THE HEROINE EXPLOITED:  
A RECURRENT THEME IN THREE NOVELS 
OF HENRY JAMES  

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Except where acknowledgement is made, this thesis is my own work.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine three novels of Henry James spanning twenty-one years in order to analyse, through the theme of 'the heroine exploited', the parallel development of James's narrative technique and moral concern. The novels are *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), and *The Wings of the Dove* (1902). Brief mention is also made of *Daisy Miller* (1878) as a forerunner of the theme. I have chosen to discuss these novels because they share elements of character, relationship, situation and event to a significant degree. The main feature common to them is the central triad of characters: the heroine, the manipulative woman and the male character. The circumstances of these characters and the relations linking them are recognizably similar in each novel.

The focus of this thesis will be the heroine and the manipulative woman, because they are central to the novel and to a consideration of the changes which occur between the works. Though certain features remain constant, the kind of relationship which exists between the two women differs from novel to novel, and can be seen to change in response to James's deepening interest in the consciousness of his characters, in how they perceive and affect one another. This interest and his experiments with the method of centre of
consciousness lead him to present an increasingly complex relationship between the heroine and the manipulative woman. Thus in The Wings of the Dove there is a more entangled relationship between the two women than that which exists in the earlier novels. This development can also be seen in the presentation of a subsidiary character, the confidante; from the peripheral place of Henrietta Stackpole in The Portrait of a Lady, to the more active and involved function of Mrs Wix in What Maisie Knew, and finally to Mrs Stringham in The Wings of the Dove, who is actually implicated in the deception of the heroine.

The concern of this thesis is to demonstrate, through the analysis of the relationship between the heroine and the manipulative woman in the three novels, that there is a significant relationship between the changing narrative technique and the increasing complexity of moral evaluation.
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine three novels by Henry James spanning twenty-one years: *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), and *The Wings of the Dove* (1902). I have chosen to discuss these novels because they share elements of character and relationship to a significant degree; that is, the similarities are critically significant, so that a study which focuses on what the novels have in common yields new insights, particularly in regard to the relation between narrative technique and moral concern.

The main feature they share is the triad of characters at the centre of the novel: the heroine, the manipulative woman and the male character. The circumstances of these characters are recognizably similar in each novel, as are the relations linking them. The two most important characters, who will be the focus of this thesis, are the heroine and the manipulative woman. The kind of relationship which exists between them differs and develops from one novel to the next, as I will show in the separate discussion of each work, but certain features remain constant. To begin with, in each novel the women stand opposed in the same way: the heroine is essentially innocent, the manipulative woman essentially knowing or experienced. The innocence of the heroine is characterized by an idealism about the world and a naive optimism about what it has to offer: Isabel's grand notions of her individual freedom; Maisie's willingness to accept in good faith whatever the adults do or
decide; Milly's belief in the 'human and personal' and her determination to act by Kate and Densher as if she had no suspicion of a deeper relationship between them (126). [1] The heroine's faith in others is precisely the quality which is exploited by the other woman.

The heroine has a sense of her difference from the social milieu in which she finds herself. Isabel Archer and Milly Theale, in Portrait and Wings respectively, are set apart by their American nationality and feel strongly the social and cultural gap between themselves and the English and European society they move in. (The fact that the Touchetts are expatriates makes little difference to Isabel's feelings of foreignness since they have largely adopted the habits and attitudes of their chosen homeland - the peripatetic Mrs Touchett even more so than her husband or son.) The second attribute of these two heroines which contributes to their sense of difference is, of course, their wealth: Isabel unexpectedly inherits a fortune and Milly is born with one. While their complex sense of social and cultural isolation is essentially personal, their wealth is a public fact which unmistakably separates them from their peers. The following description from The Wings of the Dove indicates the extent to which Milly is marked for others by her money:

1. Except where otherwise indicated, the quotations from the works of Henry James discussed in this thesis are taken from the eleven volume Bodley Head (London) edition, published in 1967-1974. The page references are to this edition, which uses the revised texts of the New York Edition of 1907-1909. Page references appear in parentheses within the text and after quotations.
She couldn't dress it away, nor walk it away, nor read it away, nor think it away; she could neither smile it away in any dreamy absence nor blow it away in any softened sigh. She couldn't have lost it if she had tried - that was what it was to be really rich. It had to be the thing you were (117).

This applies in essence to Isabel as well, even though Milly's wealth is 'stupendous' compared to Isabel's inheritance. Thus for both of them the individual sense of being set apart from their peers is reinforced by the objective fact of wealth which affects the way others see them.

Maisie Farange too feels herself - and is seen by the other characters in What Maisie Knew - to be significantly different from the other members of her circumscribed society. Maisie is a child, separated from the adult world she inhabits by her innocence, her ignorance of the meaning of events and her incomprehension of adult behaviour. In this she is more thoroughly isolated than either of the other two heroines. Her difference is something over which she has no control, whereas both Isabel and Milly are adults and must be held accountable for attitudes which contribute to and permit their exploitation: Isabel is arrogant; Milly decides to trust Kate Croy against her intuition. Maisie is thus more truly an innocent than either.

The manipulative women of the three novels also have a sense of their own difference; they consider themselves set apart from their peers, but their position differs from the heroines'. Their sense of their difference stems, at least in part, from a need for deception (though this fact in itself of course needs to be referred back to their personalities and aspirations, and can only stand to a limited extent as an explanation). They each have a secret concerning the male
character which they wish to conceal. Madame Merle is Osmond's ex-lover, and the mother of Pansy; Mrs Beale has an adulterous relationship with Sir Claude; Kate Croy is betrothed to Merton Densher and does in Venice become his lover. These facts are deliberately concealed from the heroine if not necessarily from everybody else. The possible exception is *What Maisie Knew* in which Mrs Beale and Sir Claude make only minimal efforts to hide their relationship from Maisie; but they rely on the fact that she is too young to understand the concepts of adultery and infidelity and their implications, so that the meaning of what her step-parents are doing is effectively hidden from her. The lovers count on her ignorance to ensure her continuing complaisance.

These women are therefore set apart by something they do not wish to draw attention to: their adulterous relationship, past or present, with the male character. In each novel the heroine loves the male character and it is this fact which the manipulative woman exploits. Madame Merle wishes through Isabel to endow Pansy with a dowry sufficient to make a good marriage, and to provide Osmond with a fortune to indulge his idle habits as a collector and connoisseur. Mrs Beale, in the early part of the book, uses Maisie as a drawcard to secure to herself Sir Claude's attentions; later she attempts to establish with Maisie and others her superior right as the child's stepmother to be her primary guardian, in order to retain for herself Sir Claude's continuing patronage. Kate Croy promotes the invalid Milly's friendship with Merton Densher in the hope of their marriage, so that on the death of his wife Densher will have an independent fortune, enabling him
to marry Kate and keep her in style.

In each case, the male character is a passive and acquiescent individual who finds it easier to fall in with the manipulative woman's plans than to stand out against her. Osmond, Sir Claude and Densher are all dilettantes; observers of life rather than actors in it. Each is unable to make decisions or to act decisively, and each dislikes acting in such a manner as to preclude other possibilities of action. They generally prefer to act ambiguously than to commit themselves clearly. This characteristic is more pronounced in Sir Claude and Densher than it is in Osmond; here, as in other respects, we can see that in the earlier novel James presents a quality or type of character which becomes more marked in the later novels (see my further discussion on pp. 21-22).

In addition to the main triad, each of the three novels has a fourth character similar in type and function: Henrietta Stackpole in Portrait, Mrs Wix in What Maisie Knew and Susan Stringham in Wings. These characters are designed to facilitate our understanding of the heroine. They elicit information from her that can be presented in no other way than by the device of questioning by someone whom the heroine trusts. James describes his need for and use of a confidante in the Preface to The Ambassadors:

... I had thus inevitably to set [Strether] up a confidant or two, to wave away with energy the custom of the seated mass of explanation after the fact, the inserted block of merely referential narrative.... [Maria Gostrey] is the reader's friend much rather than Strether's... and she acts... in that capacity alone, with exemplary devotion, from beginning to end of the book. She is an enrolled, a direct, aid to lucidity... (25).

The confidante's function, in the three novels to be considered
here, develops from that of fulfilling an expository need into a more active role. In Portrait, Henrietta is already assuming more than a strictly functional significance, as James acknowledges in his Preface when he notes that he has 'suffered Henrietta...to pervade' (27). Still, she is undoubtably a subsidiary character. She comments on Isabel, but is of little relevance to the main action. In What Maisie Knew, the confidante has taken on a more significant role; no longer is she peripheral to the action. The small number of characters in Maisie compared to Portrait emphasizes the confidante's different position - Mrs Wix is one of the five characters (besides Maisie) who appear regularly. Other characters who serve a functional purpose are definitely secondary, and make only brief appearances: Susan Ash, the Captain, the Countess, Ida's lover. In contrast, Mrs Wix has been brought forward to the ranks of the protagonists, and indeed she hopes to influence the outcome of events by attempting to bully both Maisie and Sir Claude into compliance with her views for their common welfare. Susan Stringham, although somewhat more sophisticated than Mrs Wix, follows this development, and we find her conniving - though with the best intentions - at Milly's deception.

Here it might be asked whether Mrs Wix in her bullying or Susan Stringham in her complicity become manipulators themselves, since directly or indirectly both attempt to influence the actions of the heroine. The answer is negative, for two reasons. Firstly, these confidantes lack the committed selfishness of the manipulative women; though both derive a vicarious pleasure from associating with the heroine, and to
some extent live through her, their feelings towards Maisie and Milly are inherently protective, even maternal. Secondly, they care more about the heroine than she cares about them, and in both novels the heroines are aware of the nature and depth of the confidante's affection. Mrs Wix and Susan Stringham do not engender fascination and admiration in the heroine as Mrs Beale and Kate Croy do. Unlike the manipulative women, the confidantes are known quantities to Milly and Maisie, by whom their actions and emotions are easily readable; thus they ultimately pose no threat. Nevertheless, since Susan Stringham and Mrs Wix become actively involved in the relationship between the heroine and the male character, they must be considered in a discussion of the triad.

However, the focus of discussion must be the relationship between the heroine and the manipulative woman as central to the novel, and to a consideration of changing narrative technique and moral viewpoint. The following comment by Sears on *The Wings of the Dove* is relevant to *Portrait* and *Maisie* as well: 'It is neither the deceived nor the deceiver who is studied but rather the changing relationship between the two and the phenomenon itself of manipulation...'. [1] The relationship is of paramount importance: the heroine, through being deceived and undeceived, is brought to question not only her assumptions about the other woman, but her fundamental beliefs and attitudes about herself and life. The discovery of the real nature of the manipulative woman's relation to her

acts as a catalyst in the heroine's experience of the world. It forces knowledge upon her which shatters her confident perceptions: Isabel learns 'the truth of things, their mutual relations, their meaning, and for the most part their horror' (594). The same kind of knowledge comes to each of the heroines, and in consequence each must make a decision which is to affect the rest of her life. Isabel must choose whether to leave Osmond or to continue living in a dead marriage with the knowledge of its having been engineered by Madame Merle; Maisie must choose between having Sir Claude as her guardian along with Mrs Beale, or not having him at all; Milly must decide how to treat Densher and Kate in the light of her knowledge of their secret betrothal. Each of these decisions requires a revaluation of fundamental assumptions, and in each case the heroine has to come to terms with the fact that, as the Countess Gemini tells Isabel, she 'has been made use of' (581).

The theme of 'the heroine exploited' can be detected in James's early work, *Daisy Miller*, and for this reason Chapter 1 opens with a brief account of the novella as a way of introducing the fuller treatment of the theme in *Portrait*. Although James's last complete novel, *The Golden Bowl*, has many features in common with the novels I shall discuss, it is rather a case of 'the heroine undeceived' than 'the heroine exploited'. Indeed, it is Maggie Verver herself who, undeceived, might best be described as the manipulative woman, and what we make of this morally is the subject of much criticism. Also, the main characters in *The Golden Bowl* comprise a quartet, not a triad. I shall refer to parallels
where they are striking and relevant to my discussion, but otherwise concentrate on the three novels I have chosen, as yielding most by comparison. These three clearly demonstrate a continuing interest in James in the triad of characters I have described, and allow us to draw some conclusions about the relation between narrative technique and moral outlook in Henry James.
Chapter 1

DAISY MILLER AND THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

As an introduction to The Portrait of a Lady I propose to look briefly at a shorter work, Daisy Miller, which was published in 1878 and precedes Portrait by three years. It contains in embryo a number of the elements common to this and the later novels, although the treatment of the same ingredients differs in several important respects. The main characters and the relations between them show certain similarities to the later novels; in particular, the character of Winterbourne adumbrates the characters of Osmond, Sir Claude and Densher, and the group pressure on Daisy to conform to a social norm has some of the effect of a single character's manipulation of the later heroines in the three novels to be discussed, particularly since the largely anonymous group responds with one mind to Daisy's behaviour. As well there is a strong link between Winterbourne and the group; a link which is as strong in its own way as the later connection between the male character and manipulative woman of the main novels. Thus despite its differences the novella indicates James's early interest in the theme of 'the heroine exploited'.

In Daisy Miller the heroine is a typical Jamesian innocent, an American ingénue in Europe. As such she is the forerunner of Isabel Archer and Milly Theale, although there are differences between Daisy and the later heroines. In these
differences we can detect James's changing thematic concerns. For instance, James gives Daisy two living parents but makes Isabel and Milly orphans; it is perhaps a small point, but it contributes significantly to the vulnerability of the later two. Their isolation means that the burden of choice – the choice of direction, of manner of living, of marriage partner – is placed squarely upon the heroine alone. (Maisie, though not so much orphaned as disowned by her parents, is in a similarly vulnerable position.) Again, while Daisy's family is clearly financially buoyant (on the evidence of Daisy's wardrobe and the prolonged presence of mother, son and daughter in Europe), Daisy obviously cannot compete with the wealth of the heiresses: Isabel's seventy thousand pounds or Milly's stupendous fortune. It seems that in the later novels James, while on one hand depriving his heroines of the natural support of parents and siblings, is on the other hand offering them a chance of freedom. Of course there is an irony in the freedom, for in both Wings and Portrait the very wealth of the heroine marks her as the prey of fortune hunters, and precipitates her deception. Another notable difference is that the heroines, including Maisie, are not capricious or flirtatious like Daisy, whose levity of manner and speech so confuses Winterbourne. While Isabel can be accused of caprice on a number of occasions, it is of a more intellectual and less purely whimsical nature than Daisy's. All three of the later heroines are portrayed as reflective, imaginatively active and intellectually curious, and it is appropriate that they are so, since their consciousness is to assume a larger significance in these novels. Having established these basic differences, I
now turn to the novella to discuss those things which invite us to consider it as a forerunner of the later works.

Daisy, like her successors, has a sense of her difference from the social milieu she moves in. As a tourist she is well aware that, socially and culturally, there is a natural division between herself and the places and people she visits; but, ironically, she also comes to feel a difference between herself and those to whom she naturally turns for society, the American expatriates in Rome and Vevey. These, the very people in whom she might expect cultural kinship, are those who profess to find her most strange; her difference is the fact about her that they recognize. Her candour, her lack of sophistication and her 'charming garrulity' either puzzle or antagonize her compatriots (41). Winterbourne thinks her a pretty, unsophisticated flirt; Mrs Costello declares that the Millers are common, 'the sort of Americans that one does one's duty by ...not accepting'; Mrs Walker decides that she is naturally indelicate, doing "Everything that is not done here" (29, 58). Daisy, discovering that her behaviour is causing disapproval, deliberately chooses to ignore the social pressure, and continues to do what is most disapproved of - to associate publicly with Giovanelli, her Italian friend. In doing so she proves herself to have the generosity of mind which typifies the later heroines; she does justice, or more than justice, to the socially unplaced Giovanelli. She does not consider herself guilty of indiscretion, for she is operating within her own set of values, which is more flexible than the rigid code of her compatriots. As she says to Winterbourne, 'People have different ideas' (62).
The difference of ideas between Daisy and her compatriots is illustrated by the conflict between her and Mrs Walker over the propriety of Daisy's conduct in taking a walk with two gentlemen in a public place. On one hand Mrs Walker sees only that "Fifty people have noticed her" (55) and urges the girl to join her in her carriage to avoid being talked about. On the other hand Daisy says to Winterbourne:

'...did you ever hear anything so cool as Mrs Walker's wanting me to get into her carriage and drop poor Mr Giovanelli; and under the pretext that it was proper? ... It would have been most unkind; he had been talking about that walk for ten days' (62).

She understands that her view of what is proper conflicts with the American circle's professed conception of propriety, but disbelieves both the basis of their objection and their sincerity: 'They are only pretending to be shocked. They don't really care a straw what I do. Besides, I don't go round so much" (71). Thus she acknowledges the difference between her compatriots and herself.

As I began by saying, there is no specific manipulative woman in the novella, but to some extent her function is adumbrated by a largely anonymous group of expatriates who constitute the American circle in Rome. Mrs Walker and Mrs Costello are representative figures who jointly function as the mouthpiece of local American opinion. Their disapproval of Daisy and their condemnation of her behaviour accurately reflect the attitude of the wider group. The characteristic that members of the circle share is their foreignness, and they have grouped together for this reason. In Rome the American colonists do not automatically command social recognition, and therefore the creation of the American circle is a guarantee
against social anonymity. The fastidious social code of the
group and its clannishness provide protection from isolation.
The need to prove their social viability in the eyes of the
wider Roman society is expressed in their ostracism of Daisy:

...Winterbourne ceased to meet her at the houses of
their common acquaintance, because, as he perceived,
these shrewd people had quite made up their minds that
she was going too far. They ceased to invite her, and
they intimated that they desired to express to
observant Europeans the great truth that, though Miss
Daisy Miller was a young American lady, her behaviour
was not representative — was regarded by her
compatriots as abnormal (69).

Their exclusion of Daisy is essentially impersonal, which she
understands: '"They don't really care a straw what I do"' (71).
Mrs Walker and her colleagues are not concerned with her
errors as an individual, but are mainly interested in holding
her up to public view as a scapegoat, an example of
impropriety, in order to establish their exclusiveness. What
they have in common with the manipulative women of the three
later novels is a preoccupation with convention and conformity.
Daisy is a maverick in not appearing to understand the extent
to which the community stands or falls by its clannishness.

Although we cannot say that the group directly manipulates
Daisy with anything like the degree of deviousness or
appearance of intimacy with which the manipulative women of the
later novels deceive the heroines, it is clear that the nature
of the group prefigures the development of the manipulative
character. Their ostracism of Daisy is a collective attempt to
pressure her into social conformity. It is a much more obvious
manoeuvre than the subtle tactics of the manipulative women,
and demonstrates the group's ability to close ranks to
nonconformists. Their ostracism of Daisy is in essence
defensive rather than offensive, and it achieves her almost total isolation and friendlessness; a situation which has particular similarities with that of Milly and Maisie. In the later novels, the diffuse social pressuring of the group becomes consolidated in a single character whose motives are individual and specific.

Winterbourne is recognizably the predecessor of Osmond, Sir Claude and Densher. He is, like his successors, a dilettante, entirely without occupation or visible means of support. (Even Densher, the only one of the three who is ostensibly employed, appears virtually untouched by any suggestion of work or office hours.) The only hint that Winterbourne has any regular occupation is an equivocal reference to 'the most contradictory accounts of his motives of sojourn: a report that he is "studying" hard - an intimation that he is much interested in a very clever foreign lady' (78). Like his successors he prefers to be an observer of life rather than a participant, and he is above all a connoisseur: 'He had a great relish for feminine beauty; he was addicted to observing and analysing it' (20-1). But even his appreciation of beautiful women falls short of a willingness to become involved and this characteristic we can relate to Osmond's cold detachment, Sir Claude's feet of clay and Densher's fastidiousness. Winterbourne is, for instance, delighted to find that Daisy is happy to go alone with him to the Castle of Chillon, and takes much satisfaction in being publicly connected with her beauty and her distinguished air, but he is half expecting her to disgrace herself in public: 'He had been a little afraid that she would talk loud, laugh overmuch, and
even, perhaps, desire to move about the boat a good deal' (41). His vanity precludes a true appreciation of her character. His involvement with her hardly extends beyond a preoccupation with her looks, and his constant attempts to define and label her behaviour: 'Was she simply a pretty girl from New York State.... Or was she also a designing, an audacious, an unscrupulous young person?' (24). In his passivity and conventionality, Winterbourne betrays his more subtle suspicions of Daisy's real virtue by his readiness to be influenced by popular opinion of her.

Winterbourne is strongly linked to the group of American expatriates, his aunt and his aunt's friends, by upbringing and social conditioning. As well as this he has ambitions to improve his financial prospects through his attentions to his wealthy aunt:

[Winterbourne], who had come up to Vevey expressly to see her, was...more attentive than those who, as she said, were nearer to her. He had imbibed at Geneva the idea that one must always be attentive to one's aunt. Mrs Costello had not seen him for many years, and she was greatly pleased with him...(28).

Thus Winterbourne in associating with the group is serving his own interest in two ways. Firstly, his connection with them provides generally for social ease and a comfortable life without commitment, and secondly it more specifically fosters good relations with his aunt. Given these links, he is just as bound to the group as, for instance, Sir Claude and Densher are to Mrs Beale and Kate Croy respectively.

Winterbourne plays a prominent part in the novella because he is the filter through which events are seen. It is a narrative technique that is central to our perception of the heroine, since Winterbourne's viewpoint frames the novella, and
we see Daisy only through his eyes. The technique differs from any used in the later novels, and is the direct opposite of that used in What Maisie Knew, where, instead of the heroine being shown to us through someone else's eyes, all the other characters are shown exclusively through the eyes of the heroine. Clearly in Daisy Miller James is not yet interested in exploring the heroine's consciousness. His intentions here are quite different: Daisy is a somewhat mysterious figure, and she remains so because Winterbourne's response to her is ambivalent, and he is so often incapable of judging her motives or interpreting her manner. Constantly kept at one remove from us, she eludes easy comprehension. Winterbourne's ambivalent attitude to Daisy is of central importance in the novella, but it is limiting. Any contact we have with her is through him, as he talks to her, watches her, puzzles about her, or discusses her with others. In order to judge Daisy we must first judge Winterbourne, and decide how far his assessment of her is coloured by his character. Only then do we begin to distinguish the real Daisy from his version of her.

Thus she is more distant from us than the later heroines. The narrative point of view in Daisy Miller can be seen as the beginning of James's experiments with technique (in relation to the theme of the heroine exploited) that in the later works increasingly focus on the consciousness of the heroine herself. In Portrait we have occasional direct glimpses of Isabel's mind at important moments; in What Maisie Knew the heroine becomes the centre of consciousness through which all events and characters are seen; in The Wings of the Dove (and The Golden Bowl) there is more than one centre of
consciousness, so that we have access not only to the heroine's consciousness, but also to that of one or more of the central characters, whose point of view is juxtaposed with the heroine's in order to illuminate further her character and predicament.

Of these novels **The Portrait of a Lady**, published three years after **Daisy Miller** in 1881, is the first full-length presentation of the set of characters and relationships which we can tentatively locate in the earlier novella. I shall first consider the differences between **Daisy Miller** and **Portrait**, then go on to discuss the clear emergence of the triad. After glancing at the differences between **Portrait** and its successors (such as in the wider range of its central concerns, its use of secondary characters and its handling of action and incident), I propose to focus in depth on the presentation of the heroine and the manipulative woman.

There are important differences between **Daisy** and **Portrait**. In the latter the heroine is no longer seen only through someone else's eyes. The indirect approach does not suit James's purpose here, and he does away with an intermediary whose point of view regulates our response to the heroine. He presents Isabel both from without and within, but most often we are shown her through the conversation and thoughts of the other characters. Despite this both Beach and Cargill have suggested that in general James adopts Isabel's consciousness as the medium of the novel, Cargill even going so far as to suggest that James should have left out a key scene (as he was to do in later novels) in order to maintain the
'integrity in point of view'.[1] But this is to ignore the fact that the novel's narrative form is significantly different from those of its successors, and that James is not attempting in it to do the same thing. As Kettle notes:

...James's purpose in this novel is not to put Isabel between the reader and the situation (in the way that Strether's consciousness is used in The Ambassadors) but to reveal to the reader the full implications of Isabel's consciousness.[2]

It is a much more accurate description of James's central concern, since the focus of the novel is the operation of the heroine's mind, its effect on her relations with other characters, and its consequences for herself. In fact, as Leavis points out:

...James's marvellous art is devoted to contenting us with very little in the way of inward realization of Isabel, and to keeping us interested, instead, in a kind of psychological detective work - keeping us intently wondering from the outside, and constructing, on a strict economy of evidence, what is going on inside.[3]

There is one notable exception to this, which Leavis specifically exempts from his claim: Isabel's long meditation of Chapter XLII. There are other minor instances in the novel of her reflection on events, but none so crucial to our understanding of her than this. It reveals the inevitable


disaster of her marriage, and explores as well her moral and psychological struggle to accommodate it. As a result it is easier in this novel to obtain the sort of information about the heroine's motives and behaviour that we can only arrive at by deduction in Daisy's case. In retrospect we can see that James is beginning to set up his heroine with an eye to greater psychological penetration, anticipating his later exploration of consciousness.

In *Portrait* the triad (that is, heroine/manipulative woman/male character) is now a distinct formation. Isabel Archer, Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond are the first example of the combination of characters which is further explored in *What Maisie Knew* and *The Wings of the Dove*. In each of these novels the basic formula is the same. The heroine, an innocent, is attracted to the passive male character, who has a secret connection with the more worldly, manipulative woman; the latter befriends the heroine, and subsequently discovers the potential for exploiting the friendship to her own advantage. To reduce the plots of three novels to a common denominator like this is to point to a similarity which invites comparison. James varies both his fictional presentation and his exploration of the formula from one novel to the next; that he chose to work three times with similar material is an invitation to examine the novels as a group. Barbara Hardy, in opening her discussion of James's method, recognizes the value of this approach when she says 'I have not treated his novels chronologically, though I am aware that his formal
concentration varies and develops'.[1] It is this development I want to trace, through a chronological consideration of the three novels.

Throughout the novels James becomes increasingly interested in the psychology of his characters, particularly in the perception of one character by another. As a result the relationships linking the triad grow closer from novel to novel, providing a more fruitful area in which to study consciousness, and enabling James to show how each character perceives and affects the others. As we shall see, the relationship between the manipulative woman and the heroine becomes increasingly intimate: Madame Merle is Isabel's senior and her social guide; Mrs Beale has parental jurisdiction and therefore a greater degree of control over Maisie; Kate Croy and Milly Theale are of similar age and social standing and enjoy a more equal friendship than do the previous pairs of women do. We can also see a change in the male character between Portrait and the later novels. Osmond differs from the later men in being relatively independent of either woman, and indeed he is largely self-sufficient; in particular his actions and behaviour are less affected by the manipulative woman than Sir Claude's or Densher's. If he is as passive as these two, it stems not so much from weakness of will (as theirs does) but from a deliberate decision not to exert himself unduly. In this he is a more sinister character than his successors; we can see shades of Grandcourt in Osmond, as

Leavis notes. [1] His attempts to pressure Isabel into precipitating Lord Warburton's proposal to Pansy, and into staying in Rome when Ralph is dying bear witness to this. (However, although he is thus more manipulative than his successors, he does not manipulate the basic situation, as Madame Merle does.) Sir Claude and Densher are inherently weaker characters, and are considerably more vulnerable to the manipulative woman. Each is romantically involved with her during the course of the novel (whereas Osmond's liaison with Madame Merle ends long before *Portrait* begins), and the fate of each is determined to a large extent by the manipulative woman's actions. Thus the relationships between the three main characters become more involved.

A comparative approach suggests that, at least briefly, *The Portrait of a Lady* should be considered in the light of what it attempts in relation to its successors. In general *Portrait* is wider ranging than the two later works. For instance, the number of secondary characters is approximately twice the number of those in the succeeding novels, and they often assume an importance in the novel not strictly related to their contribution to its central concern. Some characters exist primarily to further the action, such as the Countess Gemini in revealing Madame Merle's duplicity to Isabel, but a number of characters overstep a simple utilitarian function.

James tells us that Henrietta Stackpole was conceived as a minor character, but that she took on a life and an

1. Leavis, 128.
independence in the novel which belies her initial conception. He says of her in his Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* that she is an example 'of the light ficelle, not of the true agent', and yet he recognizes that somehow she got away from him: 'The only thing is that I may well be asked ...why... I have suffered Henrietta (of whom we have indubitably too much) ...to pervade' (26,27). His explanation is that 'she exemplifies ... in her superabundance, not an element of my plan, but only an excess of my zeal' (29). Henrietta 'pervades' because she represents something that interests James; the idea of the new American woman, emancipated, independent, and actively pursuing her individual bent regardless of the conventional social restraints on women. As such she stands at one end of the range of possibilities open to women in the novel. (Madame Merle, epitomizing convention, stands at the opposite end.) Although she is primarily a comic character, and we do not take her seriously in her chauvinistic 'letters' from abroad, we cannot dismiss so lightly her attitude to her occupation as a lady-journalist. It is a serious commitment, which is apparently not to end even with her marriage to Mr Bantling. Ralph Touchett's fascination with Henrietta as a modern phenomenon seems to echo James's own: 'Henrietta ... does smell of the Future - it almost knocks one down!' (121).

James's excess of zeal in portraying her is typical of his treatment of the secondary characters (Ralph and Caspar Goodwood pervade in a similar way), and it overflows also into secondary issues. Cultural conflict, the modern woman, and the education of young girls are three subsidiary themes of some importance in the novel. As a consequence of the range of the
The novel - the vitality of secondary characters and the variety of thematic concerns - it does not achieve the sharpness of focus on a single character or theme that is evident, say, in *What Maisie Knew*. The particular mark of the later novels is that they focus sharply on their main concern: the manipulation of the heroine. In contrast, *The Portrait of a Lady* focuses now on the manipulation of Isabel, now on a detail in the background of the portrait.

Incidents in the novel do not always serve to further the action with the economy that James has constantly in mind in the later works. For instance, Lord Warburton's unexpected encounter with Isabel in the Roman Forum in Chapter XXVII does not contribute to the development of the action, or further this relationship with her, or throw light on his character or actions. It confirms what has already been established: his unshakeable preference for Isabel and her equally unwavering determination not to marry him. It creates a slightly factitious tension in supporting briefly the illusion that a choice is still open to Isabel; but the main achievement of the scene is in its effect on Osmond. His egotistical estimation of Isabel's value as a wife increases as a result of his guessing that she has rejected an aristocrat. Again, it confirms what has already been established. His opinion of Isabel and his plans for her do not change as a result of the scene, and it does not mark a significant contribution to them.

In contrast, the encounters between characters in *What Maisie Knew* are more closely linked to the development of the central action, in contributing to the sharpness of the novel's focus. For example, the one brief appearance of the
Captain in Chapter XVI marks a new moral awareness in Maisie as she comes to see the value of loyalty in a relationship. This recognition includes her sense that Ida's relations with men are all too likely not to have this quality; so that she expresses a belief in the desirability of loyalty at the same time as she is aware of its probable failure or non-existence in a particular case. The dual awareness has considerable significance for the final choice in the novel, in her realistic assessment of the claims of her remaining potential guardians in relation to her ultimate good.

This is one small illustration of the way in which James in the two later works consistently sharpens each novel's focus through his concentration on the development of the major action. Even a brief scene such as this can be seen to contribute to the central theme, and this is the kind of thing that Hardy is talking about when, in her discussion of James's economy of method, she says that '[w]hat distinguishes the Jamesian novel from its large loose baggy contemporaries is the special relation of its parts to the whole' [1]. The structure of Portrait, however, is still loosely organized. The narrative, overflowing into a variety of characters and concerns, extends its scope well beyond the manipulation of the heroine. Its concerns are both broader and more diffuse.

In a close examination of the three novels, it is clear that the portrayal of character in Portrait is conventional in comparison to the two later novels, which are innovative in

1. Hardy, 11.
their attempt to represent the inner consciousness of one or more of the main characters. Portrait does not, in fact, sufficiently narrow its focus to present fully a central consciousness; that is an achievement still to come. James asserts an interest in giving what Lubbock calls 'the picture of a mind...fully dramatized', but in fact is equally concerned with the analysis of Isabel's relation to other characters, the way she affects them, and the consequences of her misguided belief in her freedom of choice [1].

An analysis in depth of the relationship between the heroine and the manipulative woman will bring out the extent to which James has developed the theme of the exploited heroine. In Chapter XVIII Isabel meets Madame Merle for the first time. The conditions of the meeting are not auspicious; Mr Touchett is dying, and there is in the house 'that perceptible hush which precedes a crisis' (199). The crisis that we expect is Mr Touchett's death, but instead the hush heralds something quite different and ultimately more chilling - Isabel's introduction to the woman who will deceive and exploit her. The irony of Isabel's response to the sound of the piano is evident:

...the musician was therefore probably Ralph, who played for his own amusement. That he should have resorted to this recreation at the present time indicated apparently that his anxiety about his father had been relieved; so that the girl took her way, almost with restored cheer, toward the source of the harmony (199).

Because Isabel is mistaken, we must look for another explanation, and the only one that fits is that someone is

being very thick-skinned indeed in playing the piano at such a time. In retrospect, Madame Merle is defined already as having within her what might, in the context, be described as a false note. The description of Isabel as 'the girl' indicates her vulnerability. She is almost cheerful, and her defences are down:

The drawing-room at Gardencourt was an apartment of great distances, and, as the piano was placed at the end of it furthest removed from the door at which she entered, her arrival was not noticed by the person seated before the instrument... it was a lady whom Isabel immediately saw to be a stranger to herself, though her back was presented to the door (199).

This scene has the effect of a painted canvas, like a number of scenes in the novel. For instance, when we first meet Isabel she is framed in a large doorway, watching three men take tea on the lawn; she, however, is the real object of observation. Here she is again observing a stranger from a doorway, but this time it is not she who is the centre of interest but Madame Merle. It is a composed, painterly scene, and because it is formal and striking, we are drawn to observe the stranger with the interest that Isabel feels.

That she is eager for new experience, and therefore disposed to be vulnerable, is apparent:

The advent of a guest was in itself far from disconcerting; she had not yet divested herself of a young faith that each new acquaintance would exert some momentous influence on her life (200).

Again there is an irony operating here. The stranger at the piano does exert a momentous influence on her life, but not the kind that Isabel in her innocence foresees. The process of disenchantment with her marriage and with Madame Merle is foreshadowed in these words: 'she had not yet divested herself of a young faith'. The implication of 'yet' is that a final
disenchantment is inevitable, and a 'young faith' suggests a naivety not compatible with mature experience. Her faith consists of her fondest beliefs about herself and the way the world ought to treat her, and these are the very things that are challenged by her later experience. Certainly the novel establishes that these beliefs are arrogant and ill-founded, but we cannot help feeling that the innocence and responsiveness of her young faith are mitigating factors.

Madame Merle in this scene is subtly but consistently set up in opposition to Isabel:

...the lady at the piano played remarkably well. She was playing something of Schubert's - Isabel knew not what, but recognised Schubert - and she touched the piano with a discretion of her own. It showed skill, it showed feeling... (200).

'Discretion' perfectly characterizes the woman and her performance. She plays 'remarkably well', but in keeping with her social persona does not play to startle or astound. This would seem to be confirmed by James' revision of the novel for the New York edition of 1908, when he substituted Schubert for the original Beethoven - the music of the former being less overtly dramatic and passionate, and therefore more amenable to the politely conventional drawing room performance, and to Madame Merle. Matthiessen confirms this when he says that in making the change 'James must have felt that he was bringing it more within Madame Merle's emotional compass' [1]. Her performance, which 'showed skill' and 'showed feeling', suggests two things about her. Firstly, that the skill and

feeling are show, an effect to be achieved by cleverness and technical accomplishment, and secondly that it is the show of a thing—what appears to be rather than what is—which is Madame Merle's particular talent.

When it was finished [Isabel] felt a strong desire to thank the player, and rose from her seat to do so, while at the same time the stranger turned quickly round, as if but just aware of her presence (200).

The effect of the player turning to find someone listening is that of surprise, and yet the phrase 'as if' throws doubt on Madame Merle's spontaneity. The appearance of being startled from a musical reverie is a fitting end to the scene, so that we suspect her of having an eye for effect. Isabel's response on the other hand is prompted by 'a strong desire':

'That's very beautiful, and your playing makes it more beautiful still,' said Isabel with all the young radiance with which she usually uttered a truthful rapture.

'You don't think I disturbed Mr Touchett then?' the musician answered as sweetly as this compliment deserved (200).

The young radiance with which Isabel utters her rapture is an echo of her young faith, and her spontaneous expression of delight contrasts with Madame Merle's relatively cool reply. She answers 'as sweetly as this compliment deserved', which indicates a calculation first about the value of the compliment, and then about the kind of response that is appropriate to it. That Isabel's rapture should be measured in this way implies a niggardly sensibility. Madame Merle is responding not to Isabel but to the form of her words—to the fact of a compliment, and not to its nature. Her response is correct but unfeeling, and in this respect her social performance perfectly matches her musical performance.

Her insensitivity, though masked by a polished social
manner, is still subtly manifest in what she says and does. Her reply to Isabel's hopes for her uncle's health is typical:

The lady smiled and discriminated. 'I'm afraid there are moments in life when even Schubert has nothing to say to us. We must admit, however, that they are our worst' (200).

The statement disguises its insensitivity as wry humour, but such discriminations, however clever, are simply inappropriate in humane terms - even callous. Her eye for effect, both visually and verbally, constantly gives away her real interest:

Suddenly the newcomer stopped with her hands on the keys, half-turning and looking over her shoulder. She was forty years old and not pretty, though her expression charmed. 'Pardon me,' she said; 'but are you the niece - the young American?' (201).

The question cannot be as ingenuous as it appears. Isabel has already established her relationship to Mr Touchett in the conversation, and her nationality, through her accent, ought to be equally apparent to the older woman. Madame Merle already knows who she is, and since she does not ask the question rhetorically, the only reason for it can be that it gives the desired effect to her arrested pose at the piano. This is emphasized in the following lines:

The lady at the piano sat still a moment longer, casting her air of interest over her shoulder. 'That's very well; we're compatriots.' And then she began to play (201).

The interest is not altogether genuine, because it purports to be a spontaneous response to the discovery of Isabel's identity. If we read closely, the credibility of Madame Merle's interest in Isabel disintegrates even further. It is an 'air' of interest; an achieved effect, not a genuine response.

Isabel is not the girl to refuse the bait. The extent to
which she is lured by Madame Merle's charm is evident in her rapidly developing disposition to romanticize her:

'Ah then she's not French,' Isabel murmured; and as the opposite supposition had made her romantic it might have seemed that this revelation would have marked a drop. But such was not the fact, rarer even than to be French seemed it to be American on such interesting terms (201).

The narrator in making an assumption about the expected logical consequence of Isabel's discovery uses an ironic tone. Her attraction to Madame Merle is not based on logic, and the latter has already begun in a small way to manipulate her.

The atmosphere of the following paragraph is foreboding, and looks forward to the sombre second half of the novel:

The lady played in the same manner as before, softly and solemnly, and while she played the shadows deepened in the room. The autumn twilight gathered in, and from her place Isabel could see the rain, which had now begun in earnest, washing the cold-looking lawn and the wind shaking the great trees (201).

The effect of the first sentence is that Madame Merle seems somehow to be actively engaged in the deepening of the gloom; she could almost be creating the shadows by her playing. Isabel's attention, and ours, moves from the player to the gathering twilight, and then outside to the wind blowing and the rain pouring down. Both these things, wind and rain, appear not as passive elements but as active forces. The rain, falling more heavily, is washing the lawn; the wind, physically violent, is 'shaking the great trees'. As images of activity and violence they foreshadow the turbulence which is to disrupt Isabel's life. With hindsight, the images of contraction, cold and darkness - the deepening shadows, twilight and autumn - anticipate the metaphors used to describe the malignant effect that Osmond has on their marriage. They
foreshadow also the inevitable contraction of her horizons and her sense of being unable to escape.

The brief exchange between the two women before Mrs Touchett appears illustrates the difference in their natures. Isabel is gauche and direct, while Madame Merle smooths over their interchange with grace and flattery:

'I'm very glad you've come back; I've heard a great deal about you.'

Isabel ...spoke with a certain abruptness in reply to this speech. 'From whom have you heard about me?'

The stranger hesitated a single moment and then, 'From your uncle,' she answered. I've been here three days, and the first day he let me come and pay him a visit in his room. Then he talked constantly of you.' 'As you didn't know me that must rather have bored you.' 'It made me want to know you' (201).

It is Madame Merle who is making the overtures. For all Isabel's readiness to be influenced by a new acquaintance she must first be won over, and we are prompted to ask why Madame Merle is trying to do so. Is it simply because she is tired of her own society, as she professes? Her slight hesitation when replying to the question 'From whom have you heard about me?' invites closer examination. If we assume that there is no point in making a mystery of the fact that someone at Gardencourt, and presumably Mr Touchett, has told her about Isabel, then it must be asked what he has said. We can fairly guess, from evidence in previous chapters, that it was complimentary to Isabel. We know that he enjoys her company:

The old man was full of kindness for her... [she] was as agreeable to his sense as the sound of flowing water. He wanted to do something for her and wished she would ask it of him (82).

Thus if Mr Touchett talked 'constantly' of his niece to Madame Merle, undoubtedly his strong affection for her was apparent. If it was not Mr Touchett who talked to her about Isabel, then
it would have been either Mrs Touchett or Ralph, since there is no evidence in the novel to suggest that she has heard of the girl from outside sources. From both the aunt and the cousin Madame Merle could easily have learnt of her uncle’s fondness for her. However the 'single moment' of hesitation she shows before revealing the name of her informant does raise the possibility that she is changing the identity to suit the occasion. The most likely explanation for this is that Madame Merle has already calculated the possibility of an inheritance for the niece, and is trying to woo her by playing on her emotions in referring to the dying man's affection for her.

Madame Merle, on a modest financial footing and without family ties, is (as we learn later) only too likely to have speculated about the disposal of the Touchett estate. Why, after all, does she arrive at Gardencourt – and stay – when the master of the house is dying? Her speculations and the fact that she harbours a bitterness about her own meagre lot in life become apparent in Chapter XX. It is natural that she should perceive the likelihood of an inheritance for a favourite niece. This is why she chooses to charm her; not because she immediately sees the possibility for redirecting the money Isabel hasn't yet got into the pockets of Osmond and Pansy, but on the general principle that a wealthy friend is always a worthwhile acquaintance. (She says later to Isabel, "I wish you had a little money" '(232).) In this context her apparently innocent comment, "It made me want to know you" ', takes on a sinister connotation.

Her formal introduction to Isabel, occurring after Mrs Touchett's arrival in the room, confirms what we have already
seen of the essential difference between the older woman and the younger.

'I'm an old friend of your aunt's. I've lived much in Florence. I'm Madame Merle.' She made this last announcement as if she were referring to a person of tolerably distinct identity. For Isabel, however, it represented little; she could only continue to feel that Madame Merle had as charming a manner as any she had ever encountered (202).

For Madame Merle the announcement of her position in the world (friend of Mrs Touchett, resident in Florence) is important. She is pre-eminently a social being, a woman who requires an audience; hence the self-important little description before she gives her name. Typically, Isabel responds not to this but to her charm, while Madame Merle's responses are governed by her desire to give a scrupulously discriminating performance.

If we are correct in the assumption that she has speculated about the possibility of Isabel's coming into money, then her hopes are realized in Chapter XX, when she visits Mrs Touchett after Mr Touchett's death and learns of Isabel's inheritance. For the first time in the novel we have access to her unguarded thoughts, of which the most striking feature is the tone of her silent comments on Mrs Touchett when the widow talks of her relationship with her late husband:

'...I never exhibited the smallest preference for any one else.'

'For any one but yourself,' Madame Merle mentally observed; but the reflexion was perfectly inaudible. 'I never sacrificed my husband to another,' Mrs Touchett continued with her stout curtness. 'Oh no,' thought Madame Merle, 'you never did anything for another!'

There was a certain cynicism in these mute comments which demands an explanation; the more so as they are not in accord either with the view - somewhat superficial perhaps that we have hitherto enjoyed of Madame Merle's character or with the literal facts of Mrs Touchett's history; the more so, too, as Madame Merle had a well-founded conviction that her friend's last remark was not in the least to be constructed as a
side-thrust at herself (236).

The narrator explains her cynicism as arising from a sense of exclusion:

The truth is that the moment she had crossed the threshold she received an impression that Mr Touchett's death had had subtle consequences and that these consequences had been profitable to a little circle of persons among whom she was not numbered (236).

It explains her true interest, which was only hinted at in the previous scene. What has not been previously touched upon, and demands explanation even more strongly than her mute criticism, is the statement that she 'had a well-founded conviction that her friend's last remark was not in the least to be construed as a side-thrust at herself'. This comment is so unexpected, and in the context so apparently superfluous, that we cannot doubt the narrator's intention to convey information about Madame Merle. The apparent innocence of the statement, coming from her and not the narrative voice, is the narrator's subtle way of seeming to disclaim responsibility for it. However its power derives from the fact that it is an unguarded comment of her own; we have not until the previous paragraph had access to her thoughts.

Regardless of how it is couched, the narrative intention to comment on her is clear. Because we are told out of the blue that she is convinced Mrs Touchett does not intend a side-thrust at herself, this immediately insinuates that she has a guilty conscience. Her very comment implies the opposite interpretation: that she has indeed sacrificed her husband for another. Of course we cannot know this until much later in the novel, when the Countess Gemini reveals it, but the narrator is giving us a hint which, if it does not make actual sense at this point, is intended at least to puzzle us; to make us ask,
'why should she think this at all?'

The insinuation of the narrator is consistent with the way the character of Madame Merle has been established from the beginning, where it is strongly intimated that she has a talent for posing and appearances. Through it we are being alerted to something that ought to make us wary of judging her at face value, although some critics, for example Beach, have missed the early implications and regard Chapter XX as the first occasion on which James gives a hint of her true nature. [1] Here the surprising tone of her mute comments that do not accord 'with the view - somewhat superficial perhaps that we have hitherto enjoyed of Madame Merle's character', helps to confirm the impression James creates of her subtlety and artifice (236). The narrator's use of 'superficial' stresses the truth of this; that we have only seen the surface until now, speculate as we might about what it hides.

Her vision of a moneyed future for Isabel, which we could guess at in the previous scene, is now more directly implied. Mr Touchett's death 'was an event which would naturally have consequences; her imagination had more than once rested upon this fact during her stay at Gardencourt' (236). Although Isabel is not mentioned, the sentence implies that Madame Merle has been imagining something out of the ordinary. Firstly, it requires no 'imagination' to see that Mrs Touchett and Ralph will be the major beneficiaries of the will. That is to be expected; it is not a matter for Madame Merle's imagination to

1. Beach, 208.
dwell upon. Secondly, she herself knows that 'she had not the faintest claim to a share in Mr Touchett's relics', even though 'she couldn't at the present moment keep from quite perversely yearning' (236, 237). Knowing that she has discounted any claim of her own to his estate has a similar effect on us as the 'well-founded conviction' discussed above. To assess her own claim as nil is tantamount to admitting that she has entertained the possibility of it. And if she has calculated this possibility, how much more likely it is that she has calculated Isabel's chances of an inheritance. In the circumstances it is an obvious subject for her imagination to dwell upon, 'more than once'.

Until the central revelation of the chapter (the news of Isabel's inheritance) the narrator continues to portray Madame Merle in an insinuating manner:

The idea of a distribution of property - she would almost have said of spoils - just now pressed upon her senses and irritated her with a sense of exclusion. I am far from wishing to picture her as one of the hungry mouths or envious hearts of the general herd, but we have already learned of her having desires that had never been satisfied (236). The narrator, in protesting that he does not wish to portray her in this way, is really slyly putting the thought into our minds, and then conceding reluctantly that there may be evidence to suggest there is a partial truth in it after all. The words he has used about her - irritated, sense of exclusion, hungry mouths and envious hearts, unsatisfied desires, perverse yearning - all overwhelmingly contribute to the impression of an avid nature. That she has something to hide is evident: 'she was careful not to betray herself' (237). 'Betray' in this context implies a significant degree
of deviousness. Referring to this passage, Beach suggests bluntly that:

Perhaps something of this kind is necessary at this point to give the reader a bit of a "tip" on what lies below the surface of Madame Merle's exquisite manner. But in the later work James would have managed to convey a sense of these depths without the false note of vulgarity. [1]

It is true that James is giving us a tip at this point, but Beach is implying that he does it vulgarly - that is, he overdoes it - because until now he has not given us any hint of Madame Merle's deviousness, and he feels it is time to warn us. But as we have seen James has indeed conveyed 'a sense of these depths' from the first appearance of the older woman in the novel, so that we are not unsuspecting of her as Beach implies. Neither is the portrayal of a disgruntled and bitter woman the false note or vulgar tip of a novelist who is as yet too clumsy to develop a consistent character.

With Madame Merle wrought to such a pitch of irritation, the effect of Mrs Touchett's revelation on her is startling:

'There's one remarkable clause in my husband's will,' Mrs Touchett added. 'He has left my niece a fortune.'
'A fortune!' Madame Merle softly repeated.
'Isabel steps into something like seventy thousand pounds.'

Madame Merle's hands were clasped in her lap; at this she raised them, still clasped, and held them a moment against her bosom while her eyes, a little dilated, fixed themselves on those of her friend.
'Ah,' she cried, 'the clever creature!' (237).

Her reaction to the news (hands clasped to the bosom, eyes a little dilated) is like that of a child confronted with a surprise. Her conjectures have been realized, and in a totally

1. Beach, 208.
unguarded moment she does betray herself: '...the clever creature!' '. In using the word 'clever' she is attributing her own avidity to Isabel, and this is the reason why she displays such confusion when Mrs Touchett challenges her on it:

'What do you mean by that?'
For an instant Madame Merle's colour rose and she dropped her eyes. 'It certainly is clever to achieve such results - without an effort!' (237).

It is the first occasion in the novel - one of the very few - when she loses her composure. The news of Isabel's new fortune so closely touches her hidden desires that, momentarily, she cannot help showing it.

However, 'Madame Merle was seldom guilty of the awkwardness of retracting what she had said; her wisdom was shown rather in maintaining it and placing it in a favourable light' (237). This is typical of her quickness of wit. She may not gloss over her blunder very adequately in logical terms, but she does it with assurance, thereby successfully deflecting the conversation away from Mrs Touchett's challenge. Her question, 'Do you mean that she doesn't know what to do with the money?' ', can thus be asked without fear of being thought interested, although with hindsight it assumes a sinister significance (238).

Her rapid and complete change of mood should indicate beyond doubt that she is not a disinterested observer of Isabel's accession to wealth: 'Madame Merle shook her head with a wise and now quite benignant smile. "How very delicious!" ' (238). It is notable that the idea of Isabel's drawing interest at the bank elicits the word 'delicious' since it perfectly complements the previous image of the older woman as a hungry mouth. Obviously her delight is due to the sense
of possibilities now open to her through Isabel. Her manner of greeting the girl expresses 'with great good taste' her suppressed elation:

...Madame Merle ...went forward, laid her hand on our heroine's shoulder and, after looking at her a moment, kissed her as if she were returning the kiss she had received from her at Gardencourt (239).

The ceremonious nature of the greeting implies an accolade; Isabel, 'our heroine', has unwittingly fulfilled the potential Madame Merle had wished for her. It is the moment which Van Ghent points to as the first revelation of the real woman: 'There are no other signs than these ...of just how quickly and acutely Madame Merle's senses ...have functioned in apprising her of the possibilities of exploitation now opened ...'. [1]

It may be true that we have not seen her senses engaged in exactly this pursuit, but we have seen her in the subtle process of creating a deliberate impression, and in manipulating Isabel's response to her. These are without doubt signs of the acuteness and quickness of her senses, so that the more overt indications of Chapter XX confirm rather than create an impression of her artifice.

Isabel's fascination with and esteem for her begins to waver after a year or two of marriage to Osmond. James makes the point that Isabel's growing dissatisfaction with her marriage and her increasing alienation from her friend are connected; to us in a significant way, because we know of Madame Merle's part in the marriage, but to Isabel only in a

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less conscious, more instinctive way:

...Isabel's feelings were ...not quite the same. Her consciousness of the situation was as acute as of old, but it was much less satisfying ....The fact of Madame Merle's having had a hand in Gilbert Osmond's marriage ceased to be one of her titles to consideration; it might have been written, after all, that there was not so much to thank her for. As time went on there was less and less, and Isabel once said to herself that perhaps without her these things would not have been. That reflection indeed was instantly stifled; she knew an immediate horror at having made it. 'Whatever happens to me let me not be unjust,' she said; 'let me bear my burdens myself and not shift them upon others!' (435).

Her desire to 'hold fast to justice' in her attitude to the other woman derives from her sense of pride and independence; she acknowledges that she is responsible for her present unhappiness (436). Her response in this situation is very similar to Milly Theale's, when Milly decides to ignore her suspicion of a connection between Kate and Densher, and to deliberately place her trust in Kate by confiding in her the secret of her fears for her health. Both heroines are exhibiting their idealism in their response to the doubts they have about the other woman, since both incline to believe the best of people, even, as in Milly's case, when it is against the evidence. It is clear that for both Isabel and Milly these grand notions about humanity (that is, that human nature inclines to what is best in it) derive from grand notions about their own individual possibilities; ideas which stem not a little from a pride in acting honourably and generously. James says of Isabel:

She spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action: she held it must be detestable to be afraid or ashamed. She had an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong (77).
Her strong tendency to romanticize and her complacent view of her ability to live up to the high standards she expects of herself are the mark of Isabel's innocence, and they are the ideas she is to painfully disabused of. In particular the discovery that she did not choose her husband freely destroys her confident assumption that she can control her own life. Milly too is prone to such confident delusions.

Despite this, Isabel's dissatisfaction with Madame Merle continues, having an emotional basis if not yet a rational one. But it is precisely Isabel's emotion and instinct which Madame Merle's behaviour most affects, not her logical mind:

...there was something irritating - there was almost an air of mockery - in her neat discrimination and clear convictions. In Isabel's mind to-day there was nothing clear; there was a confusion of regrets, a complication of fears. She felt helpless as she turned away from her friend...Madame Merle knew so little what she was thinking of! She was herself moreover so unable to explain (435-6).

Her confusion, her feeling of helplessness and her inability to explain are ironically opposed to Madame Merle's 'neat discrimination and clear convictions'. In the juxtaposition lies the hint that the older woman knows something that the younger doesn't; in detecting an air of mockery in her manner Isabel is instinctively responding to an implicit judgement of herself.

The moment at which she begins to detect that she has a concrete reason to feel dissatisfied is the result of an appeal to her intuition so strong that she cannot ignore it as a mere phantom of her imagination. She unwittingly surprises Madame Merle and Osmond in conference:

The impression had, in strictness, nothing unprecedented; but she felt it as something new....their colloquy had for the moment converted
itself into a sort of familiar silence, from which she instantly perceived that her entrance would startle them. Madame Merle was standing on the rug, a little way from the fire; Osmond was in a deep chair, leaning back and looking at her. Her head was erect, as usual, but her eyes were bent on his. What struck Isabel first was that he was sitting while Madame Merle stood; there was an anomaly in this that arrested her. Then she perceived that they had arrived at a desultory pause in their exchange of ideas and were musing, face to face, with the freedom of old friends who sometimes exchange ideas without uttering them. There was nothing to shock in this; they were old friends in fact. But the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light. Their relative positions, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected (439).

The anomaly is of course that the two are clearly much more familiar than she knows them to be. The stillness of their respective attitudes (the sitting/standing pose) makes an image for Isabel 'like a sudden flicker of light'. It is a single photographic instant, a frozen picture. This brief impression has bypassed logic and rational deduction, yet her conclusion of 'something detected' has a certainty about it that is no less sure for being intuitive. Indeed since we have already learnt to distrust the operation of her rational mind, it is the more powerful for being so sudden and complete an appeal to her instinct.

From this time onward, until she learns of the older woman's true relationship to her husband from the Countess Gemini, Isabel is more consciously wary of Madame Merle, and the alienation growing between them is more obvious. The issue of Pansy's marriage prospects occurs at this time, and naturally (we know in retrospect) it touches Madame Merle deeply. On this topic the latter finds difficulty in affecting the air of detachment she has hitherto maintained:

'I notify you, at any rate, as I notified Osmond, that I wash my hands of the love-affairs of Miss Pansy and Mr Edward Rosier. Je n'y peux rien, moi! I can't talk
to Pansy about him. Especially', added Madame Merle, 'as I don't think him a paragon of husbands.'

Isabel reflected a little; after which, with a smile, 'You don't wash your hands then!' she said. After which again she added in another tone: 'You can't - you're too much interested' (442).

Isabel's comment is an expression of the intuitive knowledge acquired through her impression of Osmond and Madame Merle in familiar colloquy. That Madame Merle is too much interested is a truth which Isabel cannot justify but which, spoken in 'another tone', has a ring of conviction. There is a nice irony in the ambiguity of the term 'interested'; its connotation of a profit motive is not intended by Isabel, but she is unwittingly accurate. However, because she has no proof of Madame Merle's 'interest', she does not follow up her comment with accusations, simply letting the remark drop - but not on deaf ears:

Madame Merle slowly rose; she had given Isabel a look as rapid as the intimation that had gleamed before our heroine a few moments before. Only this time the latter saw nothing (442).

The implication of something concealed by Madame Merle increases with this reference to her uncertain response to Isabel's remark. Her uncertainty is in fact a measure of the distance between the two women and the change in their relationship. No longer is Isabel the charmed and innocent admirer, but an independent woman disillusioned with her marriage and wary of the friend who seems to have a mysterious connection with her life. Madame Merle is no longer unquestionably superior in social skills or experience, and neither does she take on as she once did the role of guide to a social novice. The women are more evenly matched, and this scene between them is marked by reserve and distrust. In retrospect we can see that Madame Merle is playing the game of
touching on something near the truth in order to deflect Isabel's suspicions away from the truth itself, when she says of Edward Rosier:

'I didn't know what mysterious connection he may have discovered between me and Pansy; but he came to me from the first, as if I held his fortune in my hand' (441).

She is effectively confronting the worst possible fears that Isabel could have about her (that is, that Pansy is her illegitimate child), on the assumption that Isabel would never think her so brazen as to mention carelessly such a connection should it in fact exist. That she does mention it shows that she believes she still has the measure of Isabel's preoccupation with beauty and bravery and magnanimity, and trusts to this to keep the girl unaware of the depths of her duplicity. Thus she is using Isabel's honourable nature as a weapon in her deceit, just as Mrs Beale and Kate Croy are to do after her with Maisie and Milly respectively. It is this behaviour in the manipulative women which, involving the abuse of special knowledge about the heroine that their relationship gives the deceivers access to, is ultimately unforgivable.

Although we can only know in retrospect the ramifications of Madame Merle's apparently innocent comment about a mysterious connection between herself and Pansy, there is already an evident tension between the two women. Isabel herself is swayed by conflicting impulses. Firstly, she is swayed by her suspicion of Madame Merle, manifesting itself in what the older woman calls her dryness, and what she herself notes as the sarcasm to which '[h]er humour had lately turned a good deal' (441). Secondly, she is swayed by her desire not to give way to her bitterness about her husband, and as far as
possible not to give him cause for complaint about her behaviour:

...if she could make it her duty to bring about such an event [that is, Pansy's marriage to Lord Warburton] she should play the part of a good wife. She wanted to be that; she wanted to be able to believe sincerely, and with proof of it, that she had been that (446).

Thus in dealing with Osmond's oldest friend she feels constrained by her code of honour to be honest about Pansy's marriage prospects. It is one of these moments which nearly leads Madame Merle into revealing herself, like the scene earlier in the novel with Mrs Touchett. As on the previous occasion, it is her avidity which betrays her into showing more of her true motives than she would wish:

'Of course,' Madame Merle added, 'you've had infinitely more observation of Lord Warburton's behaviour than I.'
'I see no reason why I shouldn't tell you that he likes my stepdaughter very much.'
Madame Merle gave one of her quick looks again.
'Likes her, you mean — as Mr Rosier means?'
'I don't know how Mr Rosier means; but Lord Warburton has let me know that he's charmed with Pansy.'
'And you've never told Osmond?' This observation was immediate, precipitate; it almost burst from Madame Merle's lips.
Isabel's eyes rested on her. 'I suppose he'll know in time; Lord Warburton has a tongue and knows how to express himself.'

Madame Merle instantly became conscious that she had spoken more quickly than usual, and the reflection brought the colour to her cheek. She gave the treacherous impulse time to subside and said as if she had been thinking it over a little: 'That would be better than marrying poor Mr Rosier.' (443)

This is the closest that narrative has yet been to explicitly labelling Madame Merle as a traitor. The 'treacherous impulse' and the phrase 'as if' in the last line are invitations to regard her as concealing something significant from Isabel.

The narrative treatment of the two women at this point is notable for its contrast; Madame Merle's exclamation almost
bursts from her lips in her surprise, whereas in response to this precipitate observation Isabel, in an image of calm, simply rests her eyes on the other woman. To single out these parts of the body - Madame Merle's lips and Isabel's eyes - underlines the current difference between the two and points up what is almost a reversal of roles. In the first half of the book before Isabel's marriage, it is she who is spontaneous and precipitate and Madame Merle who is the picture of calm (it is no accident that her first name is Serena). Reserve is something Isabel has learnt since her marriage ('she had learned caution - learned it in a measure from her husband's very countenance'), and now she too is capable of holding her tongue and emotions in check (449). Her eyes would earlier have been a reflection of her state of mind, but here they are evoked as separate entities in order to suggest the emotional distance that now divides the women. Her eyes 'rest' on Madame Merle as if she were merely an object of contemplation; they do not connect with her.

Isabel's conflicting impulses - to be reserved on one hand, and to be honest on the other - lead her into contradictory statements which clearly puzzle her listener:

"After all, Pansy Osmond's the most attractive person [Lord Warburton] has ever known!" Isabel exclaimed. Madame Merle stared, and indeed she was justly bewildered. 'Ah, a moment ago I thought you seemed rather to disparage her.' 'I said she was limited. And so she is. And so's Lord Warburton.' 'So are we all, if you come to that. If it's no more than Pansy deserves, all the better. But if she fixes her affections on Mr Rosier I won't admit that she deserves it. That will be too perverse.' 'Mr Rosier's a nuisance!' Isabel cried abruptly. 'I quite agree with you, and I'm delighted to know that I'm not expected to feed his flame. For the future, when he calls on me, my door shall be closed to him.' And gathering her mantle together Madame Merle
prepared to depart. She was checked, however ... by an inconsequent request from Isabel.

'All the same, you know, be kind to him.'

She lifted her shoulders and eyebrows and stood looking at her friend. 'I don't understand your contradictions!' (444).

Madame Merle bewildered by Isabel is an unfamiliar occurrence, but one that is consistent with the change in their relationship. No longer is the younger woman either predictable or tractable in her behaviour as she once was, and in the meditation scene of Chapter XLII we learn why. It is the first time we are given an extended presentation of her inner consciousness. After her marriage we had no direct explanation of what happened between her and Osmond, but only incidental comments gleaned from other characters, such as Madame Merle's remark to Edward Rosier that the Osmonds think quite differently about things, and her advice to him not to multiply the points of difference between them (390,393).

The way James split his narrative chronologically by ending Chapter XXXV just after Isabel's announcement of her engagement, and beginning Chapter XXXVI three or four years later, has already had the effect of distancing us from the heroine and weakening our rapport with her. James accentuated this by forcing us to become reacquainted with her through the eyes of a stranger; that is, from the point of view of Edward Rosier as he attended one of Isabel's soirées at the Palazzo Roccanera, the Osmonds' imposing 'domestic fortress' (395). He approached the house and its inhabitants uncertain of his reception, with the result that we too were in doubt as to what we would find there. What we did find was a more formidable Isabel: 'He... met Mrs Osmond coming out of the deep doorway. She was dressed in black velvet; she looked high and splendid...'
Thus her first appearance in the novel after her marriage was dramatic. The passage has her framed in a doorway, as in her first appearance at Gardencourt, with the difference that in this scene she does not stand still but is moving forward, a suggestion of the new authority marriage has given her, as well as an image of the restlessness which is a result of it. The deepness of the doorway and the blackness of the velvet intensify this impression of a grand society hostess.

From this point until Chapter XLII we draw progressively closer to Isabel as we learn of her unhappy position. This is achieved mainly through the observations of Ralph on the probable nature of her marriage, from the changes he notes in her:

...there was an amplitude and a brilliancy in her personal arrangements that gave a touch of insolence to her beauty. Poor human-hearted Isabel, what perversity had bitten her? Her light step drew a mass of drapery behind it; her intelligent head sustained a majesty of ornament. The free, keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something. What did Isabel represent? Ralph asked himself; and he could only answer by saying that she represented Gilbert Osmond (424).

Ralph's theories about how their marriage functions seems to us, with no direct evidence, only too probable. From our knowledge of Osmond before his marriage, and Madame Merle's part in it, we are willing to believe that he is at least a petty tyrant, without a scrap of the impulsive humanity that his wife has in abundance. Isabel's own private observations soon begin to justify her cousin's interpretation of her marriage. Life is difficult, she has a dissatisfied mind, and she finds she has less to thank Madame Merle for than she had originally thought (433,435).
Her state of mind and the circumstances of her marriage are made clear to us in the extended meditation of Chapter XLII. It is this scene which constitutes an exploration of consciousness which James is later to develop in *What Maisie Knew* and *The Wings of a Dove*. It is, as Krook says, 'a long and intense interior monologue', and in it James presents us with Isabel's uninterrupted reflections on her life, the problems of her marriage, and how these things most affect her. [1] Through it we re-establish the rapport that we had with her before her marriage, and it is the very subjectivity of the scene that enlists our sympathy.

More than this, we understand her, as she struggles to understand herself. The result of Isabel's experience is that she has been forced by the unexpected failure of her marriage to question her hopes and motives in marrying. The outcome is so much at odds with her earlier beliefs about it, that for the first time in her life she cannot avoid the conclusion that her initial confidence was badly misplaced. The actual process of her disillusionment is told in retrospect in this scene so that we are not witness to its slow growth, as we are, for example, to Maisie's growing awareness of Sir Claude's weakness in *What Maisie Knew*. Rather, Isabel's progress in self-awareness, in relation to her marriage, is analysed as an established fact and serves to confirm the hints dropped and the theories advanced by others about her differences with her husband. Her own reflections on the subject are the culmination of such

outside speculation, and it is the point to which the distancing effects of the narrative have been leading. Because of this the scene is powerful, which James recognizes when he says in his Preface to Portrait that '[i]t is obviously the best thing in the book' (28). This comment is a measure of the importance that James attaches to the presentation of inner consciousness, and an indication of the direction his interest in point of view is to take him in the later novels.

More immediately, the scene's centrality in the novel is unquestionable. Isabel's acceptance of the culpability of her own illusions constitutes a major breakthrough in her self-awareness. It is all the more powerful for being an unpalatable recognition of her own nature, although it is only a limited recognition, as I shall discuss later. At least, as Tanner notes, 'she is starting to read things properly'. [1] This, in its significance to the heroine, is similar to the self-awareness which grows upon Maisie and is thrust upon Milly; each has her fondest illusions shattered, and, starting to read things properly, must learn to live with the recognition that her personal horizons have been severely limited.

In Isabel's case the knowledge of her own part in the disappointment of her hopes is as devastating as the revelation of Osmond's true nature. She understands that 'if she had not deceived him in intention...how completely she must have done so in fact' before their marriage, but with the passage of time

she can no longer excuse her present behaviour from blame with the plea of ignorance (457). She might try to prove herself an obedient wife to him, but this can itself become an expression of her pride:

It was all very well to undertake to give him a proof of loyalty; the real fact was that the knowledge of his expecting a thing raised a presumption against it....Was the fault in himself, or only in the deep mistrust she had conceived for him? This mistrust was now the clearest result of their short married life; a gulf had opened between them over which they looked at each other with eyes that were on either side a declaration of the deception suffered. It was a strange opposition, of the like of which she had never dreamed - an opposition in which the vital principle of the one was a thing of contempt to the other (455-6).

With the knowledge that her mere resolve to conform to the part of a loyal and acquiescent wife can never alter the hostility between them, Isabel sees that she is caught in an inescapable trap. She 'scan[s] the future with dry, fixed eyes', an image of the aridity of her prospects, but which also suggests more positively a conscious refusal to romanticize her life further (457). Her impulsiveness has given way to caution, and her grand vague notions about beauty and bravery and magnanimity have given way to the fixed stare of one who is determined never again to be deluded by her imagination.

Isabel's review of her disappointed hopes and the growth of her self-awareness culminates in an awareness of quite another order: her 'remembered vision - that of her husband and Madame Merle unconsciously and familiarly associated' (467). That there is more to their old friendship than she had assumed is becoming evident to her, sparked by the strange impression of the two together that she has recently received, and further suggested to her by Madame Merle's behaviour during their discussion of Pansy's suitors (442). Her instinct that
all is not what it seems, and that Madame Merle is too much interested in Pansy's marriage prospects, is not enough from which to guess the truth. Indeed in retrospect we can see that Madame Merle has attempted to ward off Isabel's potential suspicions of the truth of her adultery with Osmond by using the same tactics that she used in the last scene, when she casually remarks to Isabel that Mr Rosier seems to have discovered a mysterious relationship between herself and Pansy. She is defending

...a dread of seeming to meddle. Madame Merle was as candid as we know, and one day she candidly expressed this dread to Isabel....'I must not forget that I knew your husband long before you did; I must not let that betray me. If you were a silly woman you might be jealous. You're not a silly woman; I know that perfectly....Of course if I had wished to make love to your husband I had ten years to do it in, and nothing to prevent; so it isn't likely I shall begin to-day, when I'm so much less attractive than I was. But if I were to annoy you by seeming to take a place that doesn't belong to me, you wouldn't make that reflection; you'd simply say I was forgetting certain differences. I'm determined not to forget them. ...Don't think I make myself uncomfortable; I'm not always watching myself. I think I sufficiently prove it in talking to you as I do now' (433-4).

Under the guise of 'candour' she tackles head on the possibility that in the ten years she knew Osmond before his marriage she had the opportunity to make love to him. Clearly it is a gamble she is prepared to take, and she ensures its success by appealing to Isabel's pride - ' "You're not a silly woman" ' - and by invoking their mutual confidence: ' "I think I sufficiently prove it in talking to you as I do now" '. By discussing the possibility and dismissing it in general conversation, Madame Merle is, as I mentioned in the previous example, effectively using her knowledge of Isabel's character in order to deceive her.
Although we cannot know this until later in the novel, the narrator in his choice of language is warning us against credulity. The apparently innocent comment about her candour, that she 'was as candid as we know' (my emphasis), is a challenge to us to recall other occasions. If we recall firstly the cynicism of her mental observations on Mrs Touchett in Chapter XX (which are completely at odds with our prior knowledge of their friendship), and secondly Madame Merle's later expressions of surprise when Mrs Touchett suggests that Osmond might be courting Isabel, then we are left with an impression of Madame Merle that does not sit happily with candour. Then to drive the implication further home the narrator repeats the word 'candid' in the second half of the same sentence. The effect is unquestionably that of overdoing it, so that an attentive reader has the sense of being virtually assaulted with what should be unnecessary assurances of Madame Merle's candour.

This quality takes her further than this in her next encounter with Isabel in Chapter XLIX, when she shows that she regards Lord Warburton's defection from Rome and from Pansy as Isabel's doing, and shows more importantly that it matters greatly to her that Pansy has missed such an opportunity. That she is irritated, and shows it, alerts Isabel to

...reflect that there was more intention in her past behaviour than she had allowed for at the time. Ah yes, there had been intention, there had been intention, Isabel said to herself; and she seemed to wake from a long pernicious dream....a strange truth was filtering into her soul. Madame Merle's interest was identical with Osmond's... (546-7).

There is evidently 'intention' in Madame Merle's new tone of insolence and in the fact that she thinks the time is right for
it (549). She quite deliberately confirms Isabel's perception of the 'strange truth' in her conscious identification with Osmond, when she admonishes Isabel for her supposedly selfish reluctance to let Lord Warburton marry Pansy: '"Let him off--let us have him!"' (549). Isabel, as if she were indeed awakening from a 'long pernicious dream', is dazed by her change in manner and the unknown horrors it implies. Already viewing this friend with a different eye, she now begins to comprehend that Madame Merle is more intimately involved in her fate than she had guessed, and that she is 'a powerful agent in her destiny' (546). In her sudden perception of this she begins, almost as if in spite of herself, to ask the kind of questions of the other woman that she has never thought to ask before, but which are in fact the most pertinent:

'Who are - what are you?' Isabel murmured. 'What have you to do with my husband?...What have you to do with me?' Isabel went on.

Madame Merle slowly got up, stroking her muff, but not removing her eyes from Isabel's face. 'Everything!' she answered.

Isabel sat there looking up at her, without rising; her face was almost a prayer to be enlightened (549).

Their relative positions reflect what is happening between them. Madame Merle at this juncture has the upper hand and is standing over Isabel, confident that the power of disclosure lies with her. Obviously she feels that she can afford to reveal herself to the extent of answering '"Everything!"' to Isabel's questions, sure in the knowledge that although it may frighten her it will not give away her real secret. Isabel remains seated as if she is powerless either to move or to assert herself. As we shall see it is a juxtaposition that is to be reversed in the final scene between the two.

Madame Merle's secret is finally revealed when the
Countess Gemini tells Isabel of her past association with Osmond, and the fact that Pansy is Madame Merle's illegitimate daughter. It comes at a crisis point for Isabel, when she is torn by conflicting loyalties: her desire to go to Ralph's bedside while he is dying at Gardencourt, and her duty to her husband, who forbids her to go:

Ten minutes before she had felt all the joy of irreflective action – a joy to which she had so long been a stranger; but action had been suddenly changed to slow renunciation, transformed by the blight of Osmond's touch (570).

At this low point the Countess decides that it is time to inform Isabel of the real nature of the relationship between Madame Merle and Osmond. It does not elicit the response she had hoped; instead, Isabel seems bewildered rather than angry (576). For all her instinctive awareness of closer ties existing between the two than she has been aware of, she receives the story as if it were 'a bale of fantastic wares some strolling gypsy might have unpacked...at her feet' (578).

It is worth noting here that until this late point in the book we don't actually know about the real motives behind the manipulation of Isabel, whatever we may guess. That is, in some measure it is an old 'surprise' type of plot; it contrasts with Maisie, in which the reason for manipulation gradually becomes evident in the course of the novel, and with Wings in which the manipulation is in full focus throughout. (In this the interest lies not, as in Portrait, in the revelation of exploitation, but in the observation of its progress from small beginnings.)

In the midst of Isabel's trouble the revelation is one which should make it easier to rebel against Osmond's wishes
and leave Rome. It is, however, too extraordinary a fact to assimilate rapidly, and Isabel, in contemplation of the intricacies of Madame Merle's dissimulation, 'almost lost her sense of being personally touched by the story' (580). In her dazed state she does not condemn either Osmond or his accomplice, but pities the first Mrs Osmond for her husband's infidelity, and pities also Madame Merle for her enforced estrangement from her daughter. The scene ends with Isabel feeling 'bruised and scant of breath; her head was humming with new knowledge'; a suggestion that it is just a matter of time until the new knowledge becomes 'a part of [her] experience' (581, 586). For all her foreboding about Madame Merle's part in her life, Isabel has never yet gone so far as to regard herself as 'an applied handled hung-up tool, as senseless and convenient as mere shaped wood and iron' (586). It is a humiliating discovery, and one which alters irrevocably the relationship between the two women.

Interestingly, Isabel never uses her knowledge to directly challenge Madame Merle, just as neither Maisie nor Milly ever confront Mrs Beale or Kate Croy with the knowledge of their deceit. Isabel's final meeting with her takes place unexpectedly in the convent where Pansy is staying:

Isabel...to her extreme surprise found herself confronted with Madame Merle. The effect was strange, for Madame Merle was already so present to her vision that her appearance in the flesh was like suddenly, and rather awfully, seeing a painted picture move (583).

This rather grotesque vision is an inversion of our early impression of Madame Merle during Isabel's first encounter with her, when she was striking poses at the piano with an eye to creating a pleasing visual effect. Isabel was enchanted by her
then; now, instead of seeing a woman who is falling into picturesque attitudes, she sees a woman who has herself become a painting which 'rather awfully' comes to life. It is the logical extension of her artificiality, and a mark of Isabel's disillusionment. The older woman's presence in the convent, where Pansy is supposed to be in virtual isolation, now takes on for Isabel 'the character of ugly evidence, of handwritings, of profaned relics, of grim things produced in court' (583). Clearly, she has assimilated the knowledge of the deception she has suffered and is now beginning to view her life in this perspective, so that she is instinctively putting Madame Merle on trial. The latter's visit to Pansy seems to her an admission of guilt and a confirmation of the maternal bond that ties her to her illegitimate daughter.

Isabel chooses silence as the weapon with which to express her feeling that 'she had absolutely nothing to say to Madame Merle' (583). Instead, the older woman is left to understand from her manner that something radical has happened to their relationship. Isabel's new critical awareness of her friend, attuned to her conversation in a way it has never been before, perceives her unspoken recognition of this fact:

...there were phrases and gradations in her speech, not one of which was lost upon Isabel's ear, though her eyes were absent from her companion's face. She had not proceeded far before Isabel noted a sudden break in her voice, a lapse in her continuity, which was in itself a complete drama. This subtle modulation marked a momentous discovery — the perception of an entirely new attitude on the part of her listener. Madame Merle had guessed in the space of an instant that everything was at an end between them, and in the space of another instant she had guessed the reason why. The person who stood there was not the same one she had seen hitherto, but was a very different person — a person who knew her secret. This discovery was tremendous, and from the moment she made it the most accomplished of women faltered and lost her courage. But only for that
moment. Then the conscious stream of her perfect manner gathered itself again and flowed on as smoothly as might be to the end....Her only safety was in her not betraying herself. She resisted this, but the startled quality of her voice refused to improve - she couldn't help it - while she heard herself say she hardly knew what (585).

To see her falter is as momentous as it is for her to realize that Isabel knows her secret, and the latter briefly enjoys her discomfort; but although there is a moment when Isabel might have 'said something that would hiss like a lash', she remains silent (586). The 'complete drama' of Madame Merle's recognition marks a revolution in her status. Not only is everything at an end between Isabel and herself, but the possibility of general exposure hangs over her, threatening her, presumably, with social ostracism. Their respective attitudes reflect the change between them:

Isabel's only revenge was to be silent still - to leave Madame Merle in this unprecedented situation. She left her there for a period that must have seemed long to this lady, who at last seated herself with a movement which was in itself a confession of helplessness. Then Isabel turned slow eyes, looking down at her. Madame Merle was very pale; her own eyes covered Isabel's face (586).

Madame Merle is seated, helpless, while Isabel stands with her back turned, savouring the moment in which she has gained ascendancy over the other. It is the very reverse of their previous encounter, when Madame Merle stood triumphantly over a powerless Isabel, implying by word and manner that she had a powerful and mysterious influence on her existence. Now Isabel is aware of the exact nature of the influence the manipulative woman has had in her life, and has herself the power of disclosure. Because Madame Merle's secret consists of the socially unacceptable facts of adultery and illegitimacy, Isabel, in choosing to keep these facts to herself or to offer
them for public consumption, holds her future in her hand.

In choosing to keep it to herself she does not merely turn the other cheek to the woman who 'made a convenience' of her, she also makes the decision that she never wishes to see Madame Merle again, and tells her so, thus stating the terms of their separation in as final a manner as Maisie does later to Mrs Beale (607). Isabel effectively banishes her from any society in which the Osmonds might move or have connections, and the older woman's response is to impose a harsh exile on herself: 'I shall go to America' (593). Her choice of exile is an acknowledgement of the seriousness of her offence, which Mrs Touchett later recognizes as a punishment though without knowing the nature of her crime. She asks Isabel:

'Do you still like Serena Merle?' she went on. 'Not as I once did. But that doesn't matter for she's going to America.' 'To America? She must have done something very bad' (606-7).

Certainly Madame Merle's social circle and her modest but comfortable position in society will be much reduced, and any dreams of marrying nobly, which the Countess suggests she has, must be diminished (579-80). Early in their relationship Isabel had

...found it difficult to think of her in any detachment or privacy, she existed only in her relations, direct or indirect, with her fellow mortals. One might wonder what commerce she could possibly hold with her own spirit (220-1).

For such a creature of society to be forced into exile and there to fall upon the resources of her own spirit is akin to purgatory.

It is also the fate of the errant Charlotte Stant in The Golden Bowl to be effectively banished to America with Adam
Verver, an arrangement engineered by Maggie, the heroine, in her bid to regain her own husband's affections after his affair with Charlotte. For both Madame Merle and Charlotte Stant it is exile for those who have no other choice. The fate of Mrs Beale in *What Maisie Knew*, although it is implied rather than stated, is yet another example of the manipulative woman's being exiled from her country of residence and the presence of the heroine. In choosing to throw in her lot with Sir Claude as his mistress, she would seem to have no option but to live quietly in the South of France in the unobtrusive kind of establishment that Sir Claude had earlier envisaged for the two of them as joint guardians of Maisie (262).

As for Isabel, she shares with her successors the fate of renunciation, giving up the chance of liberty and a truly passionate relationship with Caspar Goodwood in favour of continuing to live in the mockery of a marriage to Osmond. The critical response to the ending of the novel is diverse, and Isabel's return to Osmond has often been mistakenly regarded as a positive act. These critics describe it as a moral victory, a spiritual rebirth, or see Isabel becoming a Jamesian artist, or regard her as 'the winner in the end'. [1] The idea of a sadder but wiser, self-aware and morally enriched Isabel is the predominant view on this side of the critical fence.

It is certainly true (from the evidence of Chapter XLVI onwards) that Isabel is no longer ignorant of the power of her imagination to mislead her, or of the external forces which precipitated her marriage. However it is a limited self-knowledge, confined to those things which she has been forced into acknowledging only by the extremity of her situation. It has taken a disastrous marriage and the destruction of her fondest hopes to make her question herself, but she remains despite it all the romantic idealist, striving for those qualities of beauty and bravery and magnanimity which are the touchstone of her beliefs. It is more in keeping with Isabel's character to accept a negative interpretation of her return to Osmond than to regard it as a sign of intellectual maturity. This position is taken by a number of critics, who offer such reasons for Isabel's flight as the fear of sexual passion, the fear of social failure, and the terror of experience. [1] The argument is put most persuasively by Moody, who says of Isabel:

She refuses to acknowledge any dishonour in her position, choosing to cling to the notion that her "honour", in an ideal sense, depends all on a difficult loyalty to her husband. "Almost anything seemed to her preferable to violating the traditionary sanctities and decencies of marriage." She is attempting, still, even in the terms Osmond dictates, to live by her theory of the ideal....she finds herself confined within a dead form; and nevertheless she labours to convince herself that this is not a perversion, but simply a more

difficult form of the ideal. [1]
Moody says that Isabel's return to Osmond represents 'the last excess of that idealism', and suggests also that the reason for the difficulty we have in being sure about the meaning or the conclusion is that James 'preserves - it is the very ground of the work - a steady consciousness of his heroine's inexhaustibly rich promise'. [2] As a result of his partiality we are led to feel that 'in spite of everything there is something fine in her doing it. To the end Isabel Archer is allowed to keep her claim to a certain ideal dignity'. [3] James as good as admits this in the novel when he says that Isabel 'would be an easy victim of scientific criticism if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender', and in this statement of intention we can foresee a similarity in his treatment of Milly Theale (78).

I have shown in this chapter that James has just begun to explore the inner consciousness of his heroine, an experiment which is to develop later into the total adoption of a single point of view in the next novel of the three, What Maisie Knew. This constitutes a complete break from the nineteenth century convention of the omniscient author to which Portrait substantially conforms. Alongside the new narrative technique, and partly as a result of its concern with the 'drama of ...consciousness', there exists a more elastic view of moral


issues. [1] The subject of the novel becomes less the consequences of the heroine's actions and attitudes, as it is in *Portrait*, than the play of her mind. Miller says '[t]he matrix of character and action is consciousness', and in bringing consciousness to the foreground of the novel, James becomes more interested in describing the thoughts and feelings of a character, and less interested in labelling the character or his actions 'good' or 'bad'. [2]

In *The Portrait of a Lady* Osmond and Madame Merle are readily identifiable as wrongdoers. The latter is particularly so, since she identifies her own guilt both before Isabel's marriage when she says to Osmond ' "You're unfathomable....I'm frightened at the abyss into which I shall have cast her" ' and after, ' "Have I been so vile all for nothing?" ' (315, 558). Osmond, though it is made plain in Chapter XLII that he as well as Isabel has been disappointed in his choice of marriage partner, is undeniably portrayed in an adverse light. Despite the fact that Isabel does not turn out to be the docile, pliant wife he had hoped for, he is sufficiently cold-blooded to enjoy the spectacle of her discomfort, and to effect a partial revenge by the continual repression of her naturally lively spirits. Isabel protests ' "I know nothing about revenge." "I do," said Osmond. "Don't give me an occasion" ' (568). This quiet but unmistakable threat is characteristic of his


dominance over Isabel; a subjugation which is yet more viciously expressed in his remark to Goodwood that ' 'We're as united, you know, as the candlestick and the snuffers'' '(537). The context of the comment (a polite social gathering), the fact that it is spoken to an old suitor of Isabel's, and Osmond's apparent jocularity, only add to our sense of horror. Thus although we can acknowledge that Osmond's feeling of being cheated in his marriage has some basis in fact, we are even more strongly convinced that his expectations of a wife are supremely egotistical.

To illustrate the difference between this and the later novels, Rahv remarks:

Osmond still retains some features of the old-fashioned villain, but his successors are gradually freed from the encumbrances of melodrama. Merton Densher (The Wings of the Dove) and Prince Amerigo (The Golden Bowl) are men of grace and intelligence, whose wicked behaviour is primarily determined by the situation in which they find themselves. [1]

To the list of Osmond's successors I would like to add Sir Claude of What Maisie Knew. These three, weak and passive as they are, are certainly painted less blackly than their predecessor, and at least to some extent it is true that we understand their 'wickedness' in terms of the situation in which they find themselves. Given different circumstances, they might imaginably (through their very passivity if for no more positive reason) avoid entanglement in the intrigues of others, and escape the imputation of blame. Osmond, although perhaps not a thorough-going villain, is certainly a thoroughly

1. Philip Rahv, 'From "The Heiress of All the Ages" ', in Merrill Studies, 26.
unpleasant character.

In the chapter to follow we shall see James's growing concern with the exploration of consciousness and the concomitant broadening of moral standpoint. His incipient interest in the consciousness of a character is evident in Isabel's meditative vigil in Portrait, and with hindsight we can recognize in the vigil the truth of Spender's claim that for James ' [p]assionate activity is intellectual activity. His realization of this is James's great contribution to the novel '. [1]

Chapter 2

WHAT MAISIE KNEW

What Maisie Knew was published in 1897, sixteen years later than The Portrait of a Lady. The configuration of heroine/manipulative woman/male character compares with that in Portrait, but the narrative technique has altered radically. My concern, in view of the similarity of theme and character, is to see how it differs, and with what effect.

There are obvious changes: most importantly, the heroine of this novel is now a little girl, which qualifies the meaning of the term 'innocent' as applied to her. She is innocent in a particularly apparent and vulnerable way — by virtue of her age and her lack of experience. She is not by nature disinclined to perceive what is actually going on around her, or to deceive herself about certain characters and their actions; for the most part she is genuinely incapable of interpreting the behaviour and motives of the adults. She lacks both knowledge and experience to provide a measure for their conduct. Thus the terms innocence, knowledge and experience, though as important to our understanding of the heroine as in the other works, have different implications. Maisie is clearly innocent to a greater degree than, for example, Isabel, and there is also a difference in Maisie's kind of innocence.

The manipulative woman stands in a different and potentially more sinister relation to the heroine. Mrs Beale
is not, like Madame Merle, the social equal of the heroine; she is in a position of authority over her. As Maisie's governess she has a jurisdiction over her which is unequalled by any of the other manipulative women. It accentuates Maisie's vulnerable position by exposing her malleable innocence to someone who, though morally obliged to place Maisie's welfare above her own, in fact ignores the obligation and makes use of the child.

The male character, too, is in a rather different relation to the heroine. Sir Claude, Maisie's stepfather and guardian, adopts a parental responsibility towards her. This places Maisie in a filial relation to him which never essentially changes, although by the end she has come to understand his weakness and his fear of Mrs Beale, and to recognize - with compassion and regret - that he is ultimately untrustworthy as a guardian. I cannot agree with Wilson or Sharp that Maisie in the final scenes is offering herself to Sir Claude as a rival to Mrs Beale, or even with Sharp's claim that the girl's relationship to him remains ambiguous in the end. [1] That she wants Sir Claude's company is indisputable, and since she challenges Mrs Beale to give him up in the last scene, it is easy to see why the issue of her sexual precocity has arisen. However it blurs the actual issue at stake in the final scenes: which adult or combination of adults will provide the loving care and the responsible parental guidance which Maisie needs?

She does want Sir Claude, but for the qualities which best equip him as her guardian. Of these Leavis says '[h]e is kind, he has a sense of decency and a conscience, and he likes Maisie...'.[1] The final offer by Sir Claude – of himself and Mrs Beale as joint guardians – she recognizes as an undesirable combination, and one into which he has been forced by Mrs Beale. Maisie sees that her stepmother's design is to use Maisie's presence to justify her own relationship with Sir Claude, and that Mrs Beale has no real affection for her beyond her usefulness. Maisie also understands in the end that Mrs Beale will not release Sir Claude, and that the only remaining alternative is to reject both step-parents and accept Mrs Wix's devotion as a substitute for the ideal of Sir Claude's companionship. Leavis rightly points out that

...it is not paradoxical to say that, though her attitude to Sir Claude is feminine right enough, she remains to the end uninterested in, and uncognizant of, sex. Her discriminations and judgements regard the qualities of personality and the capacities for sensitive personal relations revealed by her adults as they perform the evolutions that are so largely set off by the spring of which she remains unaware.[2]

An important change to the basic triad established in Portrait is the inclusion of Mrs Wix, Maisie's second governess. She functions as a confidante, a character of a kind we first meet in Henrietta Stackpole, and whose successor and kindred spirit we find in Susan Stringham, in The Wings of the Dove. Henrietta is a ficelle (literally a

2. Leavis, in Bewley, 130.
'string' or 'thread'), James's term for a character who facilitates our access to knowledge about the protagonist, usually by acting as a confidante. Sharp says:

She is a character...whose technical function expands from the simple confidante of the protagonist through an active championship...As confidante she performs the usual functions hitherto discernible in the role: she interprets, advises, prophesies, judges, and in turn confides in the protagonist. Most of these functions serve expository purposes....The functions that are peculiar to her individual role are those of intrigue and armed conflict. These become apparent and increasingly prominent from the middle of the novel onwards.[1]

Mrs Wix stands in significant relationship to the three central characters. I have outlined my reasons for not considering her manipulative in the Introduction; nevertheless, she is not only the confidante of Maisie and Sir Claude (and later turns confider herself), but she prompts them to action, rivals Mrs Beale for Maisie's affection, and attempts to influence the child for the same purpose that Mrs Beale does - to secure social recognition and financial security through Sir Claude. She adds further complexity to the web of relationships; and, as a confidante whose function is more than expository, she is the precursor of Susan Stringham in The Wings of the Dove and Fanny Assingham in The Golden Bowl.

The most interesting aspect of What Maisie Knew is its different narrative mode. The centre of consciousness in the novel is a young child who for the most part does not understand the implications of what is going on around her. In his Preface to Maisie James says:

I recall that my first view of this neat possibility was as the attaching problem of the picture restricted (while yet achieving, as I say, completeness and coherency) to what the child might be conceived to have understood — to have been able to interpret and appreciate. Further reflexion and experiment showed me my subject strangled in that extreme of rigour. The infant mind would at the best leave great gaps and voids; so that with a systematic surface possibly beyond reproach we should nevertheless fail of clearness of sense. I should have to stretch the matter to what my wondering witness materially and inevitably saw; a great deal of which quantity she either wouldn't understand at all or would quite misunderstand... (15).

He chose to widen his first conception by including in the novel material which Maisie sees but does not understand. This means that we are always obliged to read with a double consciousness of what Maisie understands and what we as readers are meant to understand. James's technical problem is the difficulty of conveying the full meaning of some event or conversation which is beyond Maisie's comprehension, while always maintaining a systematic and deliberate limitation of the narrative point of view. Maisie's viewpoint is a veil which partly obscures the world of the adults, and we have only the information to which she has access to help us penetrate it. In the Preface James defines his intention:

...to make and to keep her so limited consciousness the very field of my picture while at the same time guarding with care the integrity of the objects represented (14).

These then are his two concerns: to keep the child's consciousness as his medium and to portray accurately the actions of others through this medium. The constant tension that results from the interplay of the two viewpoints, adult's and child's, is responsible for much of the comedy of the novel. As Leavis notes:

The tone and mode of What Maisie Knew...are those of an extraordinarily high-spirited comedy....In its central
aspect it is the comedy of a child's innocence; a comedy that, while being so high-spirited, is at the same time, and essentially, a rendering of the pathos of Maisie's situation....[1]

In fact, not only are there two viewpoints to consider in a discussion of the novel, we must also take into account the authorial voice which, though elusive, is demonstrably there.

James's intentions regarding narrative point of view have frequently been misunderstood by critics. Beach, for instance, finds that:

The choice of Maisie for the "register" of these occurrences makes impossible the rendering of their real significance,—their significance either for the grown-up persons taking part, or their significance (if this might be distinguished from the other) for an author more coolly aware of the broad moral bearings of what is done and suffered. Only in the concluding scenes do we have any approach to an adequately interpretative record of events as they affect the principal—the grown-up—participants. And do we, on the other hand, have the story of Maisie herself? Maisie herself has really no story.[2]

To assume that the adults are the principal participants and to conclude that the novel does not adequately render a 'serious subjective experience' is to miss the whole point of the narrative mode, though Beach does concede that James's consistent use of Maisie's viewpoint is technically remarkable.[3] Later critics, who perceive the intention to place Maisie at the centre of his picture, just as frequently misinterpret the character of what is being presented:

The theme of What Maisie Knew is, I submit, the violation of innocence; in particular, the corruption of a child, to add the final turn of the screw, by her

1. Leavis, in Bewley, 119, 123.
2. Beach, 238–9.
3. Beach, 239.
These comments of Wilson's are indicative of the attitude adopted by a number of critics who claim that Maisie is corruptible, and more often than not that she is sexually precocious as well. The question of what Maisie knows becomes for them the question of how sexually knowing she is, and how far this knowledge influences her final actions and decisions: in other words, to what extent she has been corrupted. McCloskey, claiming that she 'becomes a ruthless prosecutor of her own desires', is along with Wilson Maisie's harshest critic:

> Her conduct to the end is a kind of bargain-and-trade ethics seeking personal advantage from the evolving final situation....And so the process of Maisie's knowledge is an ironic one. It culminates in the ascendancy of her ego, untrained, unrestrained, ill-formed, and ethically illiterate, an ego that will satisfy itself even at the cost of what it regards as everything. [2]

Wilson's appraisal stresses the sexual knowledge which he sees as integral to the child's development:

> What Maisie saw was Sir Claude's sexual promiscuity, "his weakness," and the secret she discovered in Bologne [sic] was that to win him for herself and Mrs Wix, she must do battle with her stepmother in terms of that weakness. Her greatest asset opposed to Mrs Beale's lush worldliness is her virginity, and that she is prepared to offer. [3]

Pattison concurs that Maisie is 'angling to capture her mother's estranged husband for herself'; and Kaston adds a new

1. Wilson, 279, 282.


3. Wilson, 281.
twist to this by suggesting that the sexual ambiguity of Sir Claude's relationship to Maisie is matched by Beale's. [1] A milder judgement is offered by Wasiolek who allows her 'the special grace of childhood', while identifying 'the first tremors of sex and self-interest' as occurring naturally together in the adolescent girl:

Maisie's intentions are still frank and honest; although in James's ambiguous art one might speculate that in her further advance into adulthood, self-interest may turn into selfish interests.[2]

At the opposite extreme are the critics who judge Maisie not as corruptible but as 'innocently pure in the midst of miry corruption'.[3] Shine, Geismar and Canby all draw the conclusion that Maisie is too good to be true, and that this is detrimental to the novel. Geismar is frankly dismissive, calling the concept of the novel sentimental and implausible, and labelling Maisie, 'one of the improbable Jamesian infants', a '[1]ittle wooden heroine'.[4] Canby, equally dismissive, says that 'Maisie seems a prodigy rather than a real child'; and even Shine, though more balanced and sympathetic in her approach, believes that James 'has not adequately dramatized effects', and that in omitting to portray aggression and


approach, believes that James 'has not adequately dramatized effects', and that in omitting to portray aggression and hostility in Maisie, he has furthered the development of his theme, but robbed Maisie of psychological authenticity.[1]

The widely divergent interpretations of these critics — those who argue for a corrupted Maisie as well as those who claim untouchable innocence for her — are based on a misunderstanding of James's narrative intention. I have pointed out that James stated his intention to make Maisie's consciousness the frame of the novel, while at the same time portraying accurately the things that she observes but does not necessarily understand. There is an ambiguity inherent in the double consciousness that the narrative mode demands of us. This arises from the fact that we as readers must make our own inferences from the raw material of Maisie's impressions and perceptions. She provides us with a jumble of information, and we are to make sense of it. The general consensus of critical opinion is that the authorial voice is rarely manifest in the novel, so that we are given little indication of what intellectual or moral judgements James intends us to make. For instance Pattison suggests that that narrator hides behind the child in order to 'escape the clear meaning' of what he depicts; that is, he avoids the responsibility for portraying it by pretending to the innocence of a child's viewpoint.[2]. This is an extreme example of the view that in What Maisie Knew

2. Pattison, 134.
with the novel. It is true that we are asked to read the adult implications into an event or conversation that is presented through Maisie, but it is not true that, as Pattison says, the guiding hand of the narrator is withdrawn.[1] On the contrary, as Weinstein notes, there is

...a remarkable increase in tonal possibilities that becomes apparent in all the novels of the nineties and the next decade. By permitting the narrative voice to speak with the intimate, interior tone of his center of consciousness, James can achieve effects of poignancy hitherto impossible....However, James does not limit himself to the appealing effects of the subjective voice in these novels. He effortlessly moves between outer and inner perspectives ....Thus James need not sacrifice the "normative," realistic perspective born of distance, and comedy can mingle unexpectedly with pathos....[2]

The outer and inner perspectives that Weinstein identifies correspond to the two concerns mentioned in the Preface: the outer perspective is the authorial presence, while the inner perspective is Maisie's viewpoint. The former gives us a better idea of the meaning of adult behaviour and conversation than Maisie can, and at the same time puts it into a broader moral perspective. James shifts frequently between inner and outer perspectives, and in doing so includes both the measured judgement born of distance and the poignancy of the interior tone. Thus he is expanding his range of what Weinstein calls tonal possibilities.

The novel constantly employs the free indirect style, a narrative technique in which 'the author appears to address us

1. Pattison, 127.

directly but uses words appropriate to a character in his novel'.[1] Bronzwaer notes that 'free indirect style passages...mark a change... from a less subjective to a more subjective perspective'.[2] To see how this works in What Maisie Knew, and how it helps us identify a particular tone and attitude as the authorial voice, I wish to look closely at a passage from the novel to discover where and how the shifts in perspective occur:

She had the knowledge that on a certain occasion which every day brought nearer her mother would be at the door to take her away, and this would have darkened all the days if the ingenious Moddle hadn't written on a paper in very big easy words ever so many pleasures that she would enjoy at the other house. These promises ranged from 'a mother's fond love' to 'a nice poached egg to your tea', and took by the way the prospect of sitting up ever so late to see the lady in question dressed, in silks and velvets and diamonds and pearls, to go out: so that it was a real support to Maisie, at the supreme hour, to feel how, by Moddle's direction, the paper was thrust away in her pocket and there clenched in her fist (30).

James here evokes the air of childhood in the passage not by using Maisie's own language but by selecting words that suggest her language and her mode of thought, and by using also the idiom of the nurse Moddle, whose common speech expresses Maisie's favourite concepts when communicating with the child. The first sentence is an example of the blend of narrative comment with the child's viewpoint: 'She had the knowledge that on a certain occasion...'. Maisie, knowing of her eventual departure from her father's house, sees it as something

concrete; she has the knowledge as firmly in her possession as the piece of paper later thrust in her pocket. It is a certainty that can be counted on, and is all the more important because such certainties in Maisie's world are rare. Although she is secure in her knowledge of departure, she is unsure when it will occur. She is primarily aware of the impending nature of the event, which will take place on a 'certain occasion', a phrase at once portentous and vague, conveying Maisie's helpless dependence on the whims of the adults. She possesses the hard fact that she is soon to leave, but is faced with the awful uncertainty of knowing only that each day brings it nearer. On that occasion Ida will materialize suddenly on Beale's doorstep demanding her instant attendance: '...Her mother would be at the door to take her away...'. This is a subjective rendering of the child's impression, where the event of Ida's appearance is isolated in the child's imagination as if her mother exists only in those moments when Maisie is face to face with her. 'The actual was the absolute, the present alone was vivid', James says earlier of her childish consciousness (31). In this way her vulnerability is much more immediate than Isabel's or Milly's.

So far the sentence has suggested almost concretely the 'feel' of the child's inner consciousness, in words which are not hers, but are appropriate to the concerns and impressions of the insecure Maisie. Because the narrative does not use her actual language in direct or reported speech, the shift that now occurs between inner and outer perspectives is not a jarring change of style but a subtle fusion of the two. In the middle of the sentence the narrative moves from its
identification with Maisie's concerns to adopt a melodramatic tone, which immediately introduces a note of irony into the passage: '...this would have darkened all the days...'. The comic overstatement detaches us from Maisie's mode of thought and suggests a broader intelligence at work. The shift in tone signals a shift in narrative perspective, and the reader's empathy with Maisie is temporarily diverted or suspended. The inflated language continues ironically with 'the ingenious Moddle': the ingenuity of the nurse merely consisting in making a list for Maisie of the nice things to look forward to at her mother's house. Perhaps — to be fair to Moddle — this is as much as anyone can do for Maisie to make the prospect of Ida less fearsome, yet the naive faith of the nurse in the power of the written word is gently mocked in the last half of the sentence, as the narrative echoes Moddle's idiom. She had 'written on a paper in very big easy words ever so many pleasures that [Maisie] would enjoy at the other house'. Without direct or indirect speech we hear Moddle's speaking voice. This is a use of a free indirect style, denoting a change in the narrative point of view from the authorial voice to one of the characters; from an ironic detachment to a more subjective perspective. The narrative is couched in the simple language that a nurse might use to a child, so that while Moddle's idiom is being used Maisie's mind is being implicitly evoked. There is an interesting doubt as to whether the phrase 'ever so' is Moddle's or Maisie's language. Whichever it is, it reflects by its ambiguity the degree of interaction between them, and stresses the peculiarly vulnerable position of the child in her reliance on her elders.
The narrator elaborates 'ever so many pleasures': 'These promises ranged from "a mother's fond love" to "a nice poached egg to your tea"...'. The juxtaposition of the two promises is clearly ironical. That Maisie must be promised her mother's love in a phrase redolent of cliché, and that it is catalogued with a nice poached egg, suggests a dubious quality in Ida's maternal affection and the slight futility of Moddle's list-making. The nurse intends to comfort, and her list does temporarily comfort; she has risen to the need of the child in a way that Ida never does. Maisie's need and the trivial comfort which is the only one that Moddle can offer, give us the measure of Maisie's extreme childish naivety as yet. The use of 'promises' illustrates the subtle imposition of Maisie's personality on the narrative. Moddle has made a list of pleasant experiences to look forward to; Maisie's eager imagination perceives them as promises. The transformation of pleasures into promises is a function of the child's strong desire for security. Although the narrative does not overtly indicate that the word 'promises' refers to Maisie's idea of the meaning of Moddle's list, yet on careful reading it becomes clear that this is implied. Ida's detachment from the child (and therefore the poignancy of Maisie's position) is reinforced by the use of 'the lady in question' to refer to her. The implication is that Ida is more the impersonal lady than a mother capable of intimacy (unless it is more appropriate to describe her as even less of a mother than she is a lady). Ironically, Moddle's idea of Maisie's enjoyment of maternal comfort is to see Ida dressed to go out, 'in silks and velvets and diamonds and pearls'. The list of fabrics and
jewels, along with the repetition of 'and', suggest the impact of the mother's exotic appearance on the child and the quality of awe and admiration which Maisie must feel for a mother who is, characteristically, about to be an absence rather than a presence.

Inflated rhetoric occurs again in reference to the actual moment of Maisie's departure from her father's house. It is the 'supreme hour', a phrase suggestive of the long awaited moment of battle. Maisie (who has earlier in the novel been described as 'a drummer-boy...in the thick of the fight' (27) ) has the list of promises 'thrust away in her pocket and there clenched in her fist'. It is as if the piece of paper is a talisman, a promise in itself of happiness and certainty. Whatever felicity it represents for her, the narrator in his choice of the words 'thrust', 'clenched' and 'fist' is showing us Maisie's grim but comical determination to hold on to it at any cost, and her continuing need (arising from her vulnerability) for such fundamentally trivial comforts.

To sum up: in the space of only two sentences we have observed several shifts of perspective. Firstly, the narrative voice really expresses the concerns of the child, articulating the interior perspective she has, but has no words for; secondly, it adopts an ironical outside view of her situation. This is heralded by the inflated language which effectively sets a distance between the reader and Maisie. In this passage the ironic detachment is followed and reinforced by the mimicry of the condescending language that Moddle uses to the child. We have seen that the nurse is directly quoted at the beginning of the next sentence ('a mother's fond love' and 'a nice
poached egg'); the voice which asserts itself again through to the end of the sentence is once more impersonal and ironic. Within this the narrative reverts twice to Maisie's point of view, by using syntax that is distinctly childish: '...took by the way the prospect of sitting up ever so late to see the lady in question dressed, in silks and velvets and diamonds and pearls, to go out...' (my emphasis). The Moddle/Maisie 'ever so' construction, though I have noted the ambiguity of its source, is still identifiable with the child (not least as a conflation of nurse and child: Moddle using language appropriate to a small child; the appropriate childish language conjuring Maisie). In the next clause, with 'so that it was a real support to Maisie', there is a shift back to the authorial voice. The passage as a whole demonstrates the skilful weaving of tone and perspective through which the author directs our sympathies and judgement.

The blend of pathos and comedy, as the narrator draws the reader in and out of Maisie's mind, is subtle and effective....By remaining within the girl's mind and choosing just the proper words to bring the reader in (poignancy) or keep him out (comic detachment), James is able to achieve rich and varied effects.[1]

Clearly, the novel does not suffer from the lack of a guiding narrative hand. The constant shifting of perspective provides a continuing commentary on the action that leaves us in no doubt about the moral sympathies of the authorial voice. One order of judgement is implied when the authorial voice mocks the well-intentioned Moddle, but the gentle nature of the mockery and its tone of amusement acknowledge that she is at

1. Weinstein, 76, 77.
least offering a kind of comfort to Maisie that, however trivial, is partially effective. Quite a different order of judgement is applied in the impersonal reference to Ida, 'the lady in question'. Muddle's heart is in the right place, Ida's is not; and in portraying the latter as wholly detached from her daughter, physically and emotionally, the implied judgement is much more harsh.

The novel exhibits a far greater economy of structure than The Portrait of a Lady. It helps to focus the larger conception of the novel – the limitation of perspective to what the child sees – on the main theme of Maisie's development, by presenting only those scenes which significantly contribute to it. In this way the thrust of the novel is directed consistently. It is in contrast to the more leisurely structure of Portrait, which includes material not strictly significant to the main theme, and a large number of characters, not all of whom are central to the action. The number of characters in What Maisie Knew is deliberately kept small. The five main characters are all closely related to Maisie, and have a significant bearing on her development. The minor characters are decidedly minor: Susan Ash, the Countess, Muddle and the Captain appear in the novel where they are needed to illustrate something about Maisie, and not simply for variety or comic effect. (I have already discussed the function of the Captain in the previous chapter.) They do not create the kind of interest in themselves that, for instance, Henrietta Stackpole does. The minor characters in What Maisie Knew are subordinate to the development of the main theme.
We can see that James, when he wrote *What Maisie Knew* (and also *The Wings of the Dove*), had a different kind of novel in mind from the one he had in writing *The Portrait of a Lady*. In general terms his later approach is characterized by a limitation in scope and a greater depth and intensity of focus on his subject. The difference between *Portrait* and *Maisie* is illustrated by James's remarks in the respective Prefaces on how the germ of each novel first appeared to him. The earlier work arose

...not at all in any conceit of a 'plot'...but altogether in the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to which all the usual elements of a 'subject,' certainly of a setting, were to need to be super-added (15).

In the later novel the setting and the plot are present from the first:

The accidental mention had been made to me of the manner in which the situation of some luckless child of a divorced couple was affected, under my informant's eyes, by the remarriage of one of its parents - I forget which; so that, thanks to the limited desire for its company expressed by the step-parent, the law of its little life, its being entertained in rotation by its father and its mother, wouldn't easily prevail (11).

In the former novel he began with the idea of a character, and went on to organize 'an ado' about her; to arrange a set of experiences for her in which her character is tested. It is how these experiences act on and exhibit the character of Isabel Archer - for this is what 'happens' to her - that constitutes the principle interest of *Portrait*. In contrast, what 'happens' to Maisie is already given; her situation is the *donnée* James starts with. It is not the child's external circumstances which particularly interest James, but instead the growth of her internal consciousness and the effect it has on those she
is in contact with. Weinstein notes that

..."what is going on" is almost wholly, in James's later work, something reflected from the mind of one or more characters; mere event or plot objectively depicted seems hardly to interest him at all.

Rather, the perceiving mind - particularly during the moments of perception - has begun to engross the author's attention to such a degree that what appeared exceptional in The Portrait - Isabel's sitting alone "motionlessly seeing" - is, with a few changes, the modus operandi of What Maisie Knew ....Isabel...seems to be a character always doing something, and the ramifications of what she does...form the sizable plot - the spectrum of experience - of that novel....Isabel's physical isolation in chapter xlii, however, is replaced by what is virtually an unbroken psychic isolation on the part of Maisie....[1]

Thus Portrait seems a conventional novel when compared to Maisie, The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl. The primary concern of the later novels is to explore the consciousness of one or more of the main characters, and to represent the mind in all the subtlety of its operation. The novels are committed to the exploration and representation of consciousness divorced from and unrestrained by the mechanical considerations of plot; they are in this sense psychological novels in a way in which Portrait is not. In the case of Maisie, our interest is in seeing at what point or points a general awareness of the inexplicability of the adult world will give way to a dawning grasp of the facts of adult manipulativeness. This grasp brings a knowledge of adult motives and an understanding of the implications of adult behaviour. The question arises, will it also destroy innocence? I would like now to turn from general discussion to specific analysis, and show the progress of Maisie's awareness through her relationship with the

1. Weinstein, 73-4.
When we first see Maisie with Miss Overmore (the future Mrs Beale) it is not the occasion of their first meeting. It is unlike the first meeting of Isabel and Madame Merle in Portrait, which is visually dramatic and evokes an atmosphere pregnant with the implication of Madame Merle's duplicity. In contrast to the drama of this scene, we initially meet Miss Overmore in the nursery, prosaically darning stockings. The scene is deliberately unromantic, as if to emphasize the mundane routine of a child's existence.

It is typical of what I have called the structural economy of this novel that the apparently slight scene in which Miss Overmore is introduced should contribute significantly to our sense of Maisie's growth in awareness. Miss Overmore here is introduced as the catalyst in a 'moral revolution' which is 'accomplished in the depths' of Maisie's nature: the child's recognition that she is used as a messenger of insult between her parents, and her subsequent decision to repeat no longer what each says about the other:

It was Miss Overmore, her first governess, who on a momentous occasion had sown the seeds of secrecy; sown them not by anything she said, but by a mere roll of those fine eyes which Maisie already admired (32).

Maisie's admiration of her governess echoes Isabel's for Madame Merle. It establishes Maisie in the same kind of relationship to the manipulative woman: she is charmed by her and regards her as a superior being on account of her social skills and her grace.

This sentence does more than describe the nature of the child's relationship to Miss Overmore; it suggests the subtle process by which she acquires knowledge. It is indeed a
momentous occasion for her to realize that she can put an end to her parent's mutual insults, merely by her silent refusal to repeat them. It is her first discovery that she can modify her own life, so that she is no longer 'the little feathered shuttlecock [her parents] could fiercely keep flying between them' (31). This is the first step towards exchanging a passive for an active role. Maisie's acuteness of perception is conveyed in these lines; her unusual situation fosters it, in forcing her to try to understand what is happening to her and what things mean:

It was to be the fate of this patient little girl to see much more than she at first understood....She was taken into the confidence of passions on which she fixed just the stare she might have had for images bounding across the wall in the slide of a magic-lantern. Her little world was phantasmagoric - strange shadows dancing on a sheet (27).

Because her attempt to make sense of her world is, by necessity of her age and dependent status, confined mainly to spectatorship, she absorbs information without knowing its meaning until she receives a clue which enables her to make sense of it:

By the time she had grown sharper...she found in her mind a collection of images and echoes to which meanings were attachable - images and echoes kept for her in the childish dusk, the dim closet, the high drawers, like games she wasn't yet big enough to play (29).

The process of acquiring knowledge out of the confusion surrounding her is generally invisible to others, being accomplished in the depths of her nature. Miss Overmore for instance has no way of knowing that her wordless response to a question of Maisie's sparks a moral revolution in the child. Maisie's admiration of Miss Overmore is uncritical and unsophisticated; yet even the simple act of comparing the
governess's behaviour with that of Muddle, the former nurse, shows her mind in the process of logically deducing from the comparison that Miss Overmore is a superior being:

Muddle had become at this time, after alternations of residence of which the child had no clear record, an image faintly embalmed in the remembrance of hungry disappearances from the nursery and distressful lapses in the alphabet....Miss Overmore, however hungry, never disappeared: this marked her somehow as of higher rank, and the character was confirmed by a prettiness that Maisie supposed to be extraordinary (32).

In the narrative, as in her chaotic little life, her perceptions and deductions are interspersed with the things she hears but does not understand. Often these things have a sexual connotation, so that in fact she cannot understand them:

Mrs Farange had described [Miss Overmore] as almost too pretty, and some one had asked what that mattered so long as Beale wasn't there. 'Beale or no Beale,' Maisie had heard her mother reply, 'I take her because she's a lady and yet awfully poor. Rather nice people, but there are seven sisters at home. What do people mean?'

Maisie didn't know what people meant, but she knew very soon all the names of all the sisters; she could say them off better than she could say the multiplication-table (32-3).

Here Maisie's innocence is deliberately juxtaposed with the knowingness of the adults, and the contrast brings out both. Maisie mightn't know what people mean, but we do; her complete ignorance (and therefore her vulnerability) in the presence of the adults' sexual innuendo invites our sympathy. By including in the narrative these things which Maisie does not understand, James conveys to us the information which allows us to judge the adults and their behaviour independently of the child's uncritical acceptance. The inclusion of such information conveys important facts and attitudes that she does not have access to, and it accentuates the moral gulf between adult and child, which elicits our sympathy for Maisie.
Our sympathy with her is confirmed by her qualities of innocence, responsiveness to others and instinctive generosity:

...Miss Overmore never, like Moddle, had on an apron, and when she ate she held her fork with her little finger curled out. The child, who watched her at many moments, watched her particularly at that one. 'I think you're lovely,' she often said to her; even mamma, who was lovely too, had not such a pretty way with the fork (33).

Maisie's naive response - 'I think you're lovely' - indicates her absolute openness to adults. She has no defences against them, and no idea that defences might be necessary. Just as, earlier, she shared Moddle's attitudes and vocabulary, she now accepts Miss Overmore's manner of holding her fork as something to be admired and probably emulated. Too young to form her own judgements of gentility and elegance, she is unaware that Miss Overmore's table manners are rather vulgar in their ostentation, and are an indication not of true elegance but of the governess's aspirations to it. One cannot assess the extent or damaging character of the adult manipulativeness to which Maisie is subjected until the degree of her original innocence has been settled; and this kind of evidence of her innocence is irrefutable. She is ripe for exploitation, in the same way that Isabel is shown to be in her first meeting with Madame Merle. Isabel is charmed by appearances; by Madame Merle's style and manner: 'She liked her extremely, but was even more dazzled than attracted' (218). This comment on Isabel applies equally to Maisie's admiration of her governess.

Miss Overmore for her part is like Madame Merle in one important respect: she cares for the show of a thing:

...she had a stocking pulled over her hand and was pricking at it with a needle which she poised in the act. Her task was homely, but her movement, like all her movements, graceful (33).
...she had a stocking pulled over her hand and was pricking at it with a needle which she poised in the act. Her task was homely, but her movement, like all her movements, graceful (33).

We feel with Maisie that this woman who eats with her little finger curled out is indeed a 'showier presence' than Moddle (33). The adjective 'showy' has the same kind of implication that we have already noted in James's use of 'show' in the description of Madame Merle's piano playing. To use the phrase 'a showier presence' is to suggest that a certain visual effect is aimed at, and that by implication something is hidden or masked by the outward appearance of the thing. To have a gullible Maisie or Isabel responding with enthusiasm to a showy presence is equally ironic.

The suggestion of duplicity in Miss Overmore's character is reinforced by her wordless response to Maisie's asking if she should pass on an insult that Ida wishes her daughter to convey to Beale:

Miss Overmore turned very red, though she laughed out till her head fell back; then she pricked again at her muffled hand so hard that Maisie wondered how she could bear it. 'Am I to tell him?' the child went on. It was then that her companion addressed her in the unmistakeable language of a pair of eyes of deep dark grey. 'I can't say No,' they replied as distinctly as possible; 'I can't say No, because I'm afraid of your mamma, don't you see? Yet how can I say Yes after your papa has been so kind to me, talking to me so long the other day, smiling and flashing his beautiful teeth at me the time we met him in the Park, the time when, rejoicing at the sight of us, he left the gentlemen he was with and turned and walked with us, stayed with us for half an hour?' (33-4).

Duplicity is implied in both the muffled hand and deep dark eyes, and in the 'unmistakeable' language of those eyes which hint at Miss Overmore's ambiguous attitude to Maisie's parents. Of course we are being asked to swallow a lot in this mute communication; it is far too much to be implied in a single
of Maisie's mind at work. What the narrator has assumed without explicitly stating is the intellectual process in Maisie of attaching meanings to memories. In this passage Miss Overmore's glance serves to crystallize for Maisie two distinct memories: the governess's fear of Mamma, and her liking for Papa. These facts become clear to the child here for the first time. Miss Overmore's glance is also the catalyst which enables Maisie to place the separate memories side by side and understand that the juxtaposition is somehow significant. The fanciful expression of the meaning of the glance is a kind of narrative shorthand for conveying Maisie's conscious perception that the two pieces of knowledge exist and make new sense together.

Somehow in the light of Miss Overmore's lovely eyes that incident came back to Maisie with a charm it hadn't had at the time, and this in spite of the fact that after it was over her governess had never but once alluded to it (34).

The charm with which she invests the incident is echoed in her 'charmed sense of being liked by [Miss Overmore]' (34). The repetition of 'charm' (with its connotations of being bewitched, entranced, or even hypnotized) suggests that Miss Overmore has already won Maisie's allegiance more easily and more completely than Madame Merle wins Isabel's. The relationship with Maisie, maintained from this point on by the governess with a view to its possible usefulness, depends on the naivety and trust of the child:

Maisie's ignorance of what she was to be saved from didn't diminish the pleasure of the thought that Miss Overmore was saving her. It seemed to make them cling together as in some wild game of 'going round' (34).

The image of Maisie clinging to her governess evokes her extreme vulnerability to manipulation, while at the same time
conveying the giddy insecurity of her life. The 'wildness' of the game suggests an essential lawlessness as well as the unpredictable movements of the players, and both these features describe the behaviour of the adults in the novel.

Miss Overmore recognizes the opportunities for using Maisie very early in the piece, and acts on them before she is married to Maisie's father. We recognize what she is up to very early too, as we do with Madame Merle, but the striking difference between this novel and Portrait is that Maisie also sees (in her innocent way) that she is useful to her governess:

The only terms on which, unless they were married, ladies and gentleman might, as Miss Overmore expressed it, knock about together, were the terms on which she and Mr Parange had exposed themselves to possible misconception. She had indeed, as has been noted, often explained this before, often said to Maisie: 'I don't know what in the world, darling, your father and I should do without you, for you just make the difference, as I've told you, of keeping us perfectly proper.' The child took in the office it was so endearingly presented to her that she performed a comfort that helped her to a sense of security even in the event of her mother's giving her up (49).

Thus there is no one moment when Miss Overmore recognizes that Maisie might be useful to her, as in Portrait, but rather a continuing series of occasions upon which her usefulness is acknowledged by the adults - generally by Miss Overmore, and often by the man she is currently involved with: firstly Beale and later Sir Claude. It is in her relationship with Sir Claude that Maisie's usefulness becomes most apparent and is most generally recognized by all: the two themselves, Maisie, Mrs Wix, Ida and Beale. Maisie regards the fact that she brought them together in a positive light, and it is part of the irony of her situation that she sees it this way. The process of her maturation hinges on her dawning knowledge that
her stepmother loves her no further than her usefulness extends; but for the greater part of the novel she innocently accepts that she is wanted and does not question the motive behind it. The process of maturation means that she must develop her powers of discrimination in order to differentiate between professed regard and genuine affection. By the last scene Maisie is able to make even more sophisticated judgements: not only does she know that Sir Claude genuinely cares for her in a way that Mrs Beale does not, but she sees equally plainly that his weakness and his fear of Mrs Beale will always overshadow his affection for herself.

Miss Overmore's first overt use of Maisie as an object to manipulate for her own benefit occurs in an encounter between the two governesses. Mrs Wix has arrived to announce Ida's engagement to Sir Claude, and to prepare Maisie for her mother's overdue resumption of maternal rights. A physical struggle for the possession of the child underscores the exchange. Miss Overmore says to Maisie: ' "Mrs Wix...has some undiscoverable reason for regarding your mother's hold on you as strengthened by the fact that she's about to marry" '(57). She has an equivalent piece of information to impart and a similar assumption to make about her newly strengthened guardianship of Maisie:

'Papa's not about to marry - papa is married, my dear. Papa was married the day before yesterday at Brighton.' Miss Overmore glittered more gaily; meanwhile it came over Maisie, and quite dazzlingly, that her 'smart' governess was a bride. 'He's my husband, if you please, and I'm his little wife. So now we'll see who's your little mother!' (58).

Now, of course, Miss Overmore's interest in Maisie does not have the same object. Her marriage to Beale means that 'her
small companion [is] no longer required at home as...a little duenna' to regularize the governess's presence in the house (60). Maisie, grasping the idea of the changed relationship between her parents, their new spouses and herself, asks:

'Shall you be different - ?' This was a full implication that the bride of Sir Claude would be.

'As your father's wedded wife ? Utterly!' Miss Overmore replied. And the difference began of course in her being addressed, even by Maisie, from that day and by her particular request, as Mrs Beale. It was there indeed principally that it ended...everything made the same impression as before. Mrs Beale had very pretty frocks, but Miss Overmore's had been quite as good... (59).

Such material differences are naturally the kind of thing a small girl would look for. However the significant difference in Mrs Beale after marriage is something which Maisie notes but fails to attach particular importance to: her stepmother's changing attitude to her husband:

...[the] honeymoon was perhaps perceptibly tinged with the dawn of a later stage of wedlock. There were things dislike of which, as the child knew it, wouldn't matter to Mrs Beale now, and their number increased so that such a trifle as [Beale's] hostility to the photograph of Sir Claude quite dropped out of view (59-60).

Maisie in her innocence accepts this as a natural outcome of marriage (it 'wouldn't matter...now'), and does not interpret it as the result of Mrs Beale's feeling that she no longer has to keep up the appearance of tolerance, or of a romantic interest in Beale, in order to ensure their marriage.

For the moment Mrs Beale has what she wants, but very shortly afterwards she meets and begins to take an interest in Sir Claude, and in this relationship Maisie innocently assumes a significant role. She becomes in the first meeting between the step-parents the focus of their sexually suggestive banter. Mrs Beale says:
'What seems to have happened is that she has brought you and me together.'
'She has brought you and me together,' said Sir Claude. His cheerful echo prolonged the happy truth, and Maisie broke out almost with enthusiasm: 'I've brought you and her together!'
Her companions of course laughed anew and Mrs Beale gave her an affectionate shake. 'You little monster — take care what you do! But that's what she does do,' she continued to Sir Claude. 'She did it to me and Beale.'
'Well then,' he said to Maisie, 'you must try the trick at our place' (67).

Hereon Maisie is to become the pretext for future meetings between the two step-parents, and consequently is just as necessary to Mrs Beale's designs on Sir Claude as she ever was to her designs on Beale. Sir Claude in his passivity accepts the situation, much as Densher does Kate's plan.

Mrs Beale's physical interaction with the girl expresses her possessive interest in her, and in this scene the stepmother's handling of Maisie punctuates the conversation. She clasps her in a tender embrace, 'gathered in her little charge', 'playfully whacked her smaller companion', 'screw[ed] her round and gaz[ed] fondly' at her, clings to, affectionately shakes and tugs at her (63,65-7). Her physical manipulation of the child is intended to establish, in front of Sir Claude, her credentials as a loving parent. The tenderness of the embrace, the fondness of the gaze and the affection are never as evident when Maisie and Mrs Beale are alone together. The logical outcome of this is what occurs in the last scene of the novel, when Mrs Beale's desperation to retain Maisie is described in increasingly oppressive terms:

She threw herself upon the child and, before Maisie could resist, had sunk with her upon the sofa, possesssed of her, encircling her....Maisie had shut her eyes, but at a word of Sir Claude's they opened. 'Let her go!' He said to Mrs Beale.
'Never, never, never!' cried Mrs Beale. Maisie felt herself more compressed (277).
Maisie's reunion with Mrs Beale in Chapter XIV exhibits the same tendency on her stepmother's part to make a show of her affection:

Mrs Beale fairly swooped upon her, and the effect of the whole hour was to show the child how much, how quite formidably indeed, after all, she was loved. This was the more the case as her stepmother, so changed — in the very manner of her mother — that she really struck her as a new acquaintance, somehow recalled more familiarity than Maisie could feel. A rich strong expressive affection in short pounced upon her in the shape of a handsomer, ampler, older Mrs Beale. It was like making a fine friend...(108).

Maisie may interpret Mrs Beale's behaviour as proof of her affection, and only feel that it recalls more familiarity than she herself can feel, but the passage has a distinctly ominous tone. The effect of 'swooped' and 'pounced' is to show us Mrs Beale as a predatory animal, and by extension Maisie as her prey. It is in fact Mrs Beale's affection which pounces upon Maisie. To divorce the emotion from the woman and to attribute to it this degree of active autonomy is to imply that the emotion does not truly belong to the woman. To couple the words 'love' and 'formidable' thus is only too appropriate both to the meaning and the expression of Mrs Beale's professed affection for the child. The phrase 'how quite formidably' is in the author's voice, but in this context it is used to identify an emotion or an understanding which is in Maisie's mind an intuition as yet; a still unrecognized fact about the adult world. She does not at this moment feel the 'compression' of the last scene, but her intuition adumbrates the feeling that such love as Mrs Beale's has something demanding and oppressive about it. Again, in noticing that Mrs Beale recalls 'more familiarity than Maisie could feel', Maisie has reached a similar halfway stage; it is an intuition not
yet formulated by her in words (that is, not yet a thought) of some falseness of emotion and a demand made on her for a false response.

Maisie's growing detachment from Mrs Beale is apparent: her stepmother 'really struck her as a new acquaintance'; she feels as though she is 'making a fine friend'. She observes too that Mrs Beale is becoming more like her mother who, as she has earlier told Sir Claude, 'doesn't care for me...Not really' (81). Although she is still rather dazzled by Mrs Beale's appearance and manner in the way we observed when we first saw them together, this impression exists alongside a developing tendency to view her objectively: 'She seemed to Maisie charming to behold, and also to have no connection at all with anybody who had once mended underclothing and had meals in the nursery' (109). In her perceptibly increasing detachment Maisie is unconsciously preparing for the full recognition of Mrs Beale's motives and character, and her own overt rebellion against her, which occur in the final scenes in France.

Maisie's arrival in France brings the flowering of the young girl's consciousness. In Boulogne, where she has been taken by Sir Claude in an attempt to establish his right to guardianship of her, she is herself aware of having

...the great ecstasy of a larger impression of life. She was 'abroad' and she gave herself up to it, responded to it, in the bright air, before the pink houses, among the bare-legged fishwives and the red-legged soldiers, with the instant certitude of a vocation. Her vocation was to see the world and to thrill with enjoyment of the picture; she had grown older in five minutes... (187-8).

It is her initiation into a sense of independent selfhood, and the outcome of the moment early in her childhood when she experienced the first tremor of independence in her decision
not to repeat the insults of one parent to the other. It is an appropriate measure of Maisie's development that the reward she then gained from her action was an entirely private satisfaction; now in Boulogne her satisfaction expresses itself outwardly:

She explained to Susan, she laughed at Susan, she towered over Susan; and it was somehow Susan's stupidity, of which she had never been so sure, and Susan's bewilderment and ignorance and antagonism, that gave the liveliest rebound to her immediate perceptions and adoptions (188).

The repetition of 'Susan' and the string of adjectives suggest the exuberance of the child in her new-found maturity. She exudes confidence; for the first time her consciousness is unleashed from the restraints of spectatorship. With this new sense of independence Maisie has come of age: '...she recognised, she understood, she adored and took possession; feeling herself attuned to everything and laying her hand, right and left, on what had simply been waiting for her' (188).

A sense of inevitability is conveyed in the idea that Maisie is taking hold of something which already exists. This is inherent in the transitive verbs used to describe the operation of her mind: she recognizes, she understands, she is attuned; taking possession implies a change in her perception of her own possibilities. The removal to France away from all that is familiar has acted as a catalyst; but it is implied that she would have come into her own sometime, regardless of her external circumstances. Now that she has begun to conceive of herself as an individual and to enjoy the sense of freedom it brings, the next step for her to take is actively to direct the course of her life. When, with the arrival of Mrs Beale, the issue of Maisie's guardianship becomes crucial, the girl
begins to take a stand on what she wants, and does not constantly try to accommodate herself to the desires of the adults as her native generosity and deference have previously urged. (Isabel and Milly also reach the point where their trust in others begins to erode, so that they can no longer unquestioningly accommodate themselves to the plans others have for them.) Maisie's stand is small but crucial, prompted by the dawning recognition that she is a pawn in the adult game of guardianship:

She put it together with a suspicion that, had she ever in her life had a sovereign changed, would have resembled an impression, baffled by the want of arithmetic, that her change was wrong: she groped about in it that she was perhaps playing the passive part in a case of violent substitution. A victim was what she should surely be if the issue between her step-parents had been settled by Mrs Beale's saying: 'Well, if she can live with but one of us alone, with which in the world should it be but me?' That answer was far from what, for days, she had nursed herself in...(237).

At this point Maisie has begun to understand what she wants for her future by seeing clearly what she does not want: that is, Mrs Beale alone. In a previous chapter before Mrs Beale arrives Maisie had been toying sentimentally with the idea of 'the beauty and antiquity of her connexion with the flower of the Overmores', a phrase conveying the younger Maisie's uncritical admiration of Mrs Beale (215). Now, although she has begun to be more discriminating in her relations with the adults, the tentative nature of the words 'groping', 'baffled', 'suspicion' and 'perhaps' imply the uncertainty with which she privately begins to challenge their absolute authority and veracity.

From this moment we can follow her growing determination to reject the solutions for her future that do not suit her.
We see it in her increasingly detached observation of Mrs Beale:

Maisie could appreciate her fatigue; the day had not passed without such an observer's discovering that she was excited and even mentally comparing her state to that of the breakers after a gale. It had blown hard in London, and she would take time to go down. It was of the condition known to the child by report as that of talking against time that her emphasis, her spirit, her humour, which had never dropped, now gave the impression (239).

The metaphorical description of Mrs Beale as taking time to go down indicates the detachment with which the girl views her. Maisie's new objectivity perceives Mrs Beale's own determination to manipulate the situation to her advantage, and perceives as well the importance that her stepmother places on it. She is 'talking against time', a phrase which suggests an underlying desperation in her efforts to win over Mrs Wix. Mrs Beale is playing her last card in a bid to retain the primary guardianship of Maisie. For her it is the only position in which she can command social standing or have any bargaining power with Sir Claude. Her enterprise is thus tinged with a bravado that even the child can see. Maisie notices her

...quite showy exemption from bewilderment at Boulogne, her acuteness on some of the very subjects on which Maisie had been acute to Mrs Wix, were a high note of the majesty, of the variety of advantage, with which she had alighted. It was all part of the wind in her sails and of the weight with which her daughter was now to feel her hand (240).

Her 'showy exemption from bewilderment' implies two things; firstly that it 'shows' enough to be evident to Maisie; and secondly that it is a deliberate effort to appear unruffled and in command. The image of Mrs Beale inflated by the wind in her sails harks back to Maisie's comparison of her to breakers after a gale, and raises the question of whether it is the girl
who foresees 'the weight with which [she] was now to feel [Mrs Beale's] hand', or whether this is a report of her stepmother's more or less conscious intention. The use of 'daughter' would suggest that it is attributable to Mrs Beale, and if so the phrase has rather sinister connotations of physical chastisement and retribution.

Mrs Beale's presence and Maisie's negative response to it make the girl all the more aware of what she is missing:

The effect of it on Maisie was to add already the burden of time to her separation from Sir Claude. This might, to her sense, have lasted for days....Hour after hour she felt as if she were waiting; yet she couldn't have said exactly for what (240).

She is of course waiting for Sir Claude, but there is something more implied in the last sentence which is not so easily articulated. Maisie expects something decisive to happen, and the effect of the passage is deliberately anticipatory, adding to our expectation of a crisis. Mrs Beale is closely associated with the developing tension: 'There were moments when [her] flow of talk was a mere rattle to smother a knock' (240). A deliberate deception is suggested here, contributing to the impression that what the novel is building up to is at least in part the revelation of what Mrs Beale is hiding. She is principally hiding her true motives for arriving in Boulogne without Sir Claude, for 'making love' (as Maisie puts it) to Mrs Wix, and for establishing herself as Maisie's guardian. Maisie, with her gathering grasp of the behaviour of the adults, is working towards the same conclusion.

Her new awareness of her stepmother and her changing attitude towards her are recorded in the first private exchange between the two after Mrs Beale's arrival. Her stepmother,
'with a push at last incontestably maternal', seems to lay claim to Maisie, with frightening overtones of Ida's cold manner (240). In doing so, the phrase 'at last' would suggest, she begins to fulfil Maisie's sense of expectation. The push manifests her attitude to her stepdaughter, whom she treats as an object to be manipulated. It is followed by this significant exchange:

'I'm going to divorce your father.'
This was so different from anything Maisie had expected that it took some time to reach her mind. She was aware meanwhile that she probably looked rather wan. 'To marry Sir Claude?'
Mrs Beale rewarded her with a kiss. 'It's sweet to hear you put it so.'
This was a tribute, but it left Maisie balancing for an objection. 'How can you when he's married?'
'He isn't - practically. He's free, you know.'
'Free to marry?'
'Free, first, to divorce his own fiend.'
The benefit that, these last days, she had felt she owed a certain person left Maisie a moment so ill-prepared for recognising this lurid label that she hesitated long enough to risk: 'Mamma?'
'She isn't your mamma any longer,' Mrs Beale returned. 'Sir Claude has paid her money to cease to be' (240-1).

The picture of Maisie balancing for an objection in the face of a tribute from Mrs Beale is something new. Along with the fact that she recognizes her own sense of shock, and is aware that it may even be physically obvious, it adds to the general picture of the child's growing determination to question the right of the adults to decide her future for her. This goes hand in hand with her maturing perception of Mrs Beale. The stepmother's crude analysis of Ida's relationship to her daughter illustrates her own ruthlessly pragmatic nature, and indicates the depths to which she will sink to serve her interests. To present the maternal relationship as one that can be bought and sold, and to imply thereby that a daughter is
a thing to trade, is an ironic comment on Mrs Beale's own claim to Maisie. Maisie, though not recognizing precisely this in the remark, recognizes a wild discrepancy between what she knows and feels about Mamma (who has just sent Mrs Wix to Boulogne for the child's benefit), and the 'lurid label' that her stepmother attaches to Ida.

This kind of private recognition is an important element in Maisie's development. It contributes to her conscious decision to offer resistance to Mrs Beale, which is apparent in her reply to the latter's assertion that Sir Claude will get a divorce:

Maisie was briefly silent; after which, 'No - he won't get it,' she said. Then she added still more boldly: 'And you won't get yours.'

Mrs Beale, who was at the dressing-glass, turned round with amusement and surprise. 'How do you know that?'

'Oh I know!' cried Maisie.

'From Mrs Wix?'

Maisie debated, then after an instant took her cue from Mrs Beale's absence of anger, which struck her the more as she had felt how much of her courage she needed. 'From Mrs Wix,' she admitted (241).

Maisie's contradiction of Mrs Beale is relatively minor, and yet it is a milestone for her. Her boldness and the courage she needed show that it is a weighty decision to stand her ground and contradict this particular adult. Her fear of her stepmother's anger, notable here by its absence, makes her resistance all the more remarkable. Obviously fear is a significant part of her response to Mrs Beale - not just the fear of offending her, but the fear of retribution. For instance, shortly after the preceding exchange Maisie is 'relieved now of the fear that their visitor would wish to separate her for the night from [Mrs Wix] ' (242).

Her determination to resist the influence of the adults is
also evident in a conversation with Mrs Wix in which they discuss which step-parent each would prefer as Maisie's guardian. Maisie is not afraid of Mrs Wix in the way she is of Mrs Beale, so that she can more confidently go beyond mere contradiction of Mrs Wix to the assertion of her own views:

'But of course,' Mrs Wix hastened to add, 'I shouldn't like [Mrs Beale] as the one nearly so well as [Sir Claude].'

'Nearly so well!' Maisie echoed. 'I should hope indeed not.' She spoke with a firmness under which she was herself the first to quiver. 'I thought you "adored" him.'

'I do,' Mrs Wix sturdily allowed.

'Then have you suddenly begun to adore her too?' Mrs Wix, instead of directly answering, only blinked in support of her sturdiness. 'My dear, in what a tone you ask that! You're coming out.'

'Why shouldn't I? You've come out. Mrs Beale has come out. We each have our turn!' And Maisie threw off the most extraordinary little laugh that had ever passed her young lips....'You don't answer my question,' Maisie persisted. 'I want to know if you accept [Mrs Beale as guardian].'

Mrs Wix continued to hedge. 'I want to know if you do!' Everything in the child's person, at this, announced that it was easy to know. 'Not for a moment.' 'Not the two now?' Mrs Wix had caught on; she flushed with it. 'Only him alone?'

'Him alone or nobody.' 'Not even me?' cried Mrs Wix. Maisie looked at her a moment, then began to undress. 'Oh you're nobody!' (242-3).

In this last statement Maisie is acknowledging (as much as to herself as to Mrs Wix) that the governess is the least significant party in the struggle for guardianship, and that the central issue lies between the step-parents. Thus her choice of "Him alone or nobody" translates as Sir Claude alone and not Mrs Beale on any terms. Mrs Wix's challenge 'Not even me?' causes Maisie to pause and reconsider her ultimatum, and her designation of her governess as 'nobody' is not a blanket dismissal but a concession to the possibility of losing Sir Claude entirely. Mrs Wix is the nobody who will be
the last option open to Maisie if Sir Claude fails her.

Her persistent questioning of Mrs Wix matches her firmness in stating her opinions. Her assertion requires a conscious effort, as we can see when we are told that 'he spoke with a firmness under which she was herself the first to quiver'. The quivering is entirely private, and shows Maisie's fright at her temerity in appearing to reprove Mrs Wix. The fact that she overcomes her natural deference and fear of offending indicates the strength of her determination to influence events as much as she can. Both the strain and the determination show in her 'extraordinary little laugh' which is part of her response to Mrs Wix's overt recognition of the change in her. Her answer to the charge of 'coming out' is in essence defensive, designed to justify and protect her new objectivity and the decision to become active on her own behalf. Although the outburst seems unlike the child we have known, in fact the way she defends herself is typical of the deferential Maisie, because she justifies her behaviour by referring to that of the adults: "Why shouldn't I? You've come out. Mrs Beale has come out. We each have our turn!". Her 'extraordinary laugh' can be seen as an expression of the tension she is experiencing, a result of the intensity of her effort to assert herself. The effort is such that her whole body reflects it: 'Everything in the child's person...announced that it was easy to know'.

Sir Claude's arrival in Boulogne precipitates the decision that Maisie's gathering confidence is leading her to. More consistently and openly she shows herself to be independent and decisive. Sir Claude's arrival seems to throw Mrs Wix into a turmoil, aware as she is of the implications of his being
'with Mrs Beale; for Maisie, the knowledge of his presence means an imminent solution to their dilemma:

Then our young lady, before the glass, gave the supreme shake. 'Well, I'm ready. And now to see him!'

Mrs Wix turned round, but as if without having heard her. 'It's tremendously grave.' There were slow still tears behind the straighteners. 'It is - it is.' Maisie spoke as if she were now dressed quite up to the occasion; as if indeed with the last touch she had put on the judgement-cap. 'I must see him immediately.'

'How can you see him if he doesn't send for you?'

'Why can't I go and find him?'

'Because you don't know where he is. '

'Can't I just look in the salon?' That still seemed simple to Maisie.

Mrs Wix, however, instantly cut it off. 'I wouldn't have you look in the salon for all the world!' Then she explained a little: 'The salon isn't ours now.'

'Ours?'

'Yours and mine. It's theirs.'

'Theirs?' Maisie, with her stare, continued to echo. 'You mean they want to keep us out?'

Mrs Wix faltered; she sank into a chair and, as Maisie had often enough seen her do before, covered her face with her hands. 'They ought to, at least. The situation's too monstrous!'

Maisie stood there a moment - she looked about the room. 'I'll go to him - I'll find him.'

'I won't! I won't go near them!' cried Mrs Wix.

'Then I'll see him alone.' The child spied what she had been looking for - she possessed herself of her hat. 'Perhaps I'll take him out!' And with decision she quitted the room (249-50).

Maisie with her 'judgement-cap' is becoming more of an actor and less of a spectator. The new sense of purpose informing her actions is reflected in the language used to describe them. The 'supreme shake' she gives has an air of decision and finality that is reinforced in 'the last touch' of the judgement-cap; a piece of apparel appropriate to a 'young lady' who is about to take a hand in shaping her own future. The symbolic headpiece is further implied in the reference to Maisie's real hat, or rather by the manner in which she takes it up. She does not merely pick it up, she 'possessed herself' of it; a phrase suggesting poise and assurance - attributes
consistent with the wearer of a judgement-cap, and so much in contrast with the little girl so often formerly 'possessed' by others. Again, Maisie does not just leave the room, she quits it with decision. The combined force of these words implies a maturity to be reckoned with. Nevertheless she doesn't really know, as society would know, why it is 'monstrous' for Sir Claude to be with Mrs Beale. Indeed, in the context of her maturation and self-direction this is almost irrelevant.

Maisie's meeting with Sir Claude is a test of her new maturity. Their reunion is strained, and shows her that he is not his usual insouciant self:

In a flash she saw he was different - more so than he knew or designed. The next minute indeed it was as if he caught an impression from her face: this made him hold out his hand (250).

To see him take his cue from Maisie is something of a reversal of roles, accustomed as we are to the child accommodating herself to the moods of the adults. It implies that Sir Claude is beginning to recognize that her expectations have an equal claim to consideration with those of the adults, and that she is not any longer an importunate child to be fobbed off with evasions. However he is too weak to act on such a recognition, and vainly attempts to deceive her:

...her eyes rested on the door of the room he had previously occupied. 'Is Mrs Beale in there?'
Sir Claude looked blankly at the same object. 'I haven't the least idea!'
'You haven't seen her?'
'Not the tip of her nose.'
Maisie thought: there settled on her, in the light of his beautiful smiling eyes, the faintest purest coldest conviction that he wasn't telling the truth. 'She hasn't welcomed you?'
'Not by a single sign.'
'Then where is she?'
Sir Claude laughed; he seemed both amused and surprised at the point she made of it. 'I give it up!'
'Doesn't she know you've come?'
He laughed again. 'Perhaps she doesn't care!'
Maisie, with an inspiration, pounced on his arm. 'Has she gone?'
He met her eyes and then she could see that his own were really much graver than his manner. 'Gone?' She had flown to the door, but before she could raise her hand to knock he was beside her and had caught it. 'Let her be. I don't care about her. I want to see you.'
Maisie fell back with him. 'Then she hasn't gone?'
He still looked as if it were a joke, but the more she saw of him the more she could make out that he was troubled. 'It wouldn't be like her!' (251-2).

She has for the first time caught him out in a lie. Maisie's 'faintest purest coldest conviction' of this suggests the delicacy of her perception as well as the inevitable chill that it brings to her implicit and warm faith in him. No longer is he infallible. It means that she must begin to question her other assumptions about him, and in the course of their morning together her sharpened perception of him reveals his fears and uncertainties to an unprecedented degree:

This difference was in his face, in his voice, in every look he gave her and every movement he made. They were not the looks and the movements he really wanted to show, and she could feel as well that they were not those she herself wanted. She had seen him nervous...but she had never seen him as nervous as this. Little by little it gave her a settled terror, a terror that partook of the coldness she had felt just before, at the hotel, to find herself, on his answer about Mrs Beale, disbelieve him. She seemed to see at present, to touch across the table, as if by laying her hand on it, what he had meant when he confessed on those several occasions to fear. Why was such a man so often afraid? It must have begun to come to her now that there was one thing just such a man above all could be afraid of. He could be afraid of himself (255).

Maisie's emerging autonomy can be seen in and through her observation of him. She is at once aware of what she wants from him and terrified to find that she disbelieves him. Both these things are unavoidably plain; she can gloss over neither, and her settled terror stems from the fact that he has feet of clay. Consequently her dreams of an idyllic future
with him must be relinquished. Her terror is of a future (now dimly seen) which will have to be lived realistically, without the protecting veil of illusion about Sir Claude. In this chapter we are witnessing Maisie's struggle to adjust to her disillusionment.

That her dreams still have a powerful hold on her emotions is evident. She dreads to hear from him the words that will finally extinguish the picture of their ideal carefree future, but she has a strong sense of its inevitability. Her constant expectation of it contributes to the tension of the chapter:

She had finished breakfast now and she sat back in her chair again: she waited in silence to hear. He had pushed the things before him a little way and had his elbows on the table. This time, she was convinced, she knew what was coming, and once more, for the crash, as with Mrs Wix lately in her room, she held her breath and drew together her eyelids. He was going to say she must give him up (261).

But the sacrifice she is asked to make is not the one she is expecting. Sir Claude instead asks her to give up Mrs Wix. The solution he is proposing is what he calls an 'unconventional' one: a little household abroad consisting of himself and Maisie and Mrs Beale. He is embarrassed about it, as Maisie notices, and he attempts to justify himself to her. The inconsistencies in his argument are obvious to us:

'Of course it would be quite unconventional,' Sir Claude went on - 'I mean the little household we three should make together; but things have got beyond that, don't you see? They got beyond that long ago. We shall stay abroad at any rate - it's ever so much easier and it's our affair and nobody else's: it's no one's business but ours on all the blessed earth' (261).

At the same time as he says that they have got beyond the conventional and implies that they need not care for appearances, he is also claiming they will be 'good' - that is,
they will cultivate the appearance of virtue in their domestic arrangements:

'My idea would be a nice little place - somewhere in the South - where she and you would be together and as good as any one else. And I should be as good too, don't you see? for I shouldn't live with you, but I should be close to you - just around the corner, and it would be just the same. My idea would be that it should all be perfectly open and frank. Honi soit qui mal y pense, don't you know?' (262).

Maisie, who is only dimly aware of the issues of sex and sexual morality (she has just grasped the notion that there is 'a kind of natural divergence between lovers and little girls') is being asked to make an important choice about her future with only partial knowledge of its ramifications (167). Sir Claude in asking her to choose freely knows perfectly well that she can't, since her knowledge is limited; he is in effect asking her to make the decision on his behalf, apparently being incapable of it, or unwilling to decide himself: ' "I never was in such a tight place: please believe it's only that that makes me put it to you as I do" ' (262). This suggests that Sir Claude has been manipulated into this 'tight place' by Mrs Beale, and that it has finally come home to him. (Densher finds himself in a similar position on several occasions in The Wings of the Dove, notably in Venice when he is pressured into staying on by Kate after she has left, in order to pay court to Milly. He feels obliged to do as Kate wishes, but has a horror of encouraging an intimacy with Milly; however, since he does not want to offend her, he cannot completely back out of the appearance of a romantic interest in her. Although his complicity with the manipulative woman is greater that Sir Claude's he, like Sir Claude, has been largely manoeuvred into this intolerable position.)
The importance of Sir Claude's question communicates itself to Maisie through his fear and his air of desperation, so that when she is asked to state her wishes she is aware of both the force of her own desires and the importance he attaches to her answer:

'Would you let [Mrs Wix] make you live with Mrs Beale?'
'Without you? Never,' Maisie then answered.
'Never,' she said again.
It made him quite triumph, and she was indeed herself shaken by the mere sound of it (264-5).

To have revealed herself in an unequivocal statement of her desires is the public début of her private determination to be active in controlling her life. It is a momentous step, because it means that having gone so far she cannot go back, and is now committed to making a decision about which of the adults she wishes to give up. This is why she is 'shaken by the mere sound of it'. In the wake of this the question she has been dreading is put to her:

Then he came back to his original question. 'Can you choose? I mean can you settle it by a word yourself? Will you stay on with us without her?'
Now in truth she felt the coldness of her terror, and it seemed to her that suddenly she knew, as she knew it about Sir Claude, what she was afraid of. She was afraid of herself (265).

The realization that she must be responsible for her choice makes her 'afraid of herself'; she is no more eager than he to decide their future. No longer is she 'present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass' — she has been thrust through the partition that divides spectators from actors (97-8). Her fear of the responsibility of choice makes her put off the moment of decision, and her wish to return to 'the old safety' is shared by Sir Claude (266). Their walk
around Boulogne, while Maisie thinks, is an attempt by both to create 'an interval, a barrier indefinite, insurmountable' between themselves and the question they must face; but they find in this diversion 'nothing...but the intenser consciousness of their quest and their subterfuge' (266).

Maisie is acutely aware that she is putting off an ordeal:

Her choice, as her friend had called it, was there before her like an impossible sum on a slate, a sum that in spite of her plea for consideration she simply got off from doing while she walked about with him (267).

Sir Claude, too, is procrastinating. At the railway station he buys 'with a strange extravagance' eleven papers: '...it took up time while they hovered at the bookstall on the restless platform...' (268). Their hovering is suggestive of their common unease and uncertainty. It is matched by the 'restless' atmosphere of the platform, and in this Maisie suddenly perceives an answer to their problem:

She knew how prepared they looked to pass into the train, and she presently brought out to her companion: 'I wish we could go. Won't you take me?'
He continued to smile. 'Would you really come?'
'Oh yes, oh yes. Try.'
'Do you want me to take our tickets?'
'Yes, take them.'
'Without any luggage?'
She showed their two armfuls, smiling at him as he smiled at her, but so conscious of being more frightened than she had ever been in her life that she seemed to see her whiteness as in a glass. Then she knew that what she saw was Sir Claude's whiteness: he was as frightened as herself (269).

Sir Claude's fear prevents him from taking tickets in time to catch the train. It is Maisie's idea, and although in suggesting it she has implicitly made a more sweeping decision than the one he has wanted her to make (that is, to give up Mrs Wix), yet for him it is too swift a decision and too radical a solution. His timidity does not allow him to embrace the idea.
of so clean a break from both women. His own fear is unabated, but Maisie's fear of decision and commitment

...had been dashed down and broken. It was gone. She looked round at last, from where she had paused, at Sir Claude's, and then saw that his wasn't. It sat there with him on the bench to which, against the wall of the station, he had retreated, and where, leaning back and, as she thought, rather queer, he still waited (270).

It is Sir Claude's nature to retreat rather than to confront, and to wait instead of acting; he has been put to the test, and Maisie finds him wanting. His non-committal response to her subsequent offer to give up Mrs Wix if he gives up Mrs Beale does nothing to alleviate this impression. She has declared herself, but he simply displays his weakness. This is implicit in their manner of rambling after leaving the station: '...even from this point they had not gone straight, but once more had wandered and loitered...' (270). Maisie has now gone beyond the notion of 'the old safety', whereas her stepfather's fearfulness still clings to it. It is briefly echoed in their visit to the quay, where they pick out 'a good place for two that was left in the lee of a lifeboat'; but even this image of safety connotes a certain desperation, and is considered by them wordlessly (271). At the quay they 'exchanged silences again, but only exchanged silences'; the silence can now only be filled by returning to the hotel and facing the two women (270).

Once there Maisie gives Sir Claude another chance to free himself by offering to leave the hotel without saying goodbye to Mrs Wix while he breaks with Mrs Beale. Or, she suggests, they could both go out and wait till both women had gone:

Oh with what a face for an instant he wondered if that could be! But his wonder the next moment only made him go to the door and, with his hands on the knob, stand
as if listening for voices. Maisie listened, but she heard none. All she heard presently was Sir Claude's saying with speculation quite choked off, but so as not to be heard in the salon: 'Mrs Beale will never go.' On this he pushed open the door and she went in with him (272).

Sir Claude's failure to act on Maisie's suggestion or his 'wonder' is characteristic of his essential weakness. The attitude of standing at the door listening fearfully for voices is the attitude of a man not in control of his own life, and of a man who is given to self-justifying prophecies of the kind: 'I'll never escape'. He may not voice these thoughts, but they implicitly guide his behaviour. There is a deep pessimism about his view of himself as a free agent which signifies more than mere vacillation.

The last pages of the novel resolve themselves into a battle between Maisie, who is by now set on self-direction, and Mrs Beale, who is still determined to manipulate her. The subordinate action is in the rivalry of the two women, who stand in ambiguous relationship as protectors of Maisie with authority over her, and in unambiguous rivalry with each other. Maisie's return initiates the major battle; Mrs Beale enters it with a strategy based on the confident belief that she has conquered Mrs Wix. In this scene Mrs Beale allows the true motive behind her relationship with Maisie to reveal itself. By this stage she has played all the cards she has; Beale has deserted her, and in a last ditch attempt to retain respectability she has come to France ahead of Sir Claude to claim the parental right to Maisie that he assumed in fleeing with the girl. She has won Mrs Wix around to accepting her as the principle guardian, persuading her to remain with stepmother and daughter and thereby usurping Sir Claude's
position in regard to the governess and her charge; a possibility which neither Mrs Wix, Maisie, nor Sir Claude had foreseen:

...addressing herself again to Mrs Wix, she launched a note that gave the very key of what, as she would have said, she was up to. 'Dear lady, please attend to my daughter' (233-4).

Her cavalier assumption of the parental role in this passage indicates a deliberate intention to arrogate the rights and privileges of parenthood. It is her last chance to make a choice between being a mother or a mistress; if she loses Maisie now she loses the status of motherhood, and therefore respectability. To live openly as Sir Claude's mistress, and to lose all social standing by it, is an ignominious prospect for a woman whom we have seen to be socially ambitious. Her volte-face in wooing Mrs Wix shows the strength of her desire for social acceptance.

When faced with the possibility that both Maisie and Sir Claude have deserted her, Mrs Beale faces the loss of both social and financial security. Having briefly faced this in the interval of their absence from the hotel, she finally reveals her true attitude towards Maisie on their return:

...[Maisie] smiled at her stepmother and offered: 'We've been everywhere.'

Mrs Beale, however, made her no response, thereby adding to a surprise of which our young lady had already felt the light brush. She had received neither a greeting nor a glance...(274).

In this passage Mrs Beale treats the girl as if she wasn't there. Mrs Wix had previously announced that she would leave, during the long absence of Sir Claude and Maisie, and following a 'big row' with her Mrs Beale believes the governess has abandoned Maisie to the care of her step-parents:
'[Mrs Wix] drivels when she doesn't rage,' Mrs Beale declared.
'And she leaves the child?'
'She leaves the child,' said Mrs Beale with great emphasis and looking more than ever over Maisie's head (274).

The 'great emphasis' implies the great change that has occurred with Mrs Wix's apparent abandonment of Maisie. It means above all that Mrs Beale is free to negotiate the best possible conditions for herself; any bargaining to be done involves only herself and Sir Claude, since Maisie's allegiance is now—by default—assured.

The scene contains other indications of Mrs Beale's true character, which result from her desperate efforts to retain the upper hand in her confrontation with Mrs Wix:

Mrs Beale was flushed, which was never quite becoming to her, and her face visibly testified to the encounter to which she alluded. Evidently, however, she had not been worsted, and she held up her head and smiled and rubbed her hands as if in sudden emulation of the patronne (273).

There is also a hint, in her boast that she is 'a little primed' after luncheon, that she has been drinking (273). These are the first directly uncomplimentary references to Mrs Beale. The comment that flushing was never quite becoming to her is the cool appraisal of the authorial voice, which further distances us from her. Following close on this is the image of the stepmother smiling and rubbing her hands in the manner of a bourgeois hotelkeeper. The image conveys acquisitiveness, vulgarity and small-mindedness, implying that Mrs Beale shares these characteristics with the patronne. The passage suggests that she is losing her looks, and this puts her on a par with Ida, whose dyed hair and startlingly made-up eyes are the measure of her age and her attempts to hide it. Mrs Beale has reached the stage at which losing her looks is important; she
is almost in the marriage market again, but with her prime advantage of youthful looks gone or going.

In the context of her new attitude to her stepdaughter, the passage shows an obvious change in her behaviour which we cannot ignore, and which does not tally either with her professed affection for the child or with Mrs Beale's apparent refinement. The language she uses in conversation with Sir Claude adds to this impression:

'She promised she'd stay even if you should come.'
'Then why has she changed?'
'Because she's a hound...'
...'And you had a big row?'
'We had a big row' - she assented with a frankness as large. 'And while you left me to that sort of thing I should like to know where you were!' She paused for a reply, but Sir Claude merely looked at Maisie; a movement that promptly quickened her challenge. 'Where the mischief have you been?'
'You seem to take it as hard as Mrs Wix,' Sir Claude returned.
'I take it as I choose to take it, and you don't answer my question' (273).

The use of the unladylike slang terms 'hound' and 'where the mischief' and the accusing, querulous tone of her demands contribute to the patronne-like impression of Mrs Beale. She is aggressive because she no longer feels constrained to pretend anything in her relationship to Sir Claude and Maisie, believing that she now has the upper hand, and that her own desires will meet with little opposition from them. She believes she is at least capable of persuading them to act on her wishes. For this reason she does not even bother to soften her treatment of Sir Claude.

Her new-found confidence receives a blow when it becomes apparent that she has not, after all, vanquished Mrs Wix:

In this position suddenly a change came into her face, caused, as the others could the next thing see, by the reappearance of Mrs Wix in the doorway which, on
coming in at Sir Claude's heels, Maisie had left gaping. 'I don't leave the child - I don't, I don't!' she thundered from the threshold, advancing upon the opposed three but addressing herself directly to Maisie (274).

The change in Mrs Beale's face signals the return of the complications she had thought were no longer present. Once again she is forced to revise her strategy, and take into account Mrs Wix's influence on the other two. Unfortunately for her she has already alienated Maisie: 'To Mrs Beale [Maisie] turned no more than Mrs Beale had turned [to her]: she felt as if already their difference had been disclosed' (275). The rift between them, and as a result Maisie's increasingly critical view of Mrs Beale, is apparent. Maisie's asking Sir Claude to go with her and Mrs Wix brings out Mrs Beale's hypocrisy:

'Come away from me, Maisie?' It was a wail of dismay and reproach, in which her stepdaughter was astonished to read that [Mrs Beale] had had no hostile consciousness and that if she had been so actively grand it was not from suspicion, but from strange entanglements of modesty (275).

The word 'astonished' shows us Maisie's emotional distance from Mrs Beale. The girl is not pleased by the change in tone, or hurt by it; she 'reads' it - a term that is emotionally neutral, and which implies critical scrutiny in the place of her early uncritical admiration. Sir Claude, 'with an expression positively sick', reproaches Mrs Beale, and Maisie perceives that her stepmother has been 'compromised' (275). Her response to Mrs Beale's fresh attempt to bully her after this is to ignore her directives; her stepmother has lost her credibility.

Mrs Wix is also judged wanting by Maisie in the final scene. In the governess's attempt to recall to her the (highly
questionable) moral sense she had tried to inculcate in the girl, it is clear to us, as it is to Maisie, that this concept of a moral sense is at best irrelevant and at worst expedient. It is no more substantial than a 'faint flower that Mrs Wix pretended to have plucked and now with such a peremptory hand thrust at her nose' (276). Ironically the passage is couched in language that evokes the schoolroom. Maisie, in her understanding and maturity, has never been less the pupil, and Mrs Wix has never had less to offer as a teacher:

It brought back to the child's recollection how she sometimes couldn't repeat on Friday the sentence that had been glib on Wednesday, and she dealt all feebly and ruefully with the present tough passage. Sir Claude and Mrs Beale stood there like visitors at an 'exam'. She had indeed an instant a whiff of the faint flower that Mrs Wix pretended to have plucked and now with such a peremptory hand thrust at her nose. Then it left her, and, as if she were sinking with a slip from a foothold, her arms made a short jerk. What this jerk represented was the spasm within her of something still deeper than a moral sense. She looked at her examiner; she looked at the visitors; she felt the rising of the tears she had kept down at the station. They had nothing - no, distinctly nothing - to do with her moral sense. The only thing was the old flat shameful schoolroom plea. 'I don't know - I don't know' (276).

The 'something still deeper than a moral sense' within the girl shows without doubt that she has within her a more complex response to the situation than Mrs Wix with her facile conception of morality. The other two adults, standing like visitors at an exam, are by implication ranged with Mrs Wix. This grouping of the adults, with Maisie at the centre of attention, emphasizes the fact that she has struck out on her own and is now in a more solitary position than ever.

Sir Claude is the only one who recognizes that a revolution has occurred inside Maisie's mind:
...I think I've produced life. I don't know what to call it - I haven't even known how decently to deal with it, to approach it; but, whatever it is, it's the most beautiful thing I've ever met - it's exquisite, it's sacred' (276-7).

For all his admiration of the mature Maisie he is unable to offer her any substantial support. His weakness and his fear of both the women prevent his shielding the girl from their potential anger; worse, he puts off on to Maisie the task of telling Mrs Wix that she is prepared to give her up;

Sir Claude wavered. 'Tell her!' he then exclaimed to the child, also turning away as if to give her the chance. But Mrs Wix and her pupil stood confronted in silence, Maisie whiter than ever - more awkward, more rigid and yet more dumb. They looked at each other hard, and as nothing came from them Sir Claude faced about again. 'You won't tell her? - you can't?' Still she said nothing; whereupon, addressing Mrs Wix, he broke into a kind of ecstasy. 'She refused - she refused!'

Maisie, at this, found her voice. 'I didn't refuse. I didn't,' she repeated (277).

Sir Claude presumably tells his outright lie because he believes her ultimately incapable of carrying through her resolution to give up her governess; certainly, it is the kind of assumption we could safely make about him. He is a congenital waverer, while Maisie, we are learning, is not. Sir Claude can admire her for it but he cannot help her, particularly in the inevitable moment of confrontation with Mrs Beale. He speaks

...with a relish as intense now as if some lovely work of art or of nature had suddenly been set down among them. He was rapidly recovering himself on this basis of fine appreciation. 'She made her condition - with such a sense of what it should be! She made the only right one.'

'The only right one?' - Mrs Beale returned to the charge. She had taken a moment before a snub from him, but she was not to be snubbed on this. 'How can you talk such rubbish and how can you back her up in such impertinence? What in the world have you done to her to make her think of such stuff?' She stood there in righteous wrath; she flashed her eyes round the circle. Maisie took them full in her own, knowing that
here at last was the moment she had had most to reckon with (278).

This, with its overtones of battle, is the climax of the rising tension, the sense of waiting, and the fear that has pervaded the final chapters. Maisie meets it without turning away or flinching, showing her readiness to complete the process that began with her questioning of the adult's right to control her life absolutely:

...Mrs Beale subdued herself to a question deeply mild. 'Have you made, my own love, any such condition as that?'

Somehow, now that it was there, the great moment was not so bad. What helped the child was that she knew what she wanted. All her learning and learning had made her at last learn that; so that if she waited an instant to reply it was only from the desire to be nice. Bewilderment had simply gone or at any rate was going fast. Finally she answered. 'Will you give him up? Will you?' (278)

Mrs Beale, an exposed manipulator, answers this with hysteria and abuse. Her 'incoherence of passion' marks her desperation; she 'almost yells', 'blazes', 'shouts' and 'shrieks' in her fear of losing what she thought was in her grasp (279-81). After labelling Maisie a 'hideous little hypocrite all these years that I've slaved to make you love me' (an admission of her manipulative strategy) she makes one last attempt to recall Maisie's affection for her, 'and her effort to be reasonable and tender was in its way remarkable':

...she fastened herself still to Maisie. 'Do you hate me, dearest?'

Maisie looked at her with new eyes, but answered as she had answered before. 'Will you give him up?'

Mrs Beale's rejoinder hung fire, but when it came it was noble. 'You shouldn't talk to me of such things!' She was shocked, she was scandalised to tears (280,281-282).

It is remarkable for the very thing she accuses Maisie of: hypocrisy. Maisie sees this with her 'new eyes' which signify the change that has taken place in her relationship to Mrs
Beale. Her stepmother is reduced to asking for her patronage. Maisie's stubborn repetition of her question (it is the third time) shows her grasp of what is essential and what is irrelevant. It finally seems to have had its effect on Mrs Beale; she is shocked and scandalized by this question. The girl's persistence had forced her to face the unpleasant reality of what she has been proposing to do. If her rejoinder seems 'noble', once we have acknowledged the irony in this inflated term, then it is because her reaction is partly sincere. Such things as an adulterous liaison and its ramifications might indeed be painful to face.

When Sir Claude has given Mrs Beale the public assurance of his fidelity (its 'never never' construction emphasizing his deep pessimism), Maisie puts into effect her ultimate decision. She 'addressed Mrs Wix. "Shan't we lose the boat?" '(282). To have cast her lot with Mrs Wix is the only feasible alternative, and it marks the abandonment of her childish dreams. In their place she has achieved a realistic view of what is possible, and a maturity of mind which enables her to speak and act with a quiet authority:

Sir Claude had reached the other door and opened it. Mrs Wix was already out. On the threshold Maisie paused; she put out her hand to her stepfather. He took it and held it a moment, and their eyes met as the eyes of those who have done for each other what they can. 'Good-bye,' he repeated. 'Good-bye.' And Maisie followed Mrs Wix (283).

It is Maisie who pauses, and Maisie who holds out a hand. Sir Claude does not initiate the action but simply responds to hers. He has done for her what he can; it is not much, but it is all he is capable of doing. His failure to live up to Maisie's ideal and to realize his own desires (Mrs Wix says
rightly of him that ' [He] would like to please [Maisie]; he would like even...to please me'), illustrate the novel's concern with human limitations and inadequacies (282). The conflict between the ideal and the possible, what people ideally want and what in fact they will settle for, results inevitably in disillusionment and the prevalence of the second-best. Sir Claude is a poignant example of this. He is so nearly what Maisie wants him to be; he is dashing, affectionate, considerate and perceptive, and yet he is crippled by a weak will which prevents him from realizing either Maisie's ideals or his own best desires. His failure to do so is especially poignant because he is himself keenly aware of it.

The others too have all had to accept a compromise with their dreams. Mrs Beale has the financial support and patronage of Sir Claude, but without the facade of respectability that the girl would have given to their liaison; Mrs Wix has Maisie but without Sir Claude. And Maisie? She has 'made her condition - with such a sense of what it should be!' - knowing that she has accepted second best, but knowing also that her ideal was a dream (278). She has grown free of the bondage of childhood spectatorship and childish illusion, which Sir Claude recognizes:

'...I only insist that she's free - she's free.' Mrs Beale stared - Mrs Beale glared. 'Free to starve with this pauper lunatic?'
'I'll do more for her than you ever did!' Mrs Wix retorted. 'I'll work my fingers to the bone' (280).

Mrs Wix will certainly do for Maisie what she can. It is less than we would like for Maisie, and less than she deserves, but it is adequate, and based on a genuine maternal affection for
the girl. As a child still, Maisie must have adult protection for some years yet. Nevertheless she is capable of realistic judgements and decisions, and is no longer the defenceless shuttlecock of the first chapter. She will make the best of Mrs Wix who, for her part, will never quite understand her 'pupil', and will continue to have 'room for wonder at what Maisie knew' (283). Yet it is not that they do not make efforts to understand each other; they simply do not experience in the same way that elusive quality, a 'moral sense'. In the final exposure of the difference between Maisie's moral sense and Mrs Wix's, James is unequivocally clear that Maisie has acquired autonomy of moral judgement.

When Mrs Wix talks of a moral sense she means that Maisie should see the situation exactly as she does, but this seems an impossible demand in view of the different ways in which they respond as a rule to experience. The following passage is an illustration of this difference:

The night, this time, was warm and one of the windows stood open to the small balcony over the rail of which, on coming up from dinner, Maisie had hung a long time in the enjoyment of the chatter, the lights, the life of the quay made brilliant by the season and the hour. Mrs Wix's requirements had drawn her in from this posture and Mrs Wix's embrace had detained her....But the casement was still wide, the spectacle, the pleasure were there still, and from her place in the room, which, with its polished floor and its panels of elegance, was lighted from without more than from within, the child could still take account of them. She appeared to watch and listen; after which she answered Mrs Wix with a question. 'If I do know--?' 'If you do condemn.' The correction was made with some austerity.

It had the effect of causing Maisie to heave a vague sigh of oppression and then after an instant and as if under cover of this ambiguity pass out again upon the balcony. She hung again over the rail; she felt the summer night; she dropped down into the manners of France (225).

Maisie's 'vague sigh of oppression' is caused by her
instinctive realization that she must preserve her autonomy against Mrs Wix's hidebound conventionality; by withdrawing on to the balcony she enters a world which has something more promising to offer her. What we are shown in this passage is what best characterizes Maisie's mind - her responsiveness. Although she is removed here from direct contact with the quayside, from her balcony she is drawn by the spectacle and involves herself imaginatively in the activity and atmosphere of the foreign night life. She allows the spectacle to work upon her in its own way; she has no preconceived notions of what it represents or what it should be, but simply and uncritically accepts these impressions and enters into their spirit as far as she is able: 'she felt the summer night; she dropped down into the manners of France' (my emphasis).

This separation from experience is familiar to her. Throughout the novel she is described as a spectator, and we have already noted the observation that she had 'an odd air of being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass' (97-8). Up on her balcony watching the activity below, Maisie finds herself in a familiar relation to her environment; her physical isolation emphasizes her enforced intellectual isolation from the centre of adult activity. To compensate for this, her response is to become a sensitive register of impressions as a way of circumventing her isolation from life.

In this passage James heightens our sense of Maisie's relation to the immediate by sensuously evoking the sights and sounds that she takes in:
There was a café below the hotel, before which, with little chairs and tables, people sat on a space enclosed by plants in tubs; and the impression was enriched by the flash of the white aprons of waiters and the music of a man and a woman who, from beyond the precinct, sent up the strum of a guitar and the drawl of a song about 'amour'. Maisie knew what 'amour' meant too, and wondered if Mrs Wix did: Mrs Wix remained within, as still as a mouse and perhaps not reached by the performance. (225-6)

While Maisie is irresistibly drawn to what is passing outside, eager to absorb new and strange impressions, Mrs Wix — symbolically — stays inside the hotel room, concerned to the exclusion of all else with instilling in Maisie an inflexible moral code: 'Mrs Wix's requirements had drawn her in from this posture and Mrs Wix's embrace had detained her...'. Mrs Wix is concerned with what should be, not what is. She is not amenable to sensory experience in the way that Maisie is; the scene from the balcony has no interest for her, whereas for the girl it is the stuff of life. Throughout the novel the governess is constantly fitting her experience into an inflexible moral framework. The black-and-white nature of her moral viewpoint is illustrated by her melodramatic language, which is saturated with stereotyped moral absolutes: 'your dreadfully base papa', 'the one person in the world...wickeder than himself', 'vileness', 'pay with my own innocence', 'such horrors and such shames', 'condemn', 'ruining you', 'spare an honest woman' and 'branded by the Bible' (224-6).

These unequivocal terms define the limits of her moral world. While Maisie responds with openness, flexibility and spontaneity, Mrs Wix's response is formulaic and rigid. The difference in their responses is the difference between lively perception and conventional preconception. Maisie is open to external stimuli and suggestion, allowing her intelligence to
be formed by her perceptions and experience. Mrs Wix's responses follow the dictates of her moral code and are therefore conventional, not individual or spontaneous. Because of this she cannot comprehend the flexibility of the child's response, and interprets what in Maisie is deeper than the merely moral as immoral. Maisie constantly tests her own knowledge through the process of questioning, and by fitting her ideas about life and the adults around the answers she gets, so that her body of knowledge gradually evolves on the basis of continuing observation. Mrs Wix's knowledge is fixed and unresponsive. '[T]ruly', as Tanner notes, 'she is never "reached by the performance" - she is temperamentally out of earshot'.[1]

Both characters are explicit in Chapter XXVI about their relation to their knowledge and their way of knowing. Maisie contemplates with satisfaction and interest the process of her evolving consciousness:

She judged that if her whole history, for Mrs Wix, had been the successive stages of her knowledge, so the very climax of the concatenation would, in the same view, be the stage at which the knowledge should overflow. As she was condemned to know more and more, how could it logically stop before she should know Most? It came to her in fact as they sat there on the sands that she was distinctly on the road to know Everything. She had not had governesses for nothing: what in the world had she ever done but learn and learn and learn? She looked at the pink sky with a placid foreboding that she soon should have learnt All. They lingered in the flushed air till it at last turned to grey and she seemed fairly to receive new information from every brush of the breeze (223).

The growth of her knowledge both frightens and excites her.

She is so attuned to things outside her that the process seems organic, as though the natural world ('pink sky', 'flushed air') is pregnant with information being transmitted by 'every brush of the breeze'. Her acceptance of the inevitability of being condemned to know more and more is in sharp contrast to Mrs Wix's attitude:

...the poor lady bewailed the tragic end of her own rich ignorance.... '...I've had to pay with my own innocence, if you do laugh! for clinging to you and keeping you. Don't let me pay for nothing; don't let me have been thrust for nothing into such horrors and such shames. I never knew anything about them and I never wanted to know! Now I know too much, too much!' the poor woman lamented and groaned (224).

To this I might add that the novel is not called What Mrs Wix Knew for a good reason; the development of Maisie's knowledge is a far more complex and subtle process than Mrs Wix's unchanging bundle of preconceptions.

With such differences of temperament and attitude, with such a different approach to what experience brings that is new or complex, we can hardly expect that they will stay together beyond Maisie's majority; or that, if they do, the governess will be much more to Maisie than the duenna propriety demands. Here the earlier ambiguity is further clarified: Mrs Wix is 'nobody' — and when Maisie chooses her, she is choosing self-direction, not dependence on a moral guide.
Chapter 3

THE WINGS OF THE DOVE

The Wings of the Dove was published in 1902 and is the penultimate novel of the late phase of James's work.[1] Written five years after What Maisie Knew, its narrative form differs from that of the earlier novel, particularly in its presentation of point of view. In What Maisie Knew the focus of the novel is on a single central consciousness; in Wings the novel explores the consciousness of several characters: three major and one minor. The three major points of view are those of the three main characters, Milly Theale, Kate Croy and Merton Densher: heroine, manipulative woman and male character. For the first time these novels are written partly from the point of view of the manipulative woman and the male character, who have hitherto had a distinctly subsidiary importance. The fourth centre of consciousness, Susan Stringham, I shall discuss separately at the end of the chapter, as she is of less importance than the others, but interesting in the Jamesian tradition of confidantes, and as a successor to Mrs Wix.

The technique of multiple centres of consciousness, each reflecting the same set of relationships and the same reality,

1. Although The Ambassadors was published in 1903, it was in fact written before Wings in 1900-1901.
grows out of a concern to have a comprehensive view of that reality. In this it is similar to an epistolary novel such as *Clarissa*, in which different points of view are presented by different correspondents. The effect is to give us a complex understanding of the heroine's situation, and this is the effect which James achieves in *Wings* using a more subtle device than the epistolary technique. In the novel, because of the elements of character, relationship, situation and event it shares with the earlier novels (common features which allow us legitimately to draw parallels), we can see that the multiplication of centres of consciousness goes with an increasing difficulty of moral evaluation. While we cannot claim that simply to present a character's consciousness is to ensure sympathy (as we shall see later, this is not necessarily so with Milly Theale), we can say that in this case we are undoubtedly more sympathetic to the manipulative woman and to the passive male character. Although this can be no simple function of a technique of presentation or degree of exposure to a character, it may be said that the expansive presentation of the consciousness of more than one central character constitutes an increasing complexity of moral evaluation.

This can be seen most clearly in the characters who correspond to the 'villains' of the earlier novels. In *Portrait* Isabel's view of Osmond so dominates the novel that, although in Chapter XLII she recognizes that he has been as deceived in her as she in him, we can have, if any, only a theoretical sympathy for Osmond. He remains for us in the end the 'sterile dilettante' that Ralph Touchett labels him; unforgivable as much for what he is as for any crime against
Isabel (375). Merton Densher, on the other hand, while his actions are as culpable as Osmond's, figures to us as more than just a bloodless villain. We may in fact regard Densher's actions as more culpable than Osmond's. The latter in his wooing of Isabel at least believed that he had grown to love her, whatever the calculations that drove him to court her in the first place. Densher, though he denies giving Milly any positive encouragement, is still content to give the impression of courting her, while feeling nothing for her but the most general friendship. Indeed he tends to patronize her; for him she is 'the little American girl', while to be with her is 'as simple as sitting with his sister might have been, and not, if the point were urged, very much more thrilling' (371).

He is a limited and selfish individual who fears the involvement with life and people that Milly so passionately desires, and who lacks the generosity of spirit that both Kate and Milly exhibit in their different ways. His attitude to life is on the contrary that of a niggard; his primary concern is to protect his privacy from the incursions of the external world. Even his passion for Kate Croy (the most likeable thing about him) is to some extent consistent with this:

Having so often concluded on the fact of his weakness, as he called it, for life - his strength merely for thought - life, he logically opined, was what he must somehow arrange to annex and possess (66).

Kate's liveliness, then, is something for him not to emulate but to 'annex and possess' - terms which suggest that the 'life' Kate offers will be under his control, but remain separate from him. His final romanticizing of Milly's memory is at one with his fear of involvement:
This was the sound [that is the sound, to his 'spiritual ear', of what he lost when Kate destroyed Milly's last letter to him unopened] he cherished when alone in the stillness of his rooms. He sought and guarded the stillness, so that it might prevail there till the inevitable sounds of life, once more, comparatively coarse and harsh, should smother and deaden it — doubtless by the same process with which they would officiously heal the ache in his soul that was somehow one with it. It moreover deepened the sacred hush that he couldn't complain (532-3).

Edel in his Introduction to *Wings* says that he is 'the classical, passive, renunciatory Jamesian hero' who is 'constitutionally passive; unable to take a position, he drifts' (10,11). To cultivate 'the sacred hush' of his sense of what might have been, and to idealize a dead woman, is ultimately easier than to face 'the knowledge of each other that [he and Kate] couldn't undo' (529). Despite his self-justifying assurances to the contrary, he does not play fair with either woman. His concern in Venice is to adopt a neutrality of attitude and behaviour which he decides is the best way to avoid encouraging Milly's hopes for marriage, but which at the same time conforms to the letter of his agreement with Kate to stay on in Venice. He is acutely aware of appearances, and his fastidious nature is offended by his ignominious position. He wonders with disgust

...if it mightn't be best just to consent, luxuriously, to be the ass the whole thing involved. Trying not to be and yet keeping in it was of the two things the more assinine. He was glad there was no male witness; it was a circle of petticoats; he shouldn't have liked a man to see him (397).

His preoccupation with maintaining a rather theoretical integrity in spite of it means that he falls short of both Kate's and Milly's expectations in the end.

However despite this, and despite his periodic sanctimonious and hypocritical denials of involvement in the
deception of Milly ('"I, my dear, have told [no lies]!''), it is a measure of the difficulty of arriving at any simple judgement of Densher that a number of critics see Densher as the character who comes out of the novel better than Kate, having undergone an ennobling moral crisis (389). A comment such as Bersani's is typical of this attitude: 'Densher emerges from his conflict having decisively chosen his higher self and renounced the acquisitive self that would possess the symbols of value in the material world'. [1] Matthiessen uses the concept of transformation, not uncommon in the discussion of Densher's character:

Densher has been transformed by the dead girl's hovering presence. Like the hero in any great tragedy he has arrived at the moral perception of the meaning of what has befallen him....Densher has learned the meaning of loss and renunciation. [2]

Beach says more simply that 'Kate's ruthless scheming proves too horrid for Merton', and this negative evaluation of Kate is echoed in Krook's judgement that she is 'totally deficient in moral sensibility'. [3] Putt's remark about Densher, that '[i]t is curious that the wretched dominated fellow doesn't lose more of our sympathy than he does', is apt. [4]. Why then must we say that for all Densher shares with Osmond in fastidiousness,


3. Beach, lxxvi, and Krook, 228.

inaction and disdain of life, he is a much more sympathetic character?

For this we must look to the first two Books, during which his close relationship to Kate is established. The circumstances of his introduction in the novel are significant; we hear of his existence first as a potential suitor of whom Kate's family selfishly disapproves. In the opening scene of Book First Kate offers to live with her reprobate father, Lionel Croy, and to give up the patronage of her wealthy and domineering aunt. Her father, primarily an opportunist, refuses her offer on purely material grounds: having Kate marry the man of her rich aunt's choice will ultimately benefit him more than having her marry poorly for love—a possibility that he correctly guesses exists. For her father Kate's marriageability is a 'tangible value', and for her sister also she represents the possibility of financial security which is not consistent with marrying a poor man (36). The coldness of her father and the querulousness of her sister, their disapproval of her lover and their overriding selfishness, mean that Kate's attachment to Densher (even before we have witnessed it at first hand) is introduced as an honourable thing against a background of mercenary family pressure. Thus the lovers have already aroused our sympathy in consequence of the nature of the adversity they face.

The account of their initial meeting and their subsequent friendship does not dispel our sympathy; on the contrary, it confirms it:

...[Kate] had had her equal consciousness that within five minutes something between them had—well, she couldn't call it anything but come. It was nothing to look at or to handle, but was somehow everything to
feel and to know; it was that something for each of them had happened....It wasn't, in a word, simply that their eyes had met; other conscious organs, faculties, feelers had met as well...(67).

The nature of their second meeting, a chance encounter on the underground, strengthens the impression of unspoken significance inherent in the first:

The day and the hour were darkness, there were six other persons and she had been busy seating herself; but her consciousness had gone to him as straight as if they had come together in some bright stretch of a desert. They had on neither part a second's hesitation; they looked across the choked compartment exactly as if she had known he would be there and he had expected her to come in...(68).

The contrast between the dark choked compartment and the bright stretch of desert in which they seem to meet reflects the sense of freedom they feel in each other's company, later expressed in their meetings in the Gardens. Their common recognition of a relation out of the ordinary is expressed in the fact that neither had 'a second's hesitation' in tacitly acknowledging the other's presence; there is even a suggestion of the preordained about it. In this way the novel builds up a picture of a relationship that is solidly based not only on a strong mutual attraction but on a 'precious unlikeness' - a complementarity of personality: for Kate 'it was on the side of the mind that Densher was rich for her and mysterious and strong'; while Densher recognizes in Kate a vitality that his own life lacks (65-6). The circumstances of their meetings in Kensington Gardens have a certain integrity about them; Kate does not wish to abuse her position as Mrs Lowder's dependent by receiving at Lancaster Gate a man of whose intentions Mrs Lowder does not approve; therefore she meets her lover openly in a public place but, scorning deception, does so in a park directly under her aunt's windows. Thus there is a sense of
honour in the way these two carry out their courtship; an impression which is, oddly, only confirmed by their secret betrothal to each other. Their dilemma - their obvious passion for and delight in each other, and yet their lack of means to marry on - arouses our sympathy; and in the light of such uncompromising family opposition their secret engagement seems a necessary deception:

Suddenly she said to him with extraordinary beauty: 'I engage myself to you for ever.'

The beauty was in everything, and he could have separated nothing - couldn't have thought of her face as distinct from the whole joy. Yet her face had a new light. 'And I pledge you - I call God to witness! - every spark of my faith; I give you every drop of my life.' That was all, for the moment, but it was enough, and it was almost as quiet as if it were nothing. They were in the open air, in an alley of the Gardens; the great space, which seemed to arch just then higher and spread wider for them, threw them back into deep concentration. They moved by a common instinct to a spot, within sight, that struck them as fairly sequestered and there, before their time together was spent, they had extorted from concentration every advance it could make them. They had exchanged vows and tokens, sealed their rich compact, solemnised, so far as breathed words and murmured sounds and lighted eyes and clasped hands could do it, their agreement to belong only, and to belong tremendously, to each other (98-9).

The strength of their feeling for each other is evident here, and their 'rich compact' suggests the great potential inherent in their partnership. (It is worth noting in comparison the shallowness of Mrs Beale's and Sir Claude's relationship, and the staleness of Madame Merle's and Osmond's; neither relationship has the stature of Kate's and Densher's, or captures our imagination or sympathy to the same degree.) The restraint placed on their actions by their presence in the Gardens serves to heighten the intensity of the scene. They are limited to 'breathed words and murmured sounds and lighted eyes and clasped hands', the minimal overt signs of affection,
and yet the very muting of their display of emotion emphasizes the 'deep concentration' of the feeling behind it: their vows to 'belong only, and to belong tremendously, to each other'. The scene leaves us with, above all, an impression of the richness and strength of their relationship, and the sincerity of their commitment to each other. It is these things which make us sympathize with Densher early in the novel; the quality of his relationship with Kate, his lack of means and the family pressure which works against his hopes for marriage. He is in love with Kate and is responsive to her wishes; in this role he appears to us in a favourable light.

If for these reasons we are, in the end, less than satisfied to describe Densher as either a villain or a merely repugnant human being, it is impossible that we should rest content with characterizing Kate Croy in this way. The difficulty of moral evaluation in Wings doesn't arise just from our knowing more about the situation of the characters. In respect of Kate it is certainly very important that we know of her straitened circumstances, of the degradation Lionel Croy has brought on the family name, of the squalor and misery of her sister's life, but these alone do not and cannot impinge on our evaluation of Kate's use of Milly. No more than in the case of Madame Merle (of whose circumstances we know similar mitigating facts) do we forgive Kate her treachery on these grounds. Rather it is in the judgement we make of Kate herself — of her vitality and the complex motivation behind her avidity as much as her actions — that the difficulty arises. In order to locate the nature of our difficulty in accepting the fact that we cannot characterize Kate by her actions in a way we
could with Madame Merle (although we must not underrate the latter's appeal to our understanding either), we must look to what it is that James characterizes in his presentation of consciousness.

We must begin by looking at the different relation in which Kate, the manipulative woman, stands to the heroine, Milly Theale. Consider the way in which the manipulative woman's plans become known to us. In The Portrait of a Lady we learn through a rare glimpse of Madame Merle's consciousness that she is envious of the Touchett wealth, and from her own mouth we hear of her excitement at the news of Isabel's inheritance. Hence quite early in the novel we are able to speculate about her mercenary motives for promoting both Isabel's marriage and Pansy's. However, it is not till the end of the book that her true motives are revealed, when the Countess Gemini tells Isabel of Madame Merle's actual relation to Osmond and his daughter (I will discuss the parallel scene in Wings later). It is a revelation both for Isabel and for us. We can see it with hindsight in her interaction with the child and her interest in Pansy's suitors, but it is not something we can actually know before it is told to us. Similarly, Mrs Beale's intention to use Maisie as a pawn in her attempt to secure Sir Claude gradually becomes evident from the point in What Maisie Knew when she first meets Maisie's stepfather; it shows openly in the moment of crisis in the last scene when she totally ignores the child's presence, until it appears Maisie might still be useful to her. Our mounting conviction throughout the novel of Mrs Beale's hypocrisy is solidly confirmed by this act, when her scheming is at its most
transparent.

In both these novels the manipulative woman stands revealed before the heroine - and us - at the end. In The Wings of the Dove this is not the case. From the beginning James lays the groundwork for Kate's potential as a manipulator. She herself says to Densher that she feels the 'danger of doing something base', at a time when she seems most confident of eventually wearing down Aunt Maud's resistance to their marriage (82). Her situation at Lancaster Gate, her 'dire accessibility to pleasure' from material things, form a strong contrast to Lionel Croy's shabby lodgings and to the drudgery of her sister's existence in a house pervaded by 'the lingering odour of boiled food'. (50,56). She meets Milly, but while she is immediately drawn to her in genuine interest and friendship, their friendship is marked in the first week or two of their acquaintance by the significant materialism of the

...objects of value [Milly] had already pressed on Kate's acceptance.... Kate... promptly embraced the propriety of making it clear that she must forswear shops till she should receive some guarantee that the contents of each one she entered as a humble companion shouldn't be placed at her feet; yet that was in truth not before she had found herself in possession, under whatever protests, of several precious ornaments and other minor conveniences (156).

The phrase 'in truth' manages to hint at something more characteristic of Kate than her protests, giving us the impression that she is susceptible to the 'convenience' of the valuable trinkets that Milly presses upon her.

Thus her perception of Milly's wealth and her admiration of it (she herself privately disclaims envy) are as clear to us as to Kate, so that we are privy to the glimmerings of her plan almost as soon as she conceives it. Later on, as the plan
ripens with Densher's conscious but grudging acquiescence, we are witness to Kate's discussion of strategy with him and their bargaining in Venice as to the part he must play in encouraging Milly's love for him. We are witness also to Kate's private assurances to herself of her good intentions regarding Milly, and the evident sincerity of her liking for the heroine. There is nothing to be revealed in the end about her motives that we do not already know, and she does not stand unmasked before Milly. Clearly, she is not in the same class of villain as her predecessors, as I hope to show in the following discussion of the development of the relationship between the two women.

I would like to begin first by concentrating on what we learn of Kate through Milly's consciousness. The first time we see Milly and Kate together is at the beginning of Book Fourth at a dinner party given by Mrs Lowder. To Milly it seems 'a situation really romantic', and her impression of being an outsider is strong (133). She is a foreigner, detached from the proceedings by her unfamiliarity with the social milieu in which she finds herself, where she is an observer of the action rather than a participant. The opening paragraph invests the scene with an air of unreality which is suggestive of the distance that Milly feels to exist between herself and the other guests. She thinks of her acquaintance with Mrs Lowder and her circle as 'so recent and so sudden a birth'; evidently a violent and unexpected transition (133). Indeed, Milly admits to Lord Mark that she scarcely knows where she is: 'It had all gone so fast...' (133). She thinks of it as a fairy tale, one which is perhaps all the more strange for the fact that her own familiar Mrs Stringham is the fairy godmother. In the face of
such glamour and excitement Mrs Stringham's response is to bear herself contentedly, whereas Milly experiences doubt and unease about what is happening. She wordlessly communes with her companion:

There were twenty persons between them, but this sustained passage was the sharpest sequel yet to that other comparison of views during the pause on the Swiss pass. It almost appeared to Milly that their fortune had been unduly precipitated - as if properly they were in the position of having ventured on a small joke and found the answer out of proportion grave. She couldn't at this moment for instance have said whether, with her quickened perceptions, she were more enlivened or oppressed... (133-4).

Milly's feeling that she has got into more than she bargained for is, in retrospect, ironic. What is to happen is out of proportion grave; she is to be out of her depth in Kate's subtlety. The image of falling in the mention of her fortune being 'unduly precipitated' is not accidental. The phrase is deliberately juxtaposed with the 'Swiss pass' of the previous sentence, and the juxtaposition evokes the abyss of Book Third. Mrs Stringham, on seeing Milly perched on what seems the very edge of the mountain, initially thinks her liable 'to slip, to slide, to leap, to be precipitated by a single false movement, by a turn of the head - how could one tell? - into whatever was beneath' (118). On reflection her fright leaves her, and she decides that Milly 'was looking down on the kingdoms of the earth....Was she choosing among them or did she want them all?' (119). If Lancaster Gate is the worldly kingdom Milly has fallen into, it is not of her own choosing; it is Mrs Stringham who has precipitated her. The complacence of the older woman, as she 'glittered... with [her] new sense of success' is placed against the instinctive unease of her companion (133). Milly's doubts are not concrete forebodings,
but in retrospect they assume a significance which is greater than that of a mere device for unfolding the plot.

Kate is introduced in this scene from Milly's point of view, as 'the handsome girl, that lady's niece' (134). The description establishes her personal as well as her social credentials. It is an impersonal statement which shows Milly's appreciation of Kate as an aesthetic object, and confirms Milly's role as an observer. This is emphasised by the repetition of 'handsome girl' later in the same sentence, and the phrase 'offered to her sight', which suggests that Kate is an *objet d'art*. [1] Milly's attitude to Kate is expressed almost wholly in these terms. Kate had made on her...

...a great impression of beauty and eminence. This impression had remained so with Milly that at present, and although her 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 - she ranked now as a wonderful creature... (134).

The emphasis on the sense of sight indicates Milly's preoccupation with appearance and is reminiscent of Maisie's initial response to Mrs Beale, as well as Isabel's to Madame Merle. In each case the heroine is fascinated by the manipulative woman's social presence and appearance, and the latter is always described as charming. Milly's description of Kate as 'that wonderful creature' recalls Maisie's ingenuous

1. This foreshadows Densher's perception in Book Sixth of Kate as an actress, with her aunt expecting her to perform: 'Densher saw himself for the moment as in his purchased stall at the play; the watchful manager was in the depths of a box and the poor actress in the glare of the footlights...her wig, her paint, her jewels, every mark of her expression impeccable, and her entrance accordingly greeted with the proper round of applause' (270).
comment to Miss Overmore: '"I think you're lovely"' (33).

There is a suggestion in all the novels that the heroine is charmed almost in spite of herself. In the above passage this is conveyed by a constant implication of detachment. Kate creates an 'impression' of beauty and eminence (as though it were separate from her real self), and she is 'that wonderful creature' - a phrase as impersonal as 'the handsome girl, that lady's niece'. Milly is aware of the whole scene, but her eyes 'were mainly engaged with Kate Croy'. The implication is that Kate's visual fascination is so strong that Milly's eyes are engaged with her in spite of the novelty and splendour of the scene. To emphasize her visual sense in this way is to imply that Kate's attraction for Milly is so predominantly visual that there is a sense in which it is also blinding: it fills up the field of vision, leaving no room for critical observation. It recalls strongly the description of Isabel as dazzled by Madame Merle.

Despite Milly's sense of being overwhelmed by the occasion and Kate's beauty, she foresees the probability of a relationship between them:

She had never, she might well believe, been in such a state of vibration; her sensibility was almost too sharp for her comfort: there were for example more indications than she could reduce to order in the manner of the friendly niece, who struck her as distinguished and interesting, as in fact surprisingly genial. This young woman's type had, visibly, other possibilities; yet here, of its own free movement, it had already sketched a relation. Were they, Miss Croy and she, to take up the tale where their two elders had left it off so many years before? - were they to find they liked each other and to try for themselves whether a scheme of constancy on more modern lines could be worked? (135-6).

Again, the implications of the passage are ambiguous. Kate is friendly, distinguished and interesting, and yet following
these positive statements about her Milly's conclusion is, cautiously, that she is 'surprisingly genial' (my emphasis). She cannot reduce her impressions of Kate to order, and yet her perception is abnormally acute. She sees the possibility of resuming with Kate the kind of friendship that the aunt and the companion originally had, but this is a reference tainted by the outcome of that shortlived adolescent relationship. Mrs Lowder patronized Susan Stringham for the poverty of her marriage, pitied and then neglected her; the latter's motive now for invoking the early friendship is largely a kind of revenge. Mrs Stringham has

...at last something to show... Whatever Mrs Lowder might have to show... she would have nothing like Milly Theale, who constituted the trophy producible by poor Susan (131).

This comment on the nature of the friendship between the two older women does not augur well for a 'scheme of constancy' for the two younger.

Milly is only too well aware of having doubts about what she might be letting herself in for, without knowing exactly what the danger is, but the very uncertainty of the future seems to hold an attraction for her. Indeed her 'plea for people and her love of life', her express reasons for coming to London, appear to be answered by Lancaster Gate:

...no little of the interest was going to be in the fresh reference and fresh effect both of people's cleverness and of their simplicity. She thrilled, she consciously flushed, and all to turn pale again, with the certitude—it had never been so present—that she should find herself completely involved: the very air of the place, the pitch of the occasion, had for her both so sharp a ring and so deep an undertone (135).

It is precisely the issue of involvement which both thrills and terrifies her. She sees her choice as between complete
involvement or none at all, and therefore she stands to gain or lose a great deal. The suddenness with which she finds herself forced into making such a momentous decision serves both to confuse her and to intensify her feelings. Thus, for example, her perception of Kate is acute, and, with hindsight, portentous:

... [Milly] felt Mrs Lowder as a person of whom the mind might in two or three days roughly make the circuit. She would sit there massive at least while one attempted it; whereas Miss Croy, the handsome girl, would indulge in incalculable movements that might interfere with one's tour. She was the amusing resisting ominous fact... (136).

Her assessment of Kate as incalculable and ominously resisting points to the hidden side of her character, which Milly is to suffer from; and yet it does not help her resist Kate's fascination, any more than Isabel and Maisie were at first able to resist the fascination of Madame Merle and Mrs Beale.

Milly's doubts are focused and magnified later in the scene with the image of the electric bell:

... Susie's overture to Mrs Lowder had been their joke, but they had pressed in that gaiety an electric bell that continued to sound. Positively while she sat there she had the loud rattle in her ears, and she wondered during these moments why the others didn't hear it. They didn't stare, they didn't smile, and the fear in her that I speak of was but her own desire to stop it (143).

The bell symbolizes the alarming unknown, intensifying the earlier reference to the pitch of the occasion, which has for her 'so sharp a ring and so deep an undertone' (135). That was in the context of Milly's excitement at the prospect of complete involvement, and it represented the part of the girl which wanted people and was dazzled by Kate. Here the pitch of the occasion is no longer the euphonious ring of the earlier passage, which suggested both purity and clarity, but is
instead a harsh mechanical rattle. This is the other face of the thrill of involvement - the fear of involvement, which includes Milly's view of Kate as ominous and incalculable.

She recognizes both aspects of her response to the people and the occasion, and although in the above passage her fear is palpable, she deliberately chooses to accept the consequences of involvement:

[Her fear] dropped, however, as if the alarm itself had ceased; she seemed to have seen in a quick though tempered glare that there were two courses for her, one to leave London again the first thing in the morning, the other to do nothing at all. Well, she would do nothing at all; she was already doing it; more than that, she had already done it, and her chance was gone. She gave herself up... (143).

Her choice is couched in terms of self surrender, and carries a sense of the inevitable, ('more than that, she had already done it, and her chance was gone'), but it is a surrender made with her eyes open. Unsure as she may be about the nature of the dangers of involvement with Lancaster Gate, she still has a strong impression of risk. She is therefore - unlike Isabel and Maisie - not completely innocent of the need for caution. It is as if she is prepared to conduct an experiment with herself and her life in allowing herself to be drawn into the society she finds herself amidst. We must grasp that, for all that there is something sinister in Kate's attraction for Milly, it is by no means a function simply of Milly's subjective imagination. Kate's beauty and social presence signify a great deal more than the affected refinements of Mrs Beale or the sophisticated but wholly public personality of Madame Merle. Kate, whatever her capacity for deception, is robustly individual: Milly, who wants to be engaged with life, is attracted to the life in Kate, and we can only feel that she
is right. Kate's vitality and presence stand in significant relation, for example, to the sour perversion of spirit that we find in her sister, Mrs Condrip, whose cramped and impecunious circumstances have drained her of all refinement of manner and intelligence. We have here to understand two things; that Kate's attraction is no mere subjective illusion on Milly's part; and that Milly is aware of a sinister aspect to Kate's incalculability but wilfully accepts the 'challenge' that life and Kate offer.

Lord Mark's assertion that she is a 'success' provides a potential perspective for Milly in her relation to Lancaster Gate; indeed in her impressionable state 'she almost felt as if he were showing her visions while he spoke' (142). The picture of the worldly Lord Mark as a seer is absurd, as she realizes, but it is the anomalous connection of such a prosaic individual with her visions that triggers her momentary fright. Despite this she feels that he is something of a guide to the Lancaster Gate set, and as a result will continue to have a special significance for her — particularly in his importance as a representative member of that circle. Her insight into his character is expressed as a general comment which embraces his colleagues as well:

'"...you all here know each other — I see that — so far as you know anything. You know what you're used to, and it's your being used to it — that, and that only — that makes you. But there are things you don't know" ' (145).

The shallow familiarity of the group reflects a smugness of attitude which precludes freshness or depth of perception. Milly elaborates with reference to Lord Mark: '"...You're familiar with everything, but conscious really of nothing" ' (146).
However it is Lord Mark who, for all his superficiality, helps to create for Milly the main impression which is to emerge from this scene for her: the difference between herself and Kate Croy. Her fascination with Kate emphasizes her awareness of the difference, and her conversation with Lord Mark serves only to increase her sense of it. Although Milly has assumed that since he is an initiated member of the Lancaster Gate circle Lord Mark will be able to throw some light on the handsome girl, she is surprised to discover that her questions about Kate are met with an equal curiosity. His relative lack of interest in Milly is seen by her as a tacit comment on the power of the other women to 'draw' others. She is 'conscious of the failure...of curiosity he had just shown in respect to herself' and inevitably compares his reactions to herself and Kate:

It was the handsome girl alone, one of his own species and his own society, who had made him feel uncertain; of his certainties about a mere little American, a cheap exotic, imported almost wholesale and whose habitat, with its conditions of climate, growth and cultivation, its immense profusion but its few varieties and thin development, he was perfectly satisfied (147-8).

Though Lord Mark's response to Milly in part reflects his own limitations, she prefers to efface herself in his eyes, wishing to 'keep herself out of the question' for him (146). She is interested rather in his uncertainty about Kate, taking it as symptomatic of the general attitude of his social peers towards her: '...if the handsome girl's place among them was something even their initiation couldn't deal with - why then she would indeed be a quantity' (149). That Lord Mark should require outside help to understand Kate is very important: Kate cannot be dismissed easily; she doesn't belong to the 'set' in this
Milly's own sense that she is dealing with a rather mysterious 'quantity' occurs soon after the acquaintance of the two young women. She perceives that Kate is bored by Susan Stringham:

...this young woman saw nothing in her - nothing to account for anything, not even for Milly's own indulgence: which little fact became in turn to the latter's mind a fact of significance. It was a light on the handsome girl - representing more than merely showed - that poor Susie was simply as nought to her (159).

It is a significant fact because it indicates an important divergence between them, and it is at this point that Milly begins to find evidence for her hypothesis of Kate's difference. Firstly, Kate's attitude is one that Milly cannot understand; it is with a sense of wonder that she first perceives it. Secondly, Milly feels it to be a tacit criticism of herself. It 'faintly rankled', and this is a defensive reaction to her inference that somehow it is she who is being made to feel different from Kate, not vice versa. Almost immediately she begins to excuse Kate, and the fact that she does so, combined with the generous way she does it, shows the effect of her decision to become involved:

...she grasped the reason, and the reason enriched her mind. Wasn't it sufficiently the reason that the handsome girl was, with twenty other splendid qualities, the least bit brutal too, and didn't she suggest, as no one yet had ever done for her new friend, that there might be a wild beauty in that, and even a strange grace? (160).

There is a fanciful contradiction in this justification that is the product of Milly's obvious desire to believe the best of her friend, and which is reminiscent of Isabel's deliberate romanticizing of Madame Merle in Chapter XVIII in Portrait.
Isabel thinks it romantic to think of Madame Merle as French, but on finding her to be American, finds that even more romantic: "...rarer even than to be French seemed it to be American on such interesting terms" (201). The passage above suggests Milly's own language and thought process. The fact that the justification is posed as a negative question - "Wasn't it...the reason...?" - implies the tentative and searching quality of Milly's thoughts, which is emphasized by the same construction in the second half of the sentence: "...and didn't she suggest...?". The qualification of beauty and grace with 'wild' and 'strange' shows too her attempt to reconcile the aspects of Kate which charm with those that affront. The effect of this passage is to make us aware of Milly's talking herself into an acceptable view of Kate's attitude to Susan Stringham. Having attributed to Kate desirable qualities, and bent her definition of brutality to suit her purpose ('Kate wasn't brutally brutal – which Milly had hitherto benightedly supposed the only way...but rather indifferently, defensively [so]'), she then goes on to generalize from this about cultural differences:

...[Kate] knew with singular quickness what she wasn't, as they said in New York, going to like. In that way at least people were clearly quicker in England than at home; and Milly could quite see after a little how such instincts might become usual in a world in which dangers abounded....At all events, with more sense of them, there were more precautions, and it was a remarkable world altogether in which there could be precautions, on whatever ground, against Susie (160).

By the end of the passage Milly has persuaded herself that Kate's attitude is quite normal, and indeed just what one might expect of any of her social peers. Thus the American girl has been able to change the disturbing contemplation of an
individual response into a bemused but complacent observation on the nature of London society. The tentative phrases which denote her uncertain and hesitant reasoning - 'after a little' and 'might become usual' - have gone, to be replaced by the decisiveness of such a phrase as 'at all events'. The significant fact about Kate is no longer a threat to Milly; it is merely symptomatic of a wider phenomenon.

The next proof of Kate's difference is considerably less easy to explain away. Susan Stringham has just related the coincidence of Mrs Lowder's and Kate's knowing the same English gentleman that Milly met in New York. In the ensuing discussion the narrative adopts Mrs Stringham's viewpoint, so that we are not given a clue to Milly's feelings until her companion mentions, as an accepted fact, that Mrs Lowder wishes her niece to marry Lord Mark. Abruptly the centre of consciousness shifts:

Milly had, under her comrade's eyes, a minute of mute detachment. She had lived with Kate Croy for several days in a state of intimacy as deep as it had been sudden, and they had clearly, in talk, in many directions, proceeded to various extremities. Yet it now came over her as in a clear cold wave that there was a possible account of their relations in which the quantity her new friend had told her might have figured as small, as smallest, beside the quantity she hadn't.

The shock that is suggested in 'a clear cold wave' is due to Milly's sudden perception of another view of Kate. She cannot this time fondly explain away Kate's behaviour, and this is reflected in the minute of mute detachment from the conversation; last time she was eager to make excuses for her friend without considering seriously the possibility that Kate was culpable. However the present matter is not a question of attitude but one of withheld information, or at worst
deliberate deceit. It strikes us too with something of the shock that Milly feels, both because of the sudden narrative shift, and because we have been present at a conversation — albeit indirectly reported — between herself and Kate precisely on the issue of Mrs Lowder's plans for Lord Mark (158). Like Milly, we have a memory of Kate's professed ignorance.

The other piece of knowledge that has just been revealed to Milly — Densher's acquaintance with Mrs Lowder and her niece — serves to confirm her impression of Kate's lack of candour, and to deepen the mystery surrounding it: '...this abrupt extrusion of Mr Densher altered all proportions, had an effect on all values' (164). The primary effect it has is on Milly's perception of Kate:

...Milly found herself seeing Kate, quite fixing her, in the light of the knowledge that it was a face on which Mr Densher's eyes had more or less familiarly rested and which, by the same token, had looked, rather more beautifully than less, into his own....the odd result of the thought was to intensify for the girl that side of her friend which she had doubtless already been more prepared than she quite knew to think of as the 'other', the not wholly calculable (165-6).

Her earlier feelings, then, have been invoked by the 'extrusion' of Merton Densher into her consciousness of Kate; her initial sense of the other girl's incalculability is beginning to be justified. Of course as readers we are already privy to the knowledge of Kate's actual relations with Densher, so we know that Milly's instinct to assume a significant connection between the two is correct. Consequently our suspicion of Kate's duplicity is more solidly based than Milly's, although we have nothing specific to accuse Kate of. Milly's new awareness of the depths of the other girl's silence again strengthens her perception of the difference between
them, because this time it is not explicable as a cultural phenomenon, but is clearly a difference of a much more individual kind:

... she became conscious of being here on the edge of a great darkness. She should never know how Kate truly felt about anything such a one as Milly Theale should give her to feel. Kate would never — and not from ill will nor from duplicity, but from a sort of failure of common terms — reduce it to such a one's comprehension or put it within her convenience (166).

A failure of common terms is an important concept. It implies a certain lack of humanity on Kate's part, in what Milly sees as the essential reserve with which she hides her true feelings. Milly, with her desire for involvement, has in a sense declared herself on the side of openness, so that Kate's reserve seems like an implicit criticism. To say that she would not 'reduce it to... one's comprehension or put it within [Milly's] convenience' is to imply that she has a choice in the matter; although she is free to make her feelings known, she will not. Milly by an act of faith has put her trust in Kate; on discovering that Kate does not honour that trust with her own, Milly is left to taste 'her own possible betrayals' (166). For Milly such a failure of common terms is extremely significant, and its importance is expressed in the use of such apparently melodramatic terms as 'betrayal', 'darkness' and 'abyss'. But most importantly the phrase denotes the personal and cultural incomprehension which makes Milly ripe for exploitation by Kate. Kate's incomparably more subtle character eludes the naive and wilfully trusting Milly; however we accept with Milly that Kate has a choice to be more open than she is, and 'failure of common terms' signifies that real communication or understanding on either side is unlikely.
In spite of the possible abysses which loom for Milly in the connection of Kate and Densher, the element of fascination is still at least as strong in Milly as the fear of betrayal: '...it was, none the less, rather exciting to be conscious of a still sharper reason for interest in the handsome girl...' (165). Although she is to see Kate in the light of the 'other' not infrequently from this point on, yet her choice to become involved and to implement this decision directs her actions. The scene at Matcham in the beginning of Book Fifth illustrates her determination to act on her original decision. Her perception here of Kate as having 'the extraordinary and attaching property of appearing at a given moment to show as a beautiful stranger' (my emphasis) is ironic, but shows the strength of the fascination Milly feels (180). In order partly to remove the distraction of Densher's viewpoint from her perception of Kate, she decides to give proof of her belief in the other woman's friendship by asking her a favour. Her impulse is to make up to Kate for mistrusting her, and she does this by asking Kate to accompany her to see Sir Luke Strett, and to keep the visit a secret from Susan Stringham.

In asking this of Kate, Milly deliberately gives her access to the knowledge of her possible ill-health, which is to be pivotal in Kate's later plans. Kate gains power by her knowledge because 'this quite special confidence' is something Milly has kept secret in consequence of its growing significance to her (193). The second piece of knowledge which Kate is eventually to use against her is the secret of Milly's love for Densher; Kate's fine instinct detects it, and combined with her knowledge of Milly's illness, she is in
possession of the two facts she needs to 'work' Milly. Other people too are later aware of the same facts — for instance Mrs Lowder and Susan Stringham — but Kate's knowledge is potentially more dangerous:

...it was just the point at which [Milly] had wished to arrive. She wanted to prove to herself that she didn't horribly blame her friend for any reserve; and what better proof could there be than this quite special confidence? If she desired to show Kate that she really believed Kate liked her, how could she show it more than by asking her help? (193).

Mrs Lowder and Susan Stringham, though both desiring (and in some sense working for) Milly's marriage to Densher, do not pose the same threat to Milly because both are to her known quantities. They are not the challenge to her imagination that Kate is; they are predictable in their behaviour and attitudes. Susan Stringham's devotion to her is unquestioned and unquestioning, and Mrs Lowder's approval of her — though owing less to sentimentality and emotion than it does to mercenary considerations — is assured. Milly, in recognizing them for what they are, has an implicit confidence in her relation to them that is born of this. Kate's incalculability as the 'beautiful stranger' transcends easy knowledge (180).

Increasingly, Milly's experience of disorientation in her moments of perceiving Kate as 'other', and her sense of their failure of common terms, temper her enjoyment of Kate's company. The result of Milly's attempt to prove her trust in the other woman (by sharing with her the secret of her fears for her health) tends to confirm this failure rather than dispel it. Her original decision requires her to continue to be open with Kate on the subject, so that she is continuing to allow Kate power over her in the sharing of this confidence:
...[Kate] stood there, none the less, so in her bloom and in her strength, so completely again the 'handsome girl' beyond all others...that to meet her now with the note of the plaintive would amount somehow to a surrender, to a confession. She would never in her life be ill; the greatest doctor would keep her, at the worst, the fewest minutes; and it was as if she had asked just with all this practical impeccability for all that was most mortal in her friend (214).

Kate's 'practical impeccability' perhaps denotes more than just her superior physical condition. It implies the lack of humanity, a callousness and impatience, already noted above; and illustrates in its juxtaposition with Milly's implied mortality the extent to which Milly feels Kate to be implicitly powerful. The potential seriousness of the threat her knowledge poses is recognized by Milly in her perception that to admit to actual ill-health on the authority of Sir Luke Strett is tantamount to 'surrender', and to submit to Kate much more of her private self than she is prepared to give. Their failure of common terms is the soil in which opposition, reserve and duplicity are sown and begin to flourish:

Almost before she knew it she was answering, and answering beautifully, with no consciousness of fraud, only as with a sudden flare of the famous 'willpower' she had heard about, read about, and which was what her medical adviser had mainly thrown her back on. 'Oh, it's all right. [Sir Luke's] lovely.' Kate was splendid...'You mean you've been absurd?' 'Absurd.' It was a simple word to say, but the consequence of it, for our young woman, was that she felt it, as soon as spoken, to have done something for her safety.

And Kate really hung on her lips. 'There's nothing at all the matter?' 'Nothing to worry about' (214-5).

This evidence of willpower in response to her fear of surrender illustrates an awareness of danger that is wholly foreign to either Isabel or Maisie at the corresponding point in their respective novels. In *Wings* there is no moment equivalent to Maisie's discovery in the last scene of the novel
that Mrs Beale is totally indifferent to her except in so far as she can be used as bait for Sir Claude. Kate is never indifferent to Milly; indeed she is genuinely persuaded of her own friendship and compassion for her. Neither is there a moment in the novel when Milly perceives that an entirely unexpected relationship exists between Kate and Densher, such as Isabel discovers between Madame Merle and Osmond. As we have seen, Milly spends a great deal of time trying not to see that such a relationship exists, in spite of her intuition that it does: 'She never wanted the truth', as Kate says later says to Densher; 'She wanted you' (481). There is of course a parallel in Wings to the scene in Portrait where the Countess reveals to Isabel the identity of Pansy's mother: that is, Lord Mark's revelation of Kate's and Densher's engagement. However it is more proper to speak of his presumed revelation of the engagement, since the scene is reported second hand to Densher through Susan Stringham, and it is never quite clear whether Lord Mark is guessing at the engagement in his resentment at being refused by Kate, or whether he has in fact learnt of it. The controlling consciousness at the time is Densher's so that the narrative is heavily coloured with his guilt. Because we know that he is in fact engaged to Kate, we tend to assume with him that Lord Mark knows and has told Milly the 'truth'. Indeed both Susan Stringham and Densher are implicated in the conspiracy to manoeuvre Milly into marriage, and so for the narrator to present Lord Mark's supposed accusations to us through them is a clever way to blur the question of who knows exactly what, and how.

The indirect presentation of a key scene is repeated in
the omission of the final meeting between Milly and Densher, and is an example of James's changing technique. So too is the fact that in this novel the heroine is much more a party to her own betrayal than the previous heroines. Isabel's arrogance may contribute largely to her gullibility, and Maisie may be only too eager to please in facilitating the schemes of the adults, but neither are so completely aware of the pitfalls and potential dangers of their situation as Milly (even Maggie Verver, the later heroine of *The Golden Bowl*, is initially completely ignorant of the possibility of betrayal). Not only does she become involved with the Lancaster Gate set with her eyes open to its preoccupation with wealth - (she notes 'that they appeared all - every one they saw - to think tremendously of money'), but on two occasions Kate herself accurately analyses for Milly's benefit the motives and operation of her circle (170). On the first occasion, early in their friendship, Kate describes briefly the philosophy of 'the working and the worked' which 'were in London...the parties to every relation':

...every one who had anything to give - it was true they were the fewest - made the sharpest possible bargain for it, got at least its value in return. The strangest thing furthermore was that this might be in cases a happy understanding. The worker in one connexion 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. People could quite like each other in the midst of it... (157-8).

The lightness of tone and the touch of irony in this are consistent with the description of a social system in which there is never much possibility of getting something for nothing; the exploiter of some rich vein must often take a turn at being mined for another's profit. The two women are able at this early stage to joke about Milly's own paying
power: '...that Milly would pay a hundred per cent - and even to the end, doubtless, through the nose - was just the beautiful basis on which they found themselves' (158).

The second occasion is one which Milly cannot take so lightly. Kate, in urging her to recognize her freedom from the bonds that indissolubly link the Lancaster Gate set together, gives her a clear warning to escape while she still has time:

...[Kate] wound up, while Milly gaped, with extraordinary words. 'We're of no use to you - it's decent to tell you. You'd be of use to us, but that's a different matter. My honest advice to you would be' - she went indeed all lengths - 'to drop us while you can. It would be funny if you didn't soon see how awfully better you can do. We've not really done for you the least thing worth speaking of - nothing you mightn't easily have had in some other way. Therefore you're under no obligation. You won't want us next year; we shall only continue to want you. But that's no reason for you, and you mustn't pay too dreadfully for poor Mrs Stringham's having let you in. She has the best conscience in the world; she's enchanted with what she has done; but you shouldn't take your people from her. It has been quite awful to see you do it.'

Milly tried to be amused, so as not - it was too absurd - to be fairly frightened....'And yet without Susie I shouldn't have had you.'

It had been at this point, however, that Kate flickered highest. 'Oh you may very well loathe me yet!' (231).

This is either a very potent warning or a bluff. If it is the latter, it is like the strategy that Madame Merle used to deflect Isabel's attention from the secret of the older woman's relationship with Osmond and Pansy: she names in casual conversation the hypothesis of her 'making love' to Osmond, and discards it equally casually as an absurdity. (In The Golden Bowl Charlotte Stant's challenging the heroine, Maggie Verver, to tell her how Charlotte has offended her is, I believe, intended to have the same bold effect. Unfortunately Charlotte is unaware of Maggie's knowledge of her adultery with Amerigo, due to his deliberate silence; therefore in choosing
to deny being offended by Charlotte, the heroine gives the situation a new twist in this novel by turning the intended bluff back on Charlotte, and thus bluffing the bluffer.) In the above passage, Kate is implying that Milly will be used by London society, and that Kate herself is not necessarily exempt by her friendship with Milly from the rapacious habits of her peers. If it is a bluff it is a much more audacious one than Madame Merle's, for it 'fairly frightens' Milly. Kate appears as 'a creature who paced like a panther', evoking the relationship of predator to prey (231). The extent of Milly's unease is indicated by her 'trying' to be amused so as not to be scared; the sudden interruption of ' - it was too absurd - ' suggests Milly's rational attempt to allay a genuine fear.

In the context of this fear Kate's bestowal of the epithet 'dove' upon Milly appears 'like an inspiration':

...she found herself accepting as the right one, while she caught her breath with relief, the name so given her. She met it on the instant as she would have met revealed truth; it lighted up the strange dusk in which she lately had walked. That was what was the matter with her. She was a dove. Oh wasn't she? (232).

It reinforces the predator/prey image, but it represents for Milly a more positive value: it is as if she has found in the name a clue to an identity that will enable her to cope with such trials as Kate's apparent warning. She almost immediately adopts it when facing Mrs Lowder's request that Milly discover from Kate whether Densher is back in London. Milly has not wished to perform this task and meets the older woman's tacit question with an evasion 'the most dovelike', which in its effect is reminiscent of Maisie's policy of deliberate
ignorance:

'I don't think, dear lady, he's here.'

It gave her straightway the measure of the success she could have as a dove: that was recorded in the long look of deep criticism, a look without a word, that Mrs Lowder poured forth (233).

This was Ida's reaction to her daughter's obtuseness too, and we can see in both cases that the heroines' deliberate adoption of a 'simple' role (ignorant child, dovelike artlessness) helps to protect them against tasks with unpleasant consequences. Maisie does not want to bear insults between her parents, and thus incur their displeasure; Milly does not want to be forced to raise Densher's name with Kate, because of the awkwardness it would inevitably create. In the guise of the dovelike Milly has found a way to combat the intrusion of others on her privacy and, however passively, to resist being 'worked'.

With Kate, however, Milly does not assume the dovelike. Instead the two women tacitly exercise a common restraint in their intimacy:

...with [Kate] Milly had constantly proceeded, and more than ever of late, on the theory of intimate confessions, private frank ironies that made up for their public grimaces and amid which, face to face, they wearily put off the mask.

These puttings-off of the mask had finally quite become the form taken by their moments together....They flourished their masks, the independent pair, as they might have flourished Spanish fans; they smiled and sighed on removing them; but the gestures, the smiles, the sighs, strangely enough, might have been suspected the greatest reality in the business....It was when they called each other's attention to their ceasing to pretend, it was then that what they were keeping back was most in the air (346).

Milly's 'theory of intimate confessions' is a continuation of her impulse to show Kate that she trusts her, but since we have already seen that Milly equates real openness with surrender, it is not surprising to find that her private frankness with
Kate is based on a 'theory' rather than a real desire for closeness. Their common perception of the removal of their public masks is 'the greatest reality'; ironically, though their recognition of the transition from public to private is uppermost, and they candidly acknowledge the relief it brings, they do not proceed in fact towards greater openness. Beneath the theory of intimacy to which they pay lip service, there exists in each an impenetrable protective layer, and each is aware that what is not being said is as important, if not more so, than what is.

James expresses this unspoken tension in an image that echoes the earlier picture of Kate pacing like a panther and Milly, fascinated, her sitting prey:

...we have positively the image, in the delicate dusk, of the figures so associated and yet so opposed, so mutually watchful: that of the angular pale princess, ostrich-plumed, black-robed, hung about with amulets, reminders, relics, mainly seated, mainly still, and that of the upright restless slow-circling lady of her court who exchanges with her, across the black water streaked with evening gleams, fitful questions and answers. The upright lady, with thick dark braids down her back, drawing over the grass a more embroidered train, makes the whole circuit, and makes it again, and the broken talk, brief and sparingly allusive, seems more to cover than to free their sense (347).

The two figures are weighted with heavy drapes and ornaments, suggesting a physical restraint on their freedom of movement; from this comes the sense of something muffled and darkened in their intercourse. The juxtaposition of the figures - 'so associated and yet so opposed' - one still, one restlessly moving, expresses the tension that is inherent in their relationship. The 'black water streaked with evening gleams' which divides them represents a lack of common meeting ground, their essential failure of common terms. But the very
qualities of obscurity and mystery which are suggested are not simply the things which separate the women, they are the qualities which provide for the interest of each in the other. Each has a novelty for the other which ensures a mutual attraction. We have seen how Kate fascinates Milly; for Kate, the 'marvellous mixture of [Milly's] weakness and of her strength, her peril, if such it were, and her option, made her, kept her, irresistibly interesting' (347-8). Although part of Milly's 'strength' and her 'option' is for Kate her great wealth and the freedom it confers upon her, Kate is not so motivated by practical considerations in befriending the heroine as her predecessors Madame Merle and Mrs Beale:

> It may be declared for Kate, at all events, that her sincerity about her friend, through this time, was deep, her compassionate imagination strong; and that these things gave her a virtue, a good conscience, a credibility for herself, so to speak, that were later to be precious to her (348).

This kind of self-justification is not possible for Madame Merle or Mrs Beale, who quite plainly in the end, if not beforehand, show themselves both guilty and conscious of their guilt. Kate on the contrary apparently believes that her deception is born largely of compassion — what Edel calls 'a "creative" lie' — and that it is to Milly's benefit (9). Whether she has serious doubts about the morality of her actions or just believes herself to be in some sense a teller of white lies, the effect is the same. Under the cover of friendship she systematically deceives Milly as to the nature of her own relationship with Densher, with a view to encouraging Milly's own feelings about him. Though she may initially have had no idea of her later plans, she took up acquaintance with Milly at least partly on Madame Merle's
principle that a wealthy friend is always potentially useful.

Kate's undeniable envy of Milly's wealth is clearly evident in the party scene at the Palazzo Leporelli in Book Eighth. It is the last time we see the two young women together. It parallels the first of Mrs Lowder's dinner parties (at which the two Americans are introduced to London society) both in the magnificence of the occasion and in the fact that Kate and Milly do not appear together, but are seen separately. In the original scene we focus on Kate through Milly's eyes, whereas in this scene Milly is the object of Kate's attention and fascination. James's neat parallelism highlights the tension between them. At Lancaster Gate Kate was on her own territory and in command of the situation; here in Venice Milly has come into her own as mistress of the magnificent palace:

...[Densher] noted that Kate was somehow - for Kate - wanting in lustre. As a striking young presence she was practically superseded...she might fairly have been dressed to-night in the little black frock, superficially indistinguishable, that Milly had laid aside (402).

This inversion of roles is deliberately emphasized by the image of Kate figuratively donning Milly's cast off frock; when applied to someone as powerfully attractive as Kate, the effect is particularly humbling. The observation helps us to see her as more vulnerable because more unguardedly herself than we have seen her previously; often she is shown through the medium of Milly's or Densher's fascination, and as a result appears consistently powerful and self-assured. Thus for Densher to observe that she is wanting in lustre is a significantly different perception of Kate from what we are used to, and clearly it owes something to Milly's current
Milly's admiration of Kate's beauty and self-possession during the first dinner party at Lancaster Gate is now replaced by the latter's envy of Milly's wealth and the power it gives her. Kate's sense of what her friend is and has is obviously uppermost in her thoughts on this occasion, so much so that Densher easily reads it in her admiration of Milly's pearls:

Densher saw now how they suited [Milly], but was perhaps still more aware of something intense in his companion's feeling about them. Milly was indeed a dove; this was the figure, though it most applied to her spirit. Yet he knew in a moment that Kate was just now, for reasons hidden from him, exceptionally under the impression of that element of wealth in her which was a power, which was a great power, and which was dove-like only so far as one remembered that doves have wings and wondrous flights...(403).

At this point in the novel the contrast between the two women is marked, as Kate's consciousness reflects. Milly is at her most dovelike; she is 'let loose among them in a wonderful white dress' - an image suggestive of an almost miraculous visitation of a winged creature (400). Her change from 'the little black frock' to a 'wonderful white dress' is so striking as to have a symbolic as well as a sensuous value. It represents the idea of herself that she wishes to present to others: her desire to live and her determination to transcend any hint of the moribund. The result of her determination is the extent to which we can see, with Densher, that she has impressed Kate. Her wondrous string of pearls may be the immediate cause of Kate's envy, but they also represent all the things that marriage with Densher will deny her:

Milly's royal ornament had - under pressure now not wholly occult - taken on the character of a symbol of differences, differences of which the vision was actually in Kate's face. It might have been in her face too that, well as she would certainly look in
pearls, pearls were exactly what Merton Densher would
never be able to give her. Wasn't that the great
difference that Milly to-night symbolised? She
unconsciously represented to Kate, and Kate took it in
at every pore, that there was nobody with whom she had
less in common than a remarkably handsome girl married
to a man unable to make her on any such lines as that
the least little present (404).

Kate's envy reminds us of her discovery in Book First that
'material things spoke to her....She had a dire accessibility
to pleasure from such sources' (50). She takes in at every pore
the unalterable difference between herself and Milly; it shows
in her face and in her want of lustre, which is later
implicitly compared with the lustre of the pearls. These are
the physical manifestations which demonstrate her psychological
vulnerability to the show of wealth, and they are capped by the
first show of tears that we have seen in Kate. Densher, after
having tacitly condoned Kate's plan for him to marry Milly,
inherit her money, and thus endow with wealth his subsequent
marriage to Kate, is callously forcing her to spell out this
logical sequence:

'You're cryptic, love!'
It made her keep her eyes on him, and he could thus see
that, by one of those incalculable motions in her
without which she wouldn't have been a quarter so
interesting, they half-filled with tears from some
source he had too roughly touched. 'I'm taking a
trouble for you I never dreamed I should take for any
human creature' (407).

It is a measure of more than the strength of her desire for
wealth and power that she has gone to such trouble, and that it
should produce tears. Her tears are an expression of the
tension within her, of the strain attached to her consistent
show of willpower. She is vulnerable to shame – and as well no
doubt to a sense that the crudest statement of her actions is
hopelessly unfair to the complexity of motivation behind them.
Her vulnerability helps preserve her attraction for both
Towards the end of the scene there occurs another passage which parallels the first dinner party at Lancaster Gate. Then, Milly was discussing Kate with Lord Mark, and in turning to look at her by way of illustration found Kate's face turned towards her own at the same time:

All she had meant to do was to insist that this face was fine; but what she had in fact done was to renew again her effect of showing herself to its possessor as conjoined with Lord Mark for some interested view of it.

Milly feels on this occasion as though Kate has caught her doing something she would not wish Kate to know about, as though she has an interest in Kate. She is interested, of course, but in a completely innocent way. The parallel scene in Book Eighth is an inversion of this. Densher and Kate have been discussing the possibility of Densher's marrying Milly:

[Kate] turned her head to where their friend was again in range, and it made him turn his, so that they watched a minute in concert. Milly, from the other side, happened at the moment to notice them, and she sent across toward them in response all the candour of her smile, the lustre of her pearls, the value of her life, the essence of her wealth. It brought them together again with faces made fairly grave by the reality she put into their plan. Kate herself grew a little pale for it, and they had for a time only a silence.

Milly's smile is candid, not in any way accusing, yet the other two are conjoined in a thoroughly 'interested view' of her and are only too aware of it, as their gravity and silence, and Kate's pallor, show. In the former passage Milly's feeling that she has been caught at something she shouldn't be doing is purely fanciful; in this passage, the conjunction of the observers is significant.

The inversion of the earlier passage indicates what has
happened to Milly since her introduction to London society. In one sense she is no longer the interested observer on the fringe of society, wishing for involvement with life and people, and fascinated by the handsome girl who seems to epitomize the life Milly wants to experience. Now in Venice it is Milly who has the glamour, the position and power; she is the principle actor. But her social success has meant that she is just as effectively isolated from life and people, partly through her refusal to be pitied (which causes a certain aloofness in her relations with others), and partly through society's deference for— if not slavish worship of— the show of wealth. In the earlier scene she was the isolated observer; now she is the isolated object of observation. Her inability to be seen independently of her wealth has already been noted in the Introduction:

She couldn't dress it away, nor walk it away, nor read it away, nor think it away; she could neither smile it away in any dreamy absence nor blow it away in any softened sigh....It had to be the thing you were (117).

In the final chapter of Book Eighth, her smile conveys for Densher and Kate 'the lustre of her pearls, the value of her life, the essence of her wealth'. She is powerless to dissociate herself from the connotations of wealth, and her helplessness is suggested in the ambiguity of the phrase 'the value of her life'. Sandwiched between the references to purely material things, it cannot avoid being tainted by a sordid materialism.

Because it is Densher and Kate who perceive these things in her smile, we are inclined to interpret the value of Milly's life in their terms, which are crudely but logically reducible to monetary considerations. The value of her life to these two
is expressible in the amount she will leave to Densher in the event of her marriage to him, and her subsequent death. Naturally to Milly herself it means more than this: it means the quality of the life that is left to her, the experience of living and involvement with people. However 'value' in this context is too loaded a term not to be compromised by its association with material things. It implies the inevitability of Milly's being perceived in this context by others, and being treated by them accordingly. Moreover, the identification of Densher with Kate in this instance puts his intermittent protestations of non-involvement in the conspiracy in a very dubious light.

In this novel there is no scene equivalent to the denouement in Portrait and Maisie when the manipulative woman realizes in the presence of the heroine that she has been found out. Although Kate learns from Densher that Lord Mark has informed Milly of their supposed engagement, she doesn't betray guilt in the same way that Madame Merle and Mrs Beale do:

'The great thing,' Kate then resumed, 'is that she's satisfied. Which,' she continued, looking across at [Densher], 'is what I've worked for.'
'Satisfied to die in the flower of her youth?'
'Well, at peace with you.'
'Oh "peace"!' he murmured with his eyes on the fire.
'The peace of having loved.'
He raised his eyes to her. 'Is that peace?'
'Of having been loved,' she went on. 'That is. Of having,' she wound up, 'realised her passion. She wanted nothing more. She has had all she wanted....We've succeeded.' She spoke with her eyes deep in his own. 'She won't have loved you for nothing.' It made him wince, but she insisted. 'And you won't have loved me' (485-6).

Kate here insists on a double success: that, despite Milly's disillusionment by Lord Mark, she has achieved satisfaction in her relationship with Densher, and thus had all she wanted.
The corollary of this is the ambiguous "She won't have loved you for nothing": she will have left Densher a handsome legacy. In this way Kate can believe that her plans have operated for Milly's benefit as much as for her own. In fact, she appears to have persuaded herself that she and Densher have provided Milly with a valuable experience that no one else was capable of giving her, and therefore she does not need to scrutinize her motives too closely.

There is a certain amount of truth in what Kate says. Her claim that Milly has 'realised her passion' is a little hollow when we think of Densher's policy in Venice of refusing to act in any way that might appear to commit him to a positive course of action in regard to Milly—he is content to allow his total passivity to be interpreted as it might. However, if we compare Kate's claim that they have made her want to live with Milly's expressed desire for life and people, then we are obliged to admit that this, at least, is what she got, though this is an ironic admission. To admit to this much, though, is neither to pardon Kate her crime nor to offer any mitigating fact as to why it is Kate cannot be regarded simply as a 'villain'. How Kate regards her actions cannot bear on our judgement of them. As we have seen, it is no crude sense of the pressure of difficult circumstances on Kate which makes us 'understand' and therefore 'pardon'. Neither do we pardon her as a result of our sense of the extraordinarily fine and subtle sensibility which renders these difficulties intolerable to her; although it is only in and through Kate's intelligence that we understand the cost in human terms of impoverished and straitened circumstances. It is through Kate that we see what
her sister's life entails - its coarseness and impoverishment of spirit most of all.

In Kate we have a woman who, if she were merely greedy, would marry the man of her aunt's choice; who would truly belong to the Lancaster Gate set. But Kate is as much in revolt against Mrs Lowder's extreme of wealthy vulgarity, and the boredom and languid materialism of the Lancaster Gate set, as she is against the pinched and suffocating poverty of Mrs Condrip. We take the measure of Mrs Lowder as much as of Mrs Condrip through Kate's consciousness. We cannot do justice to the difficulty of responding to all that Kate is simply by referring to her vitality (an aspect of her character acknowledged by many critics). The Wings of the Dove presents us with a much more difficult task: to acknowledge that she is avid for the power and freedom of action that wealth gives, but to acknowledge simultaneously the attraction of the complex sense of life explored through the presentation of her consciousness, out of which her intention to use and deceive Milly springs. If the basest actions are hers, so too is the subtlest, most engaging intelligence.

If we compare Kate and Milly nothing is more different than the poverty of imagination behind the creation of the heroine. It is difficult to read the novel without feeling that it is the manipulative woman rather than the heroine who is the more interesting character; Milly always remains a little elusive, a little aloof from the reader as well as from the other characters in the novel. James notes this in his preface, and attributes it to 'the author's instinct everywhere for the indirect presentation of his main image':
I note how, again and again, I go but a little way with the direct — that is with the straight exhibition of Milly; it resorts for relief, this process, whenever it can, to some kinder, some merciful indirection: all as if to approach her circuitously, deal with her at second hand, as an unspotted princess is ever dealt with....All of which proceeds, obviously, from her 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 (29-30).

James acknowledges that his attitude to his heroine is to handle her with kid gloves. In presenting her indirectly so often through the 'successive windows' of other people's consciousness, he fails to realize her as fully as her central place in the novel would seem to require. Leavis says:

The great, the disabling failure is in the presentment of the Dove, Milly Theale....A vivid, particularly realized Milly might for [James] stand in the midst of his indirections, but what for his reader these skirt round is too much like emptiness; she isn't there....[1]

James's tenderness of imagination about Maisie and Isabel did not result in a similar problem; on the contrary, both the earlier heroines are unquestionably the focus equally of the novel and of the reader's sympathetic interest. [2]

James admits to the superiority of the early part of the book, recognizing 'not only no deformities but, I think, a positively close and felicitous application of [the] method [of alternating centres of consciousness]':

1. Leavis, 175.

2. I have mentioned A.D.Moody's doubts (with which I agree) about the novel's uncritical approval of Isabel's behaviour at the end of Portrait; yet this flaw does not detract from the realization of the heroine as does the indirect and insubstantial presentation of Milly in Wings.
There was the 'fun', to begin with, of establishing one's successive centres - of fixing them so exactly that the portions of the subject commanded by them as by happy points of view, and accordingly treated from them, would constitute... sufficiently solid blocks of wrought material...as to have weight and mass and carrying power...to conduce to effect and to provide for beauty. Such a block, obviously, is the whole preliminary presentation of Kate Croy, which, from the first, I recall, absolutely declined to enact itself save in terms of amplitude (26-7,20).

It is the 'carrying power' of the early part of the book and of Kate, its main centre of consciousness, which by contrast emphasizes the different presentation of Milly. This is reflected in the images James uses about the two women in the Preface. Milly is the 'unspotted princess' and the 'mystic figure in the gilded coach' seen from afar; images of reverence and tenderness, but incontestably distant (30). With Kate he speaks of 'our drawing breath through the young woman's lungs' and of looking 'over Kate Croy's shoulder' when he refers to the narrative's return to her point of view; the immediacy of the images and the intimacy with the physical Kate which they evoke reflect the intimate understanding we have of her (28). Even the direct presentation of Milly's consciousness does not bring her to life for us; technique, as we have noted, cannot guarantee vital characterization or sympathetic understanding on the part of the reader. (It is instructive in this context to compare the effect of the scene in Book Fifth, where Milly sits and thinks about her mortality, to the effect of Isabel's meditation scene in Chapter XLII of Portrait; such a comparison clearly points to the superiority of the latter.) What we can conclude, however, is that through the broadening of characterization - the extensive exploration of the consciousness of the manipulative woman and male character - we have in Wings a vastly increased difficulty of
This difficulty is reflected in the novel's treatment of the occasional fourth centre of consciousness, the confidante Mrs Stringham, whose relatively minor part in the action I now wish to consider as constituting a development of the role of the confidante in *What Maisie Knew*. In a curious way James in *Wings* seems to have shuffled the roles of manipulative woman and confidante, so that each partakes of the qualities of the other. In *Wings* the manipulative woman consciously deceives the heroine believing it is to her benefit, while the confidante, whose sole avowed purpose is the good of the heroine, is in fact unconsciously betraying her. James has deliberately blurred the distinctions between good and bad that are so much more positive in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

Susan Stringham performs the same kind of function as Mrs Wix in *What Maisie Knew*: a confidante and foil for the heroine. We saw in the previous novel how the character of the confidante had developed a more active role, with Mrs Wix's determination to influence the outcome of events by pressuring Sir Claude to give up Mrs Beale and set up house with herself and Maisie, and by attempting to force upon Maisie her own inflexible idea of morality. This contrasts with the function of Henrietta Stackpole in *Portrait*, who was basically peripheral to the action of the novel, or as James describes this type of confidante in the Preface to the novel:

...they may run beside the coach 'for all they are worth', they may cling to it till they are out of breath (as poor Miss Stackpole all so visibly does), but neither, all the while, so much as gets her foot on the step, neither ceases for a moment to tread the dusty road (26-7).
Obviously with Mrs Wix and Susan Stringham the character of the confidante now has a seat in the coach, or at least a foot in the door.

Susan Stringham is essentially similar to her predecessor in a number of ways, and although she is unquestionably superior to Mrs Wix in that she is better educated, she is really nothing but a more sophisticated version of the type. All Mrs Wix's ignorant sentimentality is present in this confidante as a slightly more lofty romanticism, but with the same elements of self-delusion and yearning. Their imagination finds sustenance in the same way - through the popular sentimental literature of the day. Maisie's education under Mrs Wix consists largely of the latter's stories, which are

...mostly those of the novels she had read; relating them with a memory that never faltered and a wealth of detail that was Maisie's delight. They were all about love and beauty and countesses and wickedness. Her conversation was practically an endless narrative, a great garden of romance... (41).

Mrs Stringham's abiding interest ('it was what she most did') is to watch 'the thin trickle of a fictive "love-interest" through that somewhat serpentine channel, in the magazines, which she mainly managed to keep clear for it' (107). This is reminiscent of the circuitous nature of reality for Mrs Wix, who 'took refuge on the firm ground of fiction, through which indeed there curled the blue river of truth' (41). Their romantic yearnings find expression in their relationships with the heroine and the male character. Both Milly and Maisie offer their companions the chance to live vicariously through them: Maisie by her proximity to Sir Claude fuels Mrs Wix's fantasy of living with and looking after the two of them, and also fuels a more private fantasy of romantic attraction for
Sir Claude. Milly's wealth and strangeness instantly appeal to Mrs Stringham as the 'real thing, the romantic life itself', and gives the latter free reign to idealize and romanticize the girl (106). She too is infatuated with the male character, but because she has so completely identified herself with Milly's interests, she sublimates her own feelings (almost as ludicrous as Mrs Wix's) into the encouragement of Densher's suit to Milly. Having cast her lot with Milly, she feels that 'she had now no life to lead; and she honestly believed that she was thus supremely equipped for leading Milly's own' (111).

She shares with Mrs Wix a melodramatic imagination which expresses itself in a language full of sentiment and drama. When discussing her the narrative frequently falls into the free indirect style, which as we saw in the previous chapter is often used as a subtle mode of authorial judgement. The inflated rhetoric employed to ridicule gently Mrs Wix's pretensions is used again in *Wings* to mock Susan Stringham for the same kind of reason. She is introduced to us as 'the admirable Mrs Stringham' - a formal adjective which draws sufficient attention to itself to make us suspicious of its intention (103). It is very quickly followed by such hints as she believed she knew 'much more about Milly Theale than Milly herself knew', and the tongue-in-cheek observation that 'Mrs Stringham, when she saw anything at all, saw much, saw everything' (103, 104). It is one thing to 'see much' but the narrator implies in 'when she saw anything at all' that either she is apt to make a great deal of fuss about very little, or that she often entirely misses what is going on around her. Neither meaning says much for Mrs Stringham's intelligence.
Her habit of seeing much is reflected in her initial impression of Milly:

It was New York mourning, it was New York hair, it was a New York history, confused as yet, but multitudinous, of the loss of parents, brothers, sisters, almost every human appendage, all on a scale and with a sweep that had required the greater stage; it was a New York legend of affecting, of romantic isolation....She was alone, she was stricken, she was rich, and in particular was strange—a combination in itself of a nature to engage Mrs Stringham's attention (105).

The melodrama and the lofty style of rhetoric in the passage reflects perfectly the fantasies of a silly woman with literary ambitions; we know already of Mrs Stringham that 'to be in truth literary had ever been her dearest thought'—that is, not simply to produce literature (though she does write short stories for magazines) but more importantly to adopt the appearance and manner of one who does (106). To embroider the life and personality of Milly suits the bent of her sentimental imagination.

Unfortunately she is not content just to live through and for Milly; she is, like Mrs Wix, a gossip with a meddlesome streak in her. Milly, who seems to have chosen Mrs Stringham as a companion for the comforting qualities of her very ordinariness and her loyalty, believes her to be perfectly discreet:

She asked herself once only if Susie could, inconceivably, have been blatant about her; for the question, on the spot, was really blown away for ever. She knew in fact on the spot and with sharpness just why she had 'elected' Susan Shepherd; she had had from the first hour the conviction of her being precisely the person in the world least possibly a trumpeter (186).

However she does not count on Susan Stringham's need to have an audience to show off her young companion to, so that while Milly retains her confidence in her discretion, Susie is
'trumpeting' to Mrs Lowder, as we learn through Kate:

'...imagine an angel with a thumping bank-account....Her fortune's absolutely huge; Aunt Maud has had all the facts, or enough of them, in the last confidence, from "Susie", and Susie speaks by the book' ' (283).

And, as Kate goes on to say to Densher, 'It's open to [Milly] to make, you see, the very greatest marriage....Her possibilities are quite plain' ' (283).

Thus it is due to Susan Stringham's tendency to gossip that Kate first conceives the idea of Milly's potential usefulness to her. And, having sown the seeds of it in Kate's mind, she then compounds her guilt by agreeing with Mrs Lowder to keep from Milly the probability of Kate's caring for Densher. So, with the best intentions, Susan Stringham becomes implicated in the plot to deceive Milly about the nature of the relationship between Kate and Densher. At this point, as Sharp says, 'Mrs Stringham is well on her way to unconscious betrayal'. [1] Her love of intrigue and her desire to show herself to be at least as good as Mrs Lowder lead her into this position. It is a result of a fundamental aspect of her character, which is revealed early in the novel when she is imagining the effect of appearing in London with Milly as her companion. She will have

...the generous revenge, of...having at last something to show....Whatever Mrs Lowder might have to show - and one hoped one did the presumptions all justice - she would have nothing like Milly Theale, who constituted the trophy producible by poor Susan (131).

This along with her perception of Milly as a mine which 'but needed working and would certainly yield a treasure' makes us justly suspicious of her relationship to her companion, despite

1. Sharp, 204.
the fact that the 'treasure' she seeks is not the literal wealth that Kate is after (120). The suggestion is made as a consequence of Susan Stringham's observation of Milly on the edge of the abyss, that the girl's

...type, aspect, marks, her history, her state, her beauty, her mystery, all unconsciously betrayed themselves to the Alpine air, and all had been gathered in again to feed Mrs Stringham's flame (120).

That she should see Milly as 'betraying' herself in solitude implies that Mrs Stringham assumes that she has something to hide. Further, it is implied that what Milly reveals unconsciously is to the other's gain; the notion of feeding a flame impues to the older woman an insatiable curiosity about her companion: 'She struck herself as hovering like a spy, applying tests, laying traps, concealing signs' (114). Although she ascribes her pleasure in watching Milly to 'a sense of her beauty' her own description of the girl's appearance is that she is 'awfully full of things' - another hint of her perception of Milly as a resource to be mined (114).

Thus her view of Milly coincides in this respect with Kate's, and herein lies her difference to Mrs Wix. Crudely speaking, Mrs Wix builds on Maisie the vision of a better life for herself, and attempts to bring this about by directly preaching to her pupil and by openly stating her ideals to both Maisie and Sir Claude. Mrs Stringham on the other hand conceals - or strives to conceal - the avidity of her interest in Milly, building on her a grandiose vision of what Milly is and what she is capable of, and regarding herself as the sole guardian of her companion's secrets. Her furtive attempts to draw out these secrets lead her to conspire with Mrs Lowder to hide from Milly the fact that Kate returns Densher's affection,
thereby allowing Milly to be deceived into believing a relationship with him possible. Later in Venice Susan Stringham, unwilling to see her dream of Milly's marriage to Densher fade, implicates herself further in the conspiracy by trying to persuade the reluctant Densher to perjure himself by telling Milly that there is no truth in Lord Mark's report of a secret betrothal. It is this covert meddling in Milly's life and love that makes her behaviour (albeit unconsciously) treacherous - a quality we cannot impute to Mrs Wix's clumsy attempts to influence Maisie, and it constitutes therefore a development of the confidante's role from the earlier novels into an approximation of the manipulative woman's.

I would like to end my discussion of the novel with a general comment by Leavis as a way of placing the achievement of The Wings of the Dove in relation to the earlier novels. The comment is intended to apply to all the later novels, but it is particularly pertinent to Wings:

Again and again in [James's] later work we find ourselves asking: What is the moral substance? what, definable in terms of human interest, is there to justify this sustained and strenuous suggestion that important issues are involved, important choices are to be made? His kind of preoccupation with eliminating the inessential clearly tends to become the pursuit of an essential that is illusory. [1]

James's indirection in Wings results in the elusiveness of the central character, and accounts both for its lack of success when compared to the earlier Portrait and Maisie, and for the relative difficulty that readers have with it. Through experimenting with and developing the technique of centres of

1. Leavis, 128.
consciousness, he brings to Wings a more complex sense of reality and a corresponding difficulty of moral evaluation. However, at the same time as James is admirably striving to portray more accurately the complexity of human relationships, behaviour and motivation ('important issues...important choices'), he is also losing a certain immediacy of characterization (fundamental to the 'human interest') which makes both Isabel Archer and Maisie Farange so appealing as protagonists, and which is central to the success of their respective novels.
CONCLUSION

In *The Wings of the Dove* we observed two developments: an increased complexity of moral evaluation and narrative technique. James has moved from the nineteenth century convention of the omniscient narrator, such as he used in *The Portrait of a Lady*, to a mode of narration in which he explores the point of view of different characters through the presentation of consciousness.

His novels show an increasingly complex interest in and presentation of the psychology of his characters; he is particularly interested in how they perceive and affect each other. This is clearly demonstrated in *What Maisie Knew*, where he places rigid restrictions on the narrative in order to explore a child's perception and interpretation of adult events beyond her understanding. We can see the glimmer of it in the earlier novel, in Isabel's 'extraordinary meditative vigil' in Chapter XLII, which James notes in his Preface as being of particular significance to the novel:

Reduced to its essence, it is but the vigil of searching criticism; but it throws the action further forward than twenty 'incidents' might have done. It was designed to have all the vivacity of incident and all the economy of picture....It is a representation simply of her motionlessly seeing, and an attempt withal to make the mere still lucidity of her act as 'interesting' as the surprise of a caravan or the identification of a pirate....It is obviously the best thing in the book, but it is only a supreme illustration of the general plan (28).

His concern to invest the scene with 'the vivacity of incident'
'the economy of picture' reflects his growing tendency to allow the consciousness of his characters to predominate in the later novels, indeed to become the true subject of his work and the stage where the significant action takes place. Although other novels, such as *The Sacred Fount*, illustrate this tendency, as well as the ones I have chosen for the purpose of this study, the fact that *Portrait*, *Maisie* and *Wings* have many features in common make the changes both in narrative technique and in the treatment of moral issues particularly profitable for study.

A statement by Dove illustrates the kind of change that comes about in the novels:

> In the early James the betrayer is as often as not a mercenary villain; in the later James he tends to be a sensitive and recognizable human being who simply cannot rise to the demands made upon him by the protagonist. [1]

This statement reflects the increasing difficulty of moral evaluation that I have shown in my discussion of the separate novels; the shift in attitude that is clearly revealed through the relationship of the heroine and the manipulative woman. We began with Madame Merle, who recognized and admitted to herself her guilt in concealing from Isabel her true motives for promoting the latter's marriage ('"Have I been so vile all for nothing?"'); to Mrs Beale, who begins by championing Maisie's cause, dominates her in a maternal relationship, and ultimately uses her as bait for Sir Claude, though never admitting to the betrayal of Maisie's trust (558). Finally, in *Wings*, the

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relationship between the two women has grown more complex, with Kate deceiving Milly while (apparently) believing it to be to Milly's benefit. The potential for friendship which both women perceive and act upon makes this relationship, out of the three under discussion, the most truly reciprocal. The obvious inequality between Madame Merle and Isabel in terms of age, experience and social sophistication clearly puts Isabel at a disadvantage in her dealings with the older woman. These factors are intensified in Maisie's case, since the manipulative woman has been given the added weight of a parental relation to a child. Kate and Milly, however, being of similar age and social standing, begin on a much more equal footing than the previous pairs of women, with the result that it is not glaringly apparent that one is in a more powerful position and is likely to dominate the other in some way. Indeed it is Milly who is potentially more socially powerful than Kate, with the wealth to attach herself to the most illustrious society, and the independence to do as she likes. This is in contrast to the two earlier novels, where the manipulative woman holds - at least initially - social sway over the heroine. [1]

Thus there has been a noticeable shift from a manipulator who is a clearly defined villain to a manipulator who requires a far more complex understanding, and who is, in part at least, a misguided friend, someone who cannot rise to the demands made

1. Isabel of course inherits wealth from Mr Touchett, and so achieves an enviable (to Madame Merle) independence early in the novel, but it is different with Milly: she is born into money rather than having it thrust upon her.
upon her by the protagonist. Isabel and Maisie are dealing with women who are by their actions unworthy of the trust the heroines place in them, and in both novels the heroine undergoes a process of disenchantment with the manipulative woman, whose duplicity is ultimately made clear. Milly is different in that she is aware, from the beginning of her acquaintance with Kate, that the 'handsome girl' will always remain a puzzle to her, and has very early the sense that Kate is hiding something from her. Isabel and Maisie may be gullible, but Milly is almost consciously a victim. The three heroines are idealists and optimists in their dealings with other people, but where Isabel and Maisie make mistakes in their relationships with others, they err in ignorance and innocence. Milly rather more deliberately chooses to immerse herself in life and in people, and despite her early forebodings about Kate she perversely expects a high reward from Kate's friendship.

James's deepening interest in the consciousness of his characters and in how they perceive and affect one another, leads him to present in *Wings* a more entangled relationship between the heroine and the manipulative woman than that which exists in the earlier novels. This interest is also reflected in his development of the confidante's role from the peripheral figure of Henrietta Stackpole in *Portrait*, to the more active figure of Mrs Stringham in *Wings*, who has become implicated in the deception of the heroine.

Thus the concern of this thesis has been to demonstrate, by comparing similarities of character, relationship, situation
and event in the three novels, that there is a relationship, well worth the exploration, between changing narrative technique and increased complexity of moral evaluation.
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