capable of arranging a marriage for her, on such terms as may recall Maud Lowder and the London "Market Place," he seems unable to relinquish his control of her as his most beloved possession. She remains in his thoughts as a "statue" or even a "precious

vase." His fears of losing her seem to inspire in Verver the need to supplement her humanity with the illusion of her being a fixed art object. He creates for her a position among the objets d'art in his collection in the hope of protecting both Maggie and himself from the cruel vicissitudes and mutability of life.

As she is understood by the two principal male characters in The Golden Bowl, Amerigo and Adam Verver, Maggie is perceived as a religious icon preserved from the imperfections of life. She inspires either the sense of an ideal or the sense of being an objet d'art, an object of possession. However, the central concern of The Golden Bowl moves beyond being a study of her false apotheosis as a work of art, and becomes a study of how the affirmation of her humanity depends upon her ability to extricate herself from the illusions of those around her. Maggie's greatest danger in life is not the misconception of either male aesthete-observer, but rather is her own naiveté. Throughout the first book of The Golden Bowl, her innocence continues to be in a sense virginal, though she does, in fact, give birth to a child. This lingering innocence then becomes a force preserving the appearance of perfect propriety in the relationship between the

Prince and Charlotte, but beneath which their illicit affair inconspicuously broods. Though like the Madonna, Maggie may have not been "'born to know evil,'" it becomes perfectly clear that, as Fanny Assingham suggests, the future of her marriage with Amerigo will depend upon her capacity to recognize and understand "'what's called Evil--with a very big E: for the first time in her life'" (XXIV,259).

The second book of The Golden Bowl initiates a shift in Maggie's consciousness away from innocence towards a conscious acceptance of evil as a condition of reality, as a condition of life. Rather than merely being complaisant with the demoniac intrigues of European life in The Golden Bowl, she slowly begins to see that she must assert that she too is a human being, that she too is affected by evil. She becomes progressively aware of the fact that her marriage to the Prince is truly no more than an innocent's fairy-tale, a kind of idealized fantasy, in which she has failed to allow for the possibility of deceit and betrayal. As Fanny Assingham again so clearly reflects, the illusion has been such that:

'It isn't a question of recovery. It

won't be a question of any vulgar struggle. To "get him back" she must have lost him, and to have lost him she must have had him....What I take her to be waking up to is the truth that, all the while, she really hasn't had him. Never.' (XXIV,258)

What Maggie is slowly "waking up to" is that, in a sense, she has yet to be married. The superficial form of marriage is possible to the extent of having fostered a child, but this, for James, is not necessarily the union of a man and a woman. James has prefaced The Golden Bowl with two novels concerned with the possibility of a "marriage of true minds"—the marriage of Merton Densher and Milly Theale, and that of Lambert Strether and Marie de Vionnet. Though celibate, even these relations would likely have been considered by James to be a more substantial alliance between a man and a woman than the marriage of the Prince and the Princess. If Maggie is to make her marriage with Amerigo the consummation of her love for him, she must willingly acknowledge the reality of evil in life, and then work to extricate him from it. The key to this knowledge is the "Golden Bowl" itself. Her dealings with the Bloomsbury Street shopkeeper, from whom she buys the bowl as a gift for Amerigo, reveal the intimacy between Charlotte and Amerigo,

Maggie discovers that her marriage is, like the icon itself, cracked beneath its golden gilt. The illusion of perfect propriety between the Prince and Charlotte quickly dissolves; the "equilibrium" of a "priceless arrangement" that Maggie herself has maintained by her innocent faith in Amerigo is overturned.

The veneration of a religious icon, without a sensitivity to what that image intends to represent, is a form of idolatry, false devotion for what is basically a mere superficial form. What the "Golden Bowl" finally represents for Maggie is the superficiality of her marriage with Amerigo, a marriage not of "true minds," but rather one of mere conventional forms. However, though conscious of Amerigo's betrayal of her love, Maggie seeks to avoid confronting him with her knowledge. She conceives of using the "Golden Bowl" as yet an image—an image of that betrayal. But any reverence or power that the chalice may incorporate is finally forsaken through the iconoclastic assertion by Fanny Assingham who lifts and shatters the "Golden Bowl" into three separate parts. Its destruction demands that Maggie herself be the living image or representation of Amerigo's deceit, and that if there is to be a reconciliation, it shall have nothing to do with a religious icon, but shall be with a woman.

Indeed, as the icon lies broken before him, Amerigo is already inquiring of Maggie: "'And what in the world, my dear, did you mean by it?'" (XXXIII,388). Unlike Claire de Cintr  or Milly Theale then, Maggie remains the living proof—herself an image—of the love the Prince has cruelly mistreated. Unlike Marie de Vionnet, Maggie is without an "ambassador" to make her final plea to Amerigo. For the one possible mediator, Fanny Assingham, the "pious priest behind the altar...with his miraculous Madonna" (XXXII,371), will not assume the role. This last Princess must be unique in confronting the Prince herself. Though she may well return the destroyed icon to its pedestal, it is clear that she is now separate from it, that she will no longer concede to the illusion of a marriage that it represents. As a human being, she risks that, unlike the "Golden Bowl," she will not be rejected by the Prince. She risks what remains realistically possible: their mutual recognition and acceptance that their marriage has been less than perfect, less than the ideal both Adam Verver and the Prince had originally hoped for, but nevertheless, still a possibility.

The transformation of Maggie Verver in The Golden Bowl involves a metamorphosis through her initiation

into the knowledge of evil from her identity as an innocent Princess to that of a mature woman. No longer the subject of a fairy-tale, she represents a human capacity to confront but not condemn the Prince. Her majesty as a human being incorporates the capacity to forgive, to love the Prince not merely as a condition of her naiveté, but by consciously accepting him as a fallible human being. No longer does she conceive of Amerigo as the Prince of the fairy-tale motif, but recognizes the validity of his human passions and the circumstances of his corruption. She accepts him as the man she needs and loves, and awaits the signs of his love for her. Her concern is not, finally, for aesthetic truth, nor for moral vindication, but rather for the realistic hope of substantiating their love and their relationship as man and wife.

Rather than becoming a stern avenger, Maggie becomes the means of redemption for all. Just as she forgives Amerigo, so too does she forgive Charlotte. She sacrifices her status and her power over Charlotte by conceding to her a failure to work against her, and thus allows for the possibility that even the "caged" Mrs. Verver may enjoy the proud happiness of her unfortunate but unknown captivity. She sacrifices her intimacy with her father, Fawns, and the best

"things" that the yet myopic Adam Verver has determined to take away with him to America. She sacrifices all that she may affirm life and love. But her great risk is not left unanswered. Amerigo returns to her as the novel closes, with the suggestion being that though "she had thrown the dice...his hand was over her cast" (XLII,510). Amerigo redeems her from a life of solitude with his tangible presence and his love. And though he willingly offers her a complete confession, Maggie now understands that, in life, confessions are made to gods, to angels, or to religious icons perhaps; she herself is merely a woman. She refuses to ascend beyond him—knowing the life-long subservience any confession he might make to her would entail. She accepts the reality of the "flesh" by redeeming him of any need for the "uttered word" (XLII,511).

The ability of Amerigo to recognize the humanity and the love of Maggie Verver is the consummate beginning of their marriage. What the Prince finally "sees" is Maggie's role in life neither as a sublime image of perfection, nor as a mere object for his own personal possession. What the Prince sees is not an icon, but a woman, not the Madonna of art, but a Madonna who has accepted and acted upon her knowledge of evil. Her immediate presence and her human love are all that

he requires: "'See"? I see nothing but you'" (XLII, 511). The image of the "Golden Bowl" that once defined the superficiality of their marriage is no longer present, but perhaps becomes what the final word of the novel suggests, and that which it truly represents: the human breast.³³ Their love is no longer a "golden" facade, but grows from the heart—affirming not immortality, finally, but rather human continuity through the birth of the Principino, the "young Prince," the first and the last living progeny born in the brilliant career of Henry James.

33. Cf. Erich Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1955), insert, pp. 44-45.

—chapter 5: conclusion

Since this thesis began with the excursion of Christopher Newman, who at one point in The American is referred to as Christopher Columbus, and since one ends with the discovery of the Prince Amerigo, who like his namesake "succeeded where Columbus failed,"³⁴ little remains to be done but to reach a conclusion to my own explorations of James's fiction. The purpose of this study has been to examine in James's fiction a recurrent preoccupation with a central female character or type. This preoccupation involves, for an aesthete-observer, a confusion between art and life. The Jamesian heroine is associated with paintings, religious icons, architectural structures, and other visual images by other characters in each of the novels. However, this motif is not without a mythological source and an essential pattern of development. In each instance, the association of the Jamesian heroine with the arts seems to point towards her affiliation with an archetypal image: the Madonna. But the development of the novels involves a disassociation of art from life. The central female character progresses from a

34. James, The Golden Bowl, p. 66.

point of elevation as a sublime image removed from the contextual exigencies of life towards a confrontation with life itself. The sense of motion is that of a fall, but if so, it is at least a "fortunate fall."

The confusion of art and life involves certain moral implications for James. Just as a work of art may be appreciated as a transcendence of the subjective experience of life, so too may the understanding of a human being often be inspired by a psychic impulse on the part of one character to impute to another character the aesthetic permanence of a work of art in James's fiction. What an observer of life will often perceive is the association of another character with a work of art, usually a religious icon, and then will lose sight of that individual's subjective identity. Often this association involves a certain recollection of a previous sensation or may even be an archetypal recognition, but whatever the case, any sense of permanence in a human being is, for James, an illusion. Permanence is, perhaps, the great distinction of art, but it is not a condition of life. To perceive another human being as unencumbered by the needs and the limitations of temporal corporeality is a denial of his or her humanity. Certainly life involves many sorrows and disappointments, and seems to end with the indifference

of death, but life is not merely cruel mutability. Life is also vibrant and exhilarating, and offers the promise of fulfilments that art may never share. However, insofar as man's greatest fear seems to be the abyss of death, what James has perceived is our attempts to avoid the confrontation with death by clutching, restraining, trying in whatever possible way one can to preserve life. Indeed, what is the true impulse motivating James's infamous collectors or his inspired romantic idealists? The need to possess and control not only objets d'art, but human beings as well, evolves, as does the need to see in a human being a sublime image, from the contagious fear of human mortality.

For James, to live was to be free to explore one's consciousness from birth until death. To live was not to seek escape from the knowledge of death, but to live and grow by one's acceptance of it. What this thesis has examined is how the Jamesian heroine is portrayed according to her role in a world defined in terms of human mutability. At the outset, Claire de Cintr   forsakes life for the protection of a Carmelite convent, and as her final identity is that of Sister Veronica, she functions, finally, as an ethereal image in the mind of Christopher Newman. As the vera ikon,

she then prefigures the attempts of each of the remaining Jamesian heroines in this study to fulfill the role of a human being, the role that Claire abandons. These attempts then evolve into a general motif: the quest for life. Undoubtedly this quest condemns each of the Jamesian heroines in the novels selected from the middle years of his career to sorrow. However, the promise of fulfilment is invoked in The Wings of the Dove by the novel's mythic structure, and the remaining novels of the "major phase" progress towards defining the role of the Jamesian heroine as a human being, as a woman capable of fulfilling and finding fulfilment within marriage. The quest for life becomes, finally, a confrontation with evil in The Golden Bowl, but life's cruel sorrows are resolved through a "realistic" acceptance of life and by the meaningful love shared by a man and a woman. In the world James creates, the realist sees something beyond the imagination, something beyond even the sublime. He sees and accepts the terms by which life must be lived.

Several critical works have been published on James's use of imagery, but each fails to identify the Madonna image as an important consideration in any understanding of James's work. Robert L Gale's The Caught Image: Figurative Language in the Fiction

of Henry James tabulates approximately 16,902 images in the 135 novels and tales by Henry James, but is essentially a descriptive survey. Gale's interpretations and commentary seem, at times, to be rather facile. With particular relevance here, one of his conclusions that proves perhaps the most troubling follows his survey of "Blest Images and Sanctified Relics." He suggests that "the only religion to James seems to have been the adoration of art."³⁵ This, I think, misinterprets many of the novels. For example, the adoration of art in The Spoils of Poynton supersedes the humanity of Fleda Vetch, and proves to be a destructive force inhibiting her pursuit of life. Furthermore, Gale's suggestion would seem to require a differentiation between the adoration of art as an aesthetic ideal, and the adoration or idolatry of mere objets d'art, which Gale fails to offer. But again, The Caught Image does provide an excellent survey as a source of reference, and Gale's system of categorization is well defined. Alexander Holder-Barell's The Development of Imagery and Its Functional Significance in Henry James's Novels offers some lucid commentary in parts, but tends towards becoming fragmented as a whole. Holder-Barell reiterates

35. R. L. Gale, The Caught Image: Figurative Language in the Fiction of Henry James (Chapel Hill: University of N. Carolina Press, 1954), p. 165.

F. O. Matthiessen's observation that James's source for the central image of The Golden Bowl may have been Blake's "Can wisdom be put in a silver rod/Or love in a golden bowl?" to which Holder-Barell suggests that "Maggie, in the end, gives a triumphant 'yes'."³⁶ He thus fails to realize the iconoclastic significance of the bowl's destruction, and, in fact, postulates that the image remains a vital concern at the end of the novel. It would seem rather that love finds its way not into a golden bowl, but rather into the hearts of Maggie and Amerigo at the conclusion of the novel. The iconic image is no longer present.

One relatively recent study on James is Viola Hopkins Winner's Henry James and the Visual Arts. She emulates Holder Barell's assumption that "Maggie succeeds in welding together the fragments of the golden bowl,"³⁷ which again fails to account for the iconoclastic ideology present in James's last complete novel. However, this major study incorporates a very useful article she has written previously as Viola Hopkins: "Visual Art Devices and Parallels in the Fiction of Henry James" (PMLA, lxxvi, 1961). Here, she offers some very interesting observations as to the possible

36. Holder-Barell, p. 157.

37. Viola Hopkins Winner, Henry James and the Visual Arts (Charlottesville: U. Pr. of Virginia, 1970), p. 167.

sources of James's selection of images from the visual arts. Finally, while other critical endeavours have examined James's use of imagery as well, none seems to have taken into account the specific confusion of art and life that shapes the development of the Jamesian heroine, nor the anticipation of the iconoclastic ideology in The Golden Bowl as this development progresses through the novels of the "major phase." Similarly, there has been a general lack of critical awareness for the myth of the Madonna as a vital concern for James and his art. By redefining the quests of two of history's greatest explorers, James depicts how man's discovery of an icon may be a source of enormous consolation in his approach towards death, but how the discovery of a woman is an invocation of life, and all that remains humanly possible.

—the end—

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