

precious antique coin'(Z,625), illustrates aptly his approach to art. Firstly, in this particular instance, it draws him away from the real concerns of life, namely Ralph's illness and Isabel's distress. That he is copying a drawing suggests how little he draws on life for his art; all his impressions are sterile and secondhand. The coin points to his worship of money, which he has attempted to elevate to the stature of art.

The sickly Ralph is also connected with art, since he tries to shape Isabel's life by giving her the means to 'gratify her imagination'. He wishes to gain vicarious enjoyment by watching the spectacle of a free young girl 'affronting her destiny'. But because of the vicarious element in his motive, his artistic creation must also fail; he does not realise the force of Isabel's romanticism and how it is dangerous to set it free. Having given her the money, he is therefore to a large degree responsible for her unhappiness.

The theme of art and the artist, apart from being carried in the images discussed above, is also brought to the reader's notice by the references to works of art themselves. The very title suggests this theme, and indeed, it is Isabel as a portrait to appreciate that Osmond imagines he is gaining by marrying her. Further, Ralph sees that Isabel's artistic taste is sure when she inspects the gallery at Gardencourt (X,610), and says that her character "is finer than the finest work of art, - than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian..." (X,748). Warburton meets Isabel for the last time in front of 'The Dying Gladiator' (Y,639) and Henrietta returns to see her favourite work of art, the 'Tribune' by Correggio (Z,344).

Art then, and James's attitude in The Portrait, are illustrated by imagery closely bound up with theme and action. The various attitudes to art are not, as in Roderick Hudson, carefully set out in a dinner-table discussion between artists. And while Isabel's failure is motivated by her background, character and environment, Roderick's have too much inevitability and too little motivation. The Portrait of a Lady therefore demonstrates a highly mature integration between theme and image with respect to art, and as such, marks a distinct advance on Roderick Hudson.

The thread of dramatic and spectator imagery which runs through The Portrait of a Lady, is common to the final three novels. In The Portrait, though, it never reaches the sophistication displayed by its counterpart in The Golden Bowl, where it marks out Maggie's gradual assumption of control;⁸⁰ the earlier work's references are more centred upon the particular

instance, rather than, as in the later works, having an additional strongly emphasised developmental facet.

In general, the dramatic images in The Portrait point to the high seriousness of the action and indicate James's wish to elevate the themes above ordinary life, the carefully selected details being framed by the limits of his stage. With the characters pictured as acting in a play, the story is also lent a certain predestined finality, giving a sense of the dark fate which hangs continually over the head of each character, particularly that of Isabel.

For example, Isabel, at her first revelation of England, is as 'entertained as a child at a pantomime' (X,743), the image suggesting her innocence and impressionability, and also her real lack of perception as to exactly what the image of England means. In relation to Ralph, the imagery is important, since he is the non-participating character who watches from the side-lines. He describes his role himself when he asks, "What is the use of being ill and disabled, and restricted to mere spectatorship at the game of life, if I really can't see the show when I have paid so much for my ticket?" (Y,183). Even Pansy, one of the most engaging characters in the novel, appropriately reminds Isabel of 'an ingénue in a French play' (Y,626). And much of Mrs. Touchett's anger at Madame Merle's actions leading to Isabel's engagement, stems from the older lady having played more than one part in the drama (Y,814).

In her lonely vigil of realisation, Isabel perceives that she is no longer at a pantomime - now the real drama of her life has begun. Osmond's saying one day that she has too many ideas, is 'like the bell that was to ring up the curtain upon the real drama of their life' (Z,229). Isabel provides the final image in this set when she calls her personal entanglement at the end first a comedy and then a tragedy, the uncertainty indicating bewilderment at her predicament (Z,485).

Closely linked to the dramatic imagery, which presumes a text to be followed by the actors, are the allusions to the written word in The Portrait. They appear in this work for the first time in James's fiction in a significantly recurring cluster, and are therefore the forerunners of those in The Wings of the Dove, which they match in purpose and complexity.⁸¹

Mrs. Touchett's telegram to Gardencourt sets the tone for this pattern of images, and a close scrutiny of this first image of the written word should focus the whole pattern's purpose (X,590). Ralph, in fact, sets out the issues for the reader; as he says, because of its condensations the telegram "seems to admit of so many interpretations".

This missive from Mrs. Touchett is in fact a microcosm for the whole novel, the difficulty of its interpretation paralleling that of the story as a whole. The questions Ralph poses are central to the themes:

"who is 'quite independent', and in what sense is the term used? Is it used in a moral or in a financial sense? Does it mean that they have been left well off, or that they wish to be under no obligations? or does it simply mean that they are fond of their own way?"

These are the questions which the reader must ask, and attempt to answer. This image therefore, and indeed the whole pattern, is a plea for the reader to interpret closely the written word so as to draw the full meaning from one of James's most successful creations.⁸²

It is interesting to note that since this is his first significant use of this type of imagery, James is sufficiently uncertain of the reader's reaction as to make one of his characters explain the significance of the telegram. In The Wings of the Dove, sure of his technique, James is able to dispense with such mechanical aids.

A significant part of James's settings, painted in the words of the novel, consists of imagery relating to houses and architecture. Isabel's life is marked out by the houses in which she lives, just as Catherine Sloper's is in Washington Square. She starts in the restriction of her house at Albany (X,597) where doors are bolted and windows blacked out. From there she moves to Gardencourt in England, which presents, in its open parklands, a long gabled front of red brick, 'with the complexion of which time and the weather had played all sorts of picturesque tricks' (X,586). Set on a low hill, it is a house which expresses the harmonic fusion of wealth and experience tempered by the passage of time; for Isabel, it is beautifully romantic. In short, the character of the house expresses the easy, genial wisdom of its owner Mr. Touchett; both have been worn and warmed by life.

The equation between character and dwelling is made explicit by Ralph when he thinks of the newly arrived Isabel in terms of a house: 'He surveyed the edifice from the outside, and admired greatly; he looked in at the windows, and received an impression of proportions equally fair' (X,748). This image of Isabel as something which Ralph can stand back and admire, prefigures the role of spectator he is to play later in her life. The equation is repeated when Osmond images the marriageable Pansy as a house to be taken possession of (Z,364).⁸³

The next house of significance in Isabel's career is that of Osmond

in Florence (Y,449), the building being carefully described so as to fit exactly with the character of its owner. It stands on top of a hill, as conscious of its lofty position as Osmond is aware of his high aestheticism. Unlike the open, natural Touchett house, it has only a 'narrow garden' ... 'productive chiefly of tangles of wild roses ...' The forward view is a picture of Osmond's face. The reader learns that the

imposing front had a somewhat incommunicative character. It was the mask of the house; it was not its face. It had heavy lids, but no eyes; the house in reality looked another way, - looked off behind, into splendid openness and the range of the afternoon light (Y,449).

As Osmond is revealed, it becomes clear that the house is indeed a correlative for his face. While he deceives Isabel by wearing a mask of pleasant urbanity, she makes the mistake of not looking at him closely enough, and of mistaking a part for the whole. And once the marriage has crumbled, he looks away, like the house, gazing detachedly at his objets d'art.

When Isabel visits Osmond, having heard Madame Merle's sentiments on people's 'shells', knowing Osmond to be her friend and feeling about his villa that 'if, once you were in, it would not be easy to get out' (Y,465), a strong feeling is conveyed of how blind and how culpable Isabel is in her disastrous choice of a husband. Only in her lonely vigil does she realise how trapped she is in the massive edifice of Osmond's egotism. She lives over again 'the incredulous terror with which she had taken the measure of her dwelling ...' (Z,230). Instead of the open, easy access to European life she had imagined it would be, Osmond's house becomes one of 'darkness,... dumbness, ... of suffocation ...' And 'Osmond's beautiful mind, indeed, seemed to peep down from a small high window, and mock at her' (Z,230).

Isabel finally returns to Gardencourt, being able, ultimately, to identify with the time-worn experience which it symbolises.

The architectural imagery in The Portrait of a Lady, therefore, shows a marked degree of sophistication. It is used not only as a dramatic setting, but also in a highly symbolic role, illuminating character, and also adding intense interest, binding the work closely together. Only in The Ambassadors, of the late novels, is similarly effective use made of architectural settings.⁸⁴

The theme of money, so important in The Ambassadors, The Wings of

the Dove and The Golden Bowl, is also strongly emphasised in The Portrait. But in the earlier work it is not reinforced by the many commercial images which bolster its value in the final novels.⁸⁵ As the story reveals, the effect of money on Isabel is catastrophic, since it gives her the desire to share her wealth with Osmond. In a mistaken act of charity, she binds herself to him for life. In brief, the theme of money in the work poses the question as to where true wealth lies. Ralph says to his father, trying to persuade him to leave money to Isabel, "I call people rich when they are able to gratify their imagination" (Y,204). Ralph's error in thinking that money will help Isabel to gratify her imagination, is demonstrated by Isabel's marriage and the manner in which, despite her money, she is bankrupt of her zest for life. Ironically too, Osmond gratifies his own imagination, and yet he could hardly be called rich in spirit.

It is old Daniel Touchett who is really the richest person in the novel. He has great material wealth, and an enormous fund of experience on which to draw. Only at the end of the novel does Isabel have sufficient suffering behind her to be classed as rich in this sense. That she does achieve this wealth of experience, is reflected by her return to Garden-court at the end, the house, as mentioned, mirroring its owner's material and time-worn character.

One further image in The Portrait deserves mention:⁸⁶ that in which Madame Merle describes herself as 'rather stout porcelain' which has been 'chipped and cracked' (Y,339). The image is picked up again when Osmond notes that one of her small porcelain cups has a crack in it (Z,499). As noted, The American has a similar image which occurs but once. Here in The Portrait of a Lady it is extended to two references; in The Golden Bowl, the cracked bowl becomes a symbol and image for the whole action. This small image of Madame Merle, showing the irregularities in her character beneath a smoothly polished and seemingly precious surface, twice carefully used, shows a growth in technique in the use of such symbolic figures; it also measures the distance still to be travelled before the heights of The Golden Bowl can be reached.

Taken as a whole, Laurence Holland seems to sum up the quality of The Portrait's combination of theme and imagery most aptly when he writes:

The image of the world rendered, and a moral perspective on it, are joined in a form which presents convincing

models of actuality, ... because instead of initiating or referring to them it represents them; it reveals them in the vividness of their body and contour by virtue of the heightened vividness of its own formal artifices, which are projected with all the gradations and completeness, the finish, and the pressure of effect that James's medium can manage.⁸⁷

The final work to be examined in this section is The Spoils of Poynton, originally called The Old Things when it was first serialised in The Atlantic Monthly in 1896. It is one of James's shorter works, initially started as a nouvelle, but eventually expanded into a fully-fledged novel.⁸⁸

As the title indicates, the 'old things', at Poynton are the central symbol in the work.⁸⁹ But since they are never actually described, and only referred to by the characters, the treasures at Poynton cannot be classed as images. James does not picture them in concrete terms for a very specific purpose; he wishes the idealistic aspect of their existence in the story to remain unimpaired. To describe them in detail, James appears to feel at this stage in his career, would detract from their high symbolic value as art objects, a value which they seem to gain from the rather distant intangibility vested in them. Pelham Edgar focuses upon this aspect of The Old Things when he writes that James

momentarily played with the idea of making "the old things" of Poynton almost personally take possession of the action, but he shrank from the inventorial exactitude that such a scheme demanded, and preferred to have the spoils gleam with vague suggestions of splendour through the narrative.⁹⁰

Having this somewhat ill-defined, but nevertheless richly suggestive symbol at its centre, sets The Old Things in sharp contrast with The Golden Bowl. In the latter novel, the major symbol has the most concrete image possible, being handled and finally destroyed by the characters whose lives it represents. The symbol therefore becomes an intensely immediate object, drawing its existence from the very conditions of life to which it means so much. And being an image in itself, it can and does serve as an important unifying centre for the image-patterns in The Golden Bowl.⁹¹ Not being an image themselves, the spoils in The Old Things cannot fulfil this role, and, although much of the imagery does revolve around their existence, the cohesiveness of the

image-patterns suffers as a result.⁹²

The most important of these patterns is that dealing with art references. Poynton, as a whole, is the largest work of art in the novel. In all England, it is said, 'There were places much grander and richer, but there was no such complete work of art, nothing that would appeal so to those who were really informed' (P,437).⁹³

With Mrs. Gereth's 'personal gift', 'the genius, the passion, the patience of the collector' (P,437), and with the house providing a matchless 'canvas' for the picture, a fine masterpiece has been created. The widow's ability to collect and arrange beautiful things is so developed that 'in such an art of the treasure-hunter, in selection and comparison refined to that point, there was an element of creation, of personality' (P,440).⁹⁴ Mrs. Gereth is therefore the major artist figure in the book. Fleda Vetch, with her sensitive consciousness, through which the whole story is seen, is also something of an artist, having armed 'herself for the battle of life by a course with an impressionist painter' (P,437).

But it is around Mrs. Gereth's struggle to retain her creation that the action revolves. As the creator, she has an undeniable right to enjoy the fruits of her careful labours. By law, however, the house and its contents belong to her 'handsome and stupid' (P,435) son, Owen Gereth. He, in his turn, is enamoured of Mona Brigstock, the 'long-limbed' and 'romping' product of the coarse Brigstock background (P,435).

The tensions produced by the entanglement of these four characters raise a number of highly complex questions. In one sense, the novel may be said to be about who owes something to whom, and who is entitled to collect what. Is Owen entitled to collect women, adding Fleda Vetch to Mona Brigstock? Should Mona be allowed to become a collector by possessing the spoils, when she has so little appreciation of them? Does Owen owe his mother any of the spoils, when legally they are his? Does Owen, in fact, owe his mother any loyalty at all? Is Fleda, an outsider, entitled to the collection, should she supplant Mona and become Owen's wife? Owen's very name brings to light the important question of the clash between ethics and morality in the novel.⁹⁵ Who, it is asked, has more right to own the spoils; the people whose actions show a deep appreciation of their artistic worth, or those who, through legal title, have a publicly sanctioned moral right?

That the questions should multiply themselves in this fashion, is evidence of the carefully constructed tensions in the work. One of the

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reasons for these tensions, is that once the equilibrium has been upset by Mrs. Gereth's dethronement from Poynton, in large measure, plain material acquisitiveness seems to drive each character in his or her bid for the spoils. The destruction of Poynton at the end is the correlative for this acquisitiveness; the fire symbolises the destructive force which lies behind the attempts of each character to gain the spoils. In other words, such rapacious acquisitiveness, even when lurking behind the facade of a collector, remains at base self-destructive.

While Fleda's consciousness is central, her dilemma also lies at the novel's core. For, having been adopted by Mrs. Gereth, she respects her patron and feels a loyalty towards her. But having also fallen in love with Owen, she realises that she cannot deceive him as to his mother's intentions. And to help him regain the spoils will only precipitate his marriage with Miss Brigstock, whom she abominates. On the other hand, to prevent Owen from ever gaining Poynton, and therefore marrying Mona Brigstock, so that the field will be open for herself, is foreign to Fleda's sense of the predominance of morality over ethics.⁹⁶ Finally, she sacrifices any ambition at all, losing her friendship with Mrs. Gereth and her chance of marrying Owen and gaining the spoils. Fleda's problem is that she is

intelligent, sympathetic and freer than the others, but at the same time she is hampered by the conditions of these traits. Her actuality imposes limits on her ideality.⁹⁷

To see Fleda's dilemma and the sacrifice and renunciation she makes in terms of ambiguities unresolved at the end, seems vastly preferable to a dogmatic statement of the attitude she adopts. As in The Portrait of Lady, James only draws together here that which makes a unity, the portrayal of the tensions is the important thing, and not their resolution.⁹⁸

In Mrs. Gereth, a conflict rages between generosity and egotism. Her love and appreciation of the treasures at Poynton are undeniable, yet this aesthetic sense clashes with her scheming to prevent Owen from marrying Miss Brigstock. She even, in this vein, sinks to the level of stealth and robbery. In her idealism she wishes the most precious 'old things' might go to someone like Fleda who can value them for all their beauty, but her machinations trap her into untimely returning the spoils. In a sense too, she is an egotist,⁹⁹ seeking to

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fulfil her own ideals at the expense of her son's happiness, (himself a 'spoil' fought over) in trying to marry off Fleda to Owen and thus protecting the fate of her treasures.

These, then, are some of the complex issues brought to the fore by the art imagery, itself referring constantly to the central symbol of the spoils. The issues are very cleverly interwoven and overlapped so as to leave few interstices for inconsistencies to slip through. The imagery, unfortunately, in spite of so much thematic material upon which to cling, lacks the real density needed to match adequately the themes. And without something to unify it, for example the Lambinet scene in The Ambassadors or a central image, as in The Golden Bowl, the imagery loses its unity because of the multitude of complex issues to which it must do service.

The imagery of eyes and vision, and the closely related pattern referring to appearance and reality, may be taken as examples. The allusions to eyes and perception in this work are few and scattered, with possibly only six major references, a surprising fact, in view of their predominance in the three works already discussed.¹⁰⁰ The second set, dealing with surface and reality, is equally unsatisfactory. These are images referring to the 'acres of varnish' at Waterbath (P,435), to the mask Mrs. Gereth wears when confronting Owen (P,438), to the 'sheen' of Mona Brigstock's 'patent leather shoes' (P,443), to Fleda Vetch, 'whom from the first hour no illusion had brushed with its wing' (P,447), and to Fleda and Owen confronting each other in their love, after her bout of weeping, as 'together without a veil' (Q,215). These comprise the majority, and the most forceful pictures of this image-pattern.

The weakness of these two image sets is noteworthy, since the novel is seen through Fleda's eyes. In The Ambassadors, where all the action is part of Strether's vision, references to eyes, vision, appearance and reality are very widespread. And, in The Old Things, with so many complex situations facing the characters, the reader cannot help but feel that greater emphasis on the aspects of eyes and seeing, and appearance and reality, could only have added to the novel's interest as a study in ordinary people trying to find their way through a maze of contending motives.¹⁰¹

This thinness in certain areas of imagery is undoubtedly a weakness in a novel which is so tightly structured and which combines so many themes in a complex web. But it is not, it should be noted, a weakness

permeating all the image-patterns. The imagery concerned with battles and the military is pervasive and effective. It is occasioned by, and illuminates the struggle for possession of the spoils at Poynton Park. When threatened with forcible eviction from Poynton, Fleda asks Mrs. Gereth

whether she literally meant to shut herself up and stand a siege, or whether it was her idea to expose herself, more informally, to be dragged out of the house by constables (P,632).

The former alternative Fleda pictures as "a thing ... of wounds inflicted and received" (P,635). One figure in particular, shows James's maturing ability for compression of meaning in a single image.

Fleda, wishing to bring her stay at Poynton to a close, feels, on the one hand, that she is under no obligations to depart; she is also sure that 'neither had she ... on the other, committed herself to hold Owen indefinitely in dalliance while his mother gained time or dug a countermine' (P,636). This image forcefully suggests that Owen and his mother are engaged in a battle of will and wits. The word 'countermine' alludes to trench warfare, a peculiarly bitter, protracted, deadly and filthy form of strife. As the story develops, it emerges that Mrs. Gereth's battle with her son is worthy of each of these adjectives, including 'deadly', since their struggle not only kills the mother-son relationship, but also destroys Poynton, the very object of their fight.

The pattern is continued when Fleda thinks that the new adorned Ricks looks to be in 'battle array' (P,722) and that Owen, appearing there to plead vainly with his mother has 'lost his fitness' to fight her, and in fact isn't 'in fighting trim' at all (P,731). When she presses Mrs. Gereth to settle, she is only met by defiance, and feels like an enemy who, 'having presented an ultimatum, has it torn up in her face' (Q,69). She realises also that to take overt legal action would only make Mrs. Gereth 'flare up and fight, flying the flag of a passionate, an heroic defence' (Q,206).

These battle images suggest forcibly the magnitude of the struggle taking place. They also convey something of its fierceness and of the seriousness with which the characters approach the question of the spoils. Reinforced, as they are, by images of wounds and pain,¹⁰² the

pattern gives a sense of the destructive forces which are inspired and let loose when material acquisitiveness becomes important.

Natural imagery in The Old Things serves as a foundation against which to measure the deviancy of all the unnatural schemes and attempts to hurt. The obtusely simple Owen is the only character who is manipulated by the others throughout. His innate simplicity never changes, and it is for this reason that he is associated with imagery characterising him as the natural man. Initially, he is described as 'very simple and natural' (P,435), having a sense of honesty which was like 'the scent of a flower' (P,734). When happy, his 'great bright sun' is seen to come out (Q,526). Ironically, the attempts by all the other characters to manoeuvre the natural Owen into an unnatural position, parallel the awful attempts of the Brigstocks to ornament their house with natural objects twisted into artificial abominations (P,445). In this respect, the imagery suggests just how warped a high aesthetic sense can become when art is the subject of personal conflict.

The animal references in The Old Things, complementing the natural imagery, show some of the richness which was observed in The Portrait of a Lady. Although many are conventional, there are a number of figures which, through their suggestive power, look forward to those in the final three works. The conventional images are as flat as anything in the first two novels. When Mrs. Gereth says she has been 'a precious donkey' (Q,63), or when Fleda plans to be 'as quiet as a mouse' (Q,71), neither the interest, the characterisation nor the action is advanced in any way.

But when Fleda, failing to lose herself in one of the suburbs of London, feels like a 'lonely fly crawling over a dusty chart' (Q,71), the action at once springs to life. Immediately in this image Fleda's feelings of low commonness, of vulnerability and of slightly soiled dissatisfaction are conveyed. The immensity of the city and the smallness of Fleda are also very strongly suggested.

One of the most atmospherically suggestive images is that of Fleda when she tries to picture Mrs. Gereth without her spoils. She sees her as 'some tropical bird, the creature of hot, dense forests, dropped on a frozen moor to pick up a living' (Q,72). Not only is the contrast in this picture highly effective, but also the combination of sight and touch; it is possible to sense the heat and cold, as well as the distance between the dense forests and the bleak moor. Mrs. Gereth is pictured as a bird because, without her treasures, she is nothing more than a physically functioning animal.

The bird image is picked up again when Mrs. Gereth has to return to a Ricks once more devoid of treasures; she goes back 'like some great, moaning, wounded bird... with wings of anguish, back to the nest she knew she should find empty' (Q,522). The tone of this image suggests perfectly how Mrs. Gereth's high aesthetic pride has been swept away, and she is now left with only her life and her starved emotions.¹⁰² Owen's action has carved down to her animal instincts where pain and the nesting impulse are at their strongest.¹⁰³

An image pattern which is uneven in a similar fashion to that of animals, is the one dealing with eyes and vision. But in spite of being uneven, this set of images does provide a number of examples which are beginning to assume a complexity and tone which measures up to some of the most sophisticated pictures in the final three novels.

For example, Owen's eyes are 'child's eyes in his man's face' (P,440), while Mona stares with eyes 'that might have been blue beads, the only ones she had' (P,442). Both images are very deft as methods of characterisation, the first denoting the simplicity of Owen's nature, and the latter suggesting that Mona's eyes are certainly no use for seeing - she is crassly impercipient - and that they are merely inconsequential little decorative objects. Such pictures are an advance on the type of eye imagery noted in Roderick Hudson, but they still lack that special quality which only one eye image has, namely tone. Owen sets a date for the evacuation of Poynton by his mother: "' You don't think I'm rough or hard, do you?'" he asks of Fleda, ' his impatience shining in his idle eyes as the dining-hour shines in club-windows' (P,631). The contrast between what Owen thinks in his impatience, and what his easy, comfortable eyes convey, is very marked. The associations, most of them highly sensory, connected with clubs at dinnertime, are what gives the image its tone. In a remarkable fusion, every one of the senses is evoked, and the picture consequently assumes a closeness which vibrates with life. The dramatic intensity of the scene, and particularly of Owen's words, is at once greatly enhanced. It is this type of image which, appearing more frequently, lends the final novels their many glittering surfaces and deep tones.

In The Old Things, the water imagery shows an interesting advance on its use in the previously examined novels. Whereas before it had been used mainly as a medium different from ordinary life flowing in a specific direction and therefore denoting movement, in The Old Things, the pattern of imagery has more of the elemental connotations which are so richly present in the last three masterpieces.

The most forceful image in this respect occurs when Fleda realises that she means something special to Owen: 'it was like the rush of a flood into her own accumulations. These stored depths had been fathomless and still, but now, for half an hour, in the empty house, they spread till they overflowed' (P,735). The sexual overtones here are strong, but there is also a feeling, conveyed by the water imagery, that there are forces at work within Fleda which stretch beyond the bounds of emotional excitement. That this is indeed so is borne out by the recurrent imagery of fire in the work. The power of such elemental forces is emphasised when, because of the tensions produced by the struggle for the spoils, Poynton is eventually destroyed, and along with it the raison d'être for the whole story.

Even in Mrs. Gereth, there are feelings imaged in terms of the sea. When Owen has announced his engagement to his mother, for her it is only 'on the second day, after the tide of emotion had somewhat ebbed' (P,447), that she is able to speak coherently once more. Plainly, the forces which her love of art occasion in her, like Fleda's, have a range and strength drawn from the very energies of the largest natural phenomena. It is this kind of elemental, and archetypal association, which water imagery, in The Ambassadors especially, takes on.¹⁰⁴

Boat and ship imagery, usually used in close conjunction with water figures, is very sparse in The Old Things. Mrs. Gereth in Ricks without her spoils is twice pictured as shipwrecked (P,634, 635), and when refusing to leave Poynton, feels that 'to give up the ship was to flinch from her duty' (P,631). Mrs. Gereth's discovery that Fleda loves Owen is marked by a great upsurge of joy like that 'of the explorer leaping upon the strand' (Q,66); and having sent Mrs. Brigstock away from Ricks with a false scent, she says to Fleda, "'we've had a narrow course to steer, but, thank God, we're at last in the open!'" (Q,379).

The most marked feature of such a pattern, and these above comprise virtually all the references, is not only the scarcity of images, or their lack of coherent development, but also their two-dimensional quality. The pictures are very simple, having only a two-way correspondence between the subject and the sense-impression invoked. As a result, they are of minimum value as significant technical devices. James has to wait until The Ambassadors before he can produce a significant set of images which are central to the novel's meaning.

The motif of a journey, which could profitably have been suggested by the boat imagery, is actually conveyed by the many train journeys

undertaken by Fleda, and the various remarks of Mrs. Gereth. These journeys mark a gradual withdrawal on Fleda's part from her first view of Poynton into more and more pernicious and uninteresting dwellings. From Poynton she goes to Ricks, to her father's flat, and finally to Maggie's unpleasant provincial town.¹⁰⁵

Another noteworthy set of image-patterns in the novel is that revolving around religion. The images in this strand are used in connection with the feelings which the 'old things' evoked. In this role, they suggest the depth and seriousness of the emotions produced by the struggles over the spoils. Because of this imagery, the art objects involved take on an added importance and are raised to a more universal level of meaning above their everyday decorative value.

Mrs. Gereth initiates the image-pattern so that its meaning is unequivocal, when she says of the objects she and her husband had collected: "They were our religion, they were our life, they were us!"¹⁰⁶ (P,444). She calls Owen and Mona 'the children of heretics' (Q,59), because they wish to separate her from Poynton, and Fleda is a 'saint' (Q,65) for helping her.

Other image patterns in The Old Things which are so inconsequential as not to merit close scrutiny, are those dealing with architecture, drama and the written word. The weakness of this last set is noteworthy, since this type of imagery, as in The Portrait of a Lady, invites the reader to scrutinise the words in front of him very closely indeed. With the great complexity of themes to be unravelled and extracted in The Old Things, such imagery would indeed have been fitting.

What emerges, therefore, from an analysis of the imagery in The Old Things, is that, although there are patterns and specific images of rich suggestive quality, on the whole, the imagery is lacking in cohesion and depth of expression. To be sure, it is undeniable that The Old Things is one of James's most carefully structured novels, and one which contains some of his most complex and ambiguous thematic concerns. With its weakness in imagery, then, what seems to have happened is that James, concentrating too fixedly on structure and theme, has neglected the equally vital aspect of 'picture'. One reason for this could be that the length of the work prevents the use of too much elaborative imagery; certainly there are far fewer images in his short stories and nouvelles, page for page, than in the novels. But this argument only raises the question of why James then judged The Old Things adequate as a work of art of this length, given its defective

image structure; there was certainly nothing to prevent him writing it longer and fuller. The only real answer seems to be that at this stage, James was unable to combine effectively the deeply complex themes and tight structure of The Old Things with an adequate fabric of images. By the time he came to compose The Ambassadors, he was in a position to do so.

CHAPTER THREEThe Ambassadors

Mrs. Allonby : They say, Lady Hunstanton, that when
good Americans die they go to Paris.

Lady Hunstanton : Indeed? And when bad Americans die,
where do they go to?

Lord Illingworth : Oh, they go to America.

From : "A Woman of No Importance", Act I.

Oscar Wilde

In his essay entitled 'The Art of Fiction' (1884), James writes that 'a novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts'.¹ The concern here is with the 'internal relations'² of a work of art, a subject which was of intense interest to James throughout his creative life. That each part of an artistic creation should have a recognisable affinity with every other was always of particular importance; in other words, there were to be no arbitrary or gratuitous strokes of the artist's brush. If, therefore, images and figurative allusions are to function as part of the unity of a work, then they must be integrally linked with the subject-matter. Ideally, the imagery should not only be closely tied to themes, but should also display a coherent structure of its own. Indeed, the importance of imagery should never be forgotten, since James himself asserts that 'the essence of any representational work is of course to bristle with immediate images'.³ Following this idea, it is therefore one of the contentions of this dissertation that James's novels in the later period began to show an increasing degree of close, inner unity, especially in relation to the imagery. Since The Ambassadors is the first novel of the 'major phase', it will be valuable to investigate whether James has woven his patterns of imagery into this work's fabric so as to make them part of the whole tapestry of the novel.

A pertinent point at which to begin is with the references made to money, medals and materialism in general. Early in the novel, Strether says to Maria Gostrey of Waymarsh: "'He's a success of a kind that I haven't approached'". "'Do you mean he has made money?'" asks Maria, to which Strether replies, "'He makes it - to my belief. And I, ... though with a back quite as bent, have never made anything. I'm a perfectly equipped failure'" (XXI, 44). In other words, 'success' in America is measured in material terms. This is a different yardstick from that used in Europe, which is why the expatriate American Miss Gostrey asks her question. In short, beneath this exchange lies a concern which threads its way throughout the novels, namely the International Theme. Broadly stated, the theme involves 'naïve America versus sophisticated Europe'⁴, although in the work under discussion it is never this schematic or simple. Nevertheless, in The Ambassadors, this theme is important for its relation to plot and situation, illuminated as it is by money, medal and material allusions.

Strether, and later the Pococks, are the ambassadors of the title who travel from America to Europe to save Chad from his predicament. The lures they hang out for Mrs. Newsome's son are, firstly, the chance to make large amounts of money in the family business, and secondly the opportunity of marrying Mamie Pocock. The Americans hope that money will entice Chad away from the decadence of Europe. The International Theme is therefore of central importance to the tensions which give rise to the drama in The Ambassadors.

In the novel, the Americans are characterised by their adherence to the commercial ethic, and all the acquisitive materialism which it presupposes. Their money is made, under the supervision of Mrs. Newsome, by the 'big brave bouncing business' at Woollett, 'well ... on the way to becom(ing) a monopoly' (XXI,59). Strether shows his awareness of the true nature of this business when he labels the unnamed manufactured article 'vulgar' (XXI,60). And he says to Miss Gostrey that the Newsomes have plenty of money, but that it's "the root of the evil" (XXI,59) as far as Chad's return is concerned.

But in spite of voicing these sentiments, at the beginning of the novel Strether thinks very much in terms of money. After his early arrival at Chester, the reader is told that, with time on his hands, 'he reflected that ... he was like a man who, elatedly finding in his pocket more money than usual, handles it a while and idly and pleasantly chinks it before addressing himself to the business of spending' (XXI,5).⁵ And, wandering around in the city, he feels he 'hadn't had for years so rich a consciousness of time - a bag of gold into which he constantly dipped for a handful' (XXI,112). With his 'want ... of money, of opportunity, of positive dignity' (XXI,87), Strether's thoughts are very much coloured by the commercial impulse.

Nevertheless, the change effected in Strether by Europe is reflected in his altered attitude to money, and the way he uses money imagery. For example, worried about Chad's relationship with Madame de Vionnet, Strether wanders into Notre Dame Cathedral. Here 'he was able ... to drop his problem at the door very much as if it had been the copper piece that he deposited, on the threshold, in the receptacle of the inveterate blind beggar' (XXII,5). From this simile, it emerges that even at this point in the story, the influence of Europe has begun to tell on Strether. Losing the rigour which characterises the New Englander, he can now let fall his problems as easily as he can part with money. That it is only a very small sum at this stage, throws into relief the huge sum he forfeits at the end when he finally

discards the problem of Mrs. Newsome's influence by seeing through the narrowness of what she stands for.

Further, whereas previously Strether has thought of profit in monetary terms, there comes a stage when his view is altered. He realises he has seen too little of Madame de Vionnet, and has 'the sense of having stupidly failed to profit where profit would have been precious' (XXII,68). Here, he does not think of gain in material terms; he thinks of it rather in the European fashion of intangible, but far more valuable, personal relationships. His values, and the store he sets by material goods, have undergone a radical change.

The Europeans, in fact, are clearly distinguished from the Americans through money and medal imagery. It is noteworthy that references to money are transferred, in relation to the Europeans, into images of the medal, a collector's piece, and not a symbol of commercialism. Hence Strether is seen in the theatre gazing at the people around him, people 'that his observation played with as, before a glass case on a table, it might have passed from medal to medal and from copper to gold' (XXI,53). While the Americans look upon money as an end in itself, the Europeans see it only as a means to the end of refined and gracious living, a life-style permitting the cultivation of an acute sensibility as a desirable attribute: 'the happy attitude itself, the state of faith and ... the sense of beauty' (XXI, 131). The rooms of Mme. de Vionnet are furnished with just such an exquisite sense of beauty, adorned with 'possessions not vulgarly numerous, but hereditary cherished charming' (XXI,244). Appropriately, on her walls hang 'medallions, pictures, books' (XXI,244), 'medals ... once pinned over hearts that had long since ceased to beat'. As suggested by the medal image, and conveyed by the whole description, the taste displayed in Mme. de Vionnet's rooms is indicative of the European's appreciation of the artistic form as beautiful in itself and not tied to materialistic values. The countess herself reminds Strether of 'an old precious medal, some silver coin of the Renaissance' (XXI,270).⁶

It should be noted that the contrast between American and European values never resolves itself into a clear-cut opposition between the two; the images of the coin and medal serve as correlatives for this. While the coin is the overt symbol of materialism, and the medal of unobtrusive wealth, they have a common element in that they are both precious and valuable. Similarly, there is an intersection of European and American values. For example, the 'organised' marriage of

Jeanne de Vionnet shocks Strether, the more so since Mme. de Vionnet was once herself the victim of such machinations. The feelings of the young lady are never taken into account in this marriage of convenience. Insensitivity of this nature is to be expected from the Americans, but is surprising in the European context where the expectation is that other people's feelings will be considered. And in Mamie Pocock is seen the best of America, unspoilt by success or intensity and therefore akin to the European outlook. She is a girl 'disinterestedly tender' (XXII,155), charming and with 'the visible habit and practice of freedom and fluency' (XXII,149). Hopefully, it is to the facet of America which she represents that Chad returns.

The return of Strether, his renunciation of America and closer perception of Europe, and his 'failure' to bring Chad back, provide a subtle twist to the theme of commercialism and money. The irony is that although he has lost Mrs. Newsome's fortune, he has profited immensely as a person in gaining a deeper knowledge of himself and of those around him. As James says, using, appropriately, money imagery, 'he is out of pocket materially: but he has a handful of gold pieces for imagination and memory'.⁷

In short, through the situation at the end of the novel, and the use of money imagery, James demonstrates that true value lies not in vulgar, outward possessions, but in a refined and broadened consciousness leading to quiet inner harmony. Strether's vision is seen to be worth the price he has to pay for it.

It is around this vision of Strether's, and to a lesser extent that of other characters, that the plot of The Ambassadors revolves. In his Preface to the novel, James poses the rhetorical question as to whether Strether has not, in fact, missed too much of life to regain a sense of what he has lost.

The answer is that he now at all events sees; so that the business of my tale and the march of my action, not to say the precious moral of everything, is just my demonstration of this process of vision.⁸

This theme of vision is firmly grounded in the many occurrences of eye imagery, and in the numerous references to eyes and seeing. The first noteworthy feature of the eye imagery is that it is carefully used to distinguish between those characters susceptible to 'education'

in Paris, and those who remain closed within their New England confines. Neither Waymarsh (XXI,25), Jim nor Sarah wears glasses, and they are the characters whose uncorrected vision allows them to see only evil in the Paris scene. On the other hand, Strether (XXI,11), Gloriani (XXI,262), Miss Barrace (XXI,113) and Maria Gostrey (XXI,10) all use aids to sight, and it is these people who finally perceive fully the charms which Paris has to offer.

But the real core of the work lies where James shows Strether's perception widening and deepening, and it is the gradual extension of this perception which marks the progress of the novel. This development is carefully marked out by the references to Strether's eyes and his ability to see. After first landing in England, Strether hardly exercises his perceptive faculty at all, so used is he to the easy assumptions of Woollett. As a result, 'his eyes were so quiet behind his eternal nippers that they might almost have been absent without changing his face' (XXI,11). And at the visiting cards which he and Maria Gostrey exchange, he gazes with 'unseeing lingering eyes' (XXI,13). It is only when he stops on a rampart to admire Chester cathedral that it strikes him as 'charming to his long-sealed eyes' (XXI,17). He notices the beauty of England very slowly at first, for, walking in the garden with Miss Gostrey, he has but 'the idlest eye for the deep smoothness of turf and clean curves of paths' (XXI,36). Significantly, though, the details he now begins to see are fine and sharply realised.

Gradually, however, he learns to distinguish between important and trivial impressions - he learns, in short, the art of fine discrimination, so vital as he sees deeper into the European scene. His ability to recognise vital scenes is shown by his reaction to Chad's first entrance at the theatre. In retrospect, he realises 'that his perception of the young man's identity ... had been quite one of the sensations that count in life' (XXI,135).

As Strether commits himself more and more closely to Madame de Vionnet, he becomes more finely in tune with Europe, that continent reflecting his feelings and sensations. Hence, having just allowed the countess to gain a subtle hold over him 'his eyes, as he considered with some intensity this circumstance, met another pair which had just come within their range and which struck him as reflecting his sense of what he had done' (XXI,276). These eyes are those of Little Bilham, the most European of all the Americans; slowly, the reader sees, Strether is gaining the type of vision that connects him with the European outlook.

With the broadening of his vision, Strether becomes more self-assured, feeling himself able to 'toddle' without Maria Gostrey. He realises that 'it was proportions that were changed, and the proportions were at all times, he philosophised, the very conditions of perception, the terms of thought' (XXII,49).

And as his impressions multiply, they begin to shape themselves into a coherent sequence in Strether's imagination. He is able to look back on them and see a recognisable form. Leaving Madame de Vionnet's apartments one day, he stares behind him for a moment: 'the whole thing made a vista, which he found high melancholy and sweet ... It was doubtless half the projection of his mind, but his mind was a thing that ... he had always needfully to reckon with' (XXII,125).⁹ Able to see things in some sort of perspective now, Strether stands ready to be confronted by the central recognition scene at Lambinet, the most shockingly visual of all his impressions.¹⁰

Finally, Strether's perception reaches the stage of sophistication¹¹ where he knows his past New England existence for exactly what it was, and still is for so many people. Miss Gostrey asks him if Mrs. Newsome has changed for him, and he replies, "'She's the same. She's more than ever the same. But I do what I didn't before - I see her'" (XXII,323). This, then, is the summation of Strether's development in the work: he sees. This vision for him is life, it fulfils his injunction to "'live all you can!'" for, in terms of the novel, James is not concerned with action and inaction, he is 'dealing not with industry versus laziness, but with ways of seeing'.¹²

Leading from the imagery of eyes, and the references to vision and perception, is the theme of appearance and reality. The multi-dimensional quality of Europe strikes Strether's vision, used only to the uniformity of Woollett, very forcibly indeed. He gazes in wonder at what Paris has to offer :

It hung before him this morning, the vast bright Babylon, like some huge iridescent object, a jewel brilliant and hard, in which parts were not to be discriminated nor differences comfortably marked. It twinkled and trembled and melted together, and what seemed all surface one moment seemed all depth the next (XXI,89).

It is through the sort of complexity offered in this image that Strether must find his way, and it is his vision, his increased ability to appreciate more fully the complexity of life, which allows him to do this.

The image therefore offers a complete reply to F. R. Leavis when he writes of, in The Ambassadors,

a technique the subtleties and elaborations of which are not sufficiently controlled by a feeling for value and significance in living. What, we ask, is this, symbolised by Paris, that Strether feels himself to have missed in his own life?¹³

It is precisely the multifold attraction, conveyed by the quoted image, that Strether feels himself to have missed. And in coming to a full perception of this, his vision, and therefore the way he lives, attain the fullest significance possible in the novel's world.

As Strether's vision pierces from one level of 'seeming' to another, so he moves closer to an inclusive consciousness of each of the planes which go to make up the life of Europe. At the start of his stay in Europe, he feels 'launched' into something strange, a sense which begins 'before the dressing-glass that struck him as blocking further, so strangely, the dimness of the window of his dull bedroom; begun with sharper survey of the elements of Appearance than he had for a long time been moved to make' (XXI,9). As this image conveys, Strether must learn first to reassess surfaces, before he can begin to understand reality. He must look initially at himself, as the mirror suggests, and not through the window, which signifies here the easy, defined outlook to which he has been accustomed in New England.

In the opening chapters, therefore, it is surfaces which engage Strether's attention. Apart from Paris, he sees, in his attempts to get Chad back, 'a mere flaw of the surface of his scheme' (XXI,83). And when Mrs. Newsome's son enters the theatre, Strether is immediately aware that he has 'a form and a surface' (XXI, 152). He is continually encountering veils as he moves through Europe,¹⁴ the final one, which he sees through, occurring after the Lambinet episode. There, Mme. de Vionnet speaks, for the first time, wholly in French, and Strether feels that 'the present result was odd, fairly veiling her identity' (XXII,261). By this stage, the American knows, of course, the exact nature of her character; her veiling is consequently in vain.

That appearances have finally been stripped away in the Lambinet scene, is emphasised by the clothing imagery, or at least the lack of it. Both Chad and his mistress leave their coats behind at their weekend hide-out because they are afraid to go back, having been seen by Strether. Up to this point, clothing has been emphasised as denoting

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the outward appearance of a person,¹⁵ but now their 'virtuous attachment' exposed, clothes are of no value in keeping up appearances.¹⁶

The end of Strether's journey of perception comes when he can see both surfaces and depths and appreciate each as a viable part of the European world. Talking to Chad's mistress, the day after the river scene, he is impressed by the depth and surface-quality of her personality. The change in her strikes him:

It gave him a mild deep person, whereas he had had on the occasion to which their interview was a direct reference a person committed to movement and surface and abounding in them; but she was in either character more remarkable for nothing than for her bridging of intervals (XXII,277).

Being able to see in this manner, means that Strether has indeed achieved an inclusive consciousness.

The ideas of seeing and perceiving are also, in another manner, integrally part of the novel's method in that they lead onto the topic of the author's point of view. The whole work is seen through the eyes of Strether, for, what he perceives, the reader also sees, neither more nor less. As Percy Lubbock says, 'It is a purely pictorial subject covering Strether's field of vision and bounded by its limits: it consists entirely of an impression received by a single man'.¹⁷

The novel develops rather like the detective story of Strether's finding out what it is to live all he can while in Europe.¹⁸ But, as Lubbock points out, although the reader sees what Strether sees, he stands slightly removed and closer to James when watching how Strether deals with his various impressions.¹⁹ Similarly, when Strether is engaged in conversation, the reader always stands on his side of the dialogue. Nevertheless, the observer's position is slightly privileged in that he watches both characters reveal themselves as they talk, while Strether sees only the person to whom he is speaking. But apart from these fine qualifications, the novel is about the world seen through Strether's eyes, the glimpses given of his mind gradually coalescing until a whole is apparent. The method is 'devious', 'roundabout', often 'tortuous', 'yet by these very qualities and precautions, it finally produces the most direct impression, for the reader has seen'.²⁰ By placing the action within a central consciousness, James achieved what he called 'a large unity' as well as 'the grace of intensity'.²¹

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one of sense-impressions. The manner in which what he sees alters his perceptions, is evidence of this. Another strand of imagery which emphasises the sensuous aspect of his and the novel's world, is that connected with eating and drinking. Indeed, while sitting in the Luxembourg Gardens, for Strether, 'the cup of his impressions seemed truly to overflow' (XXI,80).

This type of imagery is used mainly to reinforce the sense of Strether's taking in and thoroughly digesting the impressions which Europe has to offer. When he first meets Maria Gostrey, Strether is imaged as keen for all the sense-impressions she can impart. Even when their conversation receives a check, 'their attitude remained, none the less, that of not forsaking the board' (XXI,7). With 'nothing else to serve', both still wait expectantly.

As early as the second paragraph of the novel, James writes that, 'they formed a qualified draught of Europe, an afternoon and an evening on the banks of the Mersey, but such as it was he (Strether) took his potion at least undiluted' (XXI,4). But as he slowly learns to see and discover for himself, so the imagery carries his movement, paralleling his increased active sense of life through deepened impressions. Hence, later in the novel he is pictured as actively drinking and not simply sitting back (as in the previous image), content to have his potion spooned to him:

It must be added however that, thanks to his constant habit of shaking the bottle in which life handed him the wine of experience, he presently found the taste of the lees rising as usual into his draught (XXI,180).

The imagery of eating and drinking serves a further purpose by pointing towards the subject of taste, in the aesthetic sense, which occurs in The Ambassadors. Very rarely are the Americans (Sarah, Jim, Mamie Pocock and Waymarsh) connected either with the imagery of eating (figuratively), or in an approbatory tone with the idea of taste. Jim Pocock is, for a time, the exception here, when James writes that he 'drank in the sparkling Paris noon' (XXII,84). But Jim immediately undermines the impression that he has any taste when he treats the highly charged meeting between his sister and Madame de Vionnet as 'an opportunity for amusement'. In so doing, he lays himself open to criticism 'on the ground of his spicing the draught too highly and pouring the cup too full' (XXII,161).²² In short, his taste is still, at base, prone to excesses, and he lacks the fine discrimination which

characterises the Europeans.

On the other hand, the Europeans and Parisians have all the taste. Chad is said by Gloriani to have 'wonderful taste' (XXI, 261); Strether is struck by 'the tact, the taste' (XXII, 9) of Mme. de Vionnet's vagueness, and Maria Gostrey's taste, though of a less important kind, is as sure as that of Chad or the Countess.

It is only at the end of the novel, when Strether's senses have been developed to their acutest pitch, that he begins to realise that even the Europeans are capable of occasional lapses in taste. Mme. de Vionnet's attempt to cover up what she and Chad had been doing in the country, strike Strether as equivocal. It is the tastelessness of her trying to preserve appearances when they have already been stripped away, that produces a sourness for Strether: 'It was the quantity of make-believe involved and so vividly exemplified that most disagreed with his spiritual stomach' (XXII, 265).

Even Chad, as he begins to lose interest in Mme. de Vionnet, reveals a lack of sensitivity which is hidden by his smooth surface, and which displays a marked lack of taste, or the ability to discriminate between what is right and wrong. Strether ponders Chad's attitude, and images it, very appropriately, in terms of eating: 'He (Chad) meant no harm, though he might after all be capable of much; yet he spoke of being "tired" of her almost as he might have spoken of being tired of roast mutton for dinner' (XXII, 313).

From these last two images it can be seen that, in the final analysis, Strether develops more taste than either the Americans or Europeans of the novel ever have. He learns to discriminate not only between narrow Woollett and broad Paris, but even between the moral gradations amongst the Europeans themselves. This last is a far finer distinction to make than any other character in the work is capable of. In this way, as James says, Strether has 'come out on the other side' of his experience.²³

The figurative imagery to do with meals and eating is complemented by actual scenes within the book of a number of meals. Waymarsh, for example, is insistent upon his 'matutinal beefsteak' (XXI, 36), Strether dines with Maria Gostrey (XXI, 50), with Madame de Vionnet (XXII, 13) and with Chad and the Countess (XXII, 263). These meals serve not only to ground the action firmly in the everyday, but also add depth to the eating and drinking references; as a result, these latter grow organically from the action of the work itself.

In a similar way, the numerous references to books, letters, telegrams and newspapers²⁴ which occur as props in the action, have their counterparts in the figurative structure of the novel as well. Before Chad appears, Little Bilham says the changed American is "like the new edition of an old book that one has been fond of - revised and amended, brought up to date, but not quite the thing one knew and loved" (XXI,177). Through this imagery James is emphasising first of all the importance of the written word in the lives of people, and secondly that Chad's actions require the same careful interpretation by Strether, that The Ambassadors requires from the reader. Only through the closest attention to the text of each 'book' will the full meaning be drawn from them. Strether sees the full meaning in the 'text' which Chad presents to him; it is up to the reader of James's work, therefore, to do the same.²⁵

An image-pattern which illuminates Strether's gradual process of learning to scrutinise and interpret correctly the facts he sees, is that of children and teaching. All those characters who have not shaken off the influences of a Woollett existence are clearly labelled by Chad: "'They're children; they play at life!'" (XXII,66). The narrow restrictions of New England have never allowed them to grow and develop that most desirable of all faculties, a broadened and mature consciousness. Waymarsh, perhaps the most vigorously inflexible of them all, takes it 'like a large snubbed child' (XXI,33) when Strether tells him it would be folly to return to America as soon as possible. This image suggests not only Waymarsh's immaturity of approach, but also something of the stubbornness and recalcitrancy which characterises the Americans in general.

Strether is also, at the outset, imaged as untutored, but at least he realises that life is a process of learning. He looks back on the events of his life, up to the time of his journey to Europe, as 'adventures, for the most part, of the sort qualified as lessons' (XXI,85). And Miss Gostrey, taking Waymarsh and Strether to the theatre, speaks of herself as "'an instructor of youth introducing her little charges to a work that was one of the glories of literature... For herself she had travelled that road and she merely waited on their innocence'" (XXI,130). As James's ficelle, she is indeed the one who leads Strether along (Waymarsh is not prepared to learn), until he feels able to 'toddle alone' (XXII,48).

Sensing finally that Waymarsh is giving him one last opportunity

to renounce Europe and give up his liking for Paris, Strether feels uneasy at the allowance Waymarsh is making. His discomfort resembles

not a little the embarrassment he had known at school, as a boy, when members of his family had been present at exhibitions. He could perform before strangers, but relatives were fatal, and it was now as if, comparatively, Waymarsh were a relative (XXI,172).

In this vivid and very real image, the feeling is forcibly conveyed of how perplexed, ill at ease and yet eager Strether is to show the manner in which he is reacting to the education dealt out to him by Europe.

He does, however, overcome these feelings, and profits enormously by the lessons of Miss Gostrey, Madame de Vionnet and the Parisian scene in general. So much so, in fact, that in his last talk with Chad, 'he was as grave as distinct, as a demonstration before a blackboard, and Chad continued to face him like an intelligent pupil' (XXII,310-11). Here, the roles are completely reversed, Strether being imaged as surpassing even the Europeans in his knowledge of what constitutes a full life.

His overtopping of the Europeans in this way presents also one of the reasons why he returns to Woollett. Plainly, it would be intolerable for him to remain amongst those who had formerly been his teachers. For this reason, too, he sees that he is incompatible with Maria Gostrey, his earlier instructor. On the other hand, at this stage of his development, he is so far ahead of the New Englanders that living with them will hardly affect him at all; he has outstripped them to the extent that they, and the New England environment, will only be negligible factors in his existence. As a result, he returns to Woollett.²⁶

The thread of game imagery in The Ambassadors is complementary to that revolving around children. The references, although conventional, do suggest that the various oppositions in the work always operate, at least on the surface, in a fairly trivial fashion. The social niceties of Europe prevent, for example, Sarah Pocock's hardness from becoming at all destructive in an overt fashion by containing it within carefully established rules of conduct. This imagery does, however, also suggest there is very real competition going on for Chad's allegiance, and that at the end of it all there must be a winner, and a loser.

In Strether's first encounter with Maria Gostrey, he sees suddenly her abilities, the realisation coming to him 'as straight ... as a ball in a well-played game...' (XXI,9). And when he sees that Mme. de Vionnet's initial absence has been carefully planned, he asks of Miss Gostrey: "'They had arranged -?'" to which she replies, "'Every move in the game'" (XXI,133). The 'they' here refers to Chad and Little Bilham, the use of the third person showing Strether to be on the other side. But in the final game image, the extent of Strether's change is indicated when he says, "'we've both been good then - we've played the game'" (XXII,234). In this instance Strether includes himself on the same side as Chad, indicating the way in which he has come to identify with the European way of life.²⁷

A pattern of images which carries a very strongly emphasised developmental motif is that of boats and ships. Closely bound up, as it is, with journey images, this image-strand suggests explicitly not only Strether's progress through the novel, but even marks out the important stages in his movement towards an expanded awareness of what Europe means.

To begin with, Strether arrives in England from America on a steamship. He has, for all intents and purposes, as this image shows, completed his physical journey, and must now move on to his journey towards a broadened consciousness of life, this journey constituting the dramatic movement of the novel. The steamer-travel at the beginning serves to point out Strether's 'voyage of consciousness' later on. James draws this image-cluster together when he writes of the novel's end that

he (Strether) recognises the conclusion, so far as he is concerned with it, when he sees it - recognises that his hour has sounded. The sound is like the bell of the steamer, calling him, from its place at the dock, aboard again, and by the same act ringing down the curtain of the play.²⁸

The whole action of the novel is to a large degree concerned with ships and boats, the characters talking freely in images of this pattern. Maria Gostrey, as a guide for Americans in Europe, is often pleased to see the last of them, packing them off as soon as possible. As she says, "'any port will serve in a storm. I'm - with all my other functions - an agent for repatriation'" (XXI,36). And Strether, early in the work, still very much a part of the stability - orientated Woollett

way of thinking, says that he thinks Chad needs "the general safety of being anchored by a strong chain" (XXI,71).²⁹ His error in thinking in these terms becomes more and more apparent to him as he sees just how fully Chad is moving upon, and enjoying, the free 'sea of life'. Strether himself, of course, also becomes caught up in this free, figurative sailing.³⁰

'That Strether has figuratively embarked upon a voyage of discovery in awareness, is suggested when the reader is told that 'he wondered, this pilgrim, if he had originally looked to Waymarsh so brave and well, so remarkably launched, as it was at present the latter's privilege to appear' (XXII,185).

During the course of the action, as Strether slowly comes to terms with his awakened consciousness, alternately advancing and suffering setbacks, so he is unsure in which 'vessel' he is sailing at specific points in the narrative. Just after his arrival, and somewhat disorientated by the multifarious impressions of Europe, he falls back on his idea of Mrs. Newsome's kindness in sending him out:

It seemed to him somehow at these instants that, could he only maintain with sufficient firmness his grasp of this truth, it might become in a manner his compass and his helm (XXI,82).

But when he is at the theatre with Waymarsh and Miss Gostrey, just before Chad's entrance, Strether is not nearly so sure of his Woollett vessel. Looking across at his lawyer friend, 'queer and stiff', he suddenly decides to temporise no longer between America and Europe; silently, he mouths to himself, "Oh hang it!"

It represented, this mute ejaculation, a final impulse to burn his ships. These ships, to the historic muse, may seem of course mere cockles, but when he presently spoke to Miss Gostrey it was with the sense at least of applying the torch (XXI,132).

Having figuratively destroyed the ship which had carried him through his life in New England, he travels for a while in images set on land. Preparing at any time to be 'disgusted' by Chad's relationship with Madame de Vionnet, he finds, surprisingly, that 'each day brought forth meanwhile a new and more engaging bend of the road' (XXI,257). And dining with Chad's mistress beside the Seine, in an atmosphere of ease and familiarity which is as strange as it is pleasant to him, Strether

thinks that he has 'travelled far since that evening in London, before the theatre, when his dinner with Maria Gostrey, between the pink shaded candles, had struck him as requiring so many explanations' ³¹ (XXII,13). The distance Strether has travelled is marked by the very fact that he has lost, by this stage, all his New England stiffness and rigour which would have prevented him from dining thus with a lady in Paris.

No sooner has he expressed the conviction that Mrs. Pocock is pulling Mrs. Newsome's boat, and that she will take Waymarsh into it (XXII,64-65), when, during the confrontation between Mme. de Vionnet and Sarah Pocock, it is revealed that the former 'publicly drew him (Strether) into her boat' (XXII,94). Further,

during the rest of the time her visit lasted he felt himself proceed to each of the proper offices, successively, for helping to keep the adventurous skiff afloat. It rocked beneath him, but he settled himself in his place. He took up an oar and, since he was to have the credit of pulling, pulled (XXII,94-95).

Actively embarking now on his adventure in Europe, he is conscious, in Madame de Vionnet's boat, of 'the movement of the vessel itself' (XXII,111).

Suddenly, however, on learning that Chad and Mme. de Vionnet have arranged a marriage of convenience for Jeanne, Strether is once more unsure of his position: 'He had struck himself at the hotel, before Sarah and Waymarsh, as being in her (Mme de Vionnet's) boat; but where on earth was he now?' (XXII,130).

But once he has come to a full realisation of what both Europe and America stand for, a realisation precipitated by Chad's and Mme. de Vionnet's appearance in the boat in the Lambinet scene (XXII,256), Strether is able to leave the boat which has, figuratively, borne him through Europe:

He was well in port, the outer sea behind him, and it was only a matter of getting ashore. There was a question that came and went for him, however, as he rested against the side of his ship, and it was a little to get rid of the obsession that he prolonged his hours with Miss Gostrey (XXII,294).

The noteworthy facets of this image are, firstly, that Strether is seen to have come to the end of his journey. He has expanded as a person to the extent that neither the American nor European ships are capable

of carrying him. Secondly, the figurative ship from which he disembarks is now, significantly, not Sarah Pocock's or Mme. de Vionnet's, but his own. He has indeed learnt to 'toddle alone'.

The image-pattern of boats and ships, then, provides one of the most comprehensive delineations of Strether's progress. The carefully placed images each suggest certain stages in his movements towards full awareness, as well as emphasising very strongly that he has embarked upon a journey which takes him to a specific destination. The technical mastery James shows in using these images, in spite of the fact that they are, in each case, conventional in appearance, is the most advanced in any of the novels. Indeed, this sequence is probably only surpassed in excellence by the water imagery in The Golden Bowl.³² There, while used as carefully, the images have, moreover, a quality of life and tone lacking in the boat figures of The Ambassadors.

A small pattern of images, but one which is noteworthy because it has a similar iterative quality to that of boats and ships, refers to a 'nail', more specifically, to a 'golden nail'.³³ The first reference occurs immediately after the central episode at Gloriani's garden-party and Strether's "'Live all you can!'" speech. Strether remains behind after the other guests have gone inside. He senses that the scene just played out has been important: 'Strether's impressions were still present; it was as if something had happened that "nailed" them, made them more intense' (XXI, 227).³⁴ At this stage Strether is still unsure as to Europe's precise effect upon him for 'he was to ask himself soon afterwards, that evening, what really had happened'. Nevertheless, the idea of a sudden halt to the flow of his life is forcibly conveyed by the nail image. It denotes the beginning of a process, at this point still rather unsophisticated, of pinning down the true quality of life beneath the enormous attraction of Paris. It also suggests how Strether is slowly being transfixed by that very attractiveness which he sees in Europe.

The image undergoes a slight modification in the following instance, a modification illustrating Strether's refined perception of what is happening to him. Having asked a small favour of Madame de Vionnet, he notes that she says 'thank you' with a 'peculiar gentleness', and he realises she has, thereby, drawn him closer to her. He knows at once that he has

under pressure from a particular perception, inconsistently,

quite stupidly, committed himself, and, with her subtlety sensitive on the spot to an advantage, she had driven in by a single word a little golden nail, the sharp intention of which he signally felt (XXI,276).

The nail is now golden,³⁵ its more precious quality being in line with the very fine issues involved in this scene, issues which Strether is clearly able to grasp and translate into meaning for himself. He sees that Madame de Vionnet, has, ever so subtly, attached him to her side of the issue.

When she obtains a pledge from Strether that he will 'see Chad through', and therefore, by implication, herself, she gains an even finer purchase on the first ambassador. The reader is immediately referred back to the earlier occasion of the golden nail, which here she makes pierce 'a good inch deeper' (XXII,22). Now, however, Strether is no longer capable of being tricked and is fully conscious of where his actions are leading: 'he reflected that he himself had only meanwhile done what he had made up his mind to on the same occasion' (XXII,22).

The image has a further development in Strether's last talk with Miss Gostrey. He explains how he had berated Chad for his 'infamy' in leaving Madame de Vionnet, to which his companion replies, "'So that it's really as if you had nailed him?'" "'Quite really as if -! I told him I should curse him'" (XXII,324), is Strether's retort. Here, noticeably, Strether is no longer the one being 'nailed', but is himself the nailer. Ironically, therefore, through this image sequence, Europe is seen to have been hoist with its own petard. The force it has used to pin down Strether's allegiance, has taught him to use the same force and finality in judging its darker aspect. The series of images also suggests not only the change in Strether but also how closely he is still associated with the elements of change.³⁶

An image-pattern flowing directly from the references to boats and ships, is that of water, streams, rivers, floating and swimming. It is by far the most prevalent pattern in the novel, and as such lends the work a number of particular qualities. One of the more general of these qualities, but nevertheless an important one, is the powerful feeling of an immense primordial depth which seems to lurk beneath the surface of the action. As Richard Chartier says 'water is primordial, and is a generating force'. He continues that it has

the capacity to transform the partly developed individual

by experiential means - that is, the individual develops and changes in its element, providing, of course that he has a reservoir of talent and sensibility.³⁷

Strether is clearly the person to whom this refers, and his development, through its association with water imagery, is very much like that of prehistoric times. Then 'land life developed and ... the mutant fish evolved into air breathers, developed legs, and crawled out of water'.³⁸ Indeed, Strether thinks himself as able to 'toddle alone', at the same time as he images himself in terms of water (XXII,48).

The archetypal and primordial associations of water ramify throughout the work. At Gloriani's reception, Strether realises he has been talked about by Chad and Madame de Vionnet: 'The thing indeed really unmistakable was its rolling over him as a wave that he had been ... a subject of discussion' (XXI,212). And immediately before Strether's 'Live all you can!' speech, there is an extremely powerful water image. This lends the utterance an archetypal depth and elemental force which carries its meaning far beyond the immediate impact it has in the novel.

The image follows Strether saying to Little Bilham that it is better to start living early than late:

This note indeed the next thing overflowed for Strether into a quiet stream of demonstration that as soon as he had let himself go he felt as the real relief. It had consciously gathered to a head, but the reservoir had filled sooner than he knew, and his companion's touch was to make the waters spread. There were some things that had to come in time if they were to come at all. If they didn't come in time they were lost forever. It was the general sense of them that had overwhelmed him with its long slow rush (XXI, 216-7).³⁹

This type of imagery is carried further when Strether talks of bridging 'the dark stream' between himself and Waymarsh (XXII,40); or when, at Chad's apartments, at his party, Strether feels that 'the overflow of hospitality meeting the high tide of response, had all from the first pressed upon' his consciousness (XXII,159). The impression conveyed by this last image is one of a strange, insistent and illimitable force working on Strether, the latent power of the figure according exactly with the far-reaching change which the waters and attractions of Europe bring about in him.

That the force can, ultimately, only be sensed and not really

understood, since it operates so strangely and so deep beneath the surface events of the work, is finally set in an image containing very strong mystic overtones. Strether realises that he must leave Miss Gostrey and Europe, and return to Woollett, since that is finally the end-point of his whole experience, and the effort it has had upon him:

It faced him, the reckoning, over the shoulder of much interposing experience - which also faced him; and one would float to it doubtless duly through these caverns of Kubla Khan (XXII,293).

At this level, the level of the 'caverns measureless to man', Strether's metamorphosis takes place. And it is a profound and deeply meaningful metamorphosis since it is brought about, imagistically, by the elemental force of water.

As Strether is pictured on a floating raft in the boat imagery, so he is often seen swimming in the stream of life and of impressions.⁴⁰ Indeed, James seems to have conceived the whole of the novel as some sort of current of ideas. He writes, for example: 'there it (the scene with Little Bilham) stands, accordingly, full in the tideway; driven in with hard taps, like some strong stake for the noose of a cable, the swirl of the current round about it'.⁴¹

Nevertheless, that Strether soon learns to float in the current of Europe, while Waymarsh never does, is used in the imagery to distinguish very clearly between them. Seeing Waymarsh to bed on the first evening of their meeting, Strether thinks that 'nothing so little resembled floating as the rigour with which, on the edge of his bed, he (Waymarsh) hugged his posture of prolonged impermanence' (XXI,26). Through this image, Waymarsh's, and all the Americans' rigour, rectitude and stiff probity⁴² are set in contrast with the easy fluidity which characterises the Europeans, and which becomes so much a part of Strether.

And as he perceives that Europe is affecting a change in him (and not in Waymarsh), Strether asks himself:

Was what was happening to himself then, was what already had happened, really that a woman of fashion was floating him into society and that an old friend deserted on the brink was watching the force of the current? (XXI,41).

Through the use of this image, James is able to suggest, most graphically, two important points: firstly, that Strether is entering

the stream of awareness,⁴³ and secondly, by the use of the river imagery, that the central character has little control over the currents which coalesce to form his consciousness.⁴⁴

On the first point, there are numerous references to impressions which crowd in upon Strether. For example, as he sits with Mamie Pocock in Chad's apartment, after he has observed her for a time on the balcony, he does not know 'of how many elements his impression was composed ... 'but nevertheless he feels that it 'was floated in upon him as part of a sudden flood' (XXII,149). Again, encountering Waymarsh after he has been out with Mrs. Pocock, the difference between himself and his friend flows over Strether in 'the current of thought' (XXII,185). At times, even, Strether is reluctant to enter this metaphoric stream, particularly at the beginning of the work. In view of its strangeness and force, noted above, this is not really surprising, only natural. After landing in Europe, hesitating as to whether to commit himself, Strether feels 'half ashamed of his impulse to plunge and more than half afraid of his impulse to wait' (XXI,86).

In fact, the difference between the Americans and Europeans is marked by their ability to enter the water, or their aversion to it. The beautiful and graceful Mamie Pocock is the only one of the second ambassadorial party who enters the figurative stream of awareness with any enjoyment or willingness. Having talked with her, Strether senses that she has

dipped into the waiting medium at last and found neither surge nor chill - nothing but the small splash she could herself make in the pleasant warmth, nothing but the safety of dipping and dipping again (XXI,260).

From this picture it emerges that only those who are willing to submit themselves in an easy and malleable form to the shaping force of the waters, will draw some enjoyment and benefit from them.⁴⁵ Like Mamie, Strether does so, and the benefit he derives is enormous; Waymarsh never does, and remains stiff and dissatisfied,⁴⁶ until his disappearance from the action. Even when Waymarsh does, temporarily, enter the river, it is only, in the imagery, in a very strange and inanimate form. The lack of communication between Strether and his friend in such a situation is brilliantly conveyed in an image which is repeated in the following two novels in substantially the same form.⁴⁷ For a time, Waymarsh himself is 'drawn into the eddy.', Strether seeming 'to bump against him as a sinking swimmer might brush a submarine

object'. But they are held together in the 'fathomless medium' of Chad's changed manner, passing each other 'in their deep immersion, with the round impersonal eye of silent fish' (XXI,172).

The figurative river, therefore, suggests not only the flow of Strether's awareness. Undoubtedly, on one level it serves as such an image, but it is also, on a broader plane, the 'river of life', and Maria Gostrey, Waymarsh, Strether and even Mme. de Vionnet are caught within it. Like the coin and the medal imagery, the water in this river of life has an ambiguous quality. It is primarily a generating force, but it is also capable of stifling and drowning those who swim contrary to its natural direction.

So, at the final interview between Mme. de Vionnet and Strether, the former, seemingly untouched up to this point by the waters of the river, sinks in despair at Chad's departure, Strether looking at her and musing that 'if to deal with them (women) was to walk on water what wonder that the water rose? And it had never surely risen higher than round this woman' (XXII,285).

Maria Gostrey, James's ficelle, is the character who first leads Strether into the stream of life, but after a certain time he sufficiently finds his own feet and is able to 'toddle alone'. For him 'other fountains had flowed; ... she (Maria) fell into her place as but one of his tributaries' (XXII,48). Strether's metaphoric swim down the river is in fact his movement towards an expanded awareness of life's forces: so in the river he is pushed this way and that by the various currents. The image of the river is peculiarly apposite in another respect. Not only does it allow movement forwards and from side to side, but it also allows for depth, thereby adding yet another dimension to Strether's process of discovery. Thus, when he learns of Jeanne de Vionnet's arranged marriage, he realises that

he had allowed for depths, but these were greater:
and it was as if, oppressively - indeed absurdly -
he was responsible for what they had now thrown up to the
surface. It was - through something ancient and cold in
in - what he would have called the real thing (XXII,129).

And at Chad's party he feels that 'they were touching bottom assuredly tonight' (XXII,160). In fact, the more he becomes involved with Europe, the deeper Strether plunges, the lowest point coming after the Lambinet episode. There, he thinks that 'there had been times when he believed himself touching bottom. This was a deeper depth than any ...' (XXII,273). The image emphasises the impact which Strether's sighting of Chad and

his mistress has upon him.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of all the water and river imagery is that the characters within the medium are all essentially passive. Strether particularly, 'drifts' and 'is floated' throughout the novel.⁴⁸ Indeed, one of the most important functions of the river and swimming imagery is to point to the illusion of freedom.⁴⁹ The characters are free to thrash about in the current to their heart's content, moving perhaps a little from side to side, but with their main direction and speed in the river of life already predetermined. In this way, through the imagery, James manages to suggest that the broadening process which Strether undergoes is the inevitable and natural result of a human being allowing his sensibilities their free unfettered play in the presence of complex, powerful and attractive impressions. The scope of the story is thus extended outwards from the characters to the lot of the general man.

The theme of freedom is very important in The Ambassadors, and is closely linked to the central episode where Strether says to Little Bilham: "live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life" (XXI,217). He reflects poignantly in the same speech that "one has the illusion of freedom". In other words, apart from the restricted movement allowed within it, the stream of life flows on regardless. That man ultimately has little control over the shape of his life is vividly expressed in the image of the mould, "either fluted and embossed, with ornamental excrescences, or else smooth and dreadfully plain, into which, a helpless jelly, one's consciousness is poured" (XXI,218).⁵⁰

This image is one of the most powerful in the book, using the senses of sight and touch, as well as movement. It conveys very vividly that the shape of man's existence is determined by the nature of the environment with which his consciousness comes into contact. The more sensitive the consciousness, and the more intricate the mould, so the richer life will be. The image also, however, carries the corollary that if the mould is smooth and plain, no matter how sensitive the consciousness, it will take on the shape of the vessel.

Apart from Strether, Chad is also imaged as having been shaped by Europe. Towards the end of his initial description he is seen as coming from a mould. 'It was as if in short he had really, copious perhaps but shapeless, been put into a firm mould and turned successfully

out' (XXI,152). Chad certainly never has a free will, as this image suggests, but his old self, which breaks out at the end, has certainly, for a time, been fashioned into a very agreeable form.

In the novel itself, Strether's progress towards a deepened sense of perception does place considerable qualifications upon the view of freedom expressed in the mould's image. Strether's conscious growth to awareness is the achievement of an immense expansion in vision, and this vision is Strether's life. That vision is his life, becomes clear when it is realised that the action of the novel consists solely of the terms of his perception. The more fully he sees, therefore, the broader based is the action of the novel, and, as a result, the more fully Strether himself is seen to live. As J. A. Ward puts it:

In The Ambassadors James fully achieved what he had approached in many of his earlier works: the identification of action with vision ... In the person of Strether vision is action; it represents a full participation in experience. It is dynamic, dramatic and personal.⁵¹

Since, therefore, vision is Strether's life, by having at least the illusion of freedom, he has in fact lived his life to the full. In other words, by thinking that Europe offers him opportunities for unlimited expansion, and by consequently expanding, he has lived life to the utmost of his capacity. In short, he is seen to fulfil himself by giving free rein to his perceptive faculty, the closest thing to true freedom which the novel has to offer.

The imagery of the natural element water, is given another dimension of expression through the many references to inanimate natural objects such as flowers and trees. Many of these images are cleverly in tune with Strether's growth of consciousness, the idea of growth which they convey adding strength and interest to the central theme. At the very beginning of his stay in Europe he thinks back to his first visit, and to the few worthwhile seeds of culture he had garnered at that time. Now, 'buried for long years in dark corners at any rate these few germs had sprouted again under forty-eight hours of Paris' (XXI,86). It is from these figurative seeds that the mature Strether of the end of the work finally springs.

The idea of growth is reiterated when Strether, breakfasting with Little Bilham, thinks back to the first balcony scene at Chad's apartments. 'The feeling strongest with him at that moment had borne

fruit almost faster than he could taste it, and Strether literally felt at the present hour that there was a precipitation in his fate' (XXI,112). The image points vividly to the abundance of impressions which are, at this stage, crowding in upon Strether. It is the very pressure of these sensations which causes him to grow in perception.⁵²

Such images of growth emphasise the important fact that the process Strether undergoes is essentially a natural one. This implies in turn that each character, cultivated correctly, in a suitable environment, could grow in a similar fashion. Generally, then, the natural imagery keeps in the reader's attention the idea that the basic impulses of the novel, in spite of the civilised surface of Parisian manners, are natural ones. In this vein, in his correspondence with Mrs. Newsome, Strether tries to keep 'the sky of life' clear of the 'clouds of explanation'. He is also concerned to keep 'the ground free of the wild weed of delusion' (XXI,141) in his dealings with the Woollett woman.

In an image appropriately artistic in conception, Little Bilham says of Jeanne de Vionnet:

I believe the pale pink petals are folded up there for some wondrous efflorescence in time; to open, that is, to some great golden sun. I'm unfortunately but a small farthing candle' (XXI,277).

This figure is especially apposite since, in natural terms, it suggests that most natural of all functions, namely sex. Apart from this, there emerges from the image a very distinct feeling of Jeanne's potential for growth and the inability of the artist not only to grow, but even to stimulate growth, because of his effete and dilettante existence.⁵³

Functioning in much the same way as the imagery of inanimate natural life, the animal references in The Ambassadors provide an undertone of suggestion as to the true impulses which govern the characters. More specifically, James carefully uses these images to differentiate between the Europeans and Americans. The latter, with their burning 'sacred rage', are seen in tropes of a far more predatory and potentially violent nature than any associated with the Europeans. The impatient Waymarsh, for example, waiting for Chad with Strether, paces back and forth, 'caged and leonine' (XXII,63). And Jim Pocock, assuring Chad that the New Englanders "'ain't fierce" and "'wear their fur smooth side out" (XXII,87), yet manages to convey in the image a

certain hidden menace. His very insistence on the negative begins to imply the exact opposite, as when he says, "They don't lash about and shake the cage, ... and it's at feeding-time that they're quietest. But they always get there"(XXII,87).

The Europeans, on the other hand, are uniformly associated with a far more gentle set of animals, either bird-like or domestic. The movement of Miss Gostrey's speech is like 'a single sweep of her wing' (XXI,67), and her home in the Quartier Marboeuf is her 'final nest' (XXI,119). Miss Barrace is also imaged as a bird: for Strether she seems 'with little cries and protests and quick recognitions, movements like the darts of some fine high-feathered free-pecking bird, to stand before life as before some full shop-window' (XXI,204). Not only the lady's excitement at life, but also her rather feather-brained and futile attempts to come to grips with it emerge from this picture conjured up by Strether, one close to that of the Countess Gemini in The Portrait of a Lady.

Further, Madame de Vionnet sees herself as a 'quiet creature living' in a 'hole' (XXII,12), an image not entirely correct and somewhat subjective, since she does have a very great effect on the action, and a stature in the novel larger than that of such a creature. Nevertheless, the passivity and unwillingness to do harm expressed by the figure, are in keeping with her character as it emerges at the novel's end. And while Little Bilham shakes his ears 'in the manner of a terrier who has got wet' (XXII,173), thereby expressing, in an image reminiscent of that of Maggie in The Golden Bowl,⁵⁴ his tame, friendly nature, Strether says to Chad that he is not afraid of the burden he must bear in his task: "I've come very much, it seems to me, to double up my fore legs in the manner of the camel when he gets down on his knees to make his back convenient" (XXII,234), he asserts. In this image he expresses not only a humble, stoic acceptance of his lot, but also his endurance at undergoing the fullest and most stringent education which Europe has to offer. The impressive figure of the artist Gloriani is the one exception to this pattern. He is seen as 'the glossy male tiger, magnificently marked' (XXI,219), and as such he is vested with the beautiful power consonant with his elevated stature as one of the most perfect of Jamesian artist figures.

The distinction made by these animal images between Europeans and Americans is important. It shows that Europeans are far more leisurely and easy-going in their attitudes to life. In their

domestic nature, they are shown to have accepted the constraints of life, and to have formed a way of living fruitfully within them. This is something the impatient and caged Americans have still to learn; measured against the Europeans, there is something almost self-destructive and even masochistic in the stern rigour by which the New Englanders insist on living. That more animal images of greater complexity and impact are used about the Europeans than the Americans, also serves to differentiate each European very sharply from the others as an individual. The Americans, described with less such imagery, and with their common Woollett conscience, fit far more easily into a general category.

One of the most important image-clusters is that centred around the natural setting of the garden in The Ambassadors.⁵⁵ There are four such scenes, and they are very closely related to the earlier use of gardens in The Portrait of a Lady.⁵⁶ As in the early novel, significant parts of the action are set in places where the environment is open and natural, and yet ordered, where feelings and sentiments can be given freer rein than normal, and yet still be kept within the limits of decorum and the surface of polite manners so important for James as a framework within which his characters functioned significantly. Following this line of thought, Louise Dauner writes that 'by his numerous and crucial garden-settings, James emphasises his dominant or central theme, the necessity for intelligence, or order, as a basis for the ethical experience'.⁵⁷

The first such garden setting is that outside the hotel in Chester where Strether meets Miss Gostrey. It is here that he first has the feeling of being 'launched in something of which the sense would be quite disconnected from the sense of his past and which was literally beginning there and then' (XXI,9). It is in this garden that Strether first encounters the easy European attitude to personal relationships, evident in Maria Gostrey's 'scraping acquaintance' with him, and later so central in Chad's relations with Madame de Vionnet. It is here also that Strether learns to 'enjoy' in the European manner, to savour moments and impressions with little thought as to what other, narrower people might think (XXI,16). He learns, in short, to laugh off the 'failure to enjoy', a failure, Miss Gostrey says, common to Woollett.

Learning, then, and appreciation, are the two central impulses of this scene, and they relate it, albeit somewhat distantly, with its

Garden of Eden origin. There, as in the novel, the first step towards a deeper understanding of the nature of life is taken. As W. M. Gibson writes, the garden scenes constitute crucial stages in 'the eating of the fruit of the tree'.⁵⁸ Through these archetypal and symbolic associations, the garden scenes in The Ambassadors serve to broaden and deepen the nature of Strether's learning process, casting it back into history and myth, and thereby giving it the broadest significance possible.

The next garden scene occurs when Strether returns to the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris to read Mrs. Newsome's letters and to consider his position. It is in this garden that he turns over 'the strange logic of his finding himself so free' (XXI,81). In the garden of the Tuileries, where he had paused for a moment, and here, 'the cup of his impressions' seems 'truly to overflow' (XXI,80) as he comes to appreciate fully the real beauty of Paris. In this setting he sees Paris in that most impressive of images, as a 'jewel brilliant and hard' (XXI,89). And while he is sitting in the gardens, through the free play of his thoughts, Strether reveals the important facts of his own and Chad's past lives. One of his most basic realisations comes to him here when he sees that 'everything he wanted was comprised moreover in a single boon - the common unattainable art of taking things as they came' (XXI,83). In the Luxembourg Gardens he starts on the process of learning to do just this, putting behind him his 'best years', given to an 'active appreciation of the way' things haven't really come to him at all. Having started on this process, Strether is able to assimilate all of what Europe has to offer, taking in, in the same manner, the important impact of the Lambinet episode.

Having met Little Bilham and Chad, Strether is invited to a party in the sculptor Gloriani's garden. There, the setting and the surroundings strike Strether very forcibly. For him, 'the place itself was a great impression' (XXI,195). The whole scene is 'as striking to the unprepared mind ... as a treasure dug up, ... sweeping away, as by a last brave brush, his usual landmarks and terms' (XXI,195). Strether feels 'the assault of images' (XXI,196), and notices the wonderful depth of life behind Gloriani. He sees, in short, the variety and beauty, as well as the ease and depth of European life, and looking back on his unremarkable Woollett existence, he measures what he has missed. From this springs his admonition to Little Bilham to '"live all you can"' (XXI,217), a speech which constitutes one of the novel's climaxes, and also the core of its meaning. In the garden, too, he

meets little Jeanne de Vionnet, an encounter which throws him into great perplexity as to exactly who Chad's 'woman' is.

These are three of the garden scenes in The Ambassadors denoting significant aspects of Strether's development. They are all characterised not only by the setting in a garden, but also by the element of wonder and even romance with which they are invested in Strether's view. Coming to these scenes for the first time, Strether tends to idealise and elevate their elements, standing in awe at what he sees. As such, he is blinded to an aspect of European life which he only comes to see fully in the Lambinet scene,⁵⁹ itself set, significantly, in the wilder and more natural garden of the French countryside. As with Isabel Archer in The Portrait, James is here distinguishing between fanciful, romantic exaggeration and real insight. On this point W. Veeder notes that 'romantic pastoral functions complexly in The Ambassadors ... because James also insists on the limitations of nature'. He continues: 'We have no doubt, however, about Strether's version of the pastoral. He is heading for a fall because he insists upon oversimplifying nature, upon seeing it as a work of art'.⁶⁰

Veeder points out how everything 'composed' for Strether in the Luxembourg Gardens, and how in the Tuileries 'the air had a taste as of something mixed with art, something that presented nature as a white-capped master-chef' (XXI,79). The critic comments incisively, a comment equally valid for the scene in Gloriani's garden, that the language here betrays Strether :

There is a saccharine fatuity to nature as chef, to life as marzipan. The very expression of the sentiment suggests the inadequacy of the vision.⁶¹

It is only in the Lambinet scene that Strether's ideas on nature and art are given a severe jolt by the intrusion into the idyll of Chad's 'virtuous attachment'. Then, Strether sees not only the reality of Chad's relationship with Mme. de Vionnet,⁶² and the real depth to European life, but also how human actions colour a view of nature, how indeed they are needed to complete it; he sees thereby the error of his earlier romantic idealisations.

In a series of images parallel to those of the garden in significance, James sets his characters upon balconies to stress important stages in the novel's progress.⁶³ The image of the balcony used for this purpose is particularly apt since the architectural shape

is, in itself, an out-jutting and noticeable part of a building. In the novel, James uses its architectural prominence as an emblem for the importance of the scenes which he sets upon it.

On his first visit to Chad's apartments in the Boulevard Malesherbes,

The balcony, the distinguished front, testified suddenly, for Strether's fancy, to something that was up and up; they placed the whole case materially, and as by an admirable image, on a level that he found himself at the end of another moment rejoicing to think he might reach (XXI,98).

Chad's elevated balcony, an extension of his apartments where he lives, which are in turn an expression of how he lives, comes therefore to stand for the things in the European way of life to which Strether aspires. At this point it is figuratively out of Strether's reach, but he moves towards it as the narrative progresses.

Next, at the theatre, Strether, Waymarsh and Miss Gostrey are interrupted in their box by Chad's sudden entrance, for Strether, 'quite one of the sensations that count in life' (XXI,135). The action of the novel is held in suspense while Chad waits at the back until the play's end. After all, 'they couldn't talk without disturbing the spectators in the part of the balcony just below them' (XXI,136). The scene is important because Strether is absolutely unprepared for Chad's having changed so markedly at the hands of Europe:

The phenomenon that had suddenly sat down there with him was a phenomenon of change so complete that his imagination, which had worked so beforehand, felt itself, in the connection, without margin or allowance (XXI,136).

The expansion of Strether's consciousness is given further impetus by his unexpectedly encountering Mamie Pocock on the balcony of Sarah Pocock's hotel room (XXII,145). Seeing her, instead of the expected Mrs. Pocock, Strether is made abruptly to think of precisely what it is she represents. In her, for the first time, he sees in a Woollett personage young, unspoilt charm, and a capacity for growth and freedom as yet untouched by the stifling influences of a puritan background. She is 'the freshest of the buds' (XXII,147), a girl 'disinterestedly tender' (XXII,155), 'destined ... remarkably to grow' (XXII,148).

She has, it seems to him, still the capacity to live fully and to enjoy the kind of life which he realises he has missed. It is her 'visible habit and practice of freedom and fluency' (XXII,148) which he envies so much, and which impresses upon him that it is not the person, but the influences upon a person which shape character, either into the European or American moulds.

Two further balcony scenes follow that between Strether and Mamie. First, the former is seen with Chad on the balcony in the Boulevard Maiesherbes in a scene in which they discuss Chad's return. 'It was as if their high place really represented some moral elevation from which they could look down on their recent past' (XXII,235). The second scene is set at the inn where Strether goes for a meal after his ramble in the French countryside, and where he sees Chad and Mme. de Vionnet boating together. It is from a slightly raised platform, which almost overhangs the water, that he catches sight of the pair (XXII,256). The analogue with the balcony is distant, but clearly intended. And certainly, the importance of this scene cannot be disputed.⁶⁴

In the final chapters, Strether passes beneath the balcony in the Boulevard Maiesherbes once more, and it feels for him 'as if his last day were oddly copying his first' (XXII,305). In this final scene, it is not Little Bilham who appears, but Chad himself whom Strether recognises at once. Whereas earlier the balcony had stood for an unknown quantity in Strether's life, which he had approached with uncertainty, now he mounts confidently towards it. He realises that Europe has transformed beyond recognition 'the simple, subtle, conveniently uniform thing that had anciently passed with him for a life of his own' (XXII,306).

In this way the balconies in The Ambassadors mark out for prominence significant stages in Strether's education at the hands of Europe. They also, through the references back in the last scene, measure the effect that this education has had. Seen thus, this series of images, with the real object reflecting the prominence it lends to plot-stages in its own character, must rank as evidence of James's most mature image-techniques.⁶⁵

This focus on the architectural image of the balcony is but one part of a larger image-pattern referring to architecture in general. The balcony image is, however, a good example of the careful structure exhibited by The Ambassadors. And it is a peculiarly fitting touch that an architectural structure should so demonstrate this fact. James himself, in describing The Portrait, notes that it is a

'structure reared with architectural competence', a competence

that makes it, to the author's own sense, the most proportional of his productions after The Ambassadors which was to follow it so many years later and which has, no doubt, a superior roundness.⁶⁶

More pertinent to a discussion of architecture in the text, are the many allusions to buildings and rooms which form an important facet of the image-patterns and, located throughout the work, are also structurally functional, binding one part of the narrative to the other. The outside of Chad's apartments presents to the as yet 'unseeing' eye of Strether, precisely the fine balance and artistic polish which he later learns is so much a part of Europe. It reflects the character of its inhabitants, particularly Chad;⁶⁷ it conveys the impression that

the quality produced by measure and balance, the fine relation of part to part and space to space, was probably — aided by the presence of ornament as positive as it was discreet, and by the complexion of the stone, a cold, fair grey, warmed and polished a little by life. (XXI,97)

This image of the building is very rich in suggestion; for one, the smooth, rhythmical movement of the prose matches the balanced and proportioned nature of the structure. The image gives an impression of the easy way in which Chad has come to terms with life in Europe. His existence is placid and balanced but, like the 'ornament' in the image, by no means withdrawn or negative. It is clear from the picture that Chad has assimilated his richness of personality from the old, quiet and established traditions of Europe.

That the exterior of the building does in fact reflect Chad's character, is implied at this stage in the novel's progress, and is explicitly emphasised by the initial impression Strether receives of him:

It (Paris) had cleared his eyes and settled his colour and polished his fine square teeth — the main ornament of his face; and at the same time it had given him a form and a surface, almost a design, it had toned his voice, established his accent, encouraged his smile to more play and his other emotions to less (XXI,152).⁶⁸

In similar fashion, the house of Mme. de Vionnet is filled with an atmosphere of tradition and history. It expresses in all its aspects the great wealth of culture behind the Comtesse, as well as the darker forces which, mixed with pomp and splendour, created France through the bloodshed of the Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. The court outside the house is 'large and open, full of revelations, for our friend', while the building itself is 'in the high homely style of an elder day, and the ancient Paris that he was always looking for - sometimes intensely felt, sometimes more acutely missed' (XXI, 243). It has 'the peace of intervals, the dignity of distances and approaches'. Inside, the possessions are 'not vulgarly numerous, but hereditary cherished charming' (XXI, 244), and, received 'beautifully passive under the spell of transmission' (XXI, 245), they convey the air of 'supreme respectability'.

In short, Madame de Vionnet's rooms are a microcosm for the European influences at work on Strether, and it is therefore as he learns to know Madame de Vionnet and her actions better that he draws closer to the real character of Europe in its multiplicity of levels. It is this multiplicity which is expressed in the many-faceted image of the noble European lady's living quarters.⁶⁹

All the images and image-patterns discussed up to this point are integral parts of James's attempt to create, in The Ambassadors, an interesting and perfectly shaped work of art. The concern and care lavished on his own production, is reflected in the novel by the important theme of art, and the many images referring to it. Indeed, many of the scenes themselves are little pictures within the larger canvas.

To begin with, Strether, the central character, in many ways plays the role of an artist. For him, in Paris, 'the air had a taste as of something mixed with art' (XXI, 79), and when gazing at the spot of the vanished old palace, he composes for himself a picture of what it used to be: 'He filled out spaces with dim symbols of scenes' (XXI, 79). In the same scene he gazes at 'shrill little girls at play all sunnily "composed" together' (XXI, 80), and feels that he passed 'an hour in which the cup of his impressions seemed truly to overflow'. In this short episode, Strether is seen both as active artist and as a passive spectator drinking in the impressions which Paris has to offer.

It is in such scenes as this that one of Strether's central problems in the novel is suggested. In Woollett, he comes to realise, he has either merely to let things happen or act weakly to make them happen,

but in Europe he is taught to act meaningfully, to create for himself a life of diversity and interest. In the Luxembourg Gardens, in the scene quoted above, he is at an intermediate stage in which he partly creates and partly allows his Woollett passivity to overtake him. As the novel progresses, Strether gradually divests himself of his Woollett heritage, participating more and more fully in the life of Europe. And the more fully he participates in life, so the more complete becomes his picture of how the Europeans live. Finally, having come out on the other side of his experience, he withdraws from Europe, the place where he has derived his knowledge of life to complete his picture, in the true style of what was, for James, the ideal artistic stance: a detached observation relying intensely on life to create art.⁷⁰

Strether therefore represents one of the artist figures closest to James in all the writings, and certainly he provides the answer to the dilemma which, raging in Roderick Hudson, finally killed the young artist; namely, to what extent can an artist fruitfully involve himself in life? Strether is, therefore, a distantly related but more mature and rounded figure than Roderick Hudson, so distant, in fact, as to be scarcely recognisable, but nevertheless very much of his lineage. James seems to present, then, in The Ambassadors, the solution to a problem which confronted him all his life: and that is the ^{problem} of the art-life dialectic. Stated barely, it resolves itself into the question: to what extent must art and the artist be seen to be a product of the world and of life?

This is an aspect of James's creativity which has been widely commented upon critically,⁷¹ and since each of these commentators draws his conclusions from the writings themselves, it is perhaps most valuable to centre upon what James had to say. The central passage occurs in the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady. Discussing the 'moral' and 'immoral' subject of a work of art (meaning a subject which is, or is not, capable of being raised to the height of the greatest art), James writes:

Recognising so promptly the one measure of the worth of a given subject, the question about it that, rightly answered, disposes of all others - is it valid, in a word, is it genuine, is it sincere, the result of some direct impression or perception of life?⁷²

He goes on to say that the amount of 'felt life' concerned in producing a work of art, is what finally determines the answer.⁷³ That Strether, with his fine sensibility and sensitivity to the tone of Europe, is implicated in the problem, is set out when James continues that, 'the question comes back thus, obviously, to the kind and degree of the artist's prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs'.⁷⁴

The theme of the art-life dialectic is also suggested within the work itself in the scene where Gloriani receives Strether and his other guests at a garden party. The figure of Gloriani represents James's definitive portrayal, in overt terms, of the ideal artist. The scene itself is suffused with art, the setting is a miniature landscape, an 'assault of images' (XXI,196) painted 'as by a last brave brush' (XXI,195). Gloriani at once affects Strether as the 'dazzling prodigy of a type', having a 'medal-like Italian face, in which every line was an artist's own, in which time told only as tone and consecration' (XXI,197). The artist draws his inspiration directly from life: he does not carry an isolated 'art for art's sake' aesthetic torch. His artistic perception is the 'long straight shaft sunk by a personal acuteness that life had seasoned to steel' (XXI,197); behind Gloriani's smile there lurks a wealth of 'terrible life' and sensual feeling as of a 'glossy male tiger, magnificently marked' (XXI,219).

It has been argued that The Ambassadors displays little felt life,⁷⁵ but the interest shown in the life of Strether's consciousness and the fine and subtle portrayal of the central character, demonstrate sufficiently that life is never outside the picture of this novel. Further, as has been shown,⁷⁶ for Strether, vision is life, and since the work is the story of his 'process of vision',⁷⁷ life is inseparable from the content of the book. Again, the visual aspect of the many images closely relates the work to this 'process of vision', and therefore to the question of the amount of felt life.

Strether, in his role as artist, draws his impressions from the world around him, and the reverberations which he feels from life are what ultimately change him (and have changed Chad) to a man who is broad in vision and deep in awareness. Strether is constantly adding to his composite picture of Chad's existence in Europe, each addition being a deft little stroke of his brush. Each of his smaller images gradually coalesces into patterns and then into a complete work of art.

Dining with Miss Gostrey, for him, all the details 'were so many

touches in he scarce knew what positive high picture' (XXI,50), while Miss Barrace reminds him of 'some last-century portrait of a clever head without powder' (XXI,113). The evening parties at Chad's house, Strether sees as a 'picture composed ... suggestively through the haze of tobacco' (XXI,173). In Gloriani's garden, Strether sees a setting suffused with art, 'the place itself (being) a great impression' (XXI,195). And it is here that Strether receives an addition to his view of Europe when Mme. de Vionnet's daughter appears: 'He had just made out, in the now full picture, something and somebody else; another impression had been superimposed' (XXI,220).

For Strether the sight of Jeanne de Vionnet completes, temporarily, the picture, but he learns later that Chad's interest lies elsewhere, and that his earlier brushwork must be painted over. In spite of this, Jeanne remains in herself, 'a faint pastel in an oval frame: he thought of her already as of some lurking image in a long gallery, the portrait of a small old-time princess of whom nothing was known but that she had died young' (XXI,259). The image shows the flatness of Jeanne's character, and Strether's perception of that fact. She is something merely pretty, one of the finest exhibits in the European 'show'. And in talking to Miss Gostrey, clarifying his view of the Woollett Americans, and of his mission in relation to them, Strether pauses, 'as if for his own expression of it (Mrs. Newsome's character) he could add no touch to that picture' (XXII,225).

The Lambinet episode, the most artistically conceived of all the scenes, finally completes Strether's picture, so that he sees fully and in great detail what European life entails. After that, Strether's vision is no longer blurred or fragmentary. On visiting Mme. de Vionnet for the last time, he thinks that 'he liked the place she lived in, the picture that each time squared itself, large and high and clear, around her' (XXII,271). Strether has now become the complete artist, composing his own full pictures.

As mentioned, there are a number of scenes which are in themselves self-contained and extremely fine details of the larger canvas of the work. They are small works of art in their own right. One of the most notable of these is the incident where Strether and Mme. de Vionnet dine beside the Seine. The whole scene is framed in the open window of the restaurant,⁷⁸ and there is a warm ease in 'the bright clean ordered waterside life' (XXII,15) which they see through it. The complete picture drawn, made up of a number of images, has the very finest balance,

presenting Europe in its most pleasing tones.⁷⁹ It is, in fact, to the exquisite 'tone' (XXII,15) of his lunch with Mme. de Vionnet that Strether surrenders. All the elements of the scene combine together in rare harmony, the 'intensely white table-linen, their omelette aux tomates, their bottle of straw-coloured Chablis' (XXII,13), the warm spring air in which there is a perceptible throb of summer. The images, embracing almost every sense, form a beautifully realised composite image, in itself a miniature work of art. In this way the imagery, as well as carrying the themes, is also very much a part of the novel's texture, giving it almost a tangible form which is very close to life.⁸⁰ The climax of these scenes, and the most perfect, is that in which Strether suddenly sees Chad and Mme. de Vionnet together on the river.

The extent to which James is concerned with art in The Ambassadors is emphasised by the strongly accented image-pattern dealing with the theatre and drama. As one of the visual arts, this image-sequence fits in easily with its counterparts in architecture and painting, as well as with the music references. James uses this type of imagery in the novel to heighten the reader's sense of watching a particular series of dramatic sequences, drawn together as an art form. This imagery also serves to heighten the feeling of tension and suspense created by Strether's 'detective-like' discovery of what life in Europe means.

At the very start, the figurative drama imagery is grounded in the actual setting when Strether goes to the theatre with Miss Gortrey. On a particular night, he is especially struck by the contrast his position makes with his normal life at Woollett. At once he senses that a significant period in his existence has begun, and he therefore images himself and his partner, and all the people around him, in dramatic terms:

It was an evening, it was a world of types, and this was a connection above all in which the figures and faces in the stalls were interchangeable with those on the stage (XXI,53).⁸¹

This ability to image himself as part of the drama, stands in direct opposition to his feeling, in Woollett, that 'if the playhouse wasn't closed his seat had at least fallen to somebody else' (XXI,88). The change in setting between these two images from 'playhouse' to 'theatre', denotes very clearly the change in importance which the drama of Strether's life has suddenly taken on. The distance Strether has travelled, and has yet to travel, in his journey to awareness, is

further stressed when he images Chad's finally settling in Europe as being, for the Woollett people, like 'a dark drop of the curtain' (XXI,92). Then, Europe for Woollett spelt finis, now for Strether it is but the start of his dramatic development. That this is so, is suggested very subtly through Chad being imaged entering the action, and Strether's life, just as the curtain rises for the second act of a play which Miss Gostrey, Waymarsh and Strether are attending (XXI,135).

Just as Chad becomes thus very much an actor in the drama, his mistress, Mme. de Vionnet, is also pictured as such. Miss Gostrey tells Strether how she, Mme. de Vionnet, had made a clean sweep at school, of every 'part' in that institution's repertory (XXI,230). And at Chad's reception, she seems to Strether like 'Cleopatra in the play' (XXI,271). This last image is particularly rich, since the reader sees James 'breathe about his heroine the same atmosphere of infinity which Shakespeare invokes for his Egyptian genius'.⁸² In fact, the image is not only a device of characterisation, but serves also, 'to extend the novel into a wider area of generalisation than it enjoys intrinsically'.⁸³

When Strether comes across Mme. de Vionnet in Notre Dame Cathedral, the image he conjures for her situation conveys not only her steadfastness in the face of her challenge, and the tension in the poised circumstances, but also his own intense desire to be closely associated with the part she is playing. She reminds him 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 might himself have written, renewing her courage, renewing her clearness, in splendidly-protected meditation (XXII,6-7).

Even Mamie Pocock comes to play a part in the 'performance of "Europe"', (XXII,105) acting out to perfection her role of the beautiful twenty-two year old American girl. It is only because she has the potential still for full growth and expansion into awareness in the European manner, that Mamie, as an American, is imaged in this way. None of the other Americans is ever associated with theatre or drama figures.

When the Pococks visit Chad's apartment, Miss Barrace, at one point, is seen to have

dropped out of the play, abandoned, in a word, the stage itself, that she might stand a minute behind scenes with Strether and so perhaps figure as one of the famous augurs replying, behind the oracle, to the wink of the other (XXII,174).

The impact of this image is that it shows, albeit rather obliquely, how Chad has by this time gained sufficient control over himself and his situation to be able to step down off the stage and begin to play an active part in the change he is undergoing.

Later in the same scene the idea of his control is somewhat qualified by a dialogue he has with Miss Barrace, which is cast in drama imagery. She says to him, "We know you as the hero of the drama, and we've gathered to see what you'll do", to which Strether replies, "I think that must be why the hero has taken refuge in this corner. He's scared at his heroism - he shrinks from his part". To this comes the answer: "Ah but we nevertheless believe he'll play it" (XXII,179). From the imagery in this exchange, it emerges that Strether is still reluctant to assert himself strongly. Plainly, the potential is there, as Miss Barrace's confidence shows, but Strether has first to feel the real power of directing and controlling things for himself, before he can act out to the full his part as chief character. This finally happens to him at the climactic river scene where he sees the boat containing his friends drift round a bend. That episode has not only a strong thread of drama-imagery within it; it has also a very powerful dramatic impact.

The patterns thus far in this chapter provide the major strands of imagery in The Ambassadors. The way in which they lead from one to another, and are often used together in the same scene, attests to their careful choice by James so that they will blend harmoniously into the texture of his work. These properties of blending, working contrapuntally and vividly illuminating, are demonstrated in the chief climactic scene of the work. This occurs when the reader is presented with Strether confronted, in the Lambinet episode, by Chad and Mme. de Vionnet together on the river (XXII,245f). In this scene, almost every strand of major imagery is brought together to form a most impressive canvas.⁸⁴

The Lambinet episode is the centre of the novel's focus in a number of ways. Most importantly, it provides the final impression Strether needs in order to complete his picture of European life, and his transformation to a final viewpoint which appreciates both Woollett and Paris, while at the same time acknowledging the drawbacks of each.

In spite of the fact that Strether is physically far from the city of Paris and morally even further from Woollett, the material and

commercial references so strong at the start of the novel, are referred to in this scene. Strether thinks what it has cost him, in front of his friends, to mix with the Parisians: 'he had never without somehow paying for it aired either his vocabulary or his accent. He usually paid for it by meeting immediately afterwards Waymarsh's eye' (XXII,248). This small reference serves two very important purposes here. First, without intruding upon the rural tone of the scene, it recalls the commercial, material ethic of the Americans and thereby charts the distance Strether has moved away from such considerations. Second, it suggests very obliquely that Strether is still a product of America, and that it is his process of change from American, through European, to an objective point of view that is being presented.

One of the most noticeable aspects of the whole scene is its intensely visual quality. Everything is seen and apprehended in a very immediate fashion. Strether sees, for example, the village where he dines, 'as a thing of whiteness, blueness and crookedness, set in coppery green, and that had the river flowing behind or before it - one couldn't say which, at the bottom, in particular, of the inn-garden' (XXII,252). That Strether's visual faculty should now be so sensitive, is very apt, since he has, up to now, received all the impressions which have changed him by seeing. It is consequently even more fitting that he should finally see the detail of Chad and Mme. de Vionnet together in the boat. Therefore, as he catches sight of them, it dawns on him that 'what he saw was exactly the right thing - a boat advancing round the bend' (XXII,256).⁸⁵ This boat completes his picture, and therefore ties up beautifully with the imagery of the visual arts which has been so prevalent throughout the novel.

The images associated with appearance and reality also occur at this stage in the novel's action. When Strether sees the boat, and realises that the occupants would have 'cut' him had he not waved, the final surface is stripped away and he sees Europe in its truest character. It is because the Europeans have been exposed that they try to cover up after the initial sighting. Mme. de Vionnet therefore speaks for the first time in idiomatic French, hiding behind language which Strether cannot follow. Strether is puzzled; he thinks, 'the present result was odd, fairly veiling her identity, shifting her back into a mere voluble class or race to the intense audibility of which he was by this time inured' (XXII,261). It is this type of veil which Strether has now learnt to pierce. And Mme. de Vionnet needs such a veil, because she and Chad have, in their attempt to cover up, left

some of their outdoor clothes elsewhere up the river; even these symbols of their appearance have been taken away (XXII,264-265).

The sense-impressions are fully utilised in this scene. Apart from the visual aspect, the sense of taste, with all its connotations, is evoked through eating and drinking imagery. At the inn, before the recognition scene, Strether is enchanted by 'the good woman's broad sketch of what she could do for her visitor's appetite' (XXII,254), when he asks the innkeeper for supper. The imagery becomes figurative when, after their meal, Strether is suddenly slightly revolted by Chad's and Mme. de Vionnet's attempts to gloss over what has happened. He finds it difficult to swallow ... It was the quantity of make-believe involved and so vividly exemplified that most disagreed with his spiritual stomach' (XXII,265).

Throughout the novel, the water and river imagery is very prevalent, and it plays a central role in this scene too. Significantly, the river is one which is unknown to Strether (XXII,247), emphasising that there are things he has still to learn⁸⁶ about his drift through Europe. Later on in the day, in spite of having met no-one, he feels 'in midstream of his drama' (XXII,253) an appropriate image in view of the later force of the current of impressions which is to spill him out. Strether is lulled into forgetfulness as to the strength of the current of Europe as he sits waiting for his meal: 'the confidence that had so gathered for him deepened with the lap of the water, the ripple of the surface' (XXII,255). And just as Europe is across the sea from America, so Strether's final realisation comes 'across the water' (XXII,257). The sense of separation conveyed by the images is important, for immediately he has recognised the pair on the boat, he moves away from a wholehearted acceptance of Europe.⁸⁷

With the water imagery so clearly drawn in, that of boats and ships is also inevitably of great importance. It is, of course, on a rowing-boat that Strether sees his two friends together. The placing of the characters surrounding this image is important: Strether, for once, is imaged as the still point on the shore, while the Europeans are moving on the water. In other words he has, figuratively, arrived safely at the other side of his journey, or at least at a point from where he is able to appreciate the full impact of what he sees. Through the image, the reader is made to realise that the Europeans will continue with their way of life, whilst Strether is destined to move beyond it. The boat imagery after this scene bears out this reading, since it pictures Strether as about to step off after a sea-voyage:

'He was well in port, the outer sea behind him, and it was only a matter of getting ashore' (XXII,294).

The scene on the river is set in a garden, and as such it forms the climax to the three previous garden-set scenes.⁸⁸ In this final instance, James is particularly careful to emphasise the garden. He does this by having Strether wander through the countryside earlier in the day, absorbing impressions and images of the free, natural world around him. But when he passes into the garden of the inn and takes his seat upon a bench, then, almost immediately, the reader sees, the scene is destined to take on, after the other garden scenes, a significance and degree of control in sharp contrast to the earlier ramble. The way the image of the boat on the river slots neatly into Strether's consciousness is in fine harmony with the significance of the garden, and also with the greater degree of precision that that natural backdrop presents. Further, with its obvious analogue in the Eden story, it is beautifully fitting that Strether should receive his final bite of the apple of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in a garden. As mentioned, it is through this final impression that Strether eventually sees the Europeans, stripped bare of their outward appearances, for what they really represent.

Even the imagery of architecture is not allowed to escape from the ambit of the Lambinet episode. The little eating-shelter is described simply, but in language which has an architectural ring- 'platform ... protecting rail ... projecting roof' (XXII,255). And as mentioned, the whole structure would seem to be a type of balcony over the water. This last facet at once gives it all the significance of the earlier balcony scenes, and ties it in closely with the development traced through the balcony imagery. In line with the other balcony scenes, the action on the river is of the very greatest significance in Strether's progress.

When Strether feels himself, during his morning wander, to be 'in midstream of his drama' (XXII,253), this thread of imagery begins to wind itself into the scene. He feels that his drama is

still going on, ... that it was essentially more than anything else a scene and a stage, that the very air of the play was in the rustle of the willows and the tone of the sky. The play and the characters had, without his knowing it till now, peopled all his space for him ... (XXII,253).

The tension and suspense in the episode, builds up the feeling that this

is indeed an intensely dramatic moment. The action hangs poised in the finest theatrical manner from Part Two across to Part Three as Strether sees 'something that gave him a sharper arrest' (XXII,255), and then for a whole page ruminates on its significance. When he finally does recognise the two occupants of the boat, the dramatisation of Strether's consciousness, the subject of the novel, is given its superbly suitable dénouement in the full-flowering of that awareness.

But it is in its careful composition, its artistic quality, and its references to art, that the Lambinet episode achieves some of its richest tones. At the very outset it is stressed that the whole scene is a painting. Strether is seen giving the whole day to 'French ruralism', enclosed in 'the little oblong window of the picture-frame' (XXII,245). He walks and gazes about him:

The oblong gilt frame disposed its enclosing lines; the poplars and willows, the reeds and river ... fell into a composition, full of felicity, within them; the sky was silver and turquoise and varnish; the village on the left was white and the church on the right was grey; it was all there, in short - it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet (XXII,247).

The influence of the Impressionist school is strong throughout the scene, and indeed it is built through a series of impressions, peculiar to him, which Strether receives as he goes his way. Having 'not once overstepped the oblong gilt frame' (XXII,252), he enters the inn for supper; it is a peaceful place where 'the picture and the play seemed supremely to melt together' (XXII,254).

In this dramatic-artistic setting, Strether sights Chad and Madame de Vionnet. The work of art he has been composing all day is at once completed:

It was suddenly as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted more or less all day, and had now drifted into sight, with the slow current, on purpose to fill up the measure (XXII,256).

As Chad and Madame de Vionnet notice Strether, they attempt, momentarily, to avoid him. This is the final impression needed to complete his vision of Europe. Their attempt at deception, and the knowledge that their attachment is deeply sexual, allow Strether to realise that there is a deeper, more corrupt side to Europe than that of the quiet culture and tradition he has hitherto seen. At this point in the story, like the artist, Strether sees and orders the elements

of his vision into a significant composition within the frame of his consciousness. And at this moment Strether the artist, learning from life, becomes complete, as his canvas is completed by the boat drifting into its centre.

In this Lambinet episode, the careful reiteration of each important image-strand serves to cast the reader's mind back to a series of significant stages in the previous action. In this way, the scene is given not only a feeling of climax, but also one of being rooted very firmly in the preceeding sections of the novel. Since Strether himself has been composed of the impressions he has received through images up to this point, it is beautifully fitting that as the image-patterns are drawn together in the scene, so his consciousness becomes complete.⁸⁹

The organic unity of the imagery in this climactic scene attests to the fact that each image-thread is carefully matched with every other. In short, each of the image-strands coalesces with the others, notably in the Lambinet scene and less obviously elsewhere, to form a pattern which 'bristles with immediate images',⁹⁰ and stands vividly as one of the central points of interest in the tapestry James called The Ambassadors. Throughout the body of the novel the imagery serves to illuminate both themes and subject-matter, providing an important unifying factor from start to finish, and hence satisfying the criterion, so important to James, of the 'internal relations of his work'.

CHAPTER FOURThe Wings of the Dove

The noblest works and foundations have proceeded from
childless men, which have sought to express the images
of their minds where those of their bodies have failed.

Francis Bacon

Having finished weaving the careful image-patterns of The Ambassadors, James embarked upon his even more symbolically suggestive The Wings of the Dove.¹ By this stage he had already recognised the broadening power of imagery, for he writes, retrospectively, in his Preface that

Terms of amplitude, terms of atmosphere, those terms, and those terms only, in which images assert their fullness and roundness, their power to revolve, so that they have sides and backs, parts in the shade true parts in the sun-these were plainly to be my conditions, right and left ...²

Consonant with such an assertion it is, in fact, through the imagery of Wings that one of the most illuminating perspectives may be gained into the themes, as well as the more intangible, mystical qualities of the work.

Bearing in mind this statement of awareness on James's part as to the role of imagery, in approaching this novel it must also be remembered that by far the greater part of his work, either early or late, demands and repays the very closest scrutiny. Consequently, the interpretative skills required to unravel the skein of his later, complex themes and intricate syntax must, of necessity, be developed to their most delicate sensitivity. Nothing but the severest examination will yield the full worth of his three great novels, and it is not incidental, in view of this particular work's complexity, especially in imagery, that the Preface should contain an explicit statement of the author's presumption as to his reader's attention. While explaining a delicate instance as to how he uses point of view in the novel, James details the manner in which a work of art should be able to withstand the greatest critical pressure, whilst simultaneously affording the reader the maximum pleasure possible :

The enjoyment of a work of art, the acceptance of an irresistible illusion, constituting, to my sense, our highest experience of 'luxury', the luxury is not greatest, by my consequent measure, when the work asks for as little attention as possible. It is greatest, it is delightfully, divinely great, when we feel the surface, like the thick ice of the skater's pond, bear without cracking the strongest pressure we throw on it. The sound of the crack one may recognise, but never surely to call it a luxury.³

Through his use of the skating figure, James here suggests the close connection between imagery and its power to attract interest and critical attention.

The text of Wings exacts precisely this close attention, a fact emphasised not only by the obvious complexity of the novel, but also by the use of grammatical imagery within the work. The first image of this nature looks forward confidently to a final meaning in each sentence and, by implication, in the book as a whole. Kate Croy, surrounded by the shabbiness of her father's home and a shattered family life, is nevertheless determined to fashion something of note from her existence; the reader is told that 'she hadn't given up yet, and the broken sentence, if she was the last word, would end with a sort of meaning' (XIX, 7).

Kate's life does indeed end with 'a sort of meaning', but what precisely constitutes that meaning is one of the central subjects of the novel. Fittingly, the final words of the book belong to Kate, as she exclaims to Merton Densher : "'We shall never be again as we were!'" (XX, 405). In these words she sums up what has happened, namely that Milly's tender, unselfish goodness has changed each one of them in the most irrevocable fashion. Through giving the first grammatical reference and the last words to Kate in this way, James invites the reader to examine his own written word, and especially the imagery, in order to discover how this change in the characters' situations has been brought about.

Indeed, the three central characters are all, at various stages, imaged in grammatical terms : Mrs. Stringham looks on Milly as something 'to be read' (XIX, 116), and Milly sees herself as a text which 'might appear to cover the page' (XIX, 295). An image which contains a miniature picture of the whole work occurs when Densher returns from his visit to New York. It seems to him that

his full parenthesis was closed, and he was once more but a sentence, of a sort, in the general text, the text that, from his momentary street-corner, showed as a great grey page of print that somehow managed to be crowded without being "fine". The grey, however, was more or less the blurr of a point of view not yet quite seized again, and there would be colour enough to come out (XX, 11).

The vagueness conveyed by this image points to Densher's uncertainty as to his exact position in London society. For the reader too,

the precise meaning of the novel is as yet unclear. It is only when Densher and the reader can obtain a clearer and larger perspective, when the events of the novel can be viewed in their entirety, that the full impact of the action and text can be appreciated. The reader therefore, along with Densher, as this simile suggests, learns, through a complete reaching of Wings, the fullness of its final meaning.

The grammatical imagery is broadened, and grounded in the actual, by the large number of letters and telegrams which pass between the characters. These missives point towards the importance of communicating, at least initially, through the written word. In this framework, the burning of Milly's unopened letter at the end is important. Densher's lack of interest in opening it, and failure to protest at Kate's throwing it into the fire, convey how communication and understanding have finally ascended to a level beyond the need for the prosaic written word; they are now on a plane more alien to a spiritual consensus ad idem. This progression in understanding mirrors the way in which the meaning of the novel is conveyed in an increasingly symbolic and spiritual fashion, most notably by the extended image, and ultimately symbol, of Milly as a dove.

One of the central aspects of the work which begs comprehension is that of Milly Theale's desire to 'live'.⁴ As James writes in his Preface,

The idea, reduced to its essence, is that of a young person conscious of a great capacity for life, but early stricken and doomed, condemned to die under short respite, while also enamoured of the world; aware moreover of the condemnation and passionately desiring to "put in" before extinction as many of the finer vibrations as possible, and so achieve, however briefly and brokenly, the sense of having lived.⁵

Life, for James, did not consist in the simple living out of an earthly span. For him, a character had to see or perceive things in their larger masses in order to live fully. Someone who, through their life had gained a deeper perception leading to a broadened consciousness of the world around them, had lived in the true sense of the word. As Dorothy van Ghent expresses it, '... in James's world, the highest affirmation of life is the development of the subtlest and most various consciousness'.⁶ Strether in The Ambassadors is a fine example of such a Jamesian character. Having exhorted Little Bill to 'live all you can!' (XXI, 217) he follows up his own

injunction by gaining an inclusive understanding of Europe with all its failings and finer points. Since for him vision is life, he is seen to live fully. In fact, he is able to balance the understanding he gains with his earlier, narrower American view - at the end his consciousness is large enough to include both outlooks.⁷

In Wings, Milly is exhorted by the physician Sir Luke Strett to 'live'. At the termination of their first interview, he rhetorically asks her, in very strong tones, "My dear young lady isn't to 'live' exactly what I'm trying to persuade you to take the trouble to do?" (XIX,247). And at their second meeting he says, "when I talk of 'life' I think I mean more than anything else the beautiful show of it, in its freshness, made by young persons of your age" (XX,128). During the novel Milly does indeed 'live', so much so that in spite of what she perceives in the tough materialistic world, and in spite of the deceits practised on her by Densher (which she sees through), nevertheless she gains an outlook sufficiently broad as to allow her to leave a great sum of money to Kate's fiancé, knowing full well he is to marry her friend. Like Strether, she sees, she expands in consciousness, she rises above all the conflicting motives before her; unlike Strether she dies most poignantly at the zenith of her magnanimity. The pathos, perhaps even the tragedy of the story, lies in her having to exchange her fullness of life for death. As Elizabeth Stevenson puts it,

It is particularly the good thing for which one pays, rather than the bad thing. Since the consciousness of life is the greatest thing, there the expense is the greatest. Milly Theale's payment of death with life is deliberate and knowing, rather than mercifully unconscious.⁸

But it is not only Milly who is concerned with seeing. Densher himself comes to see Milly in all her delicate grace and spiritual beauty. He sees also the sin of the horrible deceit he practises upon Milly at the money-hungry Kate's instigation. And Kate, amongst the confusing materialistic motives by which she is encircled, sees that Milly's memory has come between herself and Densher.

Closely connected with this theme of perception is the imagery concerned with eyes. Kate's father, utterly incapable of perceiving anything, and at the same time a successful sponge who continually elicits sympathy and support from his family has 'safe eyes' (XIX,8).

Ironically, his eyes are safe, not only because behind them lurks a man who has been so unsafe as to ruin his family, but also because he is quite safe from the disturbing experience of seeing things other than those in his own selfish world. The impecunious but treacherous Lord Mark has eyes which, 'at moments - though it was an appearance they could suddenly lose - were as candid and clear as those of a pleasant boy' (XIX,151). Lord Mark's spiteful revelation to Milly of Densher's engagement is here prefigured in the changeability of his eyes, while their immature, small-boy quality hints at his impercipient as to the real hurt he is inflicting upon Milly. Lord Mark is, in fact, very myopic in outlook, and this is emphasised by his constantly wearing his double eyeglass; indeed, it finally emerges that his glasses 'always altered the expression of his eyes' (XX,152). Milly has 'gentle eyes' (XX,131) which are consonant with her dove image; Aunt Maud has 'fine, onyx eyes' (XIX,266) which fail to blink, eyes which show the extent of her materialistic myopia. Never, with such eyes, would she be able to appreciate the fineness of a character such as Milly Theale, or even the aspirations of the lively Kate.

Each of these images, apart from suggesting the character's role in the theme of seeing, is also a vivid window into their respective personalities. The pattern is extended by an image of Mrs. Lowder, not directly concerned with eyes (although obviously closely connected) which demonstrates James's mature ability to convey character by a single vivid image. The reader is told that 'it was an oddity of Mrs. Lowder's that her face in speech was like a lighted window at night, but that silence immediately drew the curtain' (XIX,82). From this image it emerges that Aunt Maud controls any insights into her character by the carefully chosen words she utters. The beautiful irony of the simile lies in the fact that it is impossible to see out of a lighted window into the dark of night. In this way, Aunt Maud's real selfish short-sightedness is obliquely but effectively suggested. In short, she sees no further than the ends of the materialistic strings by which she manipulates those around her.

This image of Mrs. Manningham's face as a window is important because it points to James's oft reiterated connection between the eye of an observer and a window. Writing about The American, for example, he says that

the interest of everything is all that it is his (Christopher Newman's) vision, his conception, his interpretation: at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness we are seated, from that admirable position we "assist".⁹

Similarly, of Milly Theale he writes of the 'painter's tenderness of imagination about her, which reduces him to watching her, as it were, through the successive windows of other people's interest in her'.¹⁰

The use of the same window image for both works implicitly invites a comparison between the two. From the passage on The American it emerges that the author or observer is very close to the central character, taking a personal part in helping him in his passage through the novel.¹¹ From that on Wings, on the other hand, it transpires that the novelist has withdrawn to a considerable extent, preferring to mirror his central character through the minds of others. It is partly because of this greater objectivity that Milly, as a character, lives more fully than Christopher Newman, for she comes to life in a more complex and multi-faceted fashion. She therefore approximates closer to Osborn Andreas's conception of James's idea of a rounded human being as

the accumulation of conscious events that he has brought to pass in the sensibilities of other people plus the accumulation of conscious events which other people have brought to pass in him.¹²

In Wings, one method James uses for conveying the exchanges which take place through the senses amongst his characters, leading to the impressions they make on the sensibilities of others, is by imaging them as communicating through eye-contact. So at Mrs. Lowder's dinner-party, although Milly's 'attention was aware at the same time of everything else, her eyes were mainly engaged with Kate Croy when not engaged with Susie. That wonderful creature's eyes moreover readily met them...' (XIX,147). Again, the reader is told that 'Kate had for her new friend's eyes the extraordinary and attaching property of appearing at a given moment to show as a beautiful stranger...' (XIX,212).¹³ It is partly by the multiplication of such sense exchanges that the build-up of Milly's character is suggested, and it is in this way that the reader watches her 'through the successive windows of other people's interest in her'.

Milly is therefore most certainly a rounded human being in James's

terms, for it is through the impact she makes on those around her that her mortal qualities are translated into the transcendent spirituality which she achieves in the memory of others after her death, a spirituality, incidentally, which Christopher Newman never could attain.

The theme of seeing and perceiving is closely bound up with that of appearance and reality in The Wings of the Dove. The ability of a character to see beyond appearances to the true nature of a situation, determines for James, as explained above, the extent to which he or she lives. The most important instance of casting aside appearance and facing reality is demonstrated by Milly when she sees Densher's attentions for what they really are. That Lord Mark is instrumental in forcing this realisation is unimportant, for Milly goes even beyond the reality of Densher's deceit. She acknowledges that in allowing her to experience love, even if at the time only from her side, Densher has provided her with a vital element of life. She is realistic and perceptive enough to see the value of what he has done for her, and for this reason she leaves him a fortune.

The deceit practised by Densher and Kate is but one instance of an appearance which belies reality. The theme is carried by a series of images referring to surfaces, masks and veils. Milly, at her last triumphant appearance at the palace, ignoring her illness and entertaining lavishly, is seen as extending her 'surface' (XX,215) to cover her malady. Here Milly's concern with surfaces is acceptable since it keeps up her appearance of health, attests to her courage, and so allows her not to worry or incommode those around her.¹⁴ As J. A. Ward puts it,

Behind James's emphasis on the importance of keeping up appearances - even though they contradict the reality of a situation - lies his recognition of the necessity of making the best of an imperfect world.¹⁵

On the other hand, Aunt Maud, talking to Densher about his prospects with Kate, presents to him the 'great glaze of her urface', which 'gave her visitor no present help' (XIX,82). In this instance Mrs. Lowder's surface is highly undesirable in that it hides her true character which is vulgar and unscrupulous. Even on this, the most obvious side of the theme, James displays a sure knowledge of reality, because in her very attempt to hide her commonness under a veneer of wealth, Mrs. Lowder displays her vulgarity and pretentiousness to the very greatest extent.

James therefore can be seen as approaching here Quentin Anderson's artist who, he says 'must be a "realist", must devote himself to the realm of appearance, in order to make its function as an image of reality plain'.¹⁶

But the contrary side to his theme, that reality is more desirable than mere surface, is illustrated, as mentioned, by the many references to masks and veils. Kate and Milly, whilst keeping on public masks, take them off in their 'intimate confessions' with one another. But whilst Milly reveals herself completely, the worldly and scheming Kate never doffs her own entirely.

There was a difference, no doubt, and mainly to Kate's advantage : Milly didn't quite see what her friend could keep back, was possessed of, in fine, that would be so subject to retention; whereas it was comparatively plain sailing for Kate that poor Milly had a treasure to hide (XX, 139).

The mask becomes therefore a surface under which a person's true nature, usually revealed in the face, is hidden. In this instance it prevents Milly from divining that Kate is already engaged to Densher; she lays herself open to terrible hurt because of this misconception. Towards the end of the novel Densher is imaged as using a silver veil to hide from reality (XX,342) and, in deceiving Milly, feels he is putting on a 'brazen mask' (XX,244), but puts it on nevertheless. Again, Lord Mark un.masks himself (XX,290) when he reveals to Milly that Densher is engaged. At that moment he is seen to be stripped of his social urbanity and exposed as 'the horrid little beast' he really is at heart.

The concluding thread is put into this pattern of imagery by Kate's removing her veil at the end of the novel :

After she had failed a little to push up her veil symmetrically and he (Densher) had said she had better take it off altogether, she had acceded to his suggestion before the glass (XX,397).

Firstly, that Kate cannot put up her veil symmetrically is revealing; she has existed so long with imperfect vision through her veil that she is incapable of gaining a balanced perspective or of openly displaying her features. She must be told by Densher to take it off completely and reveal for once her true face. It is, after

all, Densher who has seen Milly in all her exquisite fineness, and at this stage, changed by his perception of Milly's fineness, he desires Kate to take an unclouded look at their relationship. That she takes this look in front of the mirror suggests the self-knowledge and insight she is gaining from her association with the American girl, as well as the awareness she is coming to of the baseness of her scheme to snatch Milly's fortune at the latter's death.

James, then, was concerned that all his characters should have some kind of vision, those who see broadest and deepest standing highest in James's esteem because of the fuller life they inevitably lead. The complexity of the theme of perception in *Wings*, so carefully suggested by the imagery, is evidence of the author's mature realisation that gaining true perception is never a simple matter.

One of the most notable features of the world of the novel is that it is one of intense competition, and often even war. Amongst all the characters, Milly's is the most desperate struggle, for she is seen to be fighting for her life. Seeking no pity, and face-to-face with the worried Mrs. Stringham, Milly 'had one of those moments in which the warned, the anxious fighter of the battle of life, as if once again feeling for the sword at his side, carries his hand straight to the quarter of his courage' (XX,98). Sadly, Milly loses her battle for life, but, paradoxically, she finally emerges triumphant by refusing to fight with the vulgar, materialistic weapons of Aunt Maud's world. As the essence of an exquisite spirit she triumphs in her death. As James says in the Preface, 'the process of life gives way fighting, and often may so shine out on the last ground as in no other connection'.¹⁷ A great part of the book's pathos lies in Milly, with all her infirm frailty, becoming involved with other far stronger characters in a worldly struggle. But in spite of being unfit for such a struggle, from the first, Milly enters the field. In the horrible realisation of her plight, after hearing the news for the first time from Sir Luke, Milly feels she must take up some sort of defensive weapon: 'she proceeded now in very truth after the fashion of a soldier on a march - proceeded as if, for her initiation, the first charge had been sounded' (XIX,248-9).

Even before Milly enters the scene, the reader is faced with a world at war. Aunt Maud's own room is her 'battlefield' (XIX, 30) and there is little doubt of what her London life is composed when

James writes that 'Mrs. Lowder was London, was life - the roar of the siege and the thick of the fray' (XIX, 32). The noise and violence of this latter image are characteristic of Mrs. Manningham, for she repeatedly bludgeons her way into any situation by means of her money and social position. Milly, in contrast, while still entering the fight, but in her own way, has a very different method of operation. She sees London as a place 'to be achieved, like a siege, by gradual approaches' (XIX, 133). In this way James uses the war imagery to distinguish between the two, thereby adding a further element of interest to their relationship.

The distinction is continued when Mrs. Stringham, the ficelle who never really enters the action, views her friendship with Mrs. Lowder as the 'charm ... of sitting .. in springtime, during a long peace, on the daisied grassy bank of some great slumbering fortress' (XIX, 169). And the ubiquitous Eugenio is also implicated, for he mounts a continual and spiteful guard outside the Palazzo Leporelli (XIX, 258). Even when Aunt Maud is entertaining, the situation has a military aspect, Kate's contribution being 'that of the faultless soldier on parade' (XX, 34).

This pattern of war imagery, centering around Aunt Maud, emphasises the brute force used by people to achieve specific aims at the expense of others. For James, appropriation of, or interference in someone else's life, was a cardinal sin; such action could only dull the sensibilities of both parties. The opposite, an 'impulse to tender and sympathetic carefulness with the expansive potentialities of other people', was the quality he admired most. Of all the characters in The Wings of the Dove, only Milly has the sensitivity to deal really feelingly with others, and also, tragically, in a world of warfare, the sensitivity to be hurt so badly that she dies as much from the wound inflicted by Densher (and Lord Mark) as she does from her ailment. Kate and Densher, on the other hand, come to a realisation of Milly's tender sensibilities, as well as, to an extent, gaining in sensitivity themselves. At the conclusion they are both sensitive to the fact that it would be foolish to bind themselves in marriage when each knows that the other has been irrevocably altered through contact with Milly.

The pain caused by insensitivity to the feelings of others is illustrated by a small but important set of images, all of which are noteworthy for their graphic impact. For Milly, emerging from her first conference with Sir Luke, Kate, 'rose for her with such a face of

sympathy as might have graced the vestibule of a dentist' (XIX, 232). The equivocal nature of this image is finely in tune with Kate's ultimate two-faced attitude to Milly. The sympathy is there, to be sure, but the image seems to suggest that it is only there because it is required by form. The image also prefigures the part Kate will play in increasing the emotional pain which Milly has to face.

In the final pages of the novel there is a further image connected with the idea of injury and pain. Densher, having returned from Venice, is slowly coming to the horrible realisation that 'the precious, of whatever sort, (is) most subject to the hunger of time' (XX, 395);¹⁸ knowing the awful hurt he has inflicted on the dead Milly, he aches for the beauty she so finely possessed. He returns again and again to the thought of what her final letter might have contained :

he took it out of its sacred corner and its soft wrappings;
he undid them one by one, handling them, handling it, as a
father, baffled and tender, might handle a maimed child
(XX, 396).

The bemused but delicate quality of Densher's actions suggested by this image conveys, apart from a realisation of the injury he has caused, the sensitivity and benevolence which he now feels towards an obviously tender and defenceless woman. Much of the poignancy stems from his not having used such tenderness with Milly at the outset.

That Kate has not been left entirely insensitive at the end is emphasised when Densher tells her that the correct way of dealing with Milly's bequest would have been to send it back unopened with a letter of refusal. As he says this to her she takes it 'with the mere brave blink with which a patient of courage signifies to the exploring medical hand that the tender place is touched' (XX, 398). The injury she has done herself in scheming against Milly has left her with a wound which, although internal and hidden, is every bit as painful as that of her victim would have been. She is now so sensitive, in fact, that it hurts to have pointed out her mistake in impulsively burning the letter.

This world of warfare and pain illustrates the most extreme form of competition which occurs in the society of the book. Another form, not as violent, but equally as uncompromising, is the cut-and-thrust which goes on for material possessions. Aunt Maud is vulgarly blatant about her material aspirations as well as those she has for Kate. Densher articulates this by remarking, (having summed up her

furniture - 'her signs and symbols') "when all's said and done, you know, she's colossally vulgar" (XIX, 76- 77).

The respective attitudes to money and materialism of Milly and Mrs. Manningham set them quite clearly apart :

Aunt Maud sat somehow in the midst of her money, founded on it and surrounded by it, even if with a masterful high manner about it, her manner of looking, hard and bright, as if it weren't there (XIX, 196).

Milly, on the other hand, with hers,

had no manner at all - which was possibly, from a point of view, a fault : she was at any rate far away on the edge of it, and you hadn't, as might be said, in order to get at her nature, to traverse, by whatever avenue, any piece of her property (XIX, 196).

In The Wings of the Dove the commercial ethic is in fact all-pervasive. From the very beginning the indigent Kate, in her frustration, feels her misery to be 'chalk-marked by fate like a "lot" at a common auction' (XIX, 4). She senses that her future is at the mercy of any bid, and in the novel Aunt Maud seems to have bid successfully. She says to Densher, concerning Kate's presence with her,

I've watched it long; I've been saving it up and letting it, as you say of investments, appreciate; and you may judge whether, now it has begun to pay so, I'm likely to consent to treat for it with any but a high bidder (XIX, 82).

It is this type of talk, substituting persons for transactable things, which leads ultimately to the act of doing so, and thus to the misery at the end.

Similarly, knowing Mrs. Lowder will block any move of hers to marry Densher, who has no money, Kate schemes for him to obtain the necessary financial status by 'making-up' to Milly.¹⁹ That this scheme should involve crushing the feelings, and, ultimately the life, of a creature as wonderful as Milly, bears witness that the commercial instinct is truly horrifying in its selfish, destructive impulse. Ultimately, as the reader sees, Milly pays for being rich with her life, but she buys with her 'beautiful, simple, sublime' (XIX, 197) personality, a transcendent immortality of far greater value than all her earthly

wealth. In short, at the base of the novel lies the contrast between selfish, worldly materialism and a spirit which is self-sacrificing.

Sir Luke Strett, a god-like figure seemingly not of this world, 'had appeared indeed to speak of purchase and payment, but in reference to a different sort of cash' (XX,142). The physician, constantly exhorting Milly to live, deals in human values. He is concerned that Milly should get the full value from what little of life is left to her, and not that he should get his full payment in money for helping her in her sickness. Similarly, the kindly Mrs. Stringham feels, as she starts out with Milly, that she is standing near the mouth of a rich mine: 'The mine but needed working and would certainly yield a treasure. She wasn't thinking, either, of Milly's gold' (XIX,126). What she is thinking of is the wealth of tenderness and beauty which slowly emerges from Milly's character as the story progresses.

In thinking this way, Mrs. Stringham is sharply contrasted with Lionel Croy who exhorts Kate to 'work' (XIX,16) her connection with Mrs. Lowder, as does her sister Marian Condrip (XIX,32), the mining image serving hereto reflect the more acquisitive characters against those with less selfish aims.

In contrast to Sir Luke and Mrs. Stringham, Aunt Maud deals in human lives themselves. Referring to Mrs. Lowder's transactions with Lord Mark over his marriage to Kate, Milly says to the latter, "she has put down you ... and I think what you mean is that, on the counter, she still keeps hold of you" (XIX,278).²⁰ Most of the relationships throughout the novel are bound up in business-type transactions of this nature. Even Densher, after he has fallen in love with Milly, thinks of 'the special solidity of the contract, the way, above all, as a service for which the price named by him had been magnificently paid, his equivalent office was to take effect ...' (XX,237). Only after Milly's death does Densher cease to image her in such commercial terms. Milly alone stands outside this world of material transactions because of her wealth and unselfish spirit. She is the one character who never deals in human lives, and never takes for herself. In Venice, she says to Lord Mark, 'I give and give and give ... I can't make a bargain' (XX,161).²¹

Densher's basest action in this world of deals occurs when he says he will marry Milly if only Kate will physically consummate their

relationship. The arrangement between himself and Kate is at once transformed from a situation where each has been willing to give to the other, into a bargain where both are taking. He takes Kate's virginity in return for a material gain which itself is of doubtful certainty.

One of the vital concepts which emerges at this point is that of reciprocity. A. Habegger defines the concept in terms of consciousness. He writes:

A quickness to respond to others, to "abound in their sense" is both reciprocal and characteristic of a fine consciousness ... Reciprocity, the central feature of morality, is the finest flower of James's aesthetic disposition towards symmetry and a love of civilised consciousness.²²

As the quotation explains, reciprocity means giving to others, without thought of reward, and with a feeling for their sensibilities. Once two people engage in such an arrangement on both sides, there is the symmetry which Habegger mentions, as well as a beautiful and stable relationship. Susan Shepherd and Milly have such a relationship, since Milly's tender consideration for her friend is reciprocated by the older woman's view 'that it was life enough simply to feel her companion's feelings' (XIX, 115). This, for James, was the finest of accords which could exist between two people, and it stands in sharp contrast to the appropriation of another's personality which he deprecated so sharply.

While the objects at stake in all these transactions in Wings are people, the currency is money. The image-pattern which carries this aspect of commercialism is that dealing with coins, medals and money in general. At the outset it is important to notice that, as in The Ambassadors,²³ James makes a careful distinction between coins and medals. Coins, the common, plentiful currency, are normally associated with the vulgar, American characteristic of business-gotten wealth. The medal, on the other hand, is connected with the European world where wealth is used as a means for the quiet and fruitful enjoyment of leisure, and not, as in America, as an end in itself.²⁴ Latent in this image of the medal, however, there lurks always the danger that the wealth which it represents will, through its age and disconnection from the common world, lose touch with the needs and forces which govern that realm.

Undoubtedly, though, James saw the medal as the more desirable and admirable image of wealth or worth, so much so that he chose it as an image for The Wings of the Dove. In his Preface to the novel he writes :

If, as I had fondly noted, the little world determined for her was to 'bristle' ... with meanings, so, by the same token, could I but make my medal hang free, its obverse and reverse, its face and its back, would beautifully become optional for the spectator. I somehow wanted them correspondingly embossed, wanted them inscribed and figured with an equal salience.²⁵

James sees the medal here as something ornamental and precious, an object to be reverently turned and examined, as he hopes his work of art will be.

At the start of this novel, Densher is depicted in

that wondrous state of youth in which the elements, the metals more or less precious, are so in fusion and fermentation that the question of the final stamp, the pressure that fixes the value, must wait for comparative coolness (XIX,49).

James suggests by this image, not only Densher's concern with money and earning, but also that he is still in a malleable state with the potential to be shaped. It is in this state that Kate moulds him to fit her designs on Milly's money. It is also while in this form that he is changed through contact with Milly into a more widely perceptive person than before.

During the course of the novel, Densher feels it is useless for him, in Mrs. Lowder's house of bribes, 'to try to impart a gloss to his own comparative brummagem' (XX,33). The irony in this image is particularly illuminating. Densher is in reality a 'genuine coin', but in Aunt Maud's house the true uses and value of money are so widely prostituted as to become the norm in their corrupt guise. In such surroundings, Densher inevitably feels himself to be some kind of counterfeit.

At the conclusion, as Densher meets Kate, he gets, 'as he had got it the other times, his apprehension of the special stamp of the fortune of the moment' (XX,346). In short, Densher finishes up as a common coin, handled, shaped and battered by his path through life. It is only his love for Milly that eventually raises him some way above the vulgar, commercial world of Mrs. Lowder.

Noticeably, the medal image occurs in the ancient Palazzo Leporelli where Milly finally retires to die. The decor in the palace is especially ornate, but displays none of the bad taste so obvious in Aunt Maud's Lancaster Gate. That house flaunts the 'solid forms, the wasted finish, the misguided cost, the general attestation of morality and money, a good conscience and a big balance' (XIX,79). Worlds apart, the ceilings of the palace have 'medallions of purple and brown, of brave old melancholy colour, medals as of old reddened gold, embossed and beribboned, all toned with time and all flourished and scalloped and gilded about' (XX,132). Looking at the two side-by-side it is possible to measure the tremendous distance in refinement and tradition which lies between the loud ostentation of market-place money, and the quiet, tonal beauty into which the medal image so harmoniously blends.

Taken as a whole, the world of The Wings of the Dove is therefore one in which commercialism and the materialistic impulse induce an extreme form of self-centred acquisitiveness. The character of Milly is the shining exception to this pattern. Even after realising that Densher and Kate are after her money, she still feels able to leave the former a large bequest. It is in this action that one of the most important messages of the novel is contained: Milly demonstrates, by her generosity, how the personal and selfless is able to overcome the selfish impersonality of the commercial ethic.

While dealing with the world of value and money, an image-pattern worthy of note is that touching on the pearl. The pearl's most important occurrence as an image is at Milly's final party in the Palazzo Leporelli. There she appears in her magnificent white dress with a 'long, priceless chain (of pearls), wound twice round (her) neck'. They hang 'heavy and pure down the front of ... (her) breast' (XX,217). The reader is told that the pearls seemed to have 'taken on the character of a symbol' (XX,219), and it is what they symbolise that is here so illuminating.

Firstly, they symbolise the difference between Milly and Kate. The latter realises, as she sees the beautiful young American in her pearls, that Densher will never be able to give her jewellery of such value. The pearls therefore suggest the distance between Milly's inner spiritual worth, and Kate's aspirations towards things of material and external value. Alexander Holder-Barrel recognises an even broader frame of reference when he asserts that:

Milly's pearls represent not only the difference between her and Kate but between two worlds, that of America with its growing monetary potentiality and that of our Western civilisation with its history, traditions, titles and ceremonies, but also its state of poverty.²⁷

In suggesting all this, the pearls point towards the opposing sets of values between which Densher must choose on his emotional seesaw between the two women.

In this scene, however, the image of the pearl symbolises more than the differences described above, and it is significant that Milly is seen to be wearing the necklace. The pearl here stands, in miniature, both for Milly's character and for the outlook which she achieves at the conclusion of the novel. The pearl is, after all, the only jewel produced by a living creature. In essence, it is softer in appearance than any other precious stone, and has an iridescent smoothness which displays, unlike a cut gem, equal beauty to every spectator. Further, the pearl is evolved by an oyster from an irritating particle which it slowly transforms into a smooth and beautiful jewel. Milly embodies all of these qualities: she is intensely alive and is palpably softer and more yielding than any of the more brilliant characters. And unlike most of them, she does not have many irregular facets, different ones reserved for different social situations - her consistent grace is one of her most endearing attributes. Like the pearls, Milly's beauty derives from the way she meets the vicissitudes of life; the greater the irritation, the brighter her radiance seems to shine. More than this, a pearl necklace gains in lustre the more it is worn; certainly Milly gains in stature as she progresses in life through the novel. Richard Gale sums up most succinctly the use of pearl imagery when he writes: 'the pearl came to symbolise for James priceless knowledge to be found in the depths of life's experience ...'²⁸

In the scene at Palazzo Leporelli the pearls serve as important links between a number of other significant image-patterns. In colour they match Milly's dress and remind Kate of her image of the American girl as a dove. "She's a dove"; Kate says, "and one somehow doesn't think of doves as bejewelled. Yet they suit her down to the ground" (XX, 218). Also, the pearl, in being formed beneath the water, where the diver must search, links closely with the important set of images in The Wings of the Dove dealing with the stream of life and society.²⁹

Another facet of the rather unpleasant world of which material acquisitiveness is but a part, is the mechanical nature of the society, a quality conveyed by the imagery referring to machines and mechanisms. In the society dominated by Mrs. Lowder each part drives some other. Aunt Maud, driven by social position-seeking, drives Kate to seek a financially suitable match. Kate, in turn, drives the indigent Densher, who works on Milly as a result. As it is explained in the novel, 'the worker in one connection was the worked in another; it was as broad as it was long - with the wheels of the system, as might be seen, wonderfully oiled' (XIX,179). It is this 'wonderful' machine which crushes the beautiful Milly beneath its impersonal wheels; wheels, it seems, which must belong to Mrs. Lowder's terrifying 'Car of Juggernaut' (XIX,90). The image is particularly apt for Aunt Maud since it conveys the power, force and impersonality of the way in which she operates.

Even Milly, if she is not to be seen as a wholly extraneous member of this society, cannot but be imaged in terms of some sort of mechanical device. With an indication of the superb control of technique which James had by this stage of his career achieved, Milly is imaged by Kate as the fine mechanism of a watch. The latter discusses Milly's hiding her illness before she dies, and says,

"she won't show for that, any more than you your watch, when it's about to stop for want of being wound up, gives you convenient notice or shows as different from usual. She won't die, she won't live, by inches" (XX,53).

In this image are conveyed not only the delicacy, in spite of its mechanical nature, which is so much a part of Milly, but also the sense of time running out. Before the end of the novel time does indeed run out for Milly. That Kate should image Milly's sickness in these mechanical terms is significant, since the objectivity displayed in such imaging points to the distance between Milly and Kate, even at this point in the story.

This mechanical imagery illustrates an important aspect of the novel for, together with the material, commercial nature of society, it shows what sort of world must be overcome in the achievement of a sensitive personality. F. C. Crews crystallises this idea when he writes: 'What Densher really perceives is that man's spirit - Milly's - is superior to the social machine in which it is forced to operate'.³⁰

This 'social machine' was, for James, a detestable manifestation of man's inability to live naturally with his fellow. Another aspect

of performance in society which James found highly objectionable was any display in the least vulgar or over-demonstrative. The circus imagery which appears in Wings is associated with, as Miriam Allott puts it, 'a garish show and a type of trained savagery'.³¹

Inevitably, therefore, Aunt Maud is the butt, in the main, of this type of imagery. In her carriage, the reader is told, she 'drove round their prospect as the principal lady at the circus drives round the ring ... It was our young man's sense that she was magnificently vulgar ...' (XIX,62); for Mrs. Lowder, such imagery is particularly fitting; she is most certainly a performer, and a chief one at that. She is not, however, imaged as a theatrical performer in the manner in which the other characters are. In short, her performance is not sufficiently refined for the theatre, and she must do her acting, since acting and performing are very much part of her role, in the public ring at the circus. In this respect the distinction in imagery is particularly telling.

One of these circus images conveys with great impact the horror which lurks just beneath the thin surface of social forms observed in the novel. At Aunt Maud's party at Lancaster Gate, Densher looks at Milly

as some spectator in an old-time circus might have watched the oddity of a christian maiden, in the arena, mildly, caressingly, martyred. It was the nosing and fumbling not of lions and tigers but of domestic animals let loose for the joke (XX,42).

Not only does this image, suggestive of Roman times, add a great historical vista to Milly's plight, but also shows how dangerous the domestic creatures of the novel can be. It serves a further purpose in linking the circus imagery with the themes of religion (the martyr reference), and of death, both central to the novel.

That Densher should be one of the spectators at such a scene, reflects his tacit and passive acquiescence in the deception of Milly, (a deception which is instrumental in bringing about her death), just as the Roman spectators acquiesced in the death of the christian martyrs.

The pattern of animal imagery, to which this arena image is obviously related, threads its way throughout the novel. Mrs. Lowder, the woman voracious for social distinction and position, is imaged as a lioness (XIX,30). Kate, temporarily out of her house, compares

herself to 'a tremb'ing kid, kept apart a day or two till her turn should come, but sure sooner or later to be introduced into the cage of the lioness' (XIX,30). The image suggests most graphically Aunt Maud's latent brutality, and also the abject fear she strikes, unfeelingly, into those of lesser standing around her. How premeditatedly she does this is shown by her imaging herself as a predatory animal when she says to Densher, "'I can bite your head off any day, any day I really open my mouth ...'" (XIX,124). That Aunt Maud should see herself in these terms only emphasises how very dangerous she is in consciously plotting violence.

In fact, behind all the action in the book, there lurks a savage jungle violence which is ready to break through the polite surface of social forms at any time. For Densher, his own and Kate's lack of 'respect' in the game they are playing to get Milly's money, is seen by him to be 'lifting its head as that of a snake in the garden' (XX,5). Densher also sees Kate's aunt as her 'beneficent dragon', the rather anomalous juxtaposition of the two words highlighting Mrs. Lowder's two-faced character. Indeed, the whole course of Milly's entry into the action is imaged, and her future is hinted at, in a very powerful animal image which occurs at her first appearance in English society. Her 'social adventure' is pictured as controlled by

one of those common caprices of the numberless foolish flock, gregarious movements as inscrutable as ocean-currents. The huddled herd had drifted to her blindly - it might as blindly have drifted away. There had been of course a signal, but the great reason was probably the absence at the moment of a larger lion. The bigger beast would come and the smaller would then incontinently vanish (XX,43).

The metaphor conveys very fully the aimlessness of London society and the influences which prey upon it, forcing it from one capricious position to another. As the novel unfolds further, the reader sees how fitting this image is; for the impulses which govern the characters are recognisably animal in origin.

The forces which stalk the background of the action are best captured in an image which confronts Densher when he realises that, engaged to Kate, he is also committed to Milly's memory. He feels his alternatives to be 'as close as a pair of monsters of whom he might have felt on either cheek the hot breath and huge eyes' (XX,352).

In this figure is crystallised the awful nearness of the world of the jungle which knows nothing of the niceties of society and the schemes which are so much a part of it in The Wings of the Dove. And it is imagery of this nature which lends to the work a deep background of primeval savagery and a sense of tension stemming from the frightening proximity of that world.³²

A significant aspect of James's technique is the manner in which his characters apprehend the world. Sight, leading to perception of the world, is one method of apprehension. Another sense which James's characters employ is that of taste. For example, Kate, at the mercy of those who wield power through money, images herself as being eaten by people with money: 'They did that without tasting' (XIX,33). The immediacy of this image to any reader, means that it expresses very directly the careless, insensitive, rapacious attitude of the socially powerful. And for Densher, after his return from Venice, 'the taste of life itself was the taste of suspense' (XX,340). Similarly, after being visited by Mrs. Stringham, who tells him of Lord Mark's revelations to Milly, he feels he has been left 'with such a taste in his mouth of what he couldn't do' (XX,295).

What all these references to taste and eating do, (and there are a great many of them),³³ is firstly to anchor the novel very firmly to a world which is familiar to the reader. (The many scenes where the characters are actually eating or drinking have only to be noted for it to be realised how concerned James was with this aspect of his work). Secondly, as mentioned above, these eating references draw attention to the capacity of his characters for receiving sense-impressions. These characters apprehend the world James creates for them through their senses, and their position in his scale of good and bad - his idea of moral worth - is determined by the sensitivity they have for the feelings of others.³⁴

And since James lays emphasis on the senses of his characters in taking in their world, it seems reasonable to assume that he is thereby calling on the reader to adopt a highly sensitive approach to the imagery in the novel, and more broadly to the fine complexity of the thematic material. He does, after all, speak of Densher's situation as 'decanted' so that the reader 'should get all the taste', just as the Venice setting was intended to be 'a deeper draught out of a larger cup'.³⁵

The subject of food and eating imagery leads naturally on to that

of 'taste', dealing with the degree of discrimination in use when impressions are assimilated and collated by the person concerned. Involved here is the fine feeling for what is fitting in a situation, and what is clearly out of place. On one side of the social spectrum, Mrs. Lowder displays no taste in the furnishings of her house. And on the other end, in the same way, at Mrs. Condrip's house, Densher sees the bric-a-brac which had 'failed to accommodate or compromise; they asserted their differences without tact and without taste' (XX,365).

Aunt Maud, in her overbearing vulgarity, will never learn to discriminate between the delicate and the crass. It is only the delicate characters who develop that fine discriminatory taste which tells them what is right. Kate demonstrates how far she has progressed in that direction when she first destroys Milly's letter and then refuses to marry Densher. In spite of what her own feelings might be, she has learnt that degree of taste in her personal relationships, through the beauty and tragedy of Milly's death, which allows her to feel that marrying Densher, changed as they both are, would be a mistake and an offence to both their sensibilities.

As noted, one of the major themes of The Wings of the Dove is that of how appearance hides reality. A related aspect of this concern is illustrated in the image-pattern referring to the game or entertainment of life. In The Notebooks, James has Kate urge Densher to "play a certain game - and you'll have money from her. But if she knows the money is to help you to marry me, you won't have it; never in the world!"³⁶ Superficially, this game might be pleasant and rather fun, but in reality the stakes are the lives and deaths of people. The whole novel may, in one sense, be seen as the description of an elaborate game. This game has a beginning, where the participants are introduced and set in their places, a period of actual play, and an end at which the players emerge with fortunes changed from those of the start. At the beginning, Kate's father is seen to have 'dealt out lies as he might the cards from the greasy old pack for the game of diplomacy to which you were to sit down with him' (XIX, 7). It is such playing with fortune and fate, suggested in this image by the cards, which leads to so much of the unlooked-for tragedy in the work. In a similar fashion, while Densher sees his part with Milly as something to be played at (XX,24), for her, life suddenly has 'the chill of the losing game' (XX,157). And inevitably, at the

conclusion, Densher says to his accomplice Kate, "'we've played our dreadful game and we've lost'" (XX,347).

This imagery of the game of life at once raises the question of how much free will and choice the players actually have.³⁷ In The Wings of the Dove, it seems as if they have very little, their struggle gaining in heroism and poignancy because of the inevitability of their fate. James himself writes:

my young woman would herself be the opposition - to the catastrophe announced to the associated Fates, powers conspiring to a sinister end and, with their command of means, finally achieving it, yet in such straits really to stifle the sacred spark, that, obviously, a creature so animated, an adversary so subtle couldn't but be felt worthy, under whatever weaknesses, of the foreground and the limelight.³⁸

Superficially at least, the characters seem free to move around their world, and yet, when looked at closely, they are seen to be caught in a series of mazes and labyrinths which rarely have easily found endings. The straightforward Mrs. Stringham, 'the woman in the world least formed by nature, as she was quite aware, for duplicities and labyrinths' (XIX,104), in linking with Milly, discovers herself 'dedicated to personal subtlety by a new set of circumstances' (XIX,104). Realising her position, she says to Milly, "'my dear child, we move in a labyrinth'" (XIX,186). And as Milly's sickness becomes a reality, and her life is thus immeasurably complicated, after visiting Sir Luke Strett, she gazes at 'the maze of possibilities through which, for hours, she had herself been picking her way' (XIX,258). Densher too, as his 'game' with Milly becomes more involved, feels himself caught in 'a wondrous silken web' (XX,64).

Noticeably, all but one of the characters never emerge from these mazes. Milly alone shakes herself free, not by any machinations in her social world, but by growing more spiritually beautiful the longer she stays on earth. In brief, she transcends the values of this world in this world by living as Sir Luke tells her to do. Unfortunately, in attaining such fineness Milly lays herself open to be crushed by the materialistic aspects of her world, and she dies. It is part of the tragedy of the story that beauty such as Milly's is incompatible with the rest of the world.³⁹

That the characters of the novel are free to move around within the larger bounds of a limiting situation, is illustrated by their

being imaged as plunged into the sea of life.⁴⁰ Lord Mark asks, concerning London life, if there is 'anything but the groping and pawing, that of the vague billows of some great greasy sea in mid-channel of masses of bewildered people' (XIX,150). The repulsive, oily texture and aimlessness conveyed in this image suggest how London society is something from which to draw back in disgust, even for those who are most often part of it. And after all the characters have appeared, 'the circumstance none the less made clear that they were all swimming together in the blue' (XIX,213).⁴¹ This type of imagery impresses upon the reader that all the characters are in the same medium and the same society. Being so placed, the characters have a mutual obligation to consider their fellow beings. The various ways in which this consideration is manifested, constitute a central theme of the work, 'since they are 'all together, for that matter, like fishes in a crystal pool' (XX,213).⁴²

There is also, in the water imagery, something distinctly prehistoric : conversation at the banquet at Matcham is 'like splashes of a slow thick tide' (XIX,160), while Milly, in an image which gives to the values she represents the timeless quality they deserve, like some neolithic creature of a bygone world, 'dips and splashes into the many-coloured stream of history' (XIX,287). She images herself, when dead, as 'not quite extinct' (XX,152), and is seen to 'stir the stream like a leviathan' (XIX,133).

As the world's evolutionary cycle took an upward turn, so life began to flourish above the water. In the same way Milly, as she nears death, which is really part of the affirmation of her life in the novel, ascends into the Palazzo Leporelli above the waters of Venice, and refuses to come down. Densher, associated through memory with Milly's transcendent life in death, also rises some distance above the shiny medium. Alone with Kate, he images his attachment to Milly as 'a small emergent rock in the waste of waters, the bottomless grey expanse of straightness' (XX,391). Noteworthy in this image is not only the ongoing movement expressed in 'emergent', but also the bottomless depths to which Aunt Maud and all the other creatures may sink. Against these vast perspectives is measured the significance of Densher's progress, however small, in the opposite direction. Densher, therefore, is free to grow upward, while the rest can only sink without the help of the buoyancy of a soul such as Milly's. By stimulating Densher's expansion and submerging the other characters, metaphorically that is, the water imagery approaches an archetypal

form in which water is not only a fertilising and refreshing agent, but also one which drowns and destroys. According to the Bible, water floated Noah to safety and drowned the sinners of the world: so the Palazzo Leporelli, in a 'summer sea', is 'the ark of her (Milly's) deluge' on which 'she must sit tight and float on and on' (XX,143).

The boats and ships which sail upon this figurative sea of society form, first of all, a useful link between the strands of mechanical and water imagery. Secondly, they point towards the theme of a journey within the novel, a theme which, as noted, is purposely omitted from the water imagery. Even with this pattern, although journeys are clearly suggested, they seem to have little direction or purpose.⁴³

To begin with, Mrs. Stringham allies herself with Milly and feels she has placed herself 'in a boat that she more and more estimated as, humanly speaking, of the biggest ... (and) of the safest' (XIX,104). Later on, Susan Shepherd sees Milly as one of the new, deep steamers, next to which 'if, in your little boat, you had chosen to hover and approach, you had but yourself to thank, when once motion was started, for the way the draught pulled you' (XIX,113). Suggested by this last image is a strong sense of Milly's significance and powers of attraction. And when Mrs. Stringham has 'the sense of rocking violently at her side', the vicissitudes of a life with Milly are suggested. Mrs. Lowder is also figured as a boat at her dinner party 'steering ... a course in which she called at subjects as if they were islets in an archipelago' (XIX,161). And when she aimlessly moves from one to another, she includes a touch of her characterically public vulgarity, with 'a splash of her screw' (XIX,161). Further, Milly's first rather hasty consultation with Sir Luke is likened to a 'useless voyage to the North Pole' (XIX,244), conveying at the same time the chill of the news which the physician must shortly break to her. As Milly's fate begins to close in, she realises that the tears she has rather ashamedly shed at her pitiful plight 'were the signs of her consciously rounding her protective promontory, quitting the blue gulf of comparative ignorance and reaching her view of the troubled sea' (XX,144). It is noticeable that in this image, as in the novel as a whole, Milly sails out into the sea of life, and not towards the specific and more restricted destination of a port. In fact, this figure indicates one of the major concerns of the novel: Milly's conscious rounding of her promontory, points toward the expanded consciousness which she achieves by the time she dies. Set in the broad context of the sea of the world,

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her action takes on a significance stretching some way beyond the immediate confines of the action. Milly's movement towards a more inclusive perception of her world, albeit savage and swampy, and then her destruction by that world, constitutes much of the poignancy, and reality, of her life and death.

The final element of this ship imagery is not provided in the novel itself, but James points to where it ends. In the Preface he writes :

Our young friend's existence would create rather, all round her, very much that whirlpool movement of the waters produced by the sinking of a big vessel or the failure of a great business; when we figure to ourselves the strong narrowing eddies, the immense force of suction, the general engulfment that, for any neighbouring object, makes immersion inevitable.⁴⁴

As conveyed by this image, it is Milly's beauty of spirit which has such a tremendous influence on the lives of those around her. She splits Kate and Densher, irreversibly changing them both. She draws Mrs. Lowder and Lord Mark along, only to disappoint them in their material aspirations. She has probably alienated Kate, who has seen the baseness of the money motive, from Aunt Maud; she has certainly made the once likely marriage between Kate and Lord Mark a virtual impossibility. That all this has been wrought by a small, sickly American girl, attests to the power of her spirit and the force of the eddies she has caused.

Of all the characters in the novel, Milly is the most natural, never hiding her true character behind a false appearance. Associated with the image of the pearl, she is lent an aura of being produced by a living creature of the natural world, and a creature unconnected with the savagery of the jungle. In this respect she stands in contrast to all the other characters who, in their various connections with animal imagery, seem intent on preying upon each other - theirs is the law of the jungle. Amongst all of them, Milly alone is imaged in terms of flowers and plants, the beautiful, quiet and passive members of the jungle kingdom. In his Preface, James notes that 'she (Milly) should be the last fine flower - blooming alone - for the fullest attestation of her freedom - of an "old" New York stem',⁴⁵ Densher, on first meeting Milly, feels that

to have got nearer the luxuriant tribe of which the rare creature was the final flower, the immense extravagant unregulated cluster ... all this, to say nothing of the effect of closer growths of the stem, was to have had one's own small world — space both crowded and enlarged (XIX,111).

What Milly does, in her flower image, is to bring to the world a much needed element of unforced beauty and silent growth. Since she is the character who grows most noticeably, it is fitting she should be the outstanding image of natural expansion. From the smallest, frailest person, she grows into one of the most impressive characters, overlapping the savage, jungle world and casting her peaceful influence over the market-place.

Much of Milly's world is imaged in flowers : knowing her fate, she feels that 'the beauty of the bloom had gone from the small old sense of safety' (XIX,248); impressions of society gather for her 'into a splendid cluster, an offering like an armful of the rarest flowers' (XIX,208), and Densher's attention to her strikes at 'the root, in her soul, of a pure pleasure. It positively lifted its head and flowered, this pure pleasure ...' (XX,78). Even the awful sadness of Milly's death is carried in this flower imagery, the destruction of something infinitely young and delicate being conveyed when Densher asks Kate if she thinks Milly is "'satisfied to die in the flower of her youth'" (XX,332).

In her image as a flower, therefore, Milly stands apart from the other characters, a role consonant with her exceptional destiny. James, however, realising that she had also to be seen as a part of society, pictured her, in line with the other characters' animal images, as a dove. It is from this image that the novel takes its title, the whole association probably derived from Psalm 55:6: 'Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then I would fly away and be at rest'.⁴⁶

The image of Milly as a dove is but one part of a larger image-pattern referring to birds in general. Kate says Mrs. Lowder has settled on her "'with her wonderful gilded claws'", to which Densher retorts, "'You speak as if she were a vulture'". Kate replies, "'Call it an eagle - with a gilded beak as well, and with wings for great flights'" (XIX,73).

The images in this exchange convey admirably the sense of Mrs. Lowder's savagery and proclivity for preying upon other people under

the guise of her wealth.

Mrs. Stringham, in an image which is highly prophetic in terms of her later meeting with Milly, sees that in the past, her 'little life had often been visited by shy conceits - secret dreams that had fluttered their hour between its narrow walls ...' (XIX,104). And Milly, the dove, represents the broadest fulfilment of those secret dreams.

Even before Milly is first called a dove, her bird-like quality is alluded to at Mrs. Lowder's dinner party. The American girl gazes in wonder at the persons around her and then 'alighted, came back, taking up her destiny again as if she had been able by a move or two of her wings to place herself briefly in sight of an alternative to it' (XIX,160).

When, therefore, Milly is first imaged as a dove by Kate after the banquet at Marcham, the figure presented grows easily from the pattern which has been started before. Milly says that without Mrs. Stringham she would never have met Kate, to which the latter replies, "'Oh you may very well loathe me yet.'" Baffled, Milly asks, "'Why do you say such things to me?'" And Kate replies, "'Because you're a dove'" (XIX,282-3).

One of the most important aspects of the image, stressed in Psalm 55:6, and in the novel's title, is that the emphasis is on the wings of the bird, and only to a lesser extent on the bird itself. The ability of the wings to lift the bird in soaring flight is one of the central facts in the strand of dove imagery.

Traditionally, the dove has always been a symbol of peace, gentleness and innocence, and has, in fact, become something of an archetypal emblem. Its very wide use in the Bible, each time associated with these characteristics, is evidence of its graphic importance as a symbol in religious, spiritual and mythical stories.⁴⁷ Milly's character, as set out in the novel, harmonises easily with the dove's ancient associations. The very first mention of the image, set out above, prefigures a large part of the work's action. Later, Milly certainly has reason to loathe Kate. That she doesn't, is because she has the dove's leaning towards peace and the ability to rise above such worldly passions as hate.⁴⁸

The religious associations of the dove image are very strong, not so much because James was trying to impart a Christian message, but rather because the values Milly stands for approximate very closely

to standards which, in terms of man's spiritual nature, have an enduring validity. Christianity merely happens to embrace these standards as well.

Milly, as the symbol of peace, is sacrificed in the novel at the altar of materialistic aspiration.⁴⁹ But, (with strong Christian implications) she finally rises above her physical death to an enduring life in memory more precious than any other. In so rising, she saves Densher from the world of animal money-making, thereby attaining a Christ-like significance. By making Milly rise in her dove form, James transforms the image into a symbol. So, in her fate, Milly stands for the heights to which human beings may rise if they practise the virtues of peace and forgiveness.

That James was aware of Milly's association with religious ideas, is shown by the very prevalent pattern of religious images and references. None of these images is peculiarly complex, but when each is seen as part of a very widespread pattern, in conjunction with the dove symbol, then the individual occurrences assume a position of some importance. For Densher and Kate, at the beginning, marriage is like 'a temple without an avenue' (XIX,59). Milly's Switzerland abyss scene is religiously charged, and comes as a 'revelation' to Mrs. Stringham (XIX,125); with Sir Luke,⁵⁰ Milly is seen as in a 'brown old temple of truth' (XIX,241). Milly figures her hours at Matcham as 'pure manna from heaven' (XIX,278), and even Aunt Maud, in highly ironic tone, is referred to as 'an angel with a thumping bank-account' (XX,51). The pattern is continued with Milly wearing lace which 'hung down o her feet like a stole of a priestess' (XX,96); in the Palazzo Leporelli, 'Milly moved slowly to and fro as the priestess of the worship' (XX,135); having been snubbed by Kate, it is at least Densher's 'crucifixion' that Milly is interested in him, (XX,244); Lord Mark's revelation to Milly of Densher's engagement, the latter sees as 'almost like purification' (XX,265), and in London, on Christmas day, Densher actually visits a church in Brompton Road (XX, 361-2).

Those, then, are some of the religious allusions, and their influence on the tone of the work is considerable. They lend to the novel a feeling of high seriousness and a quality which associates its contents with the very oldest spiritual concerns ; thereby, they extend the frame of reference of the novel in the broadest possible way.

As mentioned, one of the most religiously charged scenes is the one where Milly sits above the abyss in Switzerland 'looking down upon

the kingdoms of the earth', but without a 'view of renouncing them' (XIX,124). The rest of the novel shows how Milly does not renounce the world and plunges into it. Having experienced the worst it can deal out in adversity, she rises purified to the higher elements. As Miss Jean Kimball says, 'if the abyss and her position at the edge of the abyss define her "practical problem of life", the dove, with its wonderful wings, is the symbol for her final solution'.⁵¹

In the final scene of the novel Kate sees that Milly has so stretched her wings as to cover both herself and Densher. Each comes to realise the wrong of their plot against her, as well as their present incompatibility. Milly, so in need of protection while on earth, has now been transformed into the protector. The tender and yet powerful quality of Milly's presence is illuminated by R. W. Short when he asks :

Is not the ambiguity of the dove-image, in fact, one of the means by which James spreads his loving and protective wings over Kate? For I take it that Kate, (like Charlotte Stant) carries with her into exile even more of our pitying imagination than abides with Milly.⁵²

An important factor which emerges from the religious imagery is the tension inherent in the clash between Milly's selflessness and the selfish impulses of those around her.⁵³ This tension draws attention to the dramatic nature of the novel's action, drama which is fostered by the interlocking and contrasting aspects of commercialism, consciousness, selflessness, life and death. The reader's attention is drawn to this drama not only by the situation itself, but also by the imagery referring to plays and theatres.

Milly's desire to go to London seems to Mrs. Stringham 'a piece of that very exposition dear to the dramatist' (XIX,133), and Mrs. Lowder, telling Milly and Kate that they can conquer the world, 'had a quality of the rough rehearsal of the possible big drama' (XX,276). The central image of this pattern is presented through Densher's consciousness during the scene at Lancaster Gate when Aunt Maud is receiving. Kate is seen as 'made-up' and playing the part of a character chosen for her by her aunt, the image suggesting not only how she is manipulated, but also, in the consummate way she carries off the part, how capable she is of dissembling actions. Densher, side-lined by Aunt Maud in the marriage-stakes, feels himself 'in his purchased stall the play', with Mrs. Lowder, who owns the show,

presented as the 'watchful manager'. Milly, slightly out of her depth socially, but nevertheless called upon to perform, is imaged as 'the poor actress in the glare of the footlights' (XX,34-35).

The outward drama of the interplay between the characters, in which they all at various stages participate,⁵⁴ is not, however, the only drama in progress. There is also the inward drama of each personality. Densher, for example, faced by Mrs. Stringham in his rooms in Venice feels how 'rapid in fact was the rhythm of his inward drama' (XX,180).

P. K. Garrett points out another aspect of the dramatic imagery when he writes :

The novel's greater degree of symbolism also appears in the way its language is charged with a more intense concentration of meaning, a quality which is particularly prominent in the cluster of key words and images centering on the notion of "acting".⁵⁵

He goes on to point out how there is a pun on 'act', which can mean either simply to do, or to represent, to play act. He shows how the word fulfils both meanings in relation to a character like Kate.

In a wider frame of reference, the characters are seen to be acting out the drama of human life, a fact towards which the drama imagery points. Here the broad question arises as to the morality of someone such as Mrs. Lowder trying to manipulate, like the producer of a play, and for purely selfish ends, the lives of Kate, Densher and Lord Mark. Her machinations reach such a level that she is indirectly responsible for Milly's death. The drama of Milly's life and death, however, affirms that, in her beauty and selflessness, ultimately her influence over the lives of others is greater than that of someone who tries to gain control for egotistical reasons alone.

One of the most outstanding features of The Wings of the Dove is the use James makes of settings. Each of the important sections of the action is carefully set in surroundings which significantly enhance its impact. At the very beginning of the novel, Kate, seeking desperately to escape her poverty, is seen in the drab, unattractive surroundings of her father's house, in its 'vulgar little street', with its 'vulgar little room' looking out on 'narrow black house-fronts' (XIX,3). The whole environment expresses very vividly the squalor in which Kate must exist, and therefore lends great credence to her attempts to break free. It is, of course, these attempts which lead to the sacrifice of Milly,

but with the reader's sympathy already engaged for her plight, Kate's actions, although despicable, are at least very real and understandable.

At the end of the novel, Kate goes to stay with her sister, Mrs. Condrip, the surroundings in that house being quite as vulgar as those in her father's. Kate's return to such a house marks the circular nature of her life. It also hints that the use of deceit in search of happiness cannot possibly lead to fulfilment; in other words, in spite of appearances, such as staying with a rich aunt, a character's moral position will remain the same unless changed from within the consciousness of the person herself.

On another level completely, Milly goes to the National Gallery to escape Sir Luke Strett's visit. The gallery represents for Milly a place which, confronted as she is by her fate, allows her to be free of that 'immense ... personal question'. She wanders inside :

It was the air she wanted and the world she would now exclusively choose; the quiet chambers, nobly overwhelming, rich but slightly veiled, opened out round her and made her presently say "If I could lose myself here!" (XIX,288).

The gallery, filled with people, and yet quiet and ordered, with its many intense expressions of life in the form of controlled art, represents what Milly, at this crucial and troubled time of her life, seeks most desperately. For a moment she is able to sit back and gaze at life as an observer before being plunged in herself. In this setting, the shock she receives in seeing Kate and Densher mirrors the sudden intrusion which her illness has made upon the previously equable state of her former life.

Again, the Palazzo Leporelli in which Milly ends her life is fittingly ornate and impressive for her death, and is perched, appropriately, high above the waters of Venice. As such, it provides a symbolic setting for Milly's final transcendence of the sea of life which has treated her so cruelly. And while the abyss scene is a microcosmic prefigurement of Milly's life and final position in the action (XIX,123-4), Regents Park, a quietly natural place outside Aunt Maud's house, provides the only setting in which Kate and Densher act openly towards each other without the unnatural taint of the deceit which they later hatch.

The careful way in which James arranges his action and settings is evidence that, in composing The Wings of the Dove, he was highly conscious of his artistic purpose. That art was in the forefront

of James's mind as he wrote, is emphasised by the many references to art and artists. The more sensitive characters continually see their situations in terms of art, Densher not least.⁵⁶ Talking to Kate about Mrs. Lowder, his fiancée graphically describes the older lady as an eagle. For the journalist, 'it had really, her sketch of the affair, a high colour and a great style; at all of which he gazed a minute as at a picture by a master' (XIX,74). At this point in the story Densher is inexperienced enough to admire Kate's sharpness and wit. Later, he will come to see that Milly's ability to work with and shape people is far greater than any other character's. As he learns more and more about Milly's beauty and goodness, so he looks at the world confronting him in a different way. Falling in love with Milly while in the process of deceiving her, he realises one day that 'he had ... only to cross again the threshold of Palazzo Leporelli to see all the elements of the business compose, as painters call it, differently' (XX,183).

Mrs. Stringham, looking at her new-found relationship with Milly, thinks : 'This was poetry - it was also history - to a finer tune even than Maeterlinck and Pater, than Marbot and Gregorovius' (XIX,111). Notably, Susan Shepherd is the ficelle, and one of the least round and imaginative characters in the work. She is therefore only able to see things in terms of other people's art, and cannot compose for herself. The same is true when she images Milly's gathering as a Veronese picture (XX,206).

More generally, James makes careful use of well-known Masters to reflect the quality of his own settings. Leading up to Milly's final party, the nature of the evoked background and action is distinctly akin to that of Veronese, and Mrs. Stringham concretises the image when she says she needs a red cockatoo to perch on her thumb in order to complete the picture (XX,206). Superficially, this is indeed what the party seems to be, since it has the life, colour and splendour so characteristic of Veronese, perhaps best exemplified in 'The Marriage Feast at Cana'. With this background, Milly's descent into society, definitely to be her last, gains tremendously in poignancy when it is realised that she is saying farewell to the life she had wanted so much to live to the full. In order to emphasise this, the picture is mentioned again after her wonderful presence has been felt during the course of the gathering (XX,213).⁵⁷

Throughout the work, then, it is the artist as shaper and organiser

who is of supreme significance, and the most important character here is undeniably Milly. She is seen to shape and influence profoundly the lives of those around her by a sensitive, harmonic force which carefully persuades the various elements of her world to form themselves into a pattern which emerges as beautiful and satisfying at the end of the novel. Mrs. Lowder, in contrast, with all her power and material means, has nothing but a superficial form of control of her elements, and she is left only with a disparate series of pieces which do not and cannot form a whole.

In this manner, Milly expresses very nearly James's ideas of how an artist should set to work on his material. That Milly gains her creative force from the very basic stuff of life, namely from an intense desire to live, suggests also James's deeply held conviction that the artist must draw his material from the life he sees around him.⁵⁸ Milly's attitude to art in the novel is consequently of great significance. As E. T. Bowden explains :

if the value of art lies in its relationship with human life, one means of defining the moral position of an individual is to show his particular view of the arts: is he sensitive to the human values suggested there, or does he ignore with a sort of moral blindness the true values in favour of a sterile aestheticism?⁵⁹

The central passage concerning Milly's relation to art is the scene where she confronts the Bronzino portrait (XIX, 220 - 21). The acute sensitivity which she displays in apprehending the meaning of this picture, attests to the fineness of her perception and the receptivity of her sensibilities to beauty.⁶⁰ The range of her vision is given a startling dimension when she sees herself and her fate in the face of the lady. Her humility in saying, "I shall never be better than this" (XIX, 221), affirms at the same time her conception of what the portrait really means. E. T. Bowden probably expresses this best when he writes :

The Bronzino is not only an image of Milly as a princess and dead. Yet the lady, in the picture, transmuted by art ... lives on and speaks to the living; she is greater than life and greater than death.⁶¹

At the conclusion of the novel Milly emerges as a symbol of

perfection in man, her sensitivity and inclusive consciousness being vital elements in her character. It seems therefore that in showing the reader her great sensitivity to art in the novel, James is asking once again, as he did through the grammatical imagery, for the same sensitivity to be brought to his own work of art in appreciating its full significance. And the reader's whole consciousness of life's shaping forces will be greater, if the values to be extracted from The Wings of the Dove are fully appreciated.

The manner, therefore, in which Milly's character draws together and centres the various elements of the novel, particularly the patterns of imagery, all of which have a direct or indirect bearing on her final state of transcendent beauty, bears out James's insertion in the Preface that

The thing has doubtless, as a whole, the advantage that each piece is true to its pattern, and that while it pretends to make no simple statement it yet never lets go its scheme of clearness.⁶²

CHAPTER FIVEThe Golden Bowl

Let onion atoms lurk within the bowl,
And, scarce suspected, animate the whole.

Recipe for Salad

Rev. Sydney Smith

James's Preface to The Golden Bowl includes the assertion that

one should, as an author, reduce one's reader, "artistically" inclined, to such a state of hallucination by the images one has evoked as doesn't permit him to rest till he has noted or recorded them, set up some semblance of them in his own other medium, by his own other art - nothing could better consort than that, I naturally allow, with the desire or the pretension to cast a literary spell.¹

Holding to the tenets here expressed, and to the fact that 'the essence of any representational work is of course to bristle with immediate images',² this final work has a density and complexity of imagery in tune with its place at the summit of James's art.

At the very outset, the novel takes its title from the central image of the flawed ornamental piece which Maggie buys for her father's birthday. In this way the central position of the image, and later symbol, of the golden bowl is clearly established. Threading its way from one side of the novel's pattern to the other, through careful reiteration, the image gradually assumes the character of a symbol.³ In fact, the bowl's position is so central that in its condition and fate can be seen those of the characters, and even after its breakage, it does not cease to play a significant part in the development of the narrative. But acting as a thematic correlative is not the only function of the bowl; it also serves as a focal centre for many of the strands of imagery which go to make up the complex figure in the carpet of The Golden Bowl.⁴ In short, the image stands at the centre of the work's unity. As Laurence Holland puts it,

the symbol of the bowl helps govern the novel because the bowl and the act of buying it or possessing it, of breaking and salvaging it later, inform each other, and the bowl itself does not stand as a merely referential or imposed symbol but serves as part of a profoundly creative act to constitute a field of form, a formal nexus.⁵

The ornate crystal cup first appears when Amerigo and Charlotte go shopping for the latter's wedding gift to Maggie. In a rather unpretentious Bloomsbury establishment, the shopkeeper offers Charlotte an item which particularly takes her fancy. It is 'a drinking-vessel larger than a common cup, yet not of exorbitant size, and formed, to appearance either of old fine gold or of

some material once richly gilt' (XXIII,112). After the shopkeeper has proudly set down his 'important object' and called it his golden bowl, James tells how Charlotte watched it as,

simple, but singularly elegant it stood on a circular foot, a short pedestal with a slightly spreading base, and, though not of signal depth, justified its title by the charm of its shape as well as by the tone of its surface ... As formed of solid gold it was impressive; it seemed indeed to warn off the prudent admirer (XXIII,112).

Soon after Charlotte has reluctantly declined to buy the cup, the Prince tells her that its solid crystal has a flaw. She, for her part, had not detected the crack, but Amerigo says he saw it as immediately obvious.

In this initial description and revelation of the bowl's flaw are foreshadowed many of the themes, images and relationships of the novel.⁶ Ironically, this is the only time Amerigo acknowledges the existence of a flaw either in the bowl or in his actions. Once he has married, the social forms in which he is so well versed allow the crack in his relationship with Maggie to be glossed over. And, of course, the Prince's culpability is immeasurably increased later on when it is realised that he is able to recognise his fault in liaising with his former lover.

On a visual level, it is important that the cup is of an attractive gold colouring. With Mr. Verver's intense interest in gold and money already made clear, and with the power he wields because of his money becoming apparent through his purchase of the Prince, the importance of gold as a source of power and as a lure to temptation is early established.⁷ The bowl's attractiveness, in spite of the material connotations, suggests the ambiguity in money which, on the one hand is the currency of the world and the devil, and on the other a means of escaping the needs of the world in order to indulge in more spiritually fruitful pursuits. In addition, the beauty of the bowl, even with its flaw, points to the attractiveness of the temptation to which the Prince is subjected. Depicted thus, his succumbing becomes all the more human and credible.

Being a 'drinking vessel', the bowl immediately calls to mind the Cup of Life, or Experience.⁸ In the novel, it is precisely from this cup that the characters drink, learning from bitter experience the hurt caused by infidelity, and how, afterwards, the old way of life must be

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broken away from before a new can be forged. The bowl also blends easily with the later pervasive pattern of drinking imagery within the work.

Further, the cup is an object of tactile as well as visual sense-impressions, a fact vital to its symbolic place in the novel. Standing on one level for the flawed human relationships in the work, the real, tangible qualities of the cup emphasise the actuality of the situation of the four chief characters. More than this, the sense-evoking qualities of the bowl, which draw the perceptive, sensitive character closer to its true nature, point to the truth that the more sensitive feeling each character brings to bear on his or her situation, the closer he or she will come to its essence. Here, naturally, Maggie is the prime example.

Also, the bowl is presented as 'important', due warning thereby being given of the central role it is destined to play. And as simple and elegant as is the bowl, so all of the characters, until Maggie begins to delve deeper, are simple in their complacent acceptance of their crossed relationships. Their elegance smooths over, but does not hide, the imbalance which comes into being between the two marriage pairs. The shallowness of the cup is paralleled by the lack of perception in each character which initially allows the situation to develop. Significantly, only when the shallow bowl is destroyed does Maggie really begin to penetrate the ambiguities and inconsistencies in their lives. Similarly, the Prince's title and background more than justify his acquisition by the Verver family; the bowl justifies 'its title by the charm of its shape as well as by the tone of its surface' (XXIII, 112).

The mention here of surface, and a few sentences above of appearance, brings to the fore the important theme of appearance and reality.⁹ Paradoxically, in the novel, it is only by keeping up the appearance of unconcern that Maggie is able to effect a deep-seated change in the relationships with which she has to work. In the first half of the novel, the polite manners of everyday living, under the shelter of Mr. Verver's munificence, allow everyone to gloss over the misdemeanours perpetrated, much in the same way as the gilt of the bowl hides its basic flaw. That the bowl 'seemed indeed to warn off the prudent admirer', gives an inkling of the dangers inherent in such a gilded but flawed image. These suggested dangers are illustrated by the patterns of imagery relating to the savage world

of animals and nature, to the fierceness of a world in which conflict and the military are prominent, and to the social desert which surrounds the characters in their blackest moments.

The bowl next appears when bought by Maggie for her father's birthday as a collector's piece. That the golden cup is to become an acquisition of Mr. Verver's, highlights the negative side of his impulse to possess all he can lay his hands on. The narrative demonstrates the dangers of an impulse which urges possession without regard to human sensibilities. It is also significant that Maggie, through the shopkeeper, discovers the true depth in time and emotion of Amerigo and Charlotte's attachment, simultaneously with the buying of her father's gift: the bowl with its flaw is now seen to coincide with the unstable marriage pairs. The theme of discovery which here asserts itself is broadened by the strands of ship, swimming and vision references.

The smashing of the bowl in Maggie's room foreshadows not only the break-up of the unnatural liaisons formed, but also symbolises the destructive violence which could shatter the lives of each character should the situation be handled brashly or callously.¹⁰ The cool, quiet reformation which takes place in the marriages finally demonstrates that human sensibilities are closer allied to the soft fluidity of water (suggested by the water imagery), rather than the harsh sparkle of unmalleable crystal. Maggie's ability to carry but two of the broken pieces at a time is symbolic, for it points to the fact that stability in marriage can only be attained by two; three people in a marriage situation create a group which cannot be handled effectively.

At the last tea, as Charlotte and Adam are about to leave for America, the individuals symbolised by the bowl at the time of its breaking, occupy the same positions, almost in the same element, as the shattered pieces. They sit, with

Charlotte throned ... between her hostess and her host, ... the whole scene having crystallised, as soon as she took her place, to the right quiet lustre; the harmony wasn't less sustained for being superficial ...' (XXIV, 358).

But this superficial balance becomes secondary when attention is directed at 'the two noble persons seated in conversation at tea', who fall 'into the splendid affect and the general harmony' (XXIV, 360).

With the Prince and Princess together, and Charlotte and Mr. Verver standing side-by-side, it becomes apparent that the bowl, either in pieces or as a whole entity, is inadequate as a symbol for the new and perfect attachments which Maggie has fashioned.

The golden bowl, then, is the centre of focus in the novel. Itself an image, it draws together many other significant image-patterns, and in its role as a symbol it demonstrates not only the very close relationship between image and symbol, but also concentrates many other thematic concerns so that the imagery comes to be closely associated with the subjects of the work.

One of the most important themes is that of the power¹¹ and influence of money, a theme which is constantly reiterated by numerous image references to medals, money and gold.¹² In the opening sequences of the book, the Prince, contemplating his future with the American Ververs, seems to himself as

if he had been some old embossed coin, of a purity of gold no longer used, stamped with glorious arms, medieval, wonderful, of which the "worth" in mere modern change, sovereigns and half-crowns, would be great enough, but as to which, since there were finer ways of using it, such taking to pieces was superfluous (XXIII,23).

The Prince is here imaging himself as a unit of value long since withdrawn from the common monetary market. His value cannot be measured in terms of such a market, and yet Mr. Verver tries to buy him as a collector's piece.¹³ In so doing, Maggie's father shows a dangerous disregard for individuality; he blindly assumes that because his life has been governed by what money can do, other people can, of necessity, be subsumed by its influence as well.

The initial distance between Mr. Verver and the Prince is measured by the former's satisfaction in his possessions, possessions which have in turn put him into relation with his own mind. For example, in the billiard room at Fawns, as he flashes back over his past, Adam realises that his 'success represented ... his one principal of pride. Pride in the mere original spring, pride in his money ...' (XXIII,149). The Prince's need for money, on the other hand, soon overshadows his European detachment from it. Just as Mr. Verver sees the Prince as something which money can buy, so the Prince soon sees Charlotte in monetary terms: looking on her for the first time in years, he reflects that

he knew above all the extraordinary fineness of her flexible waist, the stem of an expanded flower which gave her a likeness also to some long loose silk purse, well filled with gold-pieces, but having been passed empty through a finger-ring that held it together (XXIII,47).

The Prince here figures Charlotte's sensuality, one of her greatest attractions, in terms of coins. The image in fact suggests the confusion of sexual, fiscal and personal attractions which is at the base of much of the tension in the novel. Amerigo's measurement of human attraction in these terms had started with his motive for marrying Maggie being, at least in part, an obvious desire for a slice of Mr. Verver's wealth. And once he is a confirmed thinker in monetary terms, the Prince is well on the way towards a disregard of human beings as sentient entities. The hurt he inflicts on Maggie, albeit unwittingly, is a manifestation of a way of thinking which has allowed itself to stray from an awareness of other people's sensibilities to an impersonal money system. The Prince, in fact, becomes so immersed in money values that, as he looks about Fawns, it seems to him 'the present order, as it spread about him, had somehow the ground under its feet, and a trumpet in its ears, and a bottomless bag of solid shining British sovereigns ...' (XXIII,333).

That the Prince is essentially commercially minded is emphasised when he feels 'as if his papers were in order, as if his accounts so balanced as they had never done in his life before and he might close the portfolio with a snap' (XXIII,19). There is a complacent finality about this image of Amerigo closing his financial books on what is obviously a profit about to accrue from his impending marriage. It is this self-satisfaction which later causes the Prince's oblivion to the hurt he is inflicting on Maggie by his adultery with Charlotte. Further, seeing the whole marriage merely as some sort of financial arrangement draws off, to an extent, the sting of being unfaithful to his wife. Maggie, on the other hand, when all has virtually been resolved, near the end of the novel, assures herself frequently 'for her human commerce of the state of the "books" of the spirit' (XXIV,256). Significantly, although she cannot escape from commercial imagery, Maggie does at least show herself to be more concerned with human values, rather than with base financial profit and loss, as the Prince had been.

Charlotte has an illuminating association with money and medal imagery. In marrying Mr. Verver, she is patently as much interested

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