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The drama in the picture: Literary portraiture in James and Proust

van Slyck, Phyllis E., Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1989

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A

The Drama in the Picture:

Literary Portraiture in James and Proust

by

Phyllis E. van Slyck

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1989

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

The Drama in the Picture: Literary Portraiture in James and Proust

by Phyllis E. van Slyck

Advisor: Burton Pike

This dissertation examines the interpretive role of pictorialism in Henry James and Marcel Proust. Pictorialism may be defined as the specific use of visual signals in narrative to create the verbal illusion of a picture. These two writers' use of pictorial technique is so pervasive and profound as to initiate a redefinition of drama in the novel through visual elements. As picture replaces story, it becomes the bearer of dramatic content.

In their use of pictorialism, Proust and James can be distinguished technically and thematically. The Jamesian picture is generally conceived within a closed frame, presented classically as a landscape, interior, or portrait. Dramatic development in James is also defined classically: it is a moment of heightened awareness or insight achieved visually. In contrast, the Proustian picture employs photographic and cinematic techniques, frequently subverting chronology in order to identify a subject as multiple, complex, and ahistorical. Dramatic content in Proust, while

also emphasizing moments of heightened awareness, emphasizes, to a greater degree, ways that the viewer controls the shape and meaning of the picture.

For both James and Proust, the quest for knowledge depicted in their novels involves an imaginative reconstitution of reality, and, for both, the visual arts offer a method and a metaphor which enables them to dramatize the inner experience of a character who struggles to interpret the world. However, where Jamesian pictures are essentially dramatic distillations of life, gradually shorn of distortions imposed by the perceiver, Proustian images remain complex and subjective, insisting on the importance of the artist-perceiver's vision. James's pictorialism, therefore, may be said to be predominantly classical, though his use of the picture to explore the inner life of imagination and memory suggests his emergence into modernism. Proust's pictorialism reveals a more profound acceptance of complexity and contradiction as inherent in all knowledge and a belief in the responsibility of the perceiver to create meaning in the world.

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To the memory of Henri Peyre

Table of Contents

Abstract		iv
Acknowledgements		vi
1.	The Drama in the Picture: Literary Portraiture in James and Proust	1
2.	Henry James and the "Economy of Picture"	17
3.	"In the Line of the Eye": Introductory Portraits	33
4.	Isabel's Romantic Pictures: _The Portrait of a Lady_	58
5.	"A Drama of Discrimination": _The Ambassadors_	87
6.	The "Indirect Presentation" of the Image: _The Wings of the Dove_	120
7.	Prospects and Windows: The Shape of Jamesian Drama	148
8.	From James to Proust: Closing in on the Subject	159
9.	A Fragile Relationship: The Perceiver Gazes at his Subject	171
10.	Entering the Frame: Marcel's Control of the Image	204
11.	Learning from the Artists: The Power of Transforming Light	231
12.	The Wonderful, Dangerous Power of the Mind: James and Proust Compared	260
Bibliography		

Notes on Abbreviations and Texts Used

The following abbreviations are used in citing references to texts of Henry James:

FN	*The Future of the Novel*
AN	*The Art of Fiction*
AM	*The American*
AMB	*The Ambassadors*
POR	*The Portrait of a Lady*
WD	*The Wings of the Dove*

The following abbreviations are used in citing references to texts of Marcel Proust:

SW	*Du côté de chez Swann*
JF	*A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*
GUER I	*Du côté des Guermantes I*
GUER II	*Du côté des Guermantes II*
SG	*Sodome et Gomorrhe*
PR	*La prisonnière*
AD	*Albertine disparue*
TR	*Le temps retrouvé*

For the early works of Henry James, I have used texts which are based on the original editions of the novels since there are significant differences between the originals and the New York Edition, published some twenty years later. For the later works (*The Ambassadors* and *The Wings of the Dove*) there were no significant differences for the purposes of this study and the New York edition was used.

The Gallimard paperback edition of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is based on the authoritative edition and contains the following note: "Le texte de la présente édition est conforme au texte de l'édition de la Pléiade, revu et établi sur les manuscrits autographes par Pierre Clarac et André Ferré."

Chapter 1

The Drama in the Picture: Literary Portraiture in James and Proust

A. Literary Pictorialism Defined

Modernist writers have altered the shape and substance of narrative in many important ways, but perhaps one of the most interesting and, until recently, least explored changes involves the enhanced use of structures and techniques borrowed from the visual arts. Pictorial elements have always been present in narrative as an aspect of description; however, with the emergence of Impressionism as the dominant artistic movement of the late nineteenth century and with the almost simultaneous development of photography and cinema, whole new ways of defining and implementing the pictorial begin to emerge too. Pictorialism derives some of its structure from other movements in philosophy and psychology so important to modernism in general. When our conceptions of human time are radically altered, and when the novel moves increasingly inward, exploring human subjectivity, the groundwork is in place for much more creative uses of the pictorial. What a character sees is no longer governed by external dramatic events; instead, as Virginia Woolf suggests, the "time of the mind" becomes the real visual and dramatic frame for the events of a story.

Pictorialism in literature may be defined simply as the extensive use of visual elements in narrative in ways and for purposes that go beyond traditional uses of descriptive material. (In the broadest sense, all description may be said to be pictorial since all description tends to spatialize story and, to the extent that it is possible, render it "still.") What defines and distinguishes pictorialism from description in general has first of all to do with visual signals which call our attention to picture as picture. Hence framing portraiture, tableau, and with the introduction of the camera, juxtapositions that imitate montage, close-ups, stills and panoramas all may be said to suggest picture. What further defines pictorialism is the way that these new devices function thematically and substantively. As writers devote more of their attention to the pictorial possibilities of narrative, subtle shifts begin to occur in the actual nature of storytelling. By the time Henry James and Marcel Proust emerge as dominant voices of late nineteenth century realism and early twentieth century modernism, we may say that the picture in narrative has undergone a radical substantive transformation. It no longer functions simply as "support" for a story which is told by other, more conventional means. It becomes the bearer of dramatic content.

The suggestion that descriptive material functions dramatically is one which forces us to reexamine our

traditional assumptions about the nature of dramatic action in the novel. In defining drama, literary critics have never abandoned the premises of Aristotle. Drama is always assumed to be based upon action. As Suzanne Langer defines it, "drama's basic abstraction is the act, which springs from the past but is directed toward the future" (307). Kenneth Burke's more philosophical definition of drama as "conflict informed by ironic necessity" (160) also assumes the primacy of the act. When Georg Lukacs defends the Aristotelian point of view in the modern period ("men's words, subjective reactions and thoughts are shown to be true or false, genuine or deceptive, significant or fatuous, in practice--as they succeed or fail in deeds and action" (117), the implication for modern narrative is that, shorn of "action" in the traditional sense, story also gives up its drama. It is this assumption which must be challenged as we look closely at the development in modern narrative of highly crafted literary pictures which seem not to abandon but rather to redefine the nature of drama in the novel.

In 1870, Flaubert challenges the canonical assumptions about what narrative should be when he announces, "What I deem beautiful, what I would like to do, is a book about nothing" (Steegmuller 247). When he argues further that the superior work is one in which "there is an excess of Art," he reflects the fundamental shift

which comes to dominate the novel of the twentieth century--a shift from the substance, the action, to the form of the work itself--with the implication that the aesthetic shape of the work provides its own story, its own drama. Percy Lubbock, recognizing Flaubert's challenge to the tradition of nineteenth century storytelling, describes Madame Bovary as "a drama chosen for the sake of the picture in it" (83), and he defines Flaubert's treatment of his subject and theme as essentially pictorial. Flaubert's method is now seen as an early instance of what Joseph Frank was to call "the spatialization of time" (15) (and what we might call the pictorialization of drama) in modern narrative, and much attention has subsequently be given to ways descriptive scenes have taken on a "signifying" as opposed to an "ornamental" role (Gentle "Boundaries of Narrative" 5). This step in the direction of a more profound examination of the possible functions of description has remained, however, a conservative one. Most twentieth century critics continue to judge description in a subordinate way, in relation to traditional categories of narrative which are considered primary--action and characterization.

More recently, however, new and extremely varied approaches to the role of pictorialism in narrative have been initiated by criticism. In addition to comprehensive studies on the thematic use of pictures--

landscapes, interiors, and portraits--many specific studies concerned with the translation of techniques from the visual arts into narrative have emerged in the last decade. To allude briefly to a few of these important works, Charles Anderson, Mary Ann Caws, Marianna Torgovnick, Adeline Tintner, Viola Hopkins-Winner, and Roger Shattuck, among others, have made significant contributions to the discussion of pictorialism in the novel. In fact, critical inquiry into the subject of pictorialism has recently become so varied as to require classification. Torgovnick, for example, suggests that visual techniques may be understood in relation to decorative, biographical, ideological, and interpretive elements in narrative (13). The concerns of this study are primarily interpretive. The following chapters focus specifically on the way two of the most important writers of this period, James and Proust, redefine narrative strategies so that picture functions dramatically; it is concerned with their precise use of techniques borrowed from the visual arts which result in a reshaping of narrative and a redefinition of the way a story communicates its drama.

B. James and Proust: approaches to the picture

In some ways, no two writers at the turn of the century differ more in style, subject matter, and point

of view than Henry James and Marcel Proust. James was to condemn the first-person point of view employed by a writer such as Proust as "foredoomed to looseness" and one imagines Proust, in turn, impatient with the calculated distance and restraint James imposes on his characters and on the reader's relationship to the story. Despite these major differences,however, James and Proust are both intensely involved in the creation and development of the pictorial mode in narrative; both use a wide variety of spatializing pictorial techniques to develop character and theme in their novels. Each writer slows the ostensible "action" in order to create a picture; for each, the study of the picture becomes a new, reflective way of telling the story. It is this kind of picture-making that enables Proust and James to redefine plot, character, and scene in the novel. Both James and Proust use pictorial technique to dramatize their fundamental belief that to see is to know, that knowledge acquired visually has a value not to be found in traditional approaches to the story. For these two writers, therefore, pictorialism may be more precisely defined as the visualization of the story's drama, or if you will, the dramatization of awareness and insight through picture. Although both of these writers have long been recognized for their contributions to modern narrative technique, their common use of pictorialism sheds light on the special

relationship between art and literature in twentieth-century fiction.

In their critical comments on narrative technique, both James and Proust have questioned standard assumptions about the nature of action in the novel and both consciously set about to redefine the novel's traditional emphasis on action. Early in his long career as poet-critic, Henry James comments on the subject of drama in the novel, suggesting that we rethink our notion of action: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is either a picture or a novel that is not of character?...It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look out at you in a certain way...At the same time it is an expression of character" (FN 15-16). As early as The Portrait of a Lady, James began to see the compositional possibilities of letting picture do the work of drama. When Isabel Archer reflects upon the life she has chosen with Osmond, James comments that this moment of solitude, reflection, and recognition is essentially dramatic:

> 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. She sits up, by; her dying fire, far into the night, under the spell of recognitions on which she finds the last sharpness suddenly wait. 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. (AN 57)

Proust, too, alerts his readers to his abandonment of conventional methods of revealing character through action: "Not once does one of my characters open a window, wash his hands, put on his overcoat, utter a formula of social introduction. If there were anything new in this book, it would be that" (COR VI: 260). At various points in A La Recherche, but especially in Le temps retrouvé, Proust's narrator examines what we mean by "reality," ultimately rejecting a "cinematographic vision" of human action as hopelessly superficial and meaningless, arguing instead for a much deeper exploration of the collected visual, sensory, and psychological contents of human subjectivity in time.

> Une image offerte par la vie nous apportait en réalité, à ce moment-là, des sensations multiples et différentes....Une heure n'est pas qu'une heure, c'est un vase rempli de parfums, de sons, de projets et de climats. Ce que nous appelons la réalité est un certain rapport entre ces sensations et ces souvenirs qui nous entourent simultanément--rapport que supprime une simple vision cinématographique, laquelle s'éloigne par là d'autant plus du vrai qu'elle prétend se borner à lui... (TR 249-50). Ce travail de l'artiste, de chercher à apercevoir sous de la matière, sous de l'expérience, sous des mots quelque chose de différent, c'est exactement le travail inverse de celui que, a chaque minute, quand nous vivons détourné de nous-mêmes... (TR 258)

As both of these passages suggest, James and Proust are profoundly interested in the psychological

movement inward and, at the same time, in the ways in which such inward vision and awareness can be depicted visually. As a consequence of this refocusing, James and Proust can be seen to be carefully altering the scene in the novel, traditional locus of dramatic action, so that it is shorn of its dramatic effects. Events in their novels are often presented as summaries, or described as repeated, habitual or remembered actions. Both writers subdue vivid confrontations, handle important events offstage, and keep dialogue to a minimum to suspend or suppress the immediate drama of an encounter. The lives of their characters are, from this standpoint, muted. But, as the activity we normally associate with drama is minimized, a kind of distilled yet intense psychological action is born. As one imagines these two writers themselves, ever close to the drama of life but never fully a part of it, their characters move through parks, city streets, in and out of drawing rooms and theatres almost without touching. They look through windows, down from vistas and balconies. They observe each other through doorways, across drawing rooms and galleries; they watch entrances, the descent on the stair, the figure in the lamplight, the silhouette in the park, the girl on a bicycle strolling by the sea. At a constant remove from the "life" of those they study, their special locations create pictorial frames

within which characters become portraits, settings become landscapes or interiors, and dramatic scenes are rendered as tableaux.

The development shared by the first-person narrator in Proust and the "central intelligence" in James brings to the novel a fundamentally new kind of story, for as these narrators create a pictorial world which replaces the traditional dramatic world of the novel, pictures themselves become bearers of true, false, and contradictory meanings. Moreover, if contradiction and complexity reside in the subject under scrutiny, the capacity to deform the picture also rests with the perceiver. In both James and Proust, the narrators must come to terms with the contradictions and complexities within their own vision as well as in the subjects themselves.

C. Proust and James: contrasts in pictorial technique

In Jamesian pictorialism, the most basic dramatic tension arises out of the conflict between early illusions a character has about another (cast in the form of a pictorial ideal) and the growing pressure of reality which refuses to correspond to the character's private vision. At some point these images, the visions of others created by Isabel Archer, Milly Theale, and Lambert Strether collapse, revealing themselves to be a mockery of the values assigned to them.

The deeper understanding required by the character only occurs after a period of meditation, during which the various images each has created are brought together for a more careful scrutiny. Madame de Vionnet, likened to an antique jewel of the Renaissance by Strether in an early portrait, is ultimately revealed in all her hardness and irreducibility. In final portraits she is no longer surrounded by soft lights and gauze-like attire, no longer mythologized by her cultural context. She remains the jewel, shorn of the spiritual associations produced by her portrait painter. In James's novels, each major character has a kind of dramatic epiphany during which false images are overturned and vision is clarified. If the Jamesian narrator repeatedly faces a conflict between his perception of a subject and the subject itself, because he remains intent on resolving this conflict, the narrative remains grounded in the external reality of the story. While this narrator may become conscious of the deforming quality of all human vision, subjective interpretation never takes over the narrative world to the extent that it does in Proust. All of James's major characters, however much they are concerned with the effect of the other on the self, share the traditional perspective of nineteenth century novelistic tradition: the quester moves from blindness to insight as successive images of another are discarded because

they reflect subjective distortions of the viewer. True knowledge of another comes as a result of recognizing the limitations of the self.

Proust, too, explores the relationship between the images his narrator creates and the narrator's own psychological processes. Marcel is profoundly aware of his own role in altering, in fact, creating reality. But he becomes so absorbed in the actual composing process and in examining the nature of his own contribution to that process, that Proust's fictional world is based, to a much greater degree, on this internal reality. Marcel is intensely concerned with the mental processes and state of mind which cause him to compose an image of another in a particular way at a particular time. Proustian "truth," therefore, has primarily to do with the accuracy with which this process is analyzed, and Marcel comes to entirely different conclusions from a Jamesian character when faced with distinct and often mutually exclusive images of the same person. Dramatic development occurs in Proust when the narrator is able to embrace the contradictions implied in the various images of a character over time. While both writers make fundamental dramatic use of contradictory images of a character, in James, the narrator's story is complete when he acknowledges the deforming tendency of consciousness. In Proust, there is a larger kind of acceptance as the self expands to

meet the marvelous, paradoxical contradictions of life. The ultimate consequences of these two stances are also in opposition: if, for James, a kind of objectivity finally wins, it is an objectivity which often results in tragic renunciation (the character must abandon or reject that part of himself which led to false composing). In Proust, integration, a kind of overcoming of the dualism between self and world is a way of possessing the world, and, for Marcel, possession is the ultimate truth. True portraits are those which synthesize these images and impressions. In further contrast to James, Proust's narrator embraces, not only the ambiguities of another character, but also the multiplicity of the self which goes to meet that character. Just as each image of Albertine is different, Marcel tells us, "...je pris l'habitude de devenir moi-même un personnage autre selon celle des Albertine à laquelle je pensais...Pour être exact, je devrais donner un nom différent à chacun des moi qui dans la suite pensa à Albertine;" (JF 623).

A fundamental difference which derives from these two writers' contrasting views of truth is that James remains essentially concerned with the product, the achieved picture, whereas Proust is concerned with the process, the actual coming into being of the picture. Proust's exploration of the dynamic between the subject and object is therefore necessarily more subtle and

complex. Because James consistently focuses on the achieved "painting" of composition, his characters' knowledge of the world, however impressionistic at a given moment, remains sequential and chronological. Proust's conception of time is much more fluid: the past exists in the present, not as a series of logically remembered, discrete images, recalled at will, but as an uncontrollable series of dramatic interruptions as well as a constantly present fluid matrix against which current perceptions appear. But these perceptions are not to be tested and compared, rejected if they cannot be integrated as they are in James; rather, they are there precisely in order to acknowledge contradiction and complexity as essential to the truth of the subject.

D. Proust and James: philosophy and aesthetics

Despite profound similarities, James and Proust differ in the kind of pictorial drama they create and in the philosophical assumptions that govern their view of knowledge as vision. Pictorialism in James returns drama to the novel not only because picture is the locus of insight for his characters but because the economy of the picture is fundamentally Aristotelian: it is a pure distillation of dramatic action. Much of James's critical commentary suggests that his great interest in pictorialism is based primarily on this

notion of rigorous dramatic economy. In his conversion of action into picture, James's method is reminiscent not only of classical but also neoclassical drama. In his creation of perceivers who frame events and comment upon them, James imitates the method of Racine who gives dramatic effect to events by restraint, indirection, and reflective commentary. In Henry James, economy, restraint, and distillation are the essential components of drama; these values shape his pictorial world. However, as profoundly as neoclassical restraint mutes action in James, it also opens wide the gates of reflection; it dramatizes the inner experience. The most important aspect of the Jamesian dramatic picture is its capacity to reveal a character's moment of insight and transcendence. In this way, James's essentially classical method also serves his emerging modernist sensibility.

Proust, in contrast, shares with his modernist successors, a deeply Romantic vision of the world: what the perceiver brings to the composition not only must be integrated, it is its most important component. All of Proust's visual techniques support and develop a more complex and elusive vision of reality. Proust's narrator is always engaged in "exploding" the frame he has created, in testing its boundaries both temporally and spatially. Proust ultimately embraces what James rejects. He accepts the subjectivity of the impression

as a genuine "truth." The contrast may again best be expressed through the metaphor of art: James ultimately preferred the narrative art of the nineteenth century for its realism and moral clarity. Proust is more comfortable with twentieth century Impressionism and with optical and cinematic metaphors that express both the fragmentation and the synthesis which are expressive of modern consciousness. As Roger Shattuck observes, vision in Proust's world is "stereoscopic" (Binoculars 51); insight associated with transcendence requires the simultaneous apprehension of a multitude of images over a lifetime. Proust, however, as this study will show, rescues his images and his epistemology from solipsism and dissolution, just as James does, through a commitment to a transcendent artistic truth. The development of the aesthetic vision of the perceivers in both of these writers consists precisely in the gradual rejection of a subjective and impressionistic point of view and in the adoption of something closer to a purely aesthetic attitude--as Vivas, for example, defines it: "to grasp the object as self-sufficient; an act of intransitive attention" (vii). Both writers may be said to share a belief in the perceiver's capacity to arrive at the privileged position of the artist--to grasp in pictorial language a transcendent and universal truth.

Chapter 2

Henry James and the "Economy of Picture"

A. The Indirect Method

In a well-known letter to his brother, William James draws an excellent caricature of Henry James's narrative technique, one which accurately identifies James's indirect method and touches on the salient points of subsequent criticism:

> You know how opposed your whole 'third manner' of execution is to the literary ideals which animate my crude and Orson-like breast, mine being to say a thing in one sentence as straight and explicit as it can be made, and then to drop it forever; yours being to avoid naming it straight, but by dint of breathing and sighing all round and round it, to arouse in the reader who may have had a similar perception already (Heaven help him if he hasn't!) the illusion of a solid object, made (like the ghost at the Polytechnic) wholly out of impalpable materials, air, and the prismatic interferences of light, ingeniously focused by mirrors upon empty space. But you do it, that's the queerness...As air, by dint of its volume, will weigh like a corporeal body; so his (the reader's) own poor little initial perception, swathed in this gigantic envelope of suggestive atmosphere, grows like a germ into something vastly bigger and more substantial. (Matthiessen 341)

While William concedes a lack of sophistication in literary matters, his failure to appreciate his brother's novels on their own terms was a source of frustration to Henry James, who replied almost petulantly to another of William's reactions, "I'm always sorry when I hear of your reading anything of mine, and always hope you won't--you seem to me so con-

stitutionally unable to 'enjoy' it and so condemned to looking at it from a point of view remotely alien to mine in writing it" (Matthiessen 340).

The clear opposition between William's and Henry's sensibilities, apparent to each of them, is mirrored in Jamesian literary criticism where the lines of battle are repeatedly drawn between censure and admiration for James techniques of indirection. Traditional critics--both early and more recent--(from Parrington and van Wyck Brooks to Leavis and Walcutt) all censure James for the same reason his brother does: his indirectness is at the least a constant frustration and at the worst a fundamental violation of the requirements of story. (When James defends his 'indirect' treatment of Milly Theale, Leavis answers: "James was deceived. A vivid particularly realized Milly might for him stand in the midst of his indirections, but what for his reader these skirt round is too much like emptiness; she isn't there" (The Great Tradition 193). Walcutt makes a similar observation about characters in James's novels: "Where the action has become an illusion, the characters must also slip and turn and fail to achieve a solid form" (Man's Changing Masks 211). On the other side, critics from Beach and Lubbock to Blackmur and contemporary theorists all make James's profound ability to bring his characters to life--without recourse to dramatic action--the subject of descriptive exegesis rather than complaint.

Despite a wide variety of contemporary approaches to narrative technique, the assumptions behind William James's remarks and those of traditional critics such as Leavis continue to haunt Jamesians: the issue of dramatization remains a kind of cornerstone, a recurrent point of departure for those who censure James as well as those who praise him. At some point, every reader of James is forced to ask the question, "Where is everybody and what on earth are they doing?" (Putt 22). The issue, again and again, is whether or not James succeeds--particularly in the later novels--in creating a world in which life actually seems to be lived, and in which characters "achieve solid form." Despite his own discussion of the necessity of indirection for the effective rendering of character, James seems so have been unaware of this void in the world of his fiction. When Edith Wharton asks him, "What was your idea in suspending the four principal characters in _The Golden Bowl_ in the void? What sort of life did they lead when they were not watching each other and fencing with each other? Why have you stripped them of all the _human fringes_ we necessarily trail after us through life?" James replies simply, "My dear--I didn't know I had!" (Leavis 202).

B. The Jamesian World

The answer to Mrs. Wharton's question is of course that "the primary location of the narrative (is) a men-

tal rather than physical continuum" (Tanner 289). But more than this, the reader does not see the "human fringes" of James's characters because, on every level (in the presentation of setting, scene, character, and dialogue), the physical world is effaced, rendered less palpable by a kind of classical restraint, decorum and economy. James's characters move through their worlds almost without touching. As they glide gracefully through parks, city streets and in and out of drawing rooms and theaters, the external world rarely impinges upon them, though their senses are ever alert to its subtleties. Moreover, the particular way in which these characters apprehend their experience is fundamentally pictorial: it is visual and compositional rather than active and experiential. As one imagines James himself, ever close to the drama of life but never a part of it, his characters look through windows, down from vistas and balconies. They observe each other through doorways and windows, across drawing rooms, in galleries. They watch entrances, the descent on the stair, the figure in the lamplight. Frequently they imagine themselves watching--not life itself--but a dramatic representation.

As these characters move, as if in slow motion across a stage, they frequently stop to examine an interior, a portrait, a tableau. As a result, dramatic activity in James is visually framed for contemplation

by the perceiving character. Action is thereby transformed into a kind of ceremony or ritual: viewed from a distance it is suggestively generalized and made universal. In addition to this visual quality, Jamesian action is most often "foreshortened" into recollection; that is, it is not action at all but rather experience contemplated and pondered. Strikingly neoclassical in its restraint, the vision (and the perception) of James's characters opens wide the gates of emotional sensibility. Some general parallels between James's conception of dramatic form and French neoclassical tradition have, in fact, been identified (Warren), but the particular, and thus far neglected, emphasis on economy, restraint, and on visual aspects of composition requires close examination. Moreover, the specific technique of recollection as a means of intensifying dramatic effect suggests that James implicitly understood drama in neoclassical terms.

Racine provides us with one of the clearest examples of such neoclassical indirection and its particularly dramatic power in the "récit de Théramène" of Phèdre. Consistent with classical decorum, the brutal death of Hippolyte occurs offstage and is 'recomposed' for the spectator as his servant, Théramène, describes the action to Thésée. The action itself, presented as a recollection, is, in one sense, remote, but

Théramène's self-reflexive commentary gives special intensity to the visual tableau he creates for the spectator. Dramatic effect is heightened through restraint, through the creation of a composed visual action. Thésée, who listens, and "sees" his own error and culpability, renders the tableau of his son's struggle with Neptune doubly poignant. There are striking parallels between Racine's controlled dramatization and James's method--a method which makes moments of intensity, revelation, and insight essentially pictorial yet fundamentally dramatic.

C. Picture and Action

James's own discussion of the nature of dramatic effect can be found in the prefaces to his novels written for the New York edition. In them, James looks back on more than three decades of novel writing, taking a craftsman's delight in describing his compositional problems and in explaining how he resolved them. His discussion reveals a conscious borrowing of certain dramatic techniques, and his discussion of point of view in particular is one of the main sources of subsequent critical inquiry, specifically that of Lubbock, Beach, and later, Blackmur, who gives James's novels their epithet, "dramas of consciousness." This line of criticism ties the essential achievement of Jamesian dramatization to point of view--the inside view of the

perceiving character limiting what the reader sees by confining narrative information to his own gradual discoveries. Fruitful as this line of inquiry has been, it has all but taken over the discussion of dramatization in James and side-tracked critics from a more comprehensive view of his dramatic method--especially one which explores his pictorial and architectural means of achieving dramatic effect.

For James himself, the limited point of view is useful not only because it imitates dramatic action but because it helps to create dramatic unity and economy: "There is no economy of treatment without an adopted, a related point of view...I understand no breaking up of the register, no sacrifice of the recording consistency that doesn't scatter and weaken" (<u>AN</u> 300). The limited point of view, therefore, is not an end in itself, nor even the cornerstone of James's technique; rather, like other compositional devices, it contributes to a larger aim: the creation of "a deep breathing economy and organic form." In short, James's best-known techniques, central intelligence, foreshortening, the substitution of picture for scene, the preference for oblique dialogue and syntactical indirection, for truncated dramatic moments and an abundant use of metaphor to describe a character's response to events, are the product of a mind whose conception of drama is based upon a classical sense of unity and economy, and upon a

belief in the organic relationship between form and content.

In his discussion of specific techniques, James consistently emphasizes the integrity of the work created according to the principles of dramatic economy, "not by multiplication of incident, but by the opposite, by the effect of compression of composition and form" (AN 14). An examination of the Jamesian scene reveals a deliberate shifting of dramatic effect away from "a multiplication of incidents" (and away from temporal progression altogether) to an intensity and depth created by the architecture, that is the formal shape of the scene. Consistently, James subdues vivid confrontations, keeps dialogue to a minimum, denies scenes their traditional dramatic character as he foreshortens actions into recollections. As one critic describes the Jamesian scene, development moves from the "portentous" to the "recollective" with the central "event"--the encounter between characters that is anticipated and then reflected upon--either sketched very lightly or omitted entirely (Ward 185). The scene itself, which Ward refers to as the "sketch," is thereby a model of dramatic economy, profiting from the momentum of what precedes it (descriptive surface, anticipatory reflection) and from what follows (deepening reflection and insight on the part of the character remembering the event), so that the scene itself as a

dramatic unit is revealed indirectly and with a minimum of action and dialogue. The "impalpable materials" which William James refers to as the substance of his brother's scenes, the illusion of "a corporeal body" derive instead from the attention of the perceiving character to the shape of the scene, to its visual subtleties and its overall composition. Dramatic development in James depends almost exclusively upon his characters' visual observations which in turn become psychological insights. We are thus describing a kind of dramatic architecture which frames an event so completely that actual dramatization is rendered superfluous! James's own discussion of dramatic effect suggests that he had this in mind.

D. Time and Space

In addition to a fairly extensive discussion of dramatic form in the prefaces to his novels, James makes repeated reference to the effects of "picture" and to the deliberate use of pictorial devices in his narrative. In fact, his tendency to discuss the relationship among parts of his narrative in spatial rather than chronological terms suggests an opposition between picture and action. Unfortunately, this has often led to the assumption that James's method is essentially undramatic. Though James himself acknowledges the competition between picture and drama ("the odd inveteracy

with which picture, at almost any turn, is jealous of drama, and drama suspicious of picture...Each is too ready to say 'I can take the thing for 'done' only when done in my way'" (AN 298), his own technique does not admit a final opposition between the two. Rather, he sees the compositional possibilities of letting picture do the work of drama, and to this end he dedicates himself. As early as The Portrait of a Lady, James has begun to render his most important dramatic scenes pictorially. By "picture" he means precisely the composed re-vision of an event or events by a character. Halfway through The Portrait Isabel reflects upon the life she has chosen with Osmond, and James indicates that this scene--a moment of solitude and reflection, of recognition--was designed to have "all the vivacity of incident and all the economy of picture."

> She sits up, by the dying fire, far into the night, under the spell of recognitions on which she finds the last sharpness suddenly wait. 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 represents, for that matter, one of the identifications dear to the novelist, and even indispensable to him; but it all goes on without her being approached by another person and without her leaving her chair. (AN 57)

One of the principal virtues of a scene composed as recollection is that it is free from temporal restrictions; dramatic development can therefore be based entirely upon the shape of the character's vision. As

Isabel compares the life she had imagined to the life she now lives, the reader is presented with a series of vivid images, and it is through their juxtaposition that dramatic recognition occurs. Charles Anderson accurately identifies the dominant visual symbol in Isabel's reflection to be that of the "vista," and he notes the dramatic contrast between her early romantic image of Osmond's Tuscan hills, ("The sun had got low, the golden light took a deeper tone, and on the mountains and the plain that stretched beneath them the masses of purple shadow seemed to glow...The scene had an extraordinary charm.") and the key image of the midnight vigil referred to above: "she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley, with a dead wall at the end" (Anderson 97). Isabel sees the history of her marriage, grasps its full meaning, pictorially. In this comparison of composed vistas, she depicts the complete reversal of her perceptions which her marriage to Osmond has brought about. The open charm of the infinite nineteenth century landscape view is dramatically countered by the "dark, narrow alley," "the dead wall" Isabel associates with Osmond's restricting control of her life.

A character's re-vision of an event generates a much greater degree of subjective analysis than would direct narration of an event, and the emphasis is

shifted from the action itself to a series of interpretations, delineated by visions and revisions of the scene. Architecturally, recollected scenes can also be presented with greater economy: they are almost invariably selective synopses rather than reenactment. Finally, James can be extraordinarily free in the manipulation of narrative time. A character can focus on memories of related incidents from any moment of the past, thus deepening the resonance of the moment at hand. While such inner time clearly has a more contemplative pace than an enacted scene, James uses visual devices, architecture and symbolic patterns (such as Isabel's vista image) to achieve dramatic economy, unity, and intensity.

E. The Drama in the Picture

In the chapters that follow, those Jamesian techniques which seem central to the creation of pictorial drama will be explored in detail; in particular, the use of the frame, the tableau, the retrospective mode of scenic presentation as it recomposes event into image, the emphasis on the visual composition of an actual scene and the frequent use of portraiture in delineating character will be discussed. Attention will also be given to the way Jamesian stylistic preferences work along with other compositional techniques in creating dramatic tension according to the same

principle of indirection. No reader of James since his brother William can fail to notice the way standard features of syntax--James's preference for periodic structure, complex syntactical embedding, circumlocution, abstract nouns and Latinate terms--tend to bring ambiguity and suspense into the very structure of language in the novels (Leech & Short 228).

In the first chapter, Jamesian exposition, the techniques he uses to introduce character and story, will be examined. James introduces his characters most often as portraits; through these initial portraits major character traits and central themes emerge. Thus it is in the presentation of character that many of the salient features of James's pictorial method can be seen most clearly. Jamesian portraiture can also be seen as a paradigm for his picture-making technique as a whole, for his way of telling story through picture and of converting picture into "the stuff of drama."

Dramatic pictures will then be examined in three novels, _The Portrait of a Lady_, _The Ambassadors_, and _The Wings of the Dove_. The first of these, generally regarded as James's earliest full-length masterpiece, exhibits significant patterns of composition that anticipate later techniques. It thus helps to establish a "grammar" of James's novelistic method and to challenge the assumption that the important transformations in that method arise only in James's later period

with the development of the limited point of view. The Portrait reveals techniques such as the frequent use of the indirect method in creating a scene and the subordination of actual drama to psychological drama, which show both the genesis and coherence of James's vision. At the same time, the simple format and structure of this early work enable us to isolate important features of James's technique, such as his use of the framed image, his representation of scene as summary or synopsis, his preference for indirect discourse, his reliance upon visual signals to convey dramatic information, and his gradual association of the narrator with the main character's point of view.

If The Portrait of a Lady helps to establish fundamental patterns in James's compositional method, The Ambassadors brings us closest to James himself. He admits in a private letter that the hero of the novel bears a certain resemblance to his author, and we see immediately in Lambert Strether, a character who, like his creator, has "the painter's eye." Like James, Strether is the quintessential spectator and, through him, we see how detached observation can be transformed into action by a powerful intensity of vision.

While Henry James felt closest to The Ambassadors which he characterizes as "the best all round" of his works, The Wings of the Dove is perhaps the novel in

which Jamesian pictorial techniques achieve their most complex formulation. As James indicates in his preface to that novel, his subject--a dying heroine--puts his narrative strategies to extreme tests: "the case prescribed for its central figure a sick young woman, at the whole course of whose disintegration and the whole ordeal of whose consciousness one would have quite honestly to assist" (AN 289). James regards the character of Milly Theale as his most challenging subject; she is a character who must be brought to the center of the stage entirely through the vision of others:

> 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, more merciful indirection; all as if to approach her circuitously, deal with her at second hand and, as an unspotted princess is ever dealt with; the pressure all round her kept easy for her, the sounds, the movements regulated, the forms and ambiguities made charming. (AN 306)

In the portrait of Milly, James does exactly what his brother William accuses him of with the greatest success: by "breathing and sighing all round and round" his subject, he arouses in his reader "the illusion of a solid object" (Matthiessen 341). He conceives of this picture of Milly as "medal" which hangs free; it is essentially a visual composition taken to its farthest extent, shorn of the accoutrements of action which are no longer necessary, for the portrait of

Milly Theale itself, shaped by others and by her own passion, is the "soul of drama" (AN 290).

Chapter 3

"In the line of the Eye": Introductory Portraits

A. Jamesian Exposition and the Presentation of Character

Almost all of James's major novels begin with a scene in which time has been momentarily suspended. In part, this is because the most common activity of his characters in these scenes is one of waiting. Sometimes only vaguely or casually, sometimes ambiguously, sometimes impatiently, almost all of his characters are initially waiting for something, and, even more frequently, someone. The Touchett family is awaiting Mrs. Touchett and her niece, Basil Ransom awaits Olive Chancellor, Kate Croy awaits her father, Strether awaits Waymarsh, and Prince Amerigo, as he reviews his pursuit and conquest of Maggie, awaits his marriage.

A more important reason for this sense of suspended time, however, is the fact that a Jamesian opening is not an "action" in any traditional sense, but rather, a study of character. The purpose of the opening is, typically, to create a portrait--one which, like all good portraits, evokes a depth beyond its visual details, a depth which suggests complexity and therefore the "story" of the character. Portraiture in James is both a symbol and a method: it illustrates his belief that the presentation of character is synonymous with the presentation of an action. Some of the

clearest discussion of his fictional technique can be found in James's analysis of the way in which character determines story:

> I was so much more antecedently conscious of my figures than of their setting...I couldn't emulate the imaginative writer so constituted as to see his fable first and to make out its agents afterwards: I could think so little of any fable that it didn't depend for its interest on the nature of the persons situated, and thereby on their way of taking it. (AN 44)

Approvingly, James quotes his mentor and friend, Turgenev, on the origin of the fictive process and the attitude of the writer toward his subject: "It began for him almost always with the vision of some person or persons, who hovered before him...interesting him and appealing to him just as they were and by what they were" (AN 42). For James too, the Aristotelian notion that plot creates character must be reversed, and he goes on to describe his own meditations on the nature of his characters, citing the importance of seeing the character "in perfect isolation" in order to understand what circumstances will best bring out its nature. And while the quarrel with Aristotle is really only a quibble (James argues for the same kind of inevitability in his own conception of action), his emphasis on process rather than product and on the formation of character itself can be observed in the actual presentation of character in his novels--a presentation which is essentially visual yet, nonetheless, dramatic.

In opening scenes, a hero or heroine is presented, if not "in perfect isolation," at least partially detached from the story to come and framed for contemplation by the reader. Frequently, a character appears for the first time, alone, in a location such as a gallery or drawing room where his relationship to the forthcoming story is effectively bracketed off. In addition, the ironic observations of a narrator, later an observing character, create further distance and even a kind of aesthetic detachment, enhanced by specific allusions to picture, frame, and composition. Lafarge urged James to become a writer because he had "the painter's eye," and James's translation of pictorial technique into narrative can be seen on many levels, but it is most evident in his initial presentation of character.

B. Two Americans: Christopher Newman and Lambert Strether

Two portraits of American men abroad, one at the beginning of James's's career, Christopher Newman of The American (1877), and one toward the end, Lambert Strether of The Ambassadors (1903), illustrate both the coherence and development of James's pictorial method. More striking in their similarities than in their differences, it is nonetheless in their differences--specifically in the greater subtlety of the latter portrait and in the point of view which governs it--that the evolution of James's technique can be seen.

Christopher Newman offers an early model of James's technique. The narrator approaches the hero as if he were a portrait in the gallery where he sits:

> An observer with anything of an eye for national types would have no difficulty in determining the local origin of this undeveloped connoisseur, and indeed such an observer might have felt a certain humorous relish of the almost ideal completeness with which he filled out the national mould. The gentleman on the divan was a powerful specimen of an American. (_AM_ 6;ch.1)

The placement of Newman's portrait in a gallery of the Louvre, like his name, Christopher (Columbus) New-man, indicates to what extent the American is out of place, but more than any other feature, it is the narrator's "humorous relish" which dominates the tone of the description. Newman's national origin is easily identified and he is a "powerful specimen," therefore a caricature; he is "undeveloped," but a "connoisseur," two epithets that cancel each other and evoke a contrast between American literal-mindedness and European subtlety. The narrator proceeds to describe the habits and preferences of his "specimen" and turns finally to a precise description of his physiognomy:

> His complexion was brown, and his nose had a bold, well-marked arch. His eye was of a clear, cold gray, and, save for a rather abundant moustache, he was clean-shaved. He had the flat jaw and sinewy neck which are frequent in the American type; but the traces of national origin are a matter of expression even more than of feature, and it was in this respect that our friend's countenance was supremely eloquent...It had that typical vagueness which is not vacuity, that blankness which is not simplicity, that look of

> being committed to nothing in particular, of standing in an attitude of general hospitality to the chances of life, of being very much at one's own disposal, so characteristic of many American faces. (AM 6-7)

The exaggerated simplicity of Newman's expression (like his physiognomy) furthers the caricature while the narrator ironically undermines his own defense of Newman's countenance: it is "supremely eloquent" in its "vagueness"; much of James's frustration with the emptiness of American life is implied. Despite several pages of exposition, Newman remains curiously blank; his "general hospitality to the chances of life" suggests a naïveté while his "vagueness" implies a spiritual deficiency. These silent but highly visible traits are the "germ" of Newman's story. In the latter part of the description the narrator shifts from concrete to abstract qualities, suddenly becoming an intensely psychological portrait painter who focuses his assessment of Newman's character through several pairs of contrasting traits "frigid yet friendly, frank yet cautious, shrewd yet credulous, positive yet sceptical, confident yet shy." Each pair of traits suggests a repeated conflict between reserve and openness thereby lodging an essential contradiction in Newman himself.

A similar kind of antithesis, the presentation of opposing traits, marks the introduction of almost every major character in James's novels and creates a kind of dialectical pattern, for, later, it is in the recon-

ciliation of such antitheses and oppositions that Jamesian characters understand each other, themselves, and their experience as a whole.

The movement into Newman's psychology is significant, moreover, because it reveals another of James's consistent patterns of exposition. It is the almost perverse tendency to give the impression of filling out meaning, of describing the subject, only to take that meaning away. Jamesian exposition of character is essentially the revelation of a mystery or conflict which will only be resolved at the end. And this fits precisely with James's own description of his method: his original vision of his characters in a kind of embryonic state--open to the chances of life but ill-defined in their nature--even to themselves. Portraiture in James (particularly when it is concerned with an American) is a shaping of character and identity.

Twenty-six years after Christopher Newman, James gives his readers a more ripened version of the American making a trip abroad. Lambert Strether's sophistication in comparison to Newman is immediately apparent in the very way he formulates his thoughts and purpose. As Ian Watt observes, the precise quality of Strether's subjective state can be discerned in the opening of The Ambassadors: "James apprises us both of his hero's supreme qualities and of his associated

limitations. Strether's delicate critical intelligence is often blinkered by a highly vulnerable mixture of moral generosity towards others combined with an obsessive sense of personal inadequacy..." (Tanner 297).

The most obvious change in James's technique of character presentation lies, of course, in the development of the internalized point of view. Yet, interestingly, though we learn much about Strether from his habits of mind, from his tendency to hesitation, from his various compunctions about Waymarsh, from his enjoyment of his initial solitude, and, most important, from his "double consciousness" towards his mission, at the same time James returns to a direct presentation of Strether's physiognomy according to the pattern established twenty-six years before. The only change is that the observer is not the narrator but the _ficelle_, Maria Gostrey:

> ...what his hostess saw, what she might have taken in with a vision kindly adjusted, was the lean, the slightly loose figure of a man of the middle height and something more perhaps than the middle age--a man of five and fifty, whose most immediate signs were a marked bloodless brownness of face, a thick dark moustache, of characteristically American cut, growing strong and falling low, a head of hair still abundant but irregularly streaked with grey, and a nose of bold free prominence, the even line, the high finish, as it might have been called, of which had a certain effect of mitigation. A perpetual pair of glasses astride of this fine ridge, and a line, unusually deep and drawn, the prolonged pen-stroke of time, accompanying the curve of the moustache from nostril to chin, did something to complete the facial furniture that an attentive observer would

> have seen catalogued, on the spot, in the vision of the other party to Strether's appointment. (AMB 8;ch.1)

If age has lent more definition to Strether's features, he is otherwise the same physical model as his predecessor. Maria Gostrey is endowed with a similar, though more gentle ironic distance than that of Newman's narrator, yet the same tendency to caricature, the same "humorous relish" can be found in her assessment of Strether's features. The advantage of the character-observer lies not only in the creation of greater intimacy, but in enabling James, through Maria, to frame the image of Strether. At the conclusion of the portrait he cannot resist positing an imaginary observer who watches Maria watching. The salient feature of Jamesian portraiture here is not so much its substance but its visual architecture, signalled by a recurrent series of frames: by the isolation of the character from the action and by the angle of vision created by both real and imaginary observers.

The great difference in the two expositions of character rests in the fact that Strether's psychological traits are presented scenically in the course of the chapter rather than through a narrator. We learn of Strether's potential bewilderment indirectly yet scenically (and therefore according to James, dramatically) in his various private and public responses to Maria. His sense of awkwardness, of hesitation, and

confusion about what he should or should not do, his series of mental comparisons, (he observes that Maria is altogether more civilized and wonders rhetorically whom he is comparing her to; he notes his sense of being "launched in something...quite disconnected from his sense of his past"), responses which reveal his inner confusion about his mission, are all mirrored in his own consciousness and in Maria's subtle observation of him. As in the earlier portrait of Newman, Strether is revealed by a series of oppositional traits that betray a confusion of values and by the suggestion that there is something lacking in his own understanding of himself and his situation. If he differs substantially from James's earlier American, it is most of all in his own sense of the burden of his "double consciousness."

As has been noted, although Strether is initially presented to the reader in the course of events, paradoxically, here as throughout the novel, he remains on the sidelines. He is a spectator, an observer and a composer. Thus the detachment which James describes as essential to his own conception of character informs not only the way he introduces characters in his novels, but often defines the nature of those characters themselves. This detachment is, paradoxically, an extremely powerful kind of presence, for it grants an observing character the power of a narrator who, as in the case of Strether, helps to create the composition.

C. Portrait as Composition: Chad Newsome

Strether's role as narrator-composer can be studied in the first portrait of Chad Newsome, whom the reader sees entirely through his eyes. Chad has been absent for the first seventy-five pages of the novel, but during that time the reader's attention has rarely been allowed to wander from the subject of Strether's mission. When Chad himself finally appears, the scene as a dramatic unit is, characteristically, suspended, for he has timed his arrival to coincide with Strether's enjoyment of a theatrical performance. Chad enters Strether's box but signals that he will wait, and while the play proceeds, the real action focuses on Strether's private reaction to Chad--a study of the young man's visible transformation, in a sense his aesthetic completion:

> There was a fascination for that critic in its not being, this ripe physiognomy, the face that, under observation at least, he had originally carried away from Woollett. Strether found a certain freedom on his own side in defining it as that of a man of the world--a formula that indeed seemed to come now in some degree to his relief; that of a man to whom things had happened and were variously known. In gleams, in glances, the past did perhaps peep out of it; but such lights were faint and instantly merged. Chad was brown and thick and strong; of old Chad had been rough. Was all the difference therefore that he was actually smooth? Possibly; for that he was smooth was as marked as in the taste of a sauce or in the rub of a hand. The effect of it was general--it had retouched his features, drawn them with a cleaner line. It had cleared his eyes and

> settled his colour and polished his fine square teeth--the main ornament of his face; and at the same time that it had given him a form and a surface, almost a design, it had toned his voice, established his accent, encouraged his smile to more play and his other motions to less. He had formerly, with a great deal of action, expressed very little; and he now expressed whatever was necessary with almost none at all. It was as if in short he had really, copious perhaps but shapeless, been put into a firm mould and turned successfully out. (AMB 98;ch.2)

All of James's earlier techniques of character presentation are here in a more subtle form: the suspended action which creates a pictorial frame is established by the context of the action rather than by mere isolation of the character; embedded description pretends to be specific but is in fact general, a peculiar kind of portraiture whose details fall just short of concreteness--"It had cleared his eyes and settled his colour and polished his fine square teeth." Antithesis has been broadened into comparison--old Chad versus new Chad--and the characteristic American vagueness, the lack of definition is a memory. Chad had been shaped and molded, aesthetically refined. As Strether observes Chad, he is imaginatively reenacting the transformation process itself, and thereby identifying himself ever more closely with Paris, with the artist who has shaped and refined the wayward son of his fiancée. In his appreciation of the new Chad, Lambert Strether has, in a subtle way, adopted the attitude of James's earlier narrators toward the quintessential

American. He too deplores the rough shapelessness of the earlier Chad, his tendency to "express very little" "with a great deal of action," and he admires that special quality of depth formerly absent: "that of a man to whom things had happened and were variously known."

The portrait of Chad is designed to convey the kind of information the long-awaited confrontation would have. The passage moves by implied contrasts; but the earlier Chad is present only in glimpses beneath the surface. His features have been "retouched," his teeth have been "polished," his voice has been "toned." But, it is a refinement which suggests calculation and Strether's pictorial language takes on the character of an action, recording the reversal in his perceptions in a set of images which are admiring yet uneasy. In this way the larger dramatic issue of the novel is also presented: the transformation which Strether's consciousness reenacts articulates the lines of conflict between Woollett and Paris which, increasingly as the novel progresses, inform all of Strether's experience. The two images of Chad--old and new--bring together in a single concrete manifestation the qualities Strether has been fumbling to define, the character of a city which has been subtly changing his attitude toward his mission and even his own identity. Portraiture in James can therefore be seen as a model of dramatic economy: it influences

the course of events with a minimum of action and even of descriptive detail. What remains is the dramatic effect of Strether's having seen Chad (and by implication his own situation) in a new way. Insights and recognitions in James characteristically arise out of such visual compositions and comparisons.

Despite the increased use of indirection in his novels of the major phase, most Jamesian males, but in particular his Americans, are similar in both physiognomy and psychology. Christopher Newman, Basil Ransom, Caspar Goodwood, Chad Newsome, Lambert Strether, and even to some extent their British counterparts (Lord Warburton and Merton Densher) share a quality of caricature in both feature and expression. Exaggerated in feature, tall and lanky, they can frequently be found standing stiffly, or seated somewhat awkwardly, stretching their legs, hands clasped behind their heads and gazing into space. Such caricature creates a tendency to associate Jamesian males with the exaggerations of melodrama and the implied spiritual deficiencies suggest a primitive psychology, a sometimes clumsy, slow reflectiveness and a relative passivity: they wait, watch and are slowly transformed by what they see. When studied by Jamesian women, as they frequently are, their naïveté is further mirrored in the more subtle awareness of their observers.

D. The Jamesian Woman

If Jamesian heroes are relatively easy to read, his heroines, in contrast are elusive, complex, and subtle. In describing his young women, James employs the narrative equivalent of the "sketch," in place of the more developed portraiture reserved for his men. Early sketches of Isabel Archer, for example are deceptively simple and straightforward: "She had seated herself...her white hands, in her lap, were folded upon her black dress; her head was erect, her eye brilliant, her flexible figure turned itself this way and that, in sympathy with the alertness with which she evidently caught impressions" (PL 18;ch.2). Jamesian women communicate their presence most often by gesture, by motion: "She was looking at everything with an eye that denoted quick perception" (PL 16;ch.2). Psychologically, however, these heroines are complex and elusive. As Milly Theale says of Kate Croy, "there were more indications than she could reduce to order in the manner of the friendly niece" (WD 98;ch.7); later, more ominously, Milly struggles to define Kate's morally ambiguous nature: "the handsome girl was, with twenty other splendid qualities, the least bit brutal too... (WD 120;ch.8).

Spiritually, James's females are in a state of fine vibration; they are assertive and reach out eagerly, often over-confidently, to shape and, most of

all, to believe in the experiences and persons they are, partly, creating. It is the Jamesian female who represents and explores James's own ambivalence toward the quintessential American engaged in "the cultivation of the self, the creation and 'rendering' of personality as a work of art" (Donadio 19). All Jamesian women are intensely conscious composers of the self and are almost always apprehended by others as visual compositions. Isabel Archer is studied, throughout The Portrait of a Lady, as someone who is actively composing her identity; similarly, she apprehends her Europeanized compatriot, Madame Merle, as a most successful "rendering" of an ideal woman. Once again, through this emphasis, portraiture becomes synonymous with action, for it is through the gradual clarification of the image, of Isabel Archer, of Serena Merle, that the story is told.

1. Isabel Archer: "the eager and personal young girl"

Nowhere in The Portrait of a Lady is the reader given a complete description of Isabel Archer, of the kind one sees repeatedly in the presentation of James's American men. Initially she is described only as "a tall girl in a black dress who at first sight looked pretty" (PL 15;ch.2), as she is framed briefly in the doorway of Gardencourt. But James devotes the better part of the first six chapters to an indirect and

direct exposition of her character, during which she is repeatedly observed, studied, and framed by others; initially during Ralph's and Lord Warburton's discussion of "an interesting woman" just prior to her arrival at Gardencourt, then by her family's mixed view of her "originality," by Mrs. Touchett's dry and witty assessment of her "independence," and, finally and most effectively, by Ralph Touchett's curiosity. It is through Ralph's view of Isabel that James returns to the framing technique which marks his pictorial method. Late on the first evening of Isabel's arrival, she begs her cousin to take her on a brief tour of the picture gallery at Gardencourt. He indicates that the light is no longer adequate and that it would be best to wait till morning, but in a gesture of willful yet charming insistence, ("If you please, I should like to see them just a little" (PL 43;ch.5)) she convinces her cousin to guide her through the gallery. As they proceed, and as she studies the pictures, he studies her:

> Ralph took a candlestick and moved about, pointing out the things he liked; Isabel, bending toward one picture after another, indulged in little exclamations and murmurs. She was evidently a judge; she had a natural taste; he was struck with that. She took a candlestick herself and held it slowly here and there, she lifted it high, and as she did so, he found himself pausing in the middle of the gallery and bending his eyes much less upon the pictures than on her figure. He lost nothing, in truth, by these wandering glances; for she was better worth looking at than most works of art. She was thin, and light, and middling tall;...Her hair, which was dark even to blackness, had been an

> object of envy to many women; her light grey eye, a little too keen perhaps in her graver moments, had an enchanting softness when she smiled. (PL 43;ch.5)

As Ralph indicates, it is Isabel who represents the singularly valuable portrait in the gallery. If the details of her physiognomy remain sketchy (it is only in the expression of Isabel's eye that ambiguities, depth, and complexity begin to suggest themselves), the portrait effectively reveals her most salient psychological feature--her eagerness, her enthusiasm. Ralph finds this eagerness amusing, but his appreciation of her is clearly an idealization: she is defined primarily by lightness and softness, and the light which he indicated was inadequate for proper appreciation of the pictures, implicitly softens his portrait of Isabel.

Ralph's portrait is one of the few examples of scenic presentation in the early description of Isabel Archer. Surprisingly, for James, much of the early chapters of the novel are given over almost entirely to summary narration, gathering together various impressions of Isabel in a single voice and returning to the characteristic Jamesian image of the American. Isabel is full of naïve idealism and high hopes, but she is carelessly overconfident that the world is a benevolent place. Once again, her narrator sums up her character in a series of internal contradictions which will become the center of her story:

> Altogether, with her meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic, her temper at once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and indifference, her desire to look well and to be if possible even better; her determination to see, to try, to know; her combination of the delicate, desultory, flame-like spirit of the eager and personal young girl; she 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 more purely expectant. (PL 48;ch.5)

Typically, Isabel's lack of self-knowledge stands in dangerous contrast to her strong will and idealism which are presented more scenically in the opening chapters of the novel. What dominates this summary however is, characteristically, the narrator's paternal tenderness which leads us to associate him with the author, and, at the close of the passage, the distinction between author and narrator is deliberately blurred. Since this narrator introduces an angle of vision and an attitude later to be adopted by Ralph--that of an apparent detachment which belies his intense involvement in the formation of Isabel's character (Ralph indicates later that he lives primarily to see what she will become)--there is a curious blending of character and narrator in James's technique. The deliberate effacement of the distinction between narrator and character, between Ralph Touchett and the omniscient narrator, results in an even stronger emphasis on character as a composed reality subjectively created by a fellow character.

2. Madame Merle: "an eye incapable of dullness"

The gentle indulgence which surrounds both scenic and summary presentation of Isabel Archer and the directness of the portrait stands in sharp contrast to the subtle irony which informs James's presentation of Isabel's mentor, Serena Merle. She is one of the few major female characters in Henry James to be described in extensive physical detail--detail verging on melodrama in its effective dramatization of Madame Merle's ambiguous and dangerous nature:

> Madame Merle was a tall, fair, plump woman; everything in her person was round and replete, though without those accumulations which minister to indolence. Her features were thick but there was a graceful harmony among them, and her complexion had a healthy clearness. She had a small grey eye, with a great deal of light in it--an eye incapable of dullness, and, according to some people, incapable of tears; and a wide, firm mouth, which, when she smiled, drew itself upward to the left side, in a manner that most people thought very odd, some very affected, and a few very graceful. Isabel inclined to range herself in the last category...her deportment expressed the repose and confidence which come from a large experience. Experience, however, had not quenched her youth; it had simply made her sympathetic and supple. She was in a word a woman of ardent impulses, kept in admirable order. What an ideal combination! thought Isabel. (PL 162-3;ch.18)

Once again the characteristic Jamesian antithesis is implicit in the series of opposing interpretations which dominates this description: roundness which does not "minister to indolence," a thickness of feature which is, however, not unharmonious. Almost

immediately, however, the moral emphasis shifts from positive to negative--"a small grey eye...incapable of dullness, and according to some people, incapable of tears;" and a smile that "most people thought very odd"--so that Isabel's admiration is effectively undercut. Clarity of expression which might otherwise dominate the portrait must be read--by these details--as calculation rather than openness. The portrait functions dramatically in revealing Isabel's desire to regard Madame Merle in a positive light, to read the composition of her new friend as an ideal model for herself. Nonetheless the problem of Serena Merle's identity--like her origin--is central to the whole chapter in which she first appears. Isabel's questions about her new acquaintance to Ralph and Mrs. Touchett and their opposing responses only deepen the antithesis--and the mystery--and encourage Isabel in a kind of defiant admiration.

By the end of the description, a picture which is ostensibly presented by a narrator is implicitly Isabel's and therefore as much a statement about her as about her new acquaintance. Even in this early novel, James repeatedly transfers the frame from narrator to perceiving character: Ralph Touchett takes over the narrator's stance in examining Isabel; Isabel becomes a mirror for Serena Merle. Both perceivers gradually learn that the initial image corresponds only to their

own imaginative ideals and must later be displaced by a more objective rendering. In this sense composition is not only a Jamesian architectural technique; it is the means by which story evolves and recognitions are achieved.

3. Kate Croy: "always in the line of the eye"

An interesting variation on the theme of recognition through portraiture is, of course, self-recognition. Kate Croy, in the opening of The Wings of the Dove, instead of being presented through the eyes of another, examines her image in a mirror and, at various points in the novel, adds her self-portrait to the compositions others create of her. Created by James some twenty-one years after Madame Merle, she nonetheless bears a strong spiritual resemblance to her, particularly in her artfully composed grace, coldness and moral ambiguity. In the depiction of Kate Croy, however, James does not depend on either extensive physical description or summary. Instead, observing a kind of visual dramatic economy, he creates an impressionistic image, letting the barest details stand for the whole. He draws her in terms of a kind of aesthetic presence, and the rhythm of his prose imitates her grace yet also implicitly her control, her calculation: "She had stature without height, grace without motion, presence without mass. Slender and

simple, frequently soundless, she was somehow always in the line of the eye--she counted singularly for its pleasure" (WD 6;ch.1). She is a figure full of high polish, aesthetically complete but somehow lifeless--a statue. (The missing feature here which enters into every previous description we have cited is that of the eye and therefore the expression.) Kate's coldness is by no means diminished in the opening chapters by her own portraits of herself--by her mood of frustration and her tendency to cast material aspirations in spiritual terms: "She saw herself as handsome, no doubt, but as hard, and felt herself as clever but as cold, and as so much too imperfectly ambitious, furthermore, that it was a pity, for a quiet life, she couldn't decide to be either finely or stupidly indifferent" (WD 41;ch.3).

Kate Croy is defined and defines herself by characteristic antithesis, by contradictions which suggest a mystery and a story. James's American pair, Susan Stringham and Milly Theale, regard her complexity as awesome, as fascinating. Milly in particular, not unlike Isabel Archer, romanticizes her new acquaintance for her capacity to be different on each new occasion. In short, she gratifies Milly's great and tragic need to get the most out of each moment: "Kate had, for her new friend's eyes, the extraordinary and attaching property of appearing at a given moment to show as a

beautiful stranger, to cut her connections and lose her identity, letting the imagination for the time make what it would of them...Nothing could have given her, as a party to a relation, a greater freshness than this sense--which sprang up at its own hours--of being as curious about her as if one hadn't known her" (WD 138;ch.10). Kate Croy, from Milly's essentially passive vantage point, is a perfect subject for a kind of detached yet happily intense scrutiny--a kind of attention which approximates life for Milly. Kate is the figure in the fairy tale, and, through her, life is as rich as fiction for Milly: "The handsome English girl from the heavy English house had been as a figure in a picture stepping by magic out of its frame" (WD 113;ch.8). Milly delights in the fact that Kate can be composed anew in each new context. Later contexts, however, involve Milly ever more deeply, and her initial enthusiasm gives way to fear as Kate's strangeness betrays itself as predatory in its indifference to those around her.

If the lack of development implied by the "sketch" suggests a danger to the character who reflects it, high polish, the appearance of aesthetic completion, and especially, complexity, are always associated with manipulation and deception. As James's technique evolves, the narrator-composer is replaced by the interested character who discovers he cannot remain

indifferent to or remote from the consequences of his own interpretations. Just as Milly discovers that her delight in Kate's originality is something she will later have reason to fear, so too Ralph Touchett later anguishes over having been too eager to create a special freedom for Isabel so that she might gratify her imagination, and Lambert Strether ruefully meditates on his own blindly selective composition of Madame de Vionnet.

It is the activity of composition therefore which lies at the center of each character's drama in James's novels. Thus story is based on portraiture, on the capacity of the image to evoke a sense of depth beyond the picture itself. Jamesian narrative is concerned primarily with the process of composition and with the slow accumulation and comparison of images which alter the attitude of the perceiver. If the purpose of composing is to name and thereby know the other, characters deliberately place each other in provisional frames and through this kind of picture-making--by seeming to make the other stand still--they derive insights which are essentially dramatic. For Henry James, picture is character and character is story because the inner contrasts, contradictions, and complexities which are mirrored in his characters' portraits (and their portraits of each other) become the center of their drama.

The pictorial mode of characterization is also a paradigm for James's storytelling method as a whole. The aesthetic detachment of the narrator, and later the perceiving character which shapes and reveals characters through portraits also shapes the story itself as a kind of composition. Almost all insights and recognitions in James have to do with visual composition. Isabel Archer "sees" the relationship between her husband and Madame Merle as she observes them standing together in a room; Milly Theale "sees" that Merton Densher has returned by observing the way Kate stands in the frame of a window, and Lambert Strether discovers the relationship between Chad Newsome and Madame de Vionnet when they enter his ideally composed "Lambinet" of the French countryside. As characters watch each other and as they study the worlds they have entered, composing pictures is fundamental to the way they develop their stories. This general perspective can serve as a starting point for a more concentrated analysis of James's pictorial method in three of his most representative novels, The Portrait of a Lady, The Ambassadors, and The Wings of the Dove.

Chapter 4

Isabel's Romantic Pictures: The Portrait of a Lady

The Portrait of a Lady (1881), generally regarded as James's first full-length masterpiece, has a classically dramatic structure: Isabel Archer, full of naïve idealism and a desire for self-improvement, comes to Europe in search of an independent and cultivated life. Plagued by suitors who would, from her point of view, restrain her freedom and inhibit her development, she refuses an American businessman who follows her abroad, an English Lord who meets her there, and finally marries a gentleman of ambiguous character whose nature she blindly idealizes. Much later she understands the deep error in her love for Gilbert Osmond, but in what is almost a tragic acceptance of personal responsibility, she chooses to remain with him. Signposts abound to remind the reader of the defects of Isabel's qualities: the vulnerability of her idealism, the stubbornness of her independent spirit and the potential for error implied by her overactive imagination. But if the reader is fully prepared for the dramatic consequences suggested by Isabel's character, James makes little use of the dramatic possibilities of his plot. Dialogue, significant encounters, scenic climaxes, and moments of recognition are carefully subdued, rendered indirect, summarized. James's narrative

strategies, even in this early novel, suggest a conscious effort to mute the immediacy of action and to replace it with a kind of perceptual picture-making. Visual composing, of which portraiture is a leading example, is a primary activity for James's characters in this novel. However, as a way of seeing the world, picture-making creates its own drama. Isabel composes her world according to her ideals, willfully transforming what she sees, and as both the narrator and other characters who take over the narrator's role (particularly Ralph Touchett) interpret her actions, they too engage in a pictorial rendering of their experience which is its own drama. Their portraits of Isabel, like her portraits of others, become stages in the development of the novel. In addition to portraits, James develops Isabel's story through domestic landscapes and interiors. Especially conscious of background and setting, he creates a series of locations, a sequence of frames, which place Isabel first in the light, then, increasingly, in shadow, as her choices lead her away from her ideals and from herself.

A. The Picture Frame

1. Gardencourt and the quality of light

Just as James creates the illusion of drama by involving the reader in the process of character formation, from the opening pages of The Portrait, he makes

the reader witness to the composing process through the actual creation of setting. He draws special attention to the activity of composition, to the contents of the scene as stage material and to both the literal and metaphorical significance of the picture-frame. In the opening scene of the novel, an afternoon tea on the lawn of an old English country house is described not as an event but as a domestic landscape, so that the activity of an imaginary artist composing is the essential action:

> Part of the afternoon had waned, but much of it was left and what was left was of the finest and rarest quality. Real dusk would not arrive for many hours; but the flood of summer light had begun to ebb, the air had grown mellow, the shadows were long upon the smooth, dense turf. They lengthened slowly, however, and the scene expressed that sense of leisure still to come which is perhaps the chief source of one's enjoyment of such a scene at such an hour. From five o'clock to eight is on certain occasions a little eternity; but on such an occasion as this the interval could be only an eternity of pleasure. The persons concerned in it were taking their pleasure quietly, and they were not of the sex which is supposed to furnish the regular votaries of the ceremony I have mentioned. The shadows on the perfect lawn were straight and angular; they were the shadows of an old man sitting in a deep wicker chair near the low table on which the tea had been served, and of two younger men strolling to and fro, in desultory talk, in front of him. (PL 5;ch.1)

As the narrator moves from light to shadow and from shadow to substance, from an imaginary prospect toward the center of his composition, it is the quality of light which defines his picture and creates its mood of

timelessness, of "a little eternity." The scene is self-consciously pictorial, even static, effecting a suspension of time which both arouses and postpones dramatic significance. The two men materialize from their long shadows on the summer lawn like puppets brought to life upon a stage, and all the while a peculiar distance is maintained: we see movements but do not hear conversation--action is presented as gesture, as tableau. The leisurely composer focuses finally on Mr. Touchett who, in turn, contemplates Gardencourt, and through Touchett's appreciation of his house, the narrator-artist comes to the center of his composition and indicates that his picture is complete: "The house that rose beyond the lawn was a structure to repay such consideration and was the most characteristic object in the peculiarly English picture I have attempted to sketch" (_PL_ 6;ch.1).

James's opening scene in this novel provides both the literal and symbolic "ground" for the story to come. The subtle recasting of afternoon twilight in major scenes of the novel is the constant background against which houses, from Gardencourt to Osmond's Roccanera, become members of the cast, living images through which characters interpret their experience. As Charles Anderson observes, it is through vistas, houses and light that James develops the novel's major themes (90-91). In this initial description, Garden-

court is presented in fairy tale terms: its world is timeless; it is isolated and therefore protects its inhabitants from real events and real people. And Gardencourt slowly reveals itself as the perfect setting for James's leading character who appears, shortly after the opening description, framed in the doorway of the house itself. Isabel's responsive, imaginative, and romantic view of life is perfectly gratified by the domestic scene before her, and when her cousin introduces her to Lord Warburton, she responds, "Oh, I hoped there would be a Lord; it's just like a novel" (PL 16;ch.1). The sense of entering the world of fiction, of disengaging oneself from reality reflected in the fairy tale world of the novel's setting is confirmed by the eager enthusiasm of James's heroine.

At the same time, the contemplative quality of this landscape, and of many scenes to come, stands in dramatic contrast to Isabel's spontaneity and becomes central to her development. A certain aesthetic distance gradually informs her perceptions and teaches her to control her more ardent impulses. It is this control which prepares her to appreciate Gilbert Osmond whose success with Isabel is based not so much on his actions (of which the reader sees very little) as on his ability to compose an image of life consonant with the contemplative mood of the novel's opening:

> My dear girl, I can't tell you how life seems to stretch there before us--what a long sum-

> mer afternoon awaits us. It's the latter half of an Italian day--with a golden haze, and the shadows just lengthening, and that divine delicacy in the light, the air, the landscape, which I have loved all my life and which you love today...It is all soft and mellow--it has the Italian colouring. (PL 325;ch.35)

If the details of the two descriptions seem parallel, there is something precious in Osmond's more impressionistic image--in his choice of language ("divine delicacy"; "the Italian colouring") and in the rhythm of his speech--absent from the English version of the scene. It is a self-conscious quality which casts an ironic shadow on the activity of making one's life a "picture." Thus the contemplative mode of life suggested by the pictorial shaping of scenes (and, later, events) points to the central dramatic conflict of the novel. Not only is Isabel's choice of Osmond, her innocent willingness to enter his picture-frame, a denial of her own freer, more expansive nature; it is based on the erroneous belief that the image of the world he has composed (and which is as counterfeit as the coins he craws), is as authentic as the original she discovered at Gardencourt.

2. Albany and the house of "mysterious melancholy"

The world of fairy tale, of illusion, is repeatedly equated with the idea of picture-making in the opening chapters of the novel. From Gardencourt, the reader is taken back in time and place to Isabel's

original home in Albany where she is studied in her own surroundings. Isabel's circumstances, her history, and especially her emotional patterns are revealed in this chapter. Her own sense of herself as an imaginative, independent, and intelligent person is ironically undercut by a narrator who notes the deficiencies in her upbringing and education, deficiencies which have led her to think too well of herself and to believe in her own imaginative renderings of experience which are dangerously blind to reality. These tendencies are represented not in Isabel's actions but through a picture of Isabel's house itself and, in particular, her chosen sanctuary within that house. The room Isabel has chosen, like the domestic landscape of Gardencourt she embraces, is an innocent model of the private dungeon she will later choose with Osmond, and the narrator emphasizes the fact that she has chosen it freely: "She might have had the whole house to choose from, and the room she had selected was the most depressed of its scenes:"

> It was enough for her that it contained an echo and a pleasant musty smell, and that it was a chamber of disgrace for old pieces of furniture, whose infirmities were not always apparent...and with which, in the manner of children, she had established relations almost human, or dramatic...The place owed much of its mysterious melancholy to the fact that it was properly entered from the second door of the house, the door that had been condemned, and that it was fastened by bolts which a particularly slender little girl found it impossible to slide. She knew that this silent motionless portal opened into the

> street; if the sidelights had not been filled with green paper, she might have looked out upon the little brown stoop and the well-worn brick pavement. But she had no wish to look out for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side--a place which became, to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror. (PL 24;ch.3)

This illustrated description of Isabel's habitual retreat is in fact an image of her mind, one whose nature is revealed in terms of exaggerated childlike emotions. The narrator's formal tone ("chamber of disgrace," "infirmities not always apparent," "mysterious melancholy") contrasts sharply with Isabel's own emotional life ("in the manner of children," "childish sorrows," "a region of delight or of terror") which is characterized by fantasy, by a disengagement from reality ("she had no wish to look out..."). Although part of this description seems to reflect back to Isabel's childhood, it is here that Mrs. Touchett discovers her. Thus, later, when Isabel asks Ralph to show her the ghost at Gardencourt, it is apparent that an adolescent quality continues to dominate her view of experience. Similarly, much later, when Madame Merle cautions Isabel to take the "house" or "shell" of another into account, Isabel insists that such external manifestations have only an arbitrary value: "Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; on the contrary, it's a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one" (PL 187;ch.19).

Just as the benign image of Gardencourt at twilight is transformed by Osmond into a controlled, static picture of life, the childhood retreat from which Isabel can escape at any time is transformed into a dwelling from which there is no egress:

> When, as the months elapsed, she followed him further and he led her into the mansion of his own habitation, then, then she had seen where she really was. She could live it over again, the incredulous terror with which she had taken the measure of her dwelling. Between those four walls she had lived ever since; they were to surround her for the rest of her life. It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air; Osmond's beautiful mind, indeed, seemed to peep down from a small high window and mock at her. (PL 396;ch.42)

Just as she has reduced places and people to elements in a composition of her own, Isabel now sees that she has been placed within the frame of another individual's picture. James intensifies the irony of this recognition with an implicit comparison to a chosen room of Isabel's childhood. The eager, independent young woman has entered the house--in fact--the mind of another as if it were an arbitrary childhood fantasy, believing it to be a place in which she might grow, fulfill her dreams, realize her ideals. Instead she finds she has given up her freedom, and, in a sense, her life. Through such parallel images early and late in the novel, James makes pictures of places function as stages in Isabel's dramatic recognition. As images of her imagination become true to life choices, they

deepen into irony, revealing to Isabel the limitations of her vision.

3. House and World: the gathering twilight

Isabel's tendency to believe in her power to shape reality is encouraged, even manipulated, by Serena Merle. Through her mentor, Isabel is slowly and subtly prepared to accept the narrow aesthetic vision of Gilbert Osmond and to reject more open and honest suitors whose manner does not reflect the same restraint or composed grace. In Isabel's first meeting with Madame Merle, an elaborate description of the setting again postpones (and finally displaces) the action. From a distant part of her aunt's house, Isabel hears music. Suggesting the internal distance she will have to travel to absorb Madame Merle's lessons and come to appreciate Osmond, Isabel traverses not only the entire house but also the room in which Madame Merle sits, at the far end, with her back to Isabel. Seemingly unconscious of Isabel's entrance, she continues to play the piano; meanwhile, Isabel studies the newest visitor to Gardencourt. A silent and highly effective dramatic pause is created giving Isabel time to examine Serena Merle. But this moment of contemplation only reinforces Isabel's false sense of objectivity. As we later learn, Madame Merle is rarely to be taken unawares, and this simple description is therefore a

visual paradigm for the subtle control she will later exert over Isabel's character and destiny.

The autumn twilight of Gardencourt has darkened and become stormy with the arrival of Isabel's mentor, suggesting an inward movement to the drama and a darkening of Isabel's prospects: "Her companion 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" (PL 160;ch.18). The eternity of the first autumn twilight becomes a more solemn kind of eternity as Ralph, Isabel, and Madame Merle await the death of old Mr. Touchett. At the same time the stage has been cleared for the relationship to develop between the two women: between the events of the household and the inclement weather, Isabel and Madame Merle are thrown together with regularity and intensity. Instead of dramatizing this encounter, however, James presents most of it in the form of summary: dialogue is indirect and separate scenes are gathered together in a single visual dramatization of their relationship, imitating the effect of Madame Merle's powerful personality on her impressionable young friend. The picture which sums up their growing intimacy is shaped by and commented upon by Isabel's powerless but all-seeing

cousin, Ralph Touchett, as he watches them from one of the windows of Gardencourt:

> A period of bad weather had settled down upon Gardencourt; the days grew shorter, and there was an end to the pretty tea parties on the lawn. But Isabel had long indoor conversations with her fellow-visitor and in spite of the rain the two ladies often sallied forth for a walk... Madame Merle was very appreciative; she liked almost everything, including the English rain. "There is always a little of it and never too much at once," she said; "and it never wets you, and it always smells good." ...Poor Ralph Touchett, as soon as the autumn had begun to define itself, became almost a prisoner; in bad weather he was unable to step out of the house, and he used sometimes to stand at one of the windows with his hands in his pockets, and, with a countenance half-rueful, half-critical, watch Isabel and Madame Merle as they walked down the avenue under a pair of umbrellas. (PL 175;ch.19)

James locates the developing intimacy between Isabel and Madame Merle externally, in relation to the elements. Their venturing forth corresponds visually to what will occur dramatically as Isabel acknowledges that she is under the influence of her new friend, as she follows her into the world. Despite the specificity of detail and dialogue, this scene does not represent a specific action; rather it stands as a kind of visual summary of an action repeated many times. The picture of the two women walking under a pair of umbrellas communicates its drama in the form of a tableau as Ralph Touchett, unable to hear their conversation from behind the window, nonetheless sadly apprehends their deepening intimacy. His silent com-

mentary ("a countenance half-rueful, half critical") communicates his doubts about the merit of their friendship whose essence he has captured in a moment of vision, arrested by the frame of the window.

Just as the reader watches Ralph who, in turn, observes the two women, throughout this chapter we observe Isabel watching Madame Merle. But Isabel's insights are not shown through actual encounters with her friend. In fact, not a single scene between the two women is every fully dramatized. Like the picture above, the entire chapter is cast in the form of summary. As Isabel reflects upon things her friend has said, and as her point of view increasingly engages the reader's attention, it is her private emotional responses which become the real drama. The conflict between conscious desire to approve of Madame Merle and her latent fear that the latter is too polished, too worldly, not natural enough, complements Ralph's silent disapproval. But the effect of this part of the story is to show the powerful influence of Madame Merle over Isabel despite the younger woman's inner warnings and Ralph's skepticism. The entire chapter is a picture of Isabel's dramatic preparation for Gilbert Osmond: it defines and explores her propensity, her willingness to be engaged by self-dramatizing characters, to believe their self-portraits are authentic, and, later, to be caught by their power to shape and control her as well.

B. Isabel's Compositions

1. Osmond and the image of cultivation

As Madame Merle leads Isabel into the world, she carefully prepares her to appreciate and to trust Gilbert Osmond. Under her mentor's subtle instruction, Isabel gradually learns to adopt the stance of the artist as Madame Merle defines it, to control her more spontaneous, freer responses to life and to replace them with a composed economy and grace. By the time she meets Osmond, she is ready to appreciate his subtlety and to regard her own lack of it as a defect. Nonetheless, she is never wholly blind to the darker side of his artfulness. Even when Isabel meets her suitor for the first time, her sense of the rehearsed atmosphere created by Osmond and Madame Merle is troubling to her: "They talked extremely well; it struck Isabel almost as a dramatic entertainment, rehearsed in advance" (_PL_ 229;ch.23). Isabel quickly becomes aware of the control Osmond exerts over others and senses that to enter into a relationship with him she must suppress her own nature even more that she has already learned to do: "His talk was like the tinkling of glass, and if she had put out her finger she might have changed the pitch and spoiled the concert" (_PL_ 229;ch.23).

Shortly after her first encounter with Osmond, Isabel goes with Madame Merle to visit him at his

Florentine villa, an imposing structure about which Isabel mentally observes, "There was something rather severe about the place; it looked somehow as if, once you were in, it would not be easy to get out" (PL 234;ch.24). Initially, however, the ominous quality of the place is softened by the gentle light of the Italian afternoon. The setting, almost Gothic, is deceptively softened and Isabel's dominant impression as she quietly listens to Osmond's discourse on Italy, is one of studied control. Even Pansy Osmond, she observes, "had a kind of finish that was not entirely artless" (PL 236;ch.24). Aware of having entered a highly composed atmosphere, Isabel joins in the activity of picture-making. Thus when Osmond guides her into his house "to see his treasures," she studies him as a portrait in his own gallery, and the scene ironically echoes her earlier exploration of the gallery at Gardencourt. Just as Ralph made Isabel his subject (PL 43;ch.5), so Isabel makes Osmond hers:

> His pictures, his carvings and tapestries were interesting; but after a while Isabel became conscious that the owner was more interesting still...For the moment she only said to herself that Mr. Osmond had the interest of rareness. It was not so much what he said and did, but rather what he withheld, that distinguished him; he indulged in no striking deflexions from common usage; he was an original without being an eccentric. Isabel had never met a person of so fine a grain. The peculiarity was physical, to begin with, and it extended to his immaterial part. His dense, delicate hair, his overdrawn, retouched features, his clear complexion, ripe without being coarse, the

> very evenness of the growth of his beard, and that light, smooth slenderness of structure which made the movement of a single one of his fingers produce the effect of an expressive gesture--these personal points struck our observant young lady as the signs of an unusual sensibility. He was certainly fastidious and critical; he was probably irritable. His sensibility had governed him--possibly governed him too much; it had made him impatient of vulgar troubles and had led him to live by himself, in a serene, impersonal way, thinking about art and beauty and history. (PL 242;ch.24)

Throughout this passage, it is Osmond's sensibility and subtlety which strikes Isabel. There is a refinement of expression in him which was notably absent in her previous suitors, Goodwood and Warburton. Both physically and in his "immaterial part," Osmond requires quiet and careful scrutiny; the smallest detail signifies. Yet Osmond's "rareness" is something to study and appreciate, but not to touch. Here, as elsewhere in Jamesian portraiture, expressive physical details are presented ambiguously, so that the viewer's effort to impose meaning sets in motion a kind of dramatic conflict. Isabel's response begins in appreciation--"Mr. Osmond had the interest of rareness. . . . he was an original without being an eccentric"--but ends in a certain disturbance at the extent to which his taste governs both his appearance and his attitude toward life--"he was certainly fastidious and critical; he was probably irritable." At the end of the passage, Isabel attempts to gloss over these negative impressions, to overcome her discomfort at Osmond's visible

irritability, justifying it as part of his preoccupation with the subtler and finer aspects of life. Thus Isabel imposes upon Osmond's portrait a kind of romantic idealization as she prepares herself to trust and share his vision. The passage moves in a kind of circle, beginning with Isabel's aesthetic appreciation of her subject, moving through her acknowledgement of its complexity and ending with a determination to justify Osmond's point of view, to regard his attitude toward life as the height of aesthetic sensibility.

If, on one level, the portrait of Osmond seems to be composed by Isabel, the studied control she perceives in his attitude reveals the fact that Osmond's picture is already a highly composed self-portrait as well. Osmond's hand in the composition, the implication that (as Ralph puts it elsewhere) he is a man who "studies effects," lends another level of irony to Isabel's naïve romanticizing. As Isabel embraces Osmond's ideal of composing oneself and one's vision of life, she reveals that this is the central element in her attraction to him. In a subsequent passage, she expands her idealized image of Osmond's character, creating a romantic, cultivated, and serious setting not only for him but for herself as well:

> She had carried away an image from her visit to his hilltop which her subsequent knowledge of him did nothing to efface and which happened to take her fancy particularly--the image of a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished man, strolling on a moss-grown ter-

> race above the sweet Val D'Arno, and holding by the hand a little girl whose sympathetic docility gave a new aspect to childhood. The picture was not brilliant, but she liked its lowness of tone, and the atmosphere of summer twilight that pervaded it. It seemed to tell a story--a story of the sort that touched her most easily; to speak of a serious choice, a choice between things of a shallow, and things of a deep interest; of a lonely studious life in a lovely land; of an old sorrow that sometimes ached today, a feeling of pride that was perhaps exaggerated, but that had an element of nobleness; a care for beauty and perfection so natural and so cultivated together that it had been the main occupation of a lifetime. (PL 256;ch.26)

Isabel has given her picture a mood and a meaning. In her assessment of Osmond's life, a quality of high-minded admiration has completely effaced Isabel's earlier doubts about her suitor's fastidiousness. She has created Osmond's sadness and she now makes it work for her; it becomes her privilege and her mission to help him realize his dreams. Her respect for the seriousness of his life subdues her anxiety and at the same time deepens her admiration for Osmond. Isabel is eloquent, even effusive in her praise--"a lonely studious life," "an element of nobleness," "a care for beauty and perfection,"--yet she has already adopted a tone of restraint that reflects the kind of control she will have to impose on herself to share this vision. The rhythm of the language and the emotional tenor of this passage suggest that Isabel is composing an image, not so much to define what she sees more clearly, but to satisfy her own need to discover a "deep" instead of a

"shallow" interest. She sets her picture of Osmond's life in the same summer twilight with which the novel opens, a twilight whose "lowness of tone" she finds more aesthetic and nobler than the brilliant but possibly shallow life Ralph dreams of for her. Harriet describes Isabel as "always planning out her development, desiring her perfection, observing her progress..."; from Isabel's point of view, Osmond's life represents these ideals. Her vision is double-edged, however, for it leads Isabel to believe that she can shape not only her own character and destiny, but the outside world itself. In her portrait of Osmond and in her idealization of his life, Isabel glosses over, effaces and finally transforms his studied control (and potential for manipulation it implies) into a noble artistic ideal. Reminiscent of the chosen world of her childhood from which she "has no wish to look out," Isabel encloses herself and hands over the design of her future to the aesthete who had shaped her artistic vision for her. Later, when she contemplates her misjudgment of Osmond, she finds herself once again in the sanctuary of her childhood, but one which in real life cannot be altered according to the needs of her imagination, one which therefore becomes a dungeon: "She had taken all the first steps in the purest confidence, and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley,

with a dead wall at the end" (PL 391;ch.42). Ironically, the house or world Isabel consistently chooses is one which separates her from reality. Initially she perceives it as a haven, a place where her imagination can roam free, but ultimately she sees that it restricts that very freedom; it entombs her: "Instead of leading to the high places of happiness from which the world would seem to lie below one...it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression, where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard as from above, and served to deepen the feeling of failure" (PL 391;ch.42). There is, of course, a direct relationship between Isabel's desire to compose her life, to choose its aesthetic and moral shape, and her later dramatic recognition, for gradually she becomes aware that the dungeon has been of her own making. If Isabel commits herself finally to return to her life with Osmond, it is in part because so much of her has gone into its creation; with a certain tragic acuteness, she perceives her responsibility.

2. Osmond and Madame Merle: a visual recognition

Isabel's understanding of the real nature of her husband is described in a series of revelatory pictures, pictures which stand in contrast to romantic compositions that she was encouraged to create during

their courtship. In a sense these new pictures are forced upon her; they occur without preparation or choice on Isabel's part yet her knowledge she gains emerges as an act of vision. the first moment of such heightened awareness occurs when Isabel surprises Madame Merle (who has largely absented herself since Isabel's marriage) and Osmond together in her drawing room:

> Just beyond the threshold of the drawing-room she stopped short, the reason for her doing so being that she had received an impression. The impression had, in strictness, and the soundlessness of her step gave her time to take in the scene before she interrupted it. Madame Merle was there in her bonnet, and Gilbert Osmond was talking to her; for a minute they were unaware that she had come in. Isabel had often seen that before, certainly; but what she had not seen, or at least had not noticed--was that their dialogue 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 away 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 upon his. What struck Isabel first was that he was sitting while Madame Merle stood; there was an anom aly in this that their 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 lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light. (PL 376;ch.40)

The scene has all the features of Jamesian portraiture; through the threshold of the drawing room, Isabel frames the scene visually; her attention is drawn first of all to physical details, to the place-

ment of each of the two figures because this is expressive of a relation. The entire picture is governed by details which emphasize stillness and silence. Isabel's awareness, her sudden knowledge is derived entirely from a visual apprehension of their intimacy signaled by a single detail: "he was sitting while Madame Merle stood; there was an anomaly in that that arrested her." Isabel intuits that this is an unguarded moment for her husband and his friend, that her arrival would startle them. Her position, poised at the entrance to the room is evocative of a nineteenth century narrative painting whose subject is the discovery of a betrayal. This first visual recognition shifts Isabel's attention from her troubled picture of Osmond to a new picture of the relations between them, with a special focus on Madame Merle from whom Isabel has been estranged but now sees with a new clarity. Until now she has been able to see only a portion of the picture at a time. Accidentally, her adversaries have offered her a glimpse of the whole composition. The image of Osmond and Madame Merle together in Isabel's drawing-room "grouped familiarly" now arises again and again in her consciousness. Isabel holds it up to the light repeatedly as she attempts to piece the facts of her life together.

James centers Isabel's recognitions around the entire history of her courtship and marriage, but the

conflict between her idealization of Osmond and the real Osmond is brought to a climax over the issue of his daughter's marriage. The strange impression Isabel receives "of her husband and Madame Merle being in more direct communication than she suspected" (PL 391;ch.42), is quickly followed by two dramatic confrontations, first, between Isabel and Madame Merle, then, between Isabel and her husband. In both of these scenes, the dramatic tension implicit in the increasingly strained relations between Isabel and her two adversaries is finally made explicit. Yet the effect in each of these scenes is one of extreme economy; it is, once again, action distilled into picture. Isabel is so astonished at these events that she is almost paralyzed. She watches these two confrontations, to which she is party, as if she were a spectator.

The encounters with her husband and his friend are extremely painful to Isabel. They betray, for the first time, the urgency and intensity of Osmond and Serena Merle's desire to see their daughter successfully married. Isabel clearly feels the pressure they exert on her as a personal and moral violation, and, while she can dismiss the intervention of Madame Merle (she is as yet ignorant of the latter's relationship to Pansy), she cannot dismiss Osmond so easily. Despite her growing uneasiness, she genuinely wishes to please

him. When Osmond suggests to Isabel that Pansy's marriage to Warburton lies in her hands ("With a little good will you may manage it. think that over and remember that I count upon you" (PL 389;ch.41)), Isabel becomes aware of the moral dimensions of her dilemma and of the complex ways in which she is now implicated in her own designs. Osmond's narrow but single-minded interest in shaping his daughter's future is similar to his treatment of Isabel as a small "garden plot" attached to his estate and it is a kind of controlling pictorialism that she herself has been engaged in. If, in part, she sees herself as able to please Osmond by helping to arrange his daughter's marriage, such assistance tests her willingness to subordinate her own moral code to the will of her husband. Instead of responding to Osmond's pressure, she remains silent, and, when he leaves the room, she sits up alone, late into the night, and ponders her entire relationship with him. If her earlier romantic image-making has falsified her understanding of Osmond, with her new moral awareness, she will now be able to see true.

3. Osmond reviewed: Isabel's midnight vigil

James describes Isabel's discovery of the true nature of her relationship with Osmond as "a representation simply of her motionlessly seeing" (AN 57). He argues, however, that this representation "throws the

action further forward than twenty 'incidents' might have done" (AN 57). Essentially, James creates the dramatic climax of the story, that is, Isabel's moment of reversal and recognition, entirely as a series of pictures, as if testing the capacity of the picture to do the work of story. Isabel reviews her initial impressions of Osmond, tries to identify the basis of her attraction, then confronts her more recent and painful awareness of his deeper nature and their fundamental differences, and finally acknowledges her own role in having seen Osmond in a particular way, of having composed a portrait to meet her own needs.

Isabel's recognitions consist of a series of pictures as she defines, first, her initial attraction to Osmond, then her wariness, her deepening mistrust. She remembers her early admiration and the way in which his position touched her emotionally: "A certain combination of features had touched her, and in them she had seen the most striking of portraits. That he was poor and lonely and yet that somehow he was noble--that was what interested her and seemed to give her her opportunity" (PL 393;ch.42). She then remembers how, as she grew to know him, her respect for his mind and his general superiority deepened: "a certain feeling took possession of her--a sense of the earnestness of his affection and a delight in his personal qualities. He was better than anyone else... The finest individual

she had ever known was hers" (PL 394;ch.42). As Isabel considers the basis of her original choice and commitment, she begins to see how much her own idealization of Osmond has governed her perceptions. In the confrontation that has just taken place, it is precisely this ideal that is challenged. In Osmond's moral indifference to the values, in fact, to the very identity of those near him (to Pansy as well as Isabel), in his subordination of respect and empathy to his own desires he reveals to Isabel the egotism which governs his real nature, an egotism which cannot admit the autonomy of another. She remembers the first warning sign of this as "he said to her one day that she had too many ideas, and that she must get rid of them" (PL 395;ch.42). Isabel then considers for the first time what Osmond's picture of her had been. If she mistakenly idealized a part of his nature and took that part for the whole, she helped him to do likewise. During their courtship it was she who suppressed the greater part of herself, she who lent credence to his portrait of her. She discovers her own inadvertent complicity in shaping an image of herself for him, and she understands that he too has felt betrayed.

Isabel's moment of recognition is initiated by her insight into Pansy's unhappiness, her sudden awareness of Osmond's overwhelming need to shape his daughter's life. It ends with her contemplation of that same con-

trolling hand in her own destiny: "The real offense, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his--attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer park" (PL 398;ch.42). She sees finally that she has become a representation of Osmond's, an insight her cousin has articulated:

> Slender still, but lovelier than before, she had gained no great maturity of aspect; but there was a kind of amplitude and brilliancy in her personal arrangements which 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 answer only by saying that she represented Gilbert Osmond. (PL 363;ch.39)

Ralph observes that Osmond has supplied a frame for Isabel, given her brilliancy and majesty, but it is all a travesty of her truer nature, her free spirit; it weighs her down with "a majesty of ornament" and transforms her into a copy, a "representation." The fundamental difference between Isabel and her husband rests finally in the contrast between an American and a European sensibility as James understood it. If Isabel's independent spirit suggests to Osmond a shameful vulgarity, his veneration of traditions, even when they are corrupt, implies a moral compromise she cannot put her name to. Through Isabel's understanding of Osmond,

the nature of the activity which has governed her life--the creation of the self as a work of art--is clarified. Osmond's need to impose absolutely his own standards and conventions, his own vision of life, is nothing less than the logical culmination of the kind of controlling portraiture which has governed his life and which Isabel has also engaged in. When applied not only to the self but imposed on another, such narrow aestheticism can only be understood as immoral.

But if Isabel, during her midnight vigil, comes to terms with the great dangers of picture-making, on another level, this activity continues. If portraiture teaches Isabel to see false, it also teaches her to see true. In this moment of meditation which is the climax of the novel, there is a new quality of attention. Isabel is focused and, for the first time, objective--in a sense, disinterested. Her view of people and events can now be distinguished from Osmond's because she is able, and he is not, to give up the impulse to shape or control them; she is able to let the picture be.

From Isabel Archer to Lambert Strether, James's characters never relinquish their visual attitude. But if, initially, their pictures betray them, assist them in their own distortions, their naïve romanticizing, ultimately they also enable them to see clearly, to gain insight. As such the activity of composing is the

dramatic pivot in each of their stories, leading them first away form themselves but finally returning them to a deeper awareness of their own natures and of their experience.

Chapter 5

"A Drama of Discrimination": The Ambassadors

A. Strether's "Double Consciousness"

In his preface to The Ambassadors, James characterizes this novel as "a drama of discrimination" (AN 316), immediately suggesting that the action will be located in the consciousness of a character. The discriminating intelligence of the novel is, of course, Lambert Strether's and, uniquely, for James, this single character's consciousness holds the stage from beginning to end, a consistency James saw as conducive to unity and intensity (AN 318). If the novel charts the evolution of Strether's consciousness, the characteristics of James's hero, highly introspective, and, as always, imaginative, are qualified by his age: "I rejoiced in the promise of a hero so mature, who would give me thereby the more to bite into--since it's only into thickened motive and accumulated character, I think, that the painter of life bites more than a little" (AN 310). Like Isabel Archer, Lambert Strether is an American on a journey of discovery, but, unlike her, his tendency to shape his environment and those he meets is less impulsive; his imaginative tendencies are more restrained and thoughtful. Although on the surface he savors his flights of freedom within set limits, precisely because Strether sees himself as seasoned and

cautious, his idealizing tendencies, when they do come into play, are more dangerous for him.

If The Ambassadors can be regarded as a novel in which very little happens, it can also be understood as a novel in which values themselves--specifically those which reflect the tensions between the opposing cultures of Europe and America--are made a concrete dramatic subject. From the opening paragraph of the novel, the characteristic motion of Strether's consciousness--and that which defines the rhythm and substance of the story--is one of slow, studied comparison. From the moment he arrives at his hotel, Strether begins to compare the world he has entered to the one he has left behind, and the kinds of comparisons that occur to him are implicitly moral in nature. In the opening chapters it becomes clear that Strether immediately sees others as representatives of either Europe or America, and this remains a constant pattern.

A series of characters, beginning with Maria Gostrey and Chad Newsome and culminating in Madame de Vionnet, all Europeanized or European, are contrasted to American "types," (always somewhat caricatured) from Waymarsh and Mrs. Newsome (ever present though never on stage) to her chief representative, Sarah Pocock, Strether's response to Waymarsh, toward the attitudes the latter reflects, are elaborated in his response to

the Pococks, just as his reaction to Maria Gostrey--the first representative of Europe despite her nationality--is enlarged and made complex by his experience of Madame de Vionnet. At the risk of simplification, it may be suggested that the novel moves by a series of contrasting portraits which provide Strether with a deeper understanding of his own culture as well as the one he is confronting. The long series of comparisons finally comes to rest in Strether's profound understanding of both worlds, despite disillusionments, and in his firmer grasp of his own identity.

1. Waymarsh and the "ordeal of Europe"

From the moment he arrives in Europe, Strether is acutely conscious of "a deep taste of change" and "a consciousness of personal freedom" (AMB 5;bk.1,ch.1). He is grateful that his friend, Waymarsh, is not awaiting him as "the first note of Europe" and clearly seeks to create a contemplative space, a pause, which will enable him to see on his own terms rather than through the eyes of another. Ironically, Strether's great desire to be free from the nagging pressure of his New England conscience (of which Waymarsh is the embodiment) also signals the dangerous receptivity of his imagination to a new set of values. The other side of Strether's "double consciousness," the side that looks

ahead rather than back and makes him feel "launched in something quite disconnected from the sense of his past" (AMB 9;bk.1,ch.1), immediately finds a guide in the person of Maria Gostrey. Maria meets Strether at his hotel, initiates a conversation and a stroll and quickly enjoins him to trust her. Within moments Strether has given up his privacy, his contemplative space and, literally, accepted her arm. This small act takes on dramatic significance moments later when they return to the hotel to be confronted by Waymarsh: Strether is inwardly relieved that he has already withdrawn his arm from Maria's. The tension between the European and American perspectives is figured in a silent tableau in which Waymarsh, "joyless," stares at Maria, ignoring her greeting, while Strether has one of his "responsive arrests," as he studies the mutually exclusive points of view represented by his old friend and his new acquaintance--attitudes which, taken together, will come to represent his own "double consciousness."

Strether's excursion with Maria is balanced in the next chapter by an evening spent with Waymarsh during which Strether is dismayed by his friend's attitude toward Europe. In contrast to his own enthusiasm, Waymarsh seems wholly resistant to the experience before him. Relatively inarticulate, he complains merely of a variety of physical discomforts, symptoms

which Strether perceives as manifestations of psychological rigidity:

> He struck his visitor as extremely, as almost willfully uncomfortable... he hugged his posture of prolonged impermanence. It suggested to his comrade something that always, when kept up worried him--a person established in a railway coach with a forward inclination. It represented the angle at which poor Waymarsh was to sit through the ordeal of Europe. (AMB 18;20;bk.1,ch.2)

Strether's picture of Waymarsh as an awkward, maladapted American, inflexible, incapable of responding to new conditions, enables him to see himself, comparatively, as free. It is a picture which liberates him further from his New England self and helps him to justify his increasing receptivity to the world of Europe.

2. Maria's antique jewel

The pattern of comparison, past with present, Waymarsh with Maria, continues in the succeeding chapters, but Strether can never truly rid himself of the past no matter how he defines it to himself. Maria Gostrey comes to dine with him and as he studies her, he also studies Mrs. Newsome; in fact, the portrait of Maria becomes displaced by a forceful image of Strether's fiancée:

> Miss Gostrey had dined with him at his hotel, face to face over a small table on which the lighted candles had rose-coloured shades; and the rose-coloured shades and the small table and the soft fragrance of the lady--had anything to his mere sense ever been so soft?--

> were so many touches in he scarce knew what positive high picture. He had been to the theatre, even to the opera, in Boston, with Mrs. Newsome, more than once acting as her only escort, but there had been no little confronted dinner, no pink lights, no whiff of vague sweetness, as a preliminary: one of the results of which was that at present, mildly rueful though with a sharpish accent, he actually asked himself why there hadn't. There was much the same difference in his impression of the noticed state of his companion, whose dress was "cut down," as he believed the term to be, in respect to shoulders and bosom, in a manner quite other than Mrs. Newsome's and who wore round her throat a broad red velvet band with an antique jewel--he was rather complacently sure it was an antique--attached to it in front. Mrs. Newsome's dress was never in any degree "cut down," and she never wore round her throat a broad red velvet band: if she had moreover, would it ever have served so to carry on and complicate, as he now almost felt, his vision? (AMB 33-34;bk.2,ch.1)

Strether's portrait of Maria Gostrey, with its soft tones and sensual details, is a model description of a romantic moment, but just as Strether seems about to let go and enjoy this experience ("had anything to his mere sense ever been so soft"), his sensual awakening prompts an ironic comparison: why had he never experienced anything like this with his fiancée? And, just as the easy grace of Maria is immediately contrasted to the stiffness of Waymarsh when Strether arrives, here Maria's softness is contrasted sharply to the stiff formality of Mrs. Newsome who would never wear a dress "cut down" nor a "broad red velvet band" around her throat. Strether's double consciousness seems inescapable: he cannot fully enjoy his evening with

Maria Gostrey because her very image is muted by a superimposed portrait of Mrs. Newsome.

Nonetheless, in his assessment of this "little confronted dinner," Strether begins to define the subtle complexity of the world he has entered. There is an artfulness to Maria's dress and to the little dinner which--as it "complicates" Strether's vision, awakens him to entirely new kinds of women. The antique jewel--a hard object--surrounded by softness, momentarily seduces Strether and blurs his vision. The tone of Strether's picture reveals his emotional vulnerability. Before the end of this scene, his response to Maria and his thoughts about Mrs. Newsome are placed in a larger context as he muses about his inexperience with women in general; he considers his distant and brief marriage, his years of solitude both of which point to his essential naïveté and potential blindness.

With each new experience, just as Strether seems to be moving forward, there is a stronger movement backward as well as inward, as current images are juxtaposed and contrasted to earlier experiences. Gradually, however, Strether's pictorial imagination increases his susceptibility to these new experiences. Each time he meets a Europeanized American or a European, his tendency to shape the image he sees in positive ways increases. When he encounters Chad Newsome, the person whom he has been sent to "handle," his New England conscience is at first nowhere in sight.

3. An "irreducible young Pagan"

In Chapter 2, Strether's first portrait of Chad draws together in a single image the initial contrasts Strether has formulated in his reactions to Maria, Waymarsh, and the ever present Mrs. Newsome--to the opposing images of America and Europe they reflect. Chad is the original American, once rough, now artfully refined by Europe itself: "it had retouched his features, drawn them with a cleaner line...it had given him a form and a surface, almost a design..." Strether's analysis of Chad's transformation is enlarged after this initial encounter, and as the two leave the theatre where they have met, have supper, and return to their lodgings, new images of Chad continue to float before Strether's eyes.

If the initial portrait is entirely positive, reflecting Chad's improvement, his aesthetic transformation under the invisible hand of Paris and its chief representative, the as yet unknown Madame de Vionnet, Strether's subsequent impressions suggest that such artfulness is not unconscious, that the effect may be one studied by Chad himself thus raising doubts about the authenticity of the change. Implicitly, Strether's New England distrust of artfulness competes with his earlier admiration. Strether mistrusts Chad and senses that he is somehow being manipulated; as a

result, Chad's portrait takes on a life and a vitality which constitutes an action:

> Chad raised his face to the lamp, and it was one of the moments at which he had, in his extraordinary way, most the air of designedly showing himself. It was as if at these instants he just presented himself, his identity so rounded off, his palpable presence and his massive young manhood...What could there be in this for Strether but the hint of some self-respect, some sense of power, oddly perverted; something latent and beyond access, ominous and perhaps enviable? The intimation had the next thing, in a flash, taken on a name--a name on which our friend seized as he asked himself if he weren't perhaps dealing with an irreducible young Pagan. This description--he quite jumped at it--had a sound that gratified his mental ear, so that of a sudden he had already adopted it. Pagan--yes, that was, wasn't it? what Chad *would* logically be. It was what he must be. It was what he was. The idea was a clue and, instead of darkening the prospect, projected a certain clearness. (*AMB* 101;bk.4,ch.1)

This passage reflects a characteristic form of Jamesian development wherein a silent picture is a dramatization, leading Strether to insights about Chad and simultaneously leading the reader to insights about Strether (about which the latter is not fully conscious). Strether seizes upon a phrase, "an irreducible young Pagan," such that an act of naming is at the same time an act of discovery, of composition, of creation. The epithet serves as an emotional center around which various elements, impressions of Chad's character, cohere. It represents a sharpening of Strether's earlier image with a heightened emphasis on Chad's sexuality. Chad represents the enviable power

and potency of youth, but the explicit sexuality Strether's puritanism regards as "ominous."

The study of Chad which begins with Strether's admiration, is soon displaced by New England discomfort. The portrait undergoes a third transformation as the "pagan" epithet is discarded: "He had been wondering a minute ago if the boy weren't a Pagan and he found himself wondering now if he weren't by chance a gentleman." The portrait refuses to resolve itself into a single unified image; instead, a tension is sustained between the two sets of images. James thus uses the act of composing meaning to make the character enlarge his own focus, to accept a greater complexity. Strether's vacillation, his inability to define his subject seems to make him aware of limitations in his way of seeing. No epithet remains final in Jamesian portraiture. Sometimes earlier pictures are partly absorbed or enlarged by later ones; sometimes they are actively contradicted. The act of naming represents an attempt to control an impression, to impose a limited meaning, but, as Charles Anderson suggests, naming is most often symbolizing in James (4). So the attitude of aesthetic contemplation which results in seeing a character pictorially and which seems to distance the viewer from events at hand, also lays the foundation for a larger, more profound ability to see beyond literal meanings and single interpretations.

Strether's literal-minded controlling impulse gradually diminishes as he is drawn into an appreciative contemplation of the novel's most subtle and complex character and Europe's chief representative, Madame de Vionnet. For the first time, he seems to give himself up entirely to the experience of vision and appreciation. Initially, Strether sees Madame de Vionnet, not as an individual, but as a representative of a culture, the conditions and character of which he is trying to fathom. Throughout the novel, the source of that culture--Paris itself--can be seen only in gleams and glimpses as its bright light filters up through shuttered windows. It is embodied instead in its effects. When Strether apprehends the effect of Europe on Chad, the entire nature of his mission is altered. He ceases to try to win Chad away from Europe and instead goes out to meet the culture before him. Madame de Vionnet is the foremost representative of that world and therefore becomes Strether's primary subject.

B. Madame de Vionnet: The Portraits

1. At Home: "the mistress of the scene"

Strether's portraits so far, of Maria and of Chad, begin in appreciation and are gradually qualified by a kind of wariness. The way Chad has of "designedly" showing himself echoes the effect of Maria's "little

confronted dinner," in itself a composition, and anticipates Strether's study of Marie de Vionnet's artful composure. Strether's first appraisal of Madame de Vionnet is also blindly appreciative, and, when he visits her for the first time at home, a new theme is introduced: she suggests to Strether a fundamental contrast between an authentic representative of a culture and one who has merely appropriated its effects:

> He had never before, to his knowledge, had present to him relics, of any special dignity, of a private order--little old miniatures, medallions, pictures, books: books in leather bindings, pinkish and greenish, with gilt garlands on the back, ranged, together with other promiscuous properties, under the glass of brass-mounted cabinets. His attention took them all tenderly into account. They were among the matters that marked Madame de Vionnet's apartment as something quite different from Miss Gostrey's little museum of bargains and from Chad's lovely home; he recognized it as founded much more on old accumulations that had possibly from time to time shrunken than on any contemporary method of acquisition or form of curiosity. Chad and Miss Gostrey had rummaged and purchased and picked up and exchanged, sifting, selecting, comparing; whereas the mistress of the scene before him, beautifully passive under the spell of transmission...had only received, accepted and been quiet. (<u>AMB</u> 156;bk.6,ch.1)

Strether's evaluation of character in terms of cultural acquisition is an attempt to simplify, to codify, a complex series of apprehensions. There is a lack of grace, an innate clumsiness to the American style of acquisition. Maria and Chad "rummage" and "exchange," selecting objects merely out of curiosity, as if the world is a flea market. They have the new world's

indifference to the deeper significance of their acquisitions. Madame de Vionnet, on the other hand, stands in the proper relation to her culture: she is the graceful recipient of the contents of the world's museum.

Like all descriptions of place in James, the picture of Madame de Vionnet's home is a portrait of its occupant. Not unlike the gradual movement in The Portrait of a Lady from the grounds of Gardencourt to its principal figures, this slow approach to the occupant of the rue de Bellechasse creates the illusion of objectivity, all the while revealing Strether's deeply subjective and romantic admiration for this foreign culture. As he passes through the succession of rooms leading to her private sanctuary, her portrait is enhanced by an imagined cultural context unlike any background possible for an American. "He found himself making out as a background of the occupant, some glory, some prosperity of the First Empire, some Napoleonic glamour, some dim lustre of the great legend..."

Marie de Vionnet suggests a more dignified, more legitimate yet altogether more passive relationship to culture than that enjoyed by American acquisitors, and it is precisely her passivity which initially distracts Strether from his earlier discomfort with her artful and possibly manipulative character. Her quiet composure suggests a reserve and an integrity absent from

Chad's aggressive masculine confidence. Madame de Vionnet herself is presented in this scene as a still portrait whose richness is enhanced by a mysterious stillness; a quiet intensity which controls and concentrates Strether's interpretation:

> She was seated, near the fire, on a small stuffed and fringed chair, one of the few modern articles in the room; and she leaned back in it with her hands clasped in her lap and no movement, in all her person, but the fine prompt play of her deep young face. The fire, under the low white marble, undraped and academic, had burnt down to the silver ashes of lit wood; one of the windows, at a distance, stood open to the mildness and stillness, out of which, in the short pauses, came the faint sound, pleasant and homely, almost rustic, of a plash and a clatter of sabots form some coach-house on the other side of the court. Madame de Vionnet, while Strether was there, wasn't to shift her posture by an inch. (AMB 157;bk.6,ch.1)

A quality of subdued sound and stilled motion, governs every detail in this passage, all contributing to a dramatic economy of effect: the fire has burnt down to ashes, sounds from the street are muted, and Madame de Vionnet herself communicates without a single gesture, entirely present to Strether in the "fine prompt play of her deep young face." Her conversation with Strether in the scene which follows is, like her expression, ambiguous and understated because she wishes to enlist his aid by emotional rather than rational means. Her silence, however, communicates an intimacy and Strether feels its effect: "He couldn't help it; it wasn't his fault; he had done nothing; but

by a turn of the hand she had somehow made their encounter a relation" (AMB 159;bk.6,ch.1). Despite Strether's initial reserve, by the end of their exchange, he becomes aware that she has communicated her need to him and enlisted his aid. (Again Strether mentally contrasts the lack of this kind of intimacy in his relations with Mrs. Newsome, and with each contact with Madame de Vionnet, he feels more distant from his fiancée.) The way Strether feels his growing relationship with Chad's mistress is consistently expressed in such highly charged visual images, images which communicate a mute but poignant appeal:

> Then it was that he saw how she had decidedly come all the way; and there accompanied it an extraordinary sense of her raising from somewhere below him her beautiful suppliant eyes. He might have been perched at his doorstep or at his window and she standing in the road. For a moment he let her stand and couldn't, moreover, have spoken. It had been sad, of a sudden, with a sadness that was like a cold breath in his face. (AMB 158;bk.6,ch.1)

Chad's mistress, in her mute appeal for his assistance, gives Strether a new sense of importance, a power over her destiny. As he sees himself placed above her, Strether, the spiritual pilgrim, becomes a knight. It is precisely Madame de Vionnet's placement, her attitude of suppliance which Strether reads visually, that mitigates the sense of her helplessness: she is too arranged, the effect is too powerful. Strether, himself, begins to sense the power of her "arrangement" in a subsequent public scene.

2. The "femme du monde"

In Madame de Vionnet's home it is the "dress" of her surroundings that speaks to Strether, that deepens the value of her person by historical and cultural associations. Strether expands his reading of her character through such external manifestations, but in contrast to the stillness of his private portraits of her, he sees Madame de Vionnet in her social context as dramatically brought to life:

> She had struck our friend, from the first of her appearing, as dressed for a great occasion, and she met still more than on either of the others the conception reawakened in him at their garden-party, the idea of the _femme du monde_ in her habit as she lived. Her bare shoulders and arms were white and beautiful; the materials of her dress, a mixture, as he supposed, of silk and crape, were of a silvery grey so artfully composed as to give an impression of warm splendour; and round her neck she wore a collar of large old emeralds, the green note of which was more dimly repeated, at other points of her apparel, in embroidery, in enamel, in satin, in substances and textures vaguely rich. Her head, extremely fair and exquisitely festal was like a happy fancy, a notion of the Renaissance; while her slim lightness and brightness, her gaiety, her expression, her decision, contributed to an effect that might have been felt by a poet as half-mythological and half-conventional. He could have compared her to a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud, or to a sea-nymph waist-high in the summer surge. Above all she suggested to him the reflexion that the _femme du monde_--in these finest developments of the type--was, like Cleopatra in the play, indeed various and multifold. She had aspects, characters, days, nights--or had them at least, showed them by a mysterious law of her own, when in addition to everything she happened also to be a woman of genius. She was

> an obscure person, a muffled person one day, and a showy person, an uncovered person the next. He thought of Madame de Vionnet tonight as showy and uncovered, though he felt the formula rough, because, thanks to one of the shortcuts of genius, she had taken all his categories by surprise. (AMB 173;bk.6,ch.3)

Madame de Vionnet is presented here at her most sophisticated, her most civilized and most mythic. The details Strether observes, however, suggest a fundamental paradox as they alternate between complexity and simplicity, between concealment and revelation. Madame de Vionnet is both "showy" and "uncovered." Her shoulders and arms are bare, but her neck is surrounded by an elaborate collar of emeralds, her face suggesting an antique coin of the Renaissance. The goddess and sea nymph are both half-concealed echoing the ethereal quality of her attire ("the materials of her dress...a silvery grey...the impression of warm splendour..."). The effect is one of calculated artlessness that hides more than it reveals. Strether's epithet for Madame de Vionnet in this portrait (the _femme du monde_) is one which embraces her contradictions. Instead of moving toward a clear impression, the description moves away from one--to a recognition on Strether's part only that Madame de Vionnet is so "various" and "multifold" that she has "taken all his categories by surprise." His portrait is full of a conscious admiration but it is undermined by his growing awareness of her art, figured in references to mythic and literary figures such as

Cleopatra, the woman of masks who manipulates others. Like his earlier and simpler portrait of Maria Gostrey, whose image is muted by rose-colored lamps, this picture suggests that much of what complicates Strether's vision is his own propensity to dramatize, his desire to see Madame de Vionnet as a special creature. She seems subject not to human conditions but to special laws of her art, and Strether witnesses in this portrait her creative self-transformation into a character of drama and myth.

In Strether's earlier "still" portrait, Madame de Vionnet is observed to be deliberately, artfully composed, while his awareness of her ability to communicate, to establish a relationship, deepens--all without movement, without gesture, almost without speech. In the above portrait, observed from a much greater distance than the first, there is, again, no explicit action, but there is a quality of animation, of motion, conveyed by the shifting images of Strether's imagination. Implied action informs the passage: "her slim lightness and brightness, her gaiety, her expression, her decision..." In each picture there is a momentary irony arising from Strether's seemingly unconscious awareness of Marie de Vionnet's calculated control. It is precisely this control, this power of hers, that draws him forward into a deepening intimacy and involvement, but at the same time James has set the

stage for a reversal, for a questioning of this quality which will deepen into mistrust.

3. At Notre Dame: "a fine firm concentrated heroine"

Without any explicit event to create ambiguous feelings in his hero, James manages to suggest--ever so gradually--that Strether feels confused, displaced, and sad as he wanders through the streets of Paris. From time to time Strether sorts out his impressions, stopping momentarily at a garden or a church, so that brief meditations on place function substantively in the portraits he continues to draw. At one point, he finds himself in Notre Dame, conscious of a desire for a quiet moment to sort out his feelings: "The great church had no altar for his worship, no direct voice for his soul; but it was nonetheless soothing even to sanctity; for he could feel while there what he couldn't elsewhere, that he was a plain tired man taking the holiday he had earned" (AMB 186;bk.7,ch.1). He has come to the church, then, to find respite from the complications of his mission, in particular, from his attempts to understand Madame de Vionnet and so, for a moment, he tries to think of himself as a "student under the charm of a museum." Ironically, however, the church recedes to the background, for Strether is in the habit of watching fellow visitants, and he soon discovers a subject for this day's con-

templation, a lady "whose supreme stillness in the shade of one of the chapels, he had two or three times noticed":

> She wasn't prostrate--not in any degree bowed, but she was strangely fixed, and her prolonged immobility showed her, while she passed, and paused, as wholly given up to the need, whatever it was, that had brought her there. She only sat and gazed before her, as he himself often sat; but she had placed herself, as he never did, within the focus of the shrine, and she had lost herself, he could easily see, as he would only have liked to do. She was not a wandering alien, keeping back more than she gave, but one of the familiar, the intimate, the fortunate, for whom these dealings had a method and a meaning. She reminded our friend...of some fine firm concentrated heroine of an old story, something he had heard, read, something that, had he had a hand for drama, he might himself have written, renewing her courage, renewing her clearness, in splendidly protected meditation. (AMB 187;bk.7,ch.1)

Strether's heroine is once again full of a communicative stillness, a subdued intensity. His own troubled mood finds its counterpart in her apparent distress. Like him, he senses that she has come "to renew her courage." But while he looks on from a distance, she is placed within the focus of the shrine: she is one of the fortunate, an insider, rather than a "wandering alien" like himself. He envies the fact that her relationship to her world enables her to find solace, or so it seems to him. The unknown visitant is revealed a moment later to be Madame de Vionnet, and, at this point, despite the fact that he has seen she is troubled, he hopefully regards her presence in Notre

Dame as fundamental evidence of her purity: "If she wasn't innocent, why did she haunt the churches?" (AMB 190;bk.7,ch.1). He ignores the fact that Madame de Vionnet's attitude toward Notre Dame is, like his own, aesthetic rather than devout, for then her presence here ceases to correspond to the portrait he has drawn. Thus the activity of aesthetic contemplation protects Strether from insights which are painful about Chad's mistress, insights which would confirm her distance from the social and moral code he has conceived in his understanding of "Europe" and through which he has come to believe in her integrity.

As in all of Strether's previous comparisons of Europe to America, the relationship of the European to his culture in this passage is enviable; the experience of the American a poor imitation. But there is a sadness, a poignancy to Strether's comparison here, one which charts the distance he has come. Throughout the novel Strether regards the European's relation to his culture as more legitimate, more authentic, somehow more ethical than that of the American interloper. Yet the passive strain he also perceives in Marie de Vionnet suggests that there is another, darker side to this relationship. Donadio provides an astute analysis of James's international theme and suggests the direction Strether's own development will take as he comes to terms with Madame de Vionnet and with the nature of his European experience:

> In James's terms, culture for the European consists in bringing oneself into a proper relation to the accumulations (both material and spiritual) of the past, for the American it consists essentially in the cultivation of the self, the creation and "rendering" of personality as a work of art. Culture therefore becomes an absorbing form of activity for the American, while for the European it suggests nothing so much as a passive relation--a veritable bondage to the past, and this distinction probably has a great deal to do with why, in James's "international relation," it is usually the Americans who gain the upper hand--at least from a moral point of view. The European is seen as a kind of empty vessel gradually filled with the rich inheritance of the past: he is nothing in himself, but like Madame Merle in The Portrait of a Lady, exists entirely in his relations with other people and especially with the things around him. (18-19)

What Strether comes to see in the novel's conclusion is that "remaining passive under the spell of transmission" as Madame de Vionnet does, carries its own moral liabilities. Though not deliberately evil like Madame Merle, Marie de Vionnet too exists entirely in her relations with others and will, out of her own needs, give Strether over to ruin. When the two cultures finally confront each other because Sarah Pocock, Chad's sister, comes to meet Madame de Vionnet, a struggle is enacted dramatically and, through it, Strether experiences a clarification of his own moral vision. The contradictions he has been struggling to reconcile in his impressions of Madame de Vionnet, now seen by a "firmer" American, can no longer be resolved.

And, for the first time, Strether is forced to take a stand: to make a commitment to one side or the other.

C. Pictures in Action

1. Sarah Pocock and Madame de Vionnet

A major turning point in The Ambassadors comes with the arrival of Sarah Pocock, the second of Mrs. Newsome's "ambassadors," and the clash in values for which the reader has been abundantly prepared--between New England and Parisian points of view--begins with Strether's arrival at Sarah's hotel. Characteristically, however, the scene is introduced as if in slow motion, the action held back as each detail is recorded by Strether's senses. The opening sentence is a paradigm for the structure of the scene: "As the door of Mrs. Pocock's salon was pushed open for him, the next day, well before noon, he was reached by a voice with a charming sound that made him just falter before crossing the threshold." James's periodic style removes the drama at hand (Madame de Vionnet has already arrived to pay her respects to Chad's sister) from direct presentation, while the passive constructions establish the mood of Strether's helplessness: he is once again an observer of the scene, a spectator at a theatrical performance. But James is quick to rescue this event from the passive and indirect mode by a seeming paradox: he creates a central tension between

Strether's mute powerlessness and his suspenseful alertness. The scene becomes once again a drama, not of action, but of visual facts: "Madame de Vionnet was already on the field, and this gave the drama a quicker pace than he felt it as yet--though his suspense had increased--in the power of any act of his own to do so" (AMB 241;bk.8,ch.4).

The contest between these two women is the subject of the scene, but the actual confrontation is all but suppressed and a new set of dramatic components arises out of Strether's anxious observations. He has missed Marie de Vionnet's initial reception, but he sees "how she had been received" "from something fairly hectic in Sarah's face" and by the position of Waymarsh, who stands with his back to the group in the embrasure of the window. "Strether felt it was immense how Waymarsh could mark things--that he had remained deeply dissociated from the overture to their hostess that we have recorded on Madame de Vionnet's side" (AMB 241;bk.8,ch.4).

Throughout the scene, the drama between the two women is presented indirectly, through Strether's observation of their expressions and gestures. In chronicling Sarah's response to Madame de Vionnet, Strether focuses entirely on the implications of her facial expression: "Although Sarah was vividly bright, she had given herself up for the moment to an ambiguous

flushed formalism." Observed details are immediately converted into psychological inferences: "She had had to reckon more quickly than she expected, but it concerned her first of all to signify that she was not to be taken unawares" (AMB 242;bk.8,ch.4). Incomplete verbal exchanges confirm Sarah's attitude and the effect of the tone she has adopted, but the dialogue is merely illustrative; the descriptive details have already told the story. Strether continues to watch with great attention the color of Sarah's cheek and the expression in her eyes. The reader learns that Sarah has refused Madame de Vionnet's hospitality by the "dry glitter" in her eyes that recalls to Strether "a fine Woollett wintry morning" (AMB 245;bk.8,ch.4) and notes the small concession (consistent only with New England decorum) as she nonetheless agrees to return Madame de Vionnet's visit by the flush in her cheek "which had by this time settled to a small definite crimson spot that was not without its own bravery" (AMB 246;bk.8,ch.4).

While the entire range of Sarah's response is conveyed by this one feature--the spot of color in her cheek (testifying to her puritanical self-control)--Marie de Vionnet is presented with an elaborateness consistent with Strether's awareness of her complexity, her subtlety and, most of all, her artfulness. "She struck him as dressed, as arranged, as prepared infinitely to conciliate" (AMB 242;bk.8,ch.4). In con-

trast to Madame de Vionnet's artfulness, simplicity and directness belongs to Sarah; her small crimson spot is her badge of honor. Regarding Chad's mistress from Chad's point of view, Strether sees her display as calculated. The dramatic conflict is consistently presented through Strether's simultaneous awareness of the view Sarah will take of her. He notices "her card on the table--her coronet and her 'Comtesse'--and the imagination was sharp in him of certain private adjustments in Sarah's mind" (AMB 242;bk.8,ch.4).

Although the initial subject of the scene is Sara's refusal to negotiate with her brother's mistress, the more significant result of the confrontation is that Madame de Vionnet further compromises Strether's relations with Mrs. Newsome by forcing him to acknowledge an alliance with herself. In effect, by the end of the scene, Madame de Vionnet has succeeded in transferring much of Sarah's irritation from her own person to Strether himself. Strether's apprehension that she is "giving him over to ruin" is apparent from the start, but he immediately translates this private into metaphor, crystallizing it into a formalized reenactment of the events at hand. Seeing that he is being drawn "into her boat," he responds gallantly:

> To meet his fellow visitor's invocation and, with Sarah's brilliant eyes on him, answer, was quite sufficiently to step into her boat. During the rest of the time her visit lasted he felt himself proceed to each of the proper offices, successively, for helping to keep

> the adventurous skiff afloat. It rocked beneath him, but he settled himself in his place. He took up an oar and, since he was to have the credit of pulling, pulled. (AMB 244;bk.8,ch.4)

Strether's fundamentally human generosity in this scene, his willingness to take her side despite the consequences for himself, makes him seem larger and kinder than either his countrywoman or the woman who has betrayed him. Marie de Vionnet has drawn Strether not only into a private relation but also a public one which is now dramatized for the Pococks. As Strether continues to focus on his own discomfort at being thus exhibited the scene closes in another tableau (reminiscent of the scene in the opening chapter where Strether privately observes the conflict inherent in the viewpoints of Maria and Waymarsh). They have all risen for the Comtesse is taking her leave but Madame de Vionnet pauses, and, as if to finalize their intimacy, asks Strether for an appointment the following week. Strether silently observes the effect of this request: "It was ridiculous, but Mrs. Pocock and Waymarsh struck him as fairly waiting for his answer. It was indeed as if they were arranged, gathered for a performance, the performance of 'Europe' by his confederate and himself. Well, the performance could only go on" (AMB 251;bk.8,ch.4). As this confrontation scene opens with Strether's sense of being a spectator, so it closes with his sense of being a performer: Madame de Vionnet

has drawn him into the action. Thus it is through the theatrical metaphor that James dramatizes a scene whose substance is predominantly visual and pictorial.

In addition to its dramatic function as a confrontation, this scene is a further instance of portraiture, and in it Strether's constant idealization of Chad's mistress is put to the test. The dignity, the composure, and the integrity he constantly ascribes to her (all of which imply a kind of classical ideal in artistic representation) are, ever so slightly, modified as he assesses her for a moment from Sarah's point of view. His sense of her general attitude, "infinitely prepared to conciliate," betrays a shift away from aesthetic appreciation to a suspicion of artifice.

Finally though, even the evidence of her willingness to sacrifice him is at this point insufficient to diminish his support, or to alter his desire to believe in her innocence. In this sense, Strether remains full of the tragic naïveté of the outsider; like Othello he requires "the ocular proof," and it is not until his subject moves out of the shadow and into the light that his perceptions are overturned.

The movement from shadow to light, from distance into focus, from the periphery to the center of the picture is a constant feature of Strether's visual composing. Chad moves under the lamp, Marie de Vionnet

enters the nave of the church, and a pair of doll-like figures floating down a river in a boat come into focus for Strether as the real Chad, the real Madame de Vionnet.

2. Strether's Lambinet: a recognition

When it seems as if all that will happen to Strether has happened--Sarah has informed him of Mrs. Newsome's unhappiness with him and the Pococks have departed--he leaves Paris by train in search of "that French ruralism, with its cool special green, into which he had hitherto looked only through the little oblong window of the picture-frame" (<u>AMB</u> 341;bk.11,ch.2). An arbitrary destination in the French countryside reminds him of a Lambinet he saw and wished to purchase in Boston years before:

> The oblong gilt frame disposed its enclosing lines; the poplars and willows, the reeds and river--a river of which he didn't know and didn't want to know, the name--fell into a composition, full of felicity, within them; the sky was silver and turquoise and varnish; the village on the left was white and the church on the right was grey; it was all there, in short--it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet. Moreover he was freely walking about in it. (<u>AMB</u> 342;bk.11,ch.2)

Here, and throughout Strether's survey of French ruralism, the emphasis falls not on the specifics--except in a kind of cataloguing of sensory detail--but on what he wants to make of the experience, on the shaping activity of his imagination and on its

aesthetic value. Uniquely in this scene, Strether has initiated the composing activity in complete privacy rather than in response to another person or an event. He is less cautious, less puzzling; he feels free to follow his inclinations and begins to orchestrate his own movements in the scene before him with the enthusiastic attention to its aesthetic harmony. The larger movement of the action, however, ironically reverses the structure of Strether's perception, moving him toward a recognition blindly opposed by his imaginative and peaceful enjoyment of his composition. As Strether moves into his picture with a perfect sense of success, with a consciousness of "a finer harmony in things," there is haunting irony in his original perception of getting down from the train "as securely as if to keep an appointment" (AMB 342;bk.11,ch.2). Late in the afternoon Strether discovers "just the right little rustic inn," and when the innkeeper tells him that another party, a man and a woman out in a boat, will be joining him, Strether welcomes them as just what his picture needs for its completion:

> What he saw was exactly the right thing--a boat advancing round the bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol. It was suddenly as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted more or less all day, and had now drifted into sight, with the slow current, on purpose to fill up the measure. (AMB 349;bk.11,ch.2)

But it is precisely at this point that the external evidence, the visual details refuse to comply. Strether immediately perceives, even from a distance, the couple's hesitation at the sight of him. In essence, after months of mute deception, a tacit compliance on the part of Chad and his mistress with the picture Strether has drawn of their relationship, they have been caught by surprise; they are not arranged, not composed.

Their initial hesitation--as if they are hoping Strether will not recognize them--immediately betrays their skillful social grace as cruel calculation, and Strether reacts to it as something "quite horrible." He deliberately shows that he recognizes them, and they share both dinner and a return ride to Paris. During this final encounter, as previously, Strether's attention remains focused on Madame de Vionnet, but this time his observations lead to quite different conclusions. Her reversion to French, instead of being an enhancement, a reflection of her culture, conceals and reduces her, "fairly veiling her identity, shifting her back into the mere voluble class or race to the intense audibility of which he was by this time inured" (AMB 352;bk.11,ch.2). Ironically, she is betrayed most of all by her dress (previously a symbol of all Strether has admired in her), for he recognizes that "she hadn't started out the day dressed and hatted and shod, and

even, for that matter, pink parasol'd" (AMB 354;bk.11,ch.2) and he is thus forced to imagine, for the first time, their "quiet retreat."

The difference in Strether's conclusions is based on the simple fact that he is no longer deceived. Both sides play out the drama of this encounter with knowledge: Chad and his mistress sense that they are no longer believed; Strether feels the hollowness of their gesture. Thus the picture-making with which James's hero began his day reaches its completion in his recognition that he has made them "by no fault of their own" act out a lie he has helped to create. His eager attempts to compose his experience of Europe artfully are simply an instance of the same pattern of deception (in this case self-deception) by which others have manipulated him. This chapter is, above all, a dramatic recognition in which Strether acknowledges his own responsibility, his willful self-blinding: "their friendship, their connection, took any amount of explaining...Yet his theory, as we know, had bountifully been that the facts were specifically none of his business and were, over and above...intrinsically beautiful" (AMB 352;bk.11,ch.2).

If Strether feels betrayed, it is primarily a feeling of self-betrayal. In his determination to come to terms with a sophisticated culture by setting aside his provincialism, he has been as blindly appreciative

in his acceptance as the Pococks are in their rejection. Ultimately, however, Strether returns to his roots and to a clear distinction between art and artifice. It is through the framework of artistic vision that his perceptions are finally balanced. The metaphor of art which leads Strether to create portraits of other characters and interiors or landscapes of events is the main source of the novel's dramatic irony, but if picture-making initially conceals, it is also that which reveals. As a thematic and structural principle and as an instrument of vision, it provides the novel with its dramatic center, moving Strether to an imaginative suspension of values and then, slowly, relentlessly, to a reintegration, sadder but wiser.

Chapter 6

The "Indirect Presentation" of the Image: *The Wings of the Dove*

Early in *The Wings of the Dove*, as Milly Theale sits at Mrs. Lowder's dinner table for the first time, the action (the dinner itself) seems to be taking place elsewhere, at a distance, while Milly is absorbed, first by Kate's "handsome figure," next by Lord Mark's reserve, but most of all by her own sensibilities which are "almost too sharp for her comfort." The intensely psychological stance of James's leading characters tends to force both setting and action to the background except for that aspect which the character is contemplating. The subjectivity of the impression is, of course, guaranteed by the limited point of view James employs in the later novels (especially in *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*), for the elements of the scene are presented exclusively through the perceiving character. But it is the overwhelming bewilderment of characters like Milly that makes the activity of interpretation--of events and of other characters--the central dramatic activity. Moreover, the fine sensibility of what James calls his "super-subtle fry" guarantees that such activity will be highly imaginative as well as--ironically--subject to fundamental distortion. The

creative contribution of Milly Theale, Kate Croy, and Merton Densher to the formulation, even formation, of scenes and characters they observe is the essence of their story in The Wings of the Dove.

A. The Sense of Place

In two early scenes of this novel, a single character is briefly isolated from the story by special circumstances. In the novel's opening, Kate Croy impatiently awaits her father in his dingy lodgings and, shortly after, Merton Densher awaits Mrs. Lowder in her drawing room. But whereas in earlier novels the visual isolation of a character signals a portrait, James does not immediately make the character the subject of our attention. Instead, he proceeds indirectly, making the character's response to his surroundings the primary subject. Only gradually do we see that such scenes function both as exposition of the absent characters and as subtle portraits of the perceiving characters.

1. "the faint flat emanation of things"

As Kate Croy waits for her father in one of the anterooms of his shabby rooming house, her impatience and irritation place us, despite her isolation, in the midst of an action, an effect created visually by her perpetual movement to escape, only to return. The con-

tents of the room, subjectively catalogued by Kate in vivid sensory detail and presented in labyrinthine periodic style, create a claustrophobic impression which is a paradigm for Kate's consciousness:

> She waited, Kate Croy, for her father to come in, but he kept her unconscionably, and there were moments at which she showed herself, in the glass over the mantel, a face positively pale with the irritation that had brought her to the point of going away without sight of him. It was at this point, however, that she remained; changing her place, moving from the shabby sofa to the armchair upholstered in a glazed cloth that gave at once--she had tried it--the sense of the slippery and the sticky. She had looked at the sallow prints on the walls and at the lonely magazine, a year old, that combined, with a small lamp in coloured glass and a knitted white centre-piece wanting in freshness, to enhance the effect of the purplish cloth on the principal table; she had above all, from time to time, taken a brief stand on the small balcony to which the pair of long windows gave access. The vulgar little street, in this view, offered scant relief from the vulgar little room; its main office was to suggest to her that the narrow black house-fronts, adjusted to a standard that would have been low even for backs, constituted quite the publicity implied by such privacies. One felt them in the room exactly as one felt the room--the hundred like it, or worse--in the street. Each time she turned in again, each time, in her impatience, she gave him up, it was to sound to a deeper depth, while she tasted the faint, flat emanation of things, the failure of fortune and of honour. (WD 5;ch.1)

The picture of the room is composed by Kate's movement as she turns restlessly from her reflection in the glass, and from the sofa to the chair, as she contemplates for a brief moment and frames a quick still life--sallow prints on the wall, a lonely magazine, a

small lamp in colored glass--and as she steps, finally, in a gesture of frustration, to the small balcony, only to return to the room feeling the presence of "the narrow black house fronts" as an even more definite impingement on her person. An initial reading of this passage would seem to contradict many of the premises regarding pictorial construction established in our reading of The Portrait of a Lady or even of The Ambassadors. There is nothing leisurely or remote about Kate's animated movement, and the sensory detail is unusually concrete for James. The vividness and action, however, are less indicative of action than of a state of being which is, in itself, full of ambiguity and conflict. Kate's brief stand on the small balcony, a gesture toward freedom, illustrates only the futility of her movement. She returns to the room, from the balcony, from the mirror, her frustration more intense. To Kate's senses the room reveals itself as a wholly negative quantity--slippery...sticky...sallow...small--but there is a subtle shift as the passage develops, away from the objects themselves and toward more abstract and general considerations, a shift created in part by strategies in James's choice of language. Like the spaced alliteration mentioned above, the formal tone established in the second half of the description ("to enhance the effect," "the principal table," "the balcony to which the long windows gave access") sug-

gests a mental distance (and a sense of composition) at odds with the immediacy of Kate's sensory response. Yet since the point of view is Kate's, the distance is also intrinsically hers, creating a gradual shift from specific observations to larger private emotions about her family. The development of the passage from the specific to the general illustrates what Leech describes in another context as a characteristic kind of progression in James, "defined not by time sequence but by the movement from more immediate to more remote circumstances which impinge on the central character's consciousness" (196). This same kind of development is repeated in the larger scenic unit which follows this passage--by Kate's summoning up of family history in response to the failures implicit in her vision of her father's surroundings.

Kate's vivid response to these surroundings, and indirectly therefore to her father, are emotionally at odds with her purpose (she has come to share his life), for she is also apparently looking for an escape. The one that is offered to her is not literal (the balcony only sends her back into the room) but intrinsic: it is contained in the image with which the passage opens--Kate's reflection in the glass. What Kate sees in her reflection provides the essential dramatic contrast to the room itself. As she returns periodically to the glass and studies her image, she senses her own value

and becomes conscious that her escape from the personal failure of her family may have something to do with the impression she can produce: "Was it not in fact the partial escape from this 'worst' in which she was steeped to be able to make herself out again as agreeable to see?" (WD 6;ch.1). Just as the opening passage reflects Kate's characteristic motion in the novel (she paces--as though caged--in subsequent scenes and Milly later describes her as a person who "paced like a panther"), Kate's return to the mirror several times in this scene is a harbinger of the effect she produces on others throughout the novel. She notes of her father in the scene immediately following, for example, "It gave him pleasure that she was handsome, that she was in her way, a sensible value." In her provincial acceptance of Aunt Maud's ambitions for her, this value is concretized. Kate submits to a role in which she functions primarily as an object, agreeable to see and, through her appearance, capable of success.

In this opening portrait of Kate, James creates a kind of miniature drama in her response to her father's surroundings. But the scene is more fundamentally dramatic in its abstract and thematic implications. Kate's response touches on all the pertinent emotional and moral sides of her dilemma. If her sense of honor is engaged in what she later describes to Densher as "a narrow little family feeling," her repugnance at the

sight of her father's world demonstrates to what extent her ideals are more consistent with Aunt Maud's world of fortune. But Aunt Maud's ultimatum (Kate reports to her father in the ensuing scene that Mrs. Lowder will keep her only if she gives him up completely), establishes a world for Kate in which honor and fortune are mutually exclusive. In essence James has used the opening scene, and specifically its visual aspects, to delineate the central theme of the novel--that of the conflict between material and spiritual values. Kate's persistent association of poverty with meanness of spirit, here, as elsewhere in the novel, is deeply ironic; it is indicative of her primitive evasion of the deeper meanings of honor that the novel will explore.

2. "a good conscience and a big balance"

A second scene early in The Wings of the Dove in which Merton Densher, summoned by Aunt Maud presumably to discuss his relationship with Kate, waits alone in her drawing room, illustrates some striking parallels (and differences) in James's use of setting to explore the novel's themes. Here, as in the scene just examined, the perceiver pays special attention to the physical character of the room before him and his response raises complex moral issues about the situation and about an absent character. As before, the perceiver's response is also a subtle self-portrait.

Densher waits in Mrs. Lowder's drawing room for a quarter of an hour, alone, irritably conscious ("the visit, the hour were of her own proposing") of her calculation in making him wait. Like Kate, Densher, in his impatience, turns to the room and proceeds with some annoyance to read the "text" of the place as a portrait of Aunt Maud. Densher too paces, taking in the message of Aunt Maud's "massive, florid furniture, the immense expression of her signs and symbols" (WD 53;ch.4):

> He couldn't describe and dismiss them collectively, call them either Mid-Victorian or early; not being at all sure they were rangeable under one rubric. It was only manifest they were splendid and were furthermore conclusively British. They constituted an order and they abounded in rare material--precious woods, metals, stuffs, stones. He had never dreamed of anything so fringed and scalloped, so buttoned and corded, drawn everywhere so tight, and curled everywhere so thick. He had never dreamed of so much rosewood and marble and malachite. But it was, above all, the solid forms, the wasted finish, the misguided cost, the general attestation of morality and money, a good conscience and a big balance. These things finally represented for him a portentous negation of his own world of thought--of which, for that matter, in the presence of them, he became as for the first time hopelessly aware. They revealed it to him by their merciless indifference. (WD 55;ch.4)

But whereas Kate is almost physically assaulted by the offensive sensory quality of her father's lodgings, Densher does not see a single specific item in Mrs. Lowder's drawing room. Instead he "sees" the control ("buttoned," "corded," "drawn tight") and the hard

strength ("marble," "malachite," "solid forms"), the inhumanity reflective of Maud Lowder's nature. The objects in her room remain brute facts, remote and cold ("gilt and glass," "precious woods," "metals," "stuffs," "stones") so that as Densher fills in his composition, he moves rapidly from hard surfaces to moral condemnation. His adjectives, "splendid," and "rare," are ironic and, like Kate, he distances himself by imagining himself superior, briefly formulating the kind of article he might write about what he sees: "He was glad to have found this last name for the whole character; 'cruel' somehow played into the subject for an article... He would write about the heavy horrors that could still flourish, that lifted their undiminished heads, in an age so proud of its short way with false gods..." (WD 54;ch.4). But like Maud Lowder herself, the items in her drawing room are not only oppressive, they are powerful. They communicate to Densher his own insignificance: "It had not yet been so distinct for him that he made no show...so complete a show seemed made there all about him." If he recognizes that Mrs. Lowder's furnishings imply an attention to surface values rather than aesthetic or spiritual ones, he also sees that they are "cruel" because they "mercilessly" preclude his own single value, the value of the inner life. Densher's picture describes not only Mrs. Lowder, and himself; it also clarifies the

lines of conflict between them--it indicates the mutual incompatibility of their worlds and values.

When Aunt Maud finally appears, her manner toward Densher is a duplication of the image "syllabled" in the furnishings of her drawing-room. James builds the parallels into the actual structure of the scene which follows. Aunt Maud speaks; Densher listens and reflects. His side of the dialogue is all but completely suppressed by Mrs. Lowder as she proceeds to describe Kate's future to Densher:

> "I can do the best with her, and I've my idea of the best."
> "Oh, I quite conceive," said Densher, "that your idea of the best isn't me."
> It was an oddity of Mrs. Lowder's that her face in speech was like a lighted window at night, but that silence immediately drew the curtain. The occasion for reply allowed by her silence was never easy to take; yet she was still less easy to interrupt. The great glaze of her surface at all events, gave her visitor no present help. "I didn't ask you to come to hear what it isn't--I asked you to come to hear what it is." (WD 57;ch.4)

Densher makes several further attempts to enter the conversation, but Maud continues to give him "the mere effect of the drawn blind." Essentially James has dispensed with the traditional dramatic effect of confrontation in this scene. By keeping most of the dialogue both indirect and minimal, James shifts dramatic pressure to imagined conversation (similar to the way image replaces action): "Aunt Maud clearly conveyed it, though he couldn't later on have said how.

'You don't really matter, I believe, so much as you think...'" (WD 58;ch.4). Densher's reflections throughout this scene illustrate the way Jamesian development arises out of the picture itself. He studies Maud Lowder visually, just as he has studied her drawing room, and it is the initial setting--her rooms--which offer the complete statement of her character. The interview which follows can be truncated dramatically because it is merely illustrative of what Densher has already "seen." Throughout the interview Densher observes Maud from the same distance and angle of vision established as he waited and examined her world. Maud is less a person with whom he can have a dialogue than an image he must study and interpret.

Dramatic development, then, is based not upon action but upon a series of images, upon the progression from concrete to increasingly abstract and imaginative renderings of what characters observe. In the passage just analyzed, we move from an image of Mrs. Lowder's drawing room (which turns out to be a portrait of Mrs. Lowder but even more of Densher himself), to Maud's image of Kate, and finally to Densher's silent reading of Maud's subtext--her real view of him implicit in her attitude during the interview. The text of the conversation, like the text of the drawing room, would be incomplete without Densher's lucid journalistic summary and evaluation.

Finally, if the broader function of this scene is to illustrate the incompatibility of Densher's and Maud Lowder's values, it is also an important harbinger of Densher's relations with Kate Croy. It is no accident that Densher finds Kate's patron's establishment as morally offensive as she finds her father's (nor is it accidental that the scenes are parallel in structure). Kate defines the poverty of her family as "the failure of fortune and honour." Densher defines Mrs. Lowder's wealth, "the general attestation of morality and money," as corrupt in its indifference to human values. Their opposing emotional responses signal the potential for difference between them that their story will explore.

3. "a situation really romantic"

As Jamesian characters take over the task of narration in the later novels, they share a tendency to distance themselves from events, to analyze more than to participate. But no character is more intrinsically cut off from the events of her story than Milly Theale, a fact which James signals in a variety of framed images of her, from her initial prospect view of the Swiss Alps to the Bronzino portrait Lord Mark observes she resembles. At the same time, no character is more centrally placed, and James was conscious of the effectiveness of point of view in achieving this. "I note

how, again and again, I go but a little with the direct--that is with the straight exhibition of Milly...all as if to approach her circuitously, deal with her at second hand, as an unspotted princess is ever dealt with..." (preface). It is not only point of view, however, but pictorial composition, as it separates and frames her, which renders her character and development as a kind of portraiture. First studied in a reminiscence of Susan Stringham's, Milly is, from the beginning, placed outside time, and allusions to her exclusion (and implicitly her death) become a constant theme, mirrored in Susan's anxieties, Milly's fears, and others characters' curiosity. James notes in the preface that his picture of Milly is built up entirely "through the successive windows of other people's interest in her," (AN 306) and, correspondingly, Milly herself does not act so much as react, responding to images of a world and of herself created by others. It is a world whose reality she alternately embraces and subjects to an increasingly mistrustful scrutiny.

Milly's response to life, like that of Isabel Archer, is initially governed by a kind of romantic eagerness, but where Isabel actively pursues and shapes her experience, Milly remains a passive though intensely alert and eager recipient. Also like Isabel, Milly's response to experience has a fairy tale quality, but again this is an effect created by other

characters' treatment of her as much as her own sense of things: "Susie had only had to wave a neat little wand for the fairy tale to begin at once" (WD 96;ch.7). Ever aware that her claims on life are tenuous, Milly copes by imagining herself brought into dramatic representation and, as such, a peculiar emotional intensity accompanies each new impression. Seated at Mrs. Lowder's dinner table for the first time, Milly's quest for experience is gratified:

> She thrilled, she consciously flushed, and turned pale 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 so positive a taste and so deep an undertone. The smallest things, the faces, the hands, the jewels of the women, the sounds of words, especially of names, across the table, the shape of the forks, the arrangement of the flowers, the attitude of the servants, the walls of the room, were all touches in a picture and denotements in a play; and they marked for her, moreover, her alertness of vision. She had never, she might well believe, been in such a state of vibration; her sensibility was almost too sharp for her comfort. (WD 98;ch.7)

Purely and simply, James has created a drama out of Milly's apprehension of the scene. As fully as Densher rejects what he sees in Mrs. Lowder's world, Milly embraces it, simply because it constitutes a greater "reality" than she has yet been privileged to know. Of the three reactions to a place examined so far, Milly's, besides being the most positive, is the most abstract: not even the qualities of objects, much less the objects themselves, are defined. If Kate sees

objects and their subjective qualities in graphic sensory detail, if Densher sees the emotional characteristics of objects, Milly reverses this tendency. She sees objects in a general way (the faces, the hands, the jewels, the sounds, the shapes...) but is wholly unable to define them. When Kate feels impinged upon, she attempts to control, to transform; when Densher feels out of his element, he raises himself above it. Milly is, by contrast, so overwhelmed that she cannot grasp her experience as something to be defined or evaluated, much less controlled. Her response defines both her moral naïveté and, ironically, her continued exclusion despite her personal sense of enchantment.

Like Densher's and Kate's, Milly's picture of the scene consists of an epic enumeration of detail, but here, since both substantive and ethical qualities are absent, all that is really communicated is Milly's emotional pitch. Her alertness is a kind of fever which the reader comes to associate with her questionable health. In the two previous passages, an emotional response led to insight or action; it enabled the character to evaluate his own position in relation to the place and therefore to the person it represented. Milly's non-judging and intense acceptance of the scene corresponds to a kind of symbiotic quest for survival among the living. As she becomes gradually and poig-

nantly aware of the brevity of her tenure, the images before her take on depth and complexity; gradually they draw her inside the frame.

James has given many of the scenes in this novel, not just those perceived by Milly, an unusual degree of sensory and psychological intensity. Kate Croy's and Merton Densher's responses have a stronger pace and emotional content than those created by either Isabel Archer or Ralph Touchett in The Portrait of a Lady, for example. (Isabel's and Ralph's responses have a distance guaranteed by the constant transformation into picture that their vision of life as art creates.) So while it is true that most of James's leading characters are "finely aware," the heightened sensibility of those characters in The Wings of the Dove is central to the kind of drama created.

B. The Portrait of Milly

In the face of her inability to act, Milly Theale, perhaps more than any other Jamesian character, becomes a portrait. Out of her tenacity, her will to live, James creates a drama of being. Milly's constant visualization of her experience as a drama or a picture is a constant reminder that she is outside the frame and her attempt to hold together what she knows is dissolving constitutes "her nearest approach" to life. As she proceeds, complications of vision are even more

exhilarating, more eagerly embraced than earlier experiences. In making her vulnerable they provide a rite of passage. Symbolically, they draw her inside the frame and bring her to life.

While Milly's active imagination shapes everything around her into an aesthetically pleasing whole, her receptive spirit is, from time to time, penetrated by an awareness of "some possibly sinister motive," a sensation which is sharpened with each new impression of Kate Croy. Initially, Kate appeals to Milly because she is "a beautiful stranger," a kind of protean dramatic character who is able to "cut her connexions and lose her identity, letting the imagination for the time make what it would of them..." (<u>WD</u> 138;ch.10). And because Milly persists in seeing her new friend as "a subject for curiosity," a member of a cast, she also persists in transforming the darker side of Kate's character into something equally attractive. When Kate expresses a disregard for Milly's companion, Susan Stringham, Milly responds privately, "it just faintly rankled in her that a person who was good enough and to spare for Milly Theale shouldn't be good enough for another girl...," (<u>WD</u> 120;ch.8) but she ponders this fact until she can "appreciate" it: "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?" (WD 120;ch.8). James couches Milly's mental activity in a series of rhetorical questions, imitating the searching motion of her consciousness and revealing, finally, her neutralization of a morally negative trait by the creation of aesthetic distance. Milly is the agent, not Kate in this instance. It is she who sees Kate in a way "no one yet had ever done"; it is she who transforms her friend's brutality (and later her capacity for deception and betrayal) into "wild beauty" and "strange grace."

1. The Dove

A central passage much later in the novel gives Milly a far more direct and frightening apprehension of Kate's brutality, a brutality Milly can no longer neutralize because it is directed toward herself. In this scene Kate instructs Milly on her choice of friends (not unlike the way Madame Merle instructs Isabel: the scene is full of irony), essentially suggesting that Milly should be more discerning, and indirectly warning Milly against Kate herself. This time, Milly's renewed effort to view Kate from the distance of "picture" does not diminish her sense of a threat: "She had felt herself alone with a creature who paced like a panther" (WD 183-4;ch.15). The entire

scene is cast in the form of a recollection--Milly, alone the next day "piecing things together in the dawn"--creating a mood of finality and the characteristic Jamesian frame. Through retrospection and reflection, James controls yet intensifies the confrontation. It is drama reenacted, visualized with the aid of a perceiver who provides a distilled summary and a subtext. The conclusion of the scene, especially, has the composed distance of neoclassical drama in which gesture and ritual signify action. Kate warns Milly against the Lowder circle, and against herself: "you may very well loathe me yet." Milly rises in a kind of alarm and asks, "Why do you say such things to me?" to which Kate replies, "Because you're a dove" (WD 184;ch.15). At this, the two come together in a kind of ceremonial tableau:

> With which she felt herself ever so delicately, so considerately, embraced; not with familiarity or as a liberty taken, but almost ceremonially and in the manner of an accolade; partly as if, though a dove who could perch on a finger, one were also a princess with whom forms were to be observed. It even came to her, through the touch of her companion's lips, that this form, this cool pressure, fairly sealed the sense of what Kate had just said. (WD 184;ch.15)

In this moment of visual drama Milly perceives a formal stillness which is fraught with violence. Kate's "wild beauty" and "strange grace" are finally understood as predatory: Milly finds herself alone with a person "who paced like a panther," a panther who stalks a dove and

whose kiss suggests betrayal. The Jamesian confrontation, as this passage illustrates, conveys its drama with classical economy: intense feeling is communicated with a minimum of action, gathered into the image, first of the panther, then of the dove. As the scene closes, Milly ponders Kate's epithet for her: "she caught her breath with relief, the name so given her. She met it on the instant as she would have met the revealed truth; it lighted up the strange dusk in which she had lately walked. That was what was the matter with her. She was a dove" (WD 185;ch.15). It is through the various images of the dove that Milly and those close to her witness both her transformation and their own. "The imagery of the novel," Fogel comments, "presents vivid images of the process of transformation itself. Thus the meaning of the dove changes from innocence and vulnerability to transcendence and triumph, and Densher has consciously to recall 'that doves have wings and wondrous flights, have them as well as tender tints and soft sounds'" (334). For Milly, the transcendence of the dove is poignant in its ambiguity, for as an image it is only an artifact, a weak substitute for real life among the living.

2. Two Portraits

A variety of explicitly pictorial images of Milly reveal the consistency of James's method. Her delayed

descent into the great saloon of the Venetian palace represents the dramatic climax of her relations to those around her. James likens this picture to one of Paolo Veronese's great ceremonial tableaux, and Ward comments, "the imagined Veronese painting statically represents Milly's complete history: she is in the position of Christ in the center of the picture, with her conspirators grouped about her. She is doomed, yet magnificent, a victim consenting to be a victim and transcending her appointed role. It is the last we see of Milly; yet it manifests what will happen to her" (181).

From her initial prospect view of the Swiss Alps to the Veronese tableau, Milly can enter the current of life only through the metaphor of art, and James makes use of the aesthetic perspective, to represent the two sides of her dilemma. If art grants permanence, it is a permanence which escapes the individual, and the characteristic attempt of the Jamesian heroine to make of her life a work of art is something that has limited and largely ironic significance for Milly. Thus when Lord Mark leads Milly into a gallery to show her the Bronzino portrait that reminds him of her she places herself inside the frame,only to apprehend that aesthetic transformation is also death:

> She found herself, for the first moment, looking at the mysterious portrait through tears. Perhaps it was her tears that made it just then so strange and fair...the face of a

> young woman, all magnificently dressed; a face almost livid in hue, yet handsome in sadness...The lady in question...with her slightly Michaelangelesque squareness, her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck...was a very great personnage--only unaccompanied by a joy. And she was dead, dead, dead. (WD 144;ch.11)

As a portrait, the young woman is magnificent, "a very great personnage," but her face is "livid in hue," her eyes are "of other days." The picture speaks to Milly of her fate, of the fact that her own "greatness," her "life" will be that of a memory for the living. Her response is poignant here--she would rebel, she would breathe life into the figure if she could. In the Veronese picture, however, her attitude is transcendent and peaceful. She has accepted her role. Through portraiture, then, James captures the key moments of Milly's dramatic awareness, her initial resistance, her final acceptance of her fate.

C. Images Recollected

In the latter third of the novel, concrete pictorial frames and images gradually disappear and the pattern upon which they are based takes on a new form. The life which resides in a memory is the subject of two important private moments for Merton Densher, the first a memory of Kate, the second, of Milly. The two passages are parallel in structure, each reflecting a stage in Densher's inner transformation. In the first

passage, Densher contemplates Kate's powerful presence in his rooms where she has lately visited him:

> It played for him--certainly in this prime afterglow--the part of a treasure kept, at home, in safety and sanctity, something he was sure of finding in its place when, with each return, he worked his heavy old key in the lock. The door had but to open for him to be with it again and for it to be all there; so intensely there that, as we say, no other act was possible to him than the renewed act, almost the hallucination, of intimacy. Wherever he looked or sat or stood, to whatever aspect he gave for the instant the advantage, it was in view as nothing of the moment...it was in view as, when the curtain has risen, the play on stage is in view, night after night, for the fiddlers. He remained thus, in his own theatre,in his single person, perpetual orchestra to the ordered drama, the confirmed 'run'; playing low and slow, moreover,in the regular way, for the situations of most importance. (WD 348;ch.29)

It is a picture, not of the act of intimacy between Kate and Densher, but of the act of remembering. When Densher enters his rooms, he enters a private theatre where his response to a private and personal drama can be reenacted. Exactly what Densher "sees" is suppressed (just as the actual encounter is omitted in the story); instead James creates a picture of Densher's emotional core, of his capacity to relive, to be present again and again to this past moment. The great irony which Densher reflects upon in the pages that follow is, of course, the fact that he goes out each day to Milly but returns to find Kate in his rooms. It is Milly who purges him of the conflict and makes him free to live the fiction his presence in Venice

implies: "When he left the palace, an hour afterwards, it was with a sense of having breathed there, in the very air, the truth he imagined" (WD 351;ch.29). James uses the issue of a visit to Densher's rooms as a dramatic pivot in the latter's relationship with each of the two women. Milly expresses a desire to come with Susie to tea at Densher's lodgings; Densher's feelings about the place clearly make such a visit impossible. He casts around for an excuse and blunders with a reference to her health: "Will it be safe for you to break with your custom of not leaving the house?", to which she replies, "You suppose me awfully bad?" The ensuing exchange touches directly on Milly's fervent desire to live, shows her at her most vulnerable and results in Densher's wholehearted capitulation to her side: "His great scruple suddenly broke, giving way to something inordinately strange...You can come, he said, when you like" (WD 355;ch.29). Unknowingly, Milly has challenged the life in Densher's memory of Kate, and triumphed. Although the visit never takes place, Densher's acquiescence is the first stage in his spiritual transformation--and it is achieved through his willingness to have the picture of Kate altered. He has given Milly his most precious possession.

Shortly before Milly's death, when Densher returns to London and to Kate, Kate senses the change in

Densher's attitude toward Milly and accuses him of being in love with her. When Densher receives the final letter from Milly and brings it, unopened, to Kate, she responds (with characteristic brutality) by tossing it into the fire. In the ensuing weeks, as Densher ponders the content and significance of the lost letter, he discovers that his feelings for Milly, unlike those for Kate, are not assailable. His private drama turns on the mystery of what she might have said and the letter becomes the image of his feelings:

> He kept it back like a favorite pang; left it behind him so to say, when he went out, but came home again the sooner for the certainty of finding it there. Then he took it out of its sacred corner and its soft wrappings; he undid them one by one, handling them, handling it, as a father, baffled and tender, might handle a maimed child. But so it was before him in his dread of who else might see it. Then he took to himself at such hours, in other words, that he should never know what had been in Milly's letter. (_WD_ 450;ch.38)

In sharp contrast to the memory of Kate (of _eros_), the memory of Milly is full of tenderness (of _caritas_). It is a love evoked, not by what has been taken, but by what has been sacrificed:

> ...the turn she would have given her act...had possibilities that, somehow, by wondering about them, his imagination had extraordinarily filled out and refined. It had made of them a revelation the loss of which was like the sight of a priceless pearl cast before his eyes--his pledge given not to save it--into the fathomless sea, or rather even it was like the sacrifice of something sentient and throbbing, something that for the spiritual ear, might have been audible as a faint, far wail. This was the sound that

> he cherished, when alone, in the stillness of his rooms. (WD 451;ch.38)

Densher's deep feeling for Milly at this moment is, profoundly, an answer to her poignant desire to live. It speaks of the beauty of Milly's spirit brought to life by Densher in these moments of contemplation. As such it also justifies the larger movement of the novel: it is only an image, a memory, a picture of an emotion, but it brings Milly to life. It also describes Densher's spiritual integration.

D. Waiting, Stillness, and Silence

Densher's image of Milly--the last in the novel--provides an important clue to the logic of James's omissions. The memory of Milly, eloquently present to Densher's imagination, is a far more profound image of her effect upon him, of his transformation, than any event (or the contents of any letter) could be. Similarly, James spares the reader a direct scene of Densher's final meeting with Milly, providing only a brief recollection for Aunt Maud (with whom Densher cannot be wholly candid). The real drama of spiritual contact between Milly and Densher is reserved for the moment of recollection, just as, throughout the novel, images remembered, are more significant than present ones. Just as recollection is what transforms Milly's knowledge of Kate, Densher can understand Milly only in memory.

The richness of Densher's memory is based on the privacy of his meditation--upon his freedom to enlarge upon the significance of Milly's gift, but it is also based upon Milly's silence. And it is especially true in this novel that characters frequently understand more about each other, and finally themselves, in privacy and in silence. Images speak more than words, and, in the end, it is silence, images contemplated in silence, that are revelatory, eloquent, and fundamentally dramatic. Milly's silent gift, like Cordelia's redemptive "no cause, no cause," makes Densher capable of love.

The Wings of the Dove moves dramatically from waiting to stillness to silence. At the outset everyone, not just Kate, is visibly waiting--Densher with ambiguity, Kate with calculation, Susie with compassion, Milly with inspired resistance. The slow movement from waiting to stillness, (Densher in Venice, no letters to England, Milly turned to the wall) and to a silence which is full of meaning is based on the transformation of action into picture, act into image. James's pictorial method creates story through a series of images, some of which precede an action, many more of which recall an action. (The event is never more than marginally present in the text.) These images are far from static, however, for they are subject to the creative activity of James's characters. They are

reviewed and understood anew, more deeply, as characters themselves develop.

Early in the novel there is a great emphasis on the social, the public, as characters struggle to define their relationship to others and their roles in a social world. But Milly's initial question--whether or not it is possible to enter the current--is pivotal. At the end of the novel everyone is fundamentally alone. The story turns inward from social and intellectual spheres to the emotional and the spiritual. At the end the same contemplation of images which initially led characters to manipulate, control, and misunderstand each other, initiates a spiritual movement from self to other. This movement, classically dramatic in structure, yet achieved without action, is described by James's characters visualization of their story.

Chapter 7

Prospects and Windows: The Shape of Jamesian Drama

In Chapter Five of The Wings of the Dove, shortly after Milly Theale and Susan Stringham are introduced, Milly disappears into the Alps to be followed discreetly by her companion. Susan discovers Milly at the end of a short promontory and stifles a cry "at the danger of such a perch for a mere maiden:"

> The whole place, with the descent of the path and as a sequel to a sharp turn that was masked by rocks and shrubs, appeared to fall precipitously and to become a "view" pure and simple, a view of great extent and beauty, but thrown forward and vertiginous. Milly, with the promise of it from just above, had gone straight down to it, not stopping till it was all before her; and here, on what struck her friend as the dizzy edge of it, she was seated at her ease. (WD 83;ch.5)

It is perhaps the most emblematic scene in the novel, illustrating as it does Milly's isolation and at the same time her eager enthusiasm as she sits "in a state of uplifted and unlimited possession," looking down upon the kingdoms of the earth." In her simple movement (going "straight down to it," "not stopping till it was all before her"), the movement of the heroine is contained. The danger of Milly's position is identified only by Susan's apprehension, for Susan does not show herself; instead she withdraws silently. In the contrast between Milly's apparent ease and Susan's discomfort, a tension is established and a silent pic-

ture is rendered dramatic. As the reader apprehends the scene from Susan's vantage point, Milly becomes part of the pictorial subject; in fact she is the center of the composition. The picture has a double frame for Milly surveys her kingdom while Susan watches Milly. Milly's view, however, is a general one, whereas Susan's is specific and focused: it contains a dramatic issue for she must interpret the significance of Milly's recklessness. (She fears at first that Milly may be contemplating a jump.) But the scene is meant to illustrate most of all Milly's stance, her innocence, her openness, and even her carelessness: it is a view of "great extent and beauty" but "precipitous," "vertiginous," and, paradoxically, Milly is "seated at her ease."

Throughout the novel Milly is made a pictorial subject in this way as other characters provide the necessary dramatic contrast to her own point of view. If in the above scene Milly is blind to Susan's apprehension, and, in a more general way, to the dangers of life, in the Bronzino portrait scene with Lord Mark, she is able to see her own danger and the imminence of her death: she is moved to tears by this portrait which reminds Lord Mark of her. In a much later scene James combines prospect and portrait as Milly descends (from her perch) into the great saloon of her Venetian palace, dressed for the first time in

white and wearing a long "priceless" chain of pearls. Dressed in old lace and bejeweled, she looks poignantly like the Bronzino. As others study her and as she herself sinks into possession of the scene, of her friends, of her palace, her chamber of state, she completes the movement from object to subject. As Milly takes control of the situation of the situation, she not only recognizes but accepts her fate. And it is all achieved through her relation to the picture, through her recognition of _its_ significance. The kind of picture-making which is the essence of Jamesian drama is assisted by his use of special patterns of location. James makes frequent use of the prospect or vista such as the one analyzed above, and for interiors he provides views from staircases, from windows or through a series of chambers. These locations are viewed by a perceiver engaged in rapid perceptual movement who brings the subject into focus. The frame is fully visible and the dramatic action made possible only when this relationship between subject and perceiver is established.

The picture frame in James is actually a kind of window, a window which triggers a moment of vision, of heightened awareness, of recognition. Windows themselves are used literally and metaphorically throughout James's novels to signal or help bring about moments of heightened perception and knowledge. Ralph Touchett

watches Isabel and Madame Merle from a window at Gardencourt; Milly Theale, standing behind Kate Croy, watches her in the embrasure of a window, looking down upon the streets of Paris. Like the picture frame, the window signals a certain distance necessary for awareness, a set of conditions wherein a quality of reflectiveness can take over. It also creates a moment of complete privacy, for the observer is always, momentarily, unobserved. Thus at key dramatic moments, James provides for his major characters a place to stand where his perceptions can be sharpened and insight can occur: through the window of Gardencourt Ralph Touchett anticipates Madame Merle's power over Isabel; at the doorway of her drawing room, Isabel discovers a relation between her husband and Madame Merle; watching Kate Croy framed by a window, Milly recognizes that Densher has returned to London and perceives that there is something more in the relations between Kate and her journalist friend than she had supposed; and Strether notes Waymarsh's deliberate placement of himself in the embrasure of a window so as to remain outside the conflict between Sarah Pocock and Madame de Vionnet--a distancing Strether himself cannot achieve.

The moment of recognition which framing creates often suggests a reversal of earlier more romanticized portraits. Gilbert Osmond, in whom Isabel first perceives such an "element of nobleness" is later

understood to be profoundly egoistic. Madame de Vionnet, likened to a jewel by Strether, is ultimately revealed in all her hardness and irreducibility. In final portraits she is no longer surrounded by soft lights and gauze-like attire, or transformed by mythic or historical connotations--earlier frames which Strether created for her. She remains the "antique jewel," the coin of the Renaissance, but shorn of the spiritual associations suggested by her portrait painter. A reverse movement can be seen in Densher's understanding of Milly Theale who grows in spiritual dimension at the end of the novel; if Milly is initially isolated, in the end, she truly occupies the center of the composition; she has won her place among the living.

The deeper understanding required by James's characters only occurs following a period of meditation during which the various pictures each has created are brought together for a more careful scrutiny. Each character has a moment of private meditation which serves as a kind of dramatic epiphany. Alone, late at night, Isabel reviews her life with Osmond, which is in all respects the opposite of the mental and emotional construct she created in choosing him. During this meditative vigil she sees that her image of him, and of herself, was false. Alone and shut out of Milly's palace, Densher considers painfully the lie he has

lived. Later, again alone, in London, he contemplates his memory of Milly and sees her for the first time. Alone, after his final encounter with Chad and Madame de Vionnet in which he has been forced to confront their all too human affair, Lambert Strether returns to Paris and meditates, late at night in his hotel room, on the real nature of Marie de Vionnet and the peculiar evolution of his vision of her. Each major character has a similar moment of awakening during which false images are overturned, vision clarified and responsibility taken for error.

If James's use of location repeatedly suggests a frame, other patterns of composition help to maintain the pictorial focus in these novels and underscore the consistency with which James reveals action through picture. In a variety of ways, James blurs the physicality of the setting into an impressionistic series of colors and textures as when Densher studies Mrs. Lowder's drawing-room or when Strether dines with Maria Gostrey. In a similar way, physical movement in James's novel is consistently muted, rendered indirect. It is as if James wishes to minimize the concrete physical act in order to transform it into portrait or tableau. James achieves transitional movements from one physical area to another without having to record the activity--the literal movement--of his characters. To convey the sense of Maria and Strether leaving the

theatre, Jamesian indirection makes an agent of the surroundings rather than Strether and Maria themselves: "the depletion of the place had already brought them nearer to the door" (AMB 64;bk.2,ch.1). Few characters in James move quickly and when they do, they are distanced by caricature (Henrietta Stackpole, the Countess Gemini), by metaphor (Kate Croy pacing like a panther) or by myth (Madame de Vionnet is "half-goddess"). Typically, James's characters move in highly stylized fashion. They can be observed standing against a chimney-piece, sitting in stillness, pouring tea, rising, turning slowly. Their gestures are almost slow motion, so that when characters come together, it is frequently in a silence suggestive of a tableau.

James subdues not only the literal movement of his characters, but he achieves a similar effect by the temporal structure of his novels as a whole. The repeated use of what Ward calls the "portentous" and "recollective" scenes rather than enacted scenes distills the most dramatic moments of the novels into visual and psychological activity on the part of the perceiving character. James uses the foreshortened scene (his word for "recollected") to reduce dialogue and action to their essence while enhancing the intensity of the moment. A classical economy of effect is achieved as the character selects only those details most pertinent to his dilemma. As a recollection the

actual confrontation is suppressed, but a kind of *klassiche dämpfung* effect is achieved as the violent emotion of the character remembering is given the stage, as his awareness of the events and of the character he contemplates is deepened.

Attempts have been made to understand the pictorial side of James's technique in the context of one of the important artistic movements of his time--Impressionism. For just as James minimizes action while vitalizing picture, Impressionism in art deliberately waives the literary element of its subject (story, anecdote, plot) and tends to "reduce all motifs to landscape, still life and portrait" (Hauser 171).

In Jamesian narrative, as in Impressionistic art, "the sense of space and movement is minimal, the sense of pulsation and energy is strong," (Frenz 54) so that drama derives from the formally controlled energy of the picture. Moreover, just as the Impressionist is "concerned only with what his senses perceive, to the exclusion of what his memory and intellect tell him about external objects," (Frenz 54) the Jamesian character begins his quest by setting aside those aspects of the situation which provide context and tradition, focusing almost exclusively on the sensory quality of what is before him. But it is these very impressionistic tendencies that lead James's characters astray, leading them to ignore the larger context

against which their insights could be tested. In this sense James's novels suggest an indictment of this way of seeing and a return to a more classical and balanced artistic perspective. His characters' obsession with the aesthetic shape of experience and with their own creative imagination leads to a fundamental distortion of its truths.

The aesthetic analogy, so important to James's characters, and symbolized by the pictures studied here, can be fully understood only at the end of each character's journey. Initially, and for the major part of their story, James's leading characters add values to the pictures they study which are not inherent in the subjects themselves. It is only when the character is finally able to let go of this compelling inclination, to let the picture be, that the true nature of the subject reveals itself. On one level the development of the Jamesian character's vision consists precisely in the gradual rejection of a subjective and impressionistic point of view and in the adoption of something closer to a purely aesthetic attitude--as Vivas, for example, defines it: "to grasp the object as self-sufficient; an act of intransitive attention" (xx).

But aestheticism too is inadequate; aesthetic vision ultimately needs to be transformed into moral vision and the Jamesian novel charts the dangers of

regarding the aesthetic and the moral as synonymous. Gilbert Osmond is James's most malignant aesthete and Isabel Archer is "too susceptible...to fine appearances, to a brilliant surface, to the appeal, in short of the merely aesthetic, to be morally altogether sound" (Krooke, 59). When James's characters recognize the moral limitations of the aesthetic model and therefore of their own vision, they are finally prepared for tragic insight and for renunciation.

Each of James's characters enters the large canvas, that of Europe itself, and lights a series of smaller pictures; but each ultimately renounces his idealistic point of view. In this renunciation there is moral transcendence. Through their inordinate propensity to visualize, to compose and to grasp life without touching it, James's characters are able to undergo the kind of reversal which compels tragic recognition. As they renounce their aesthetic stance they become capable of moral insight. It is in these terms that James wishes us to understand the moral necessity of Isabel's return to Rome, Densher's inner transformation and Strether's acceptance of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's frail humanity. The American's spiritual enlargement (Densher too is essentially American in spirit as he rejects, on moral grounds, the European point of view imposed by his fiancée) diminishes by contrast the world he has been trying to

fathom. The protagonist in Henry James does succeed finally in detaching the subject from its context, of grasping its essence, but only after a spiritual transformation which compels him to reject the world he has been holding at arm's length. He sees that his vision has been a kind of spiritual blindness, and at this moment he becomes capable of tragic insight and renunciation.

Chapter 8

From James to Proust: Closing in on the Subject

A. Drama and Picture: framing and focusing the story

Jamesian pictorialism derives its structure and epistemology from James's education in the visual arts. In her study of the "museum world" in James's novels, Adeline Tintner observes that the "master" took possession of the old world, by appropriating it "in the form in which he had been bred to recognize civilization, in its material culture sequestered in museums" (2). The implications of this notion are most significant for the study of pictorialism in literature, for not only does James "borrow" numerous paintings and use them in his novels, but, as we have shown, he creates characters whose understanding of the world is essentially an act of vision. With great consistency, all of James's major characters see "pictures" of other characters which "trigger complex perceptual and hermeneutical processes" (Torgovnick 84); that is, they interpret the drama of human relations pictorially. To be civilized, for the Jamesian character, is to compose the world. The viewpoint of the Jamesian perceiver, however, is essentially that of the nineteenth century landscape composer or portrait artist: a distance from the subject is generally maintained and the picture itself tends to be a traditionally composed "whole" rather

than a fragment. However much the perceiver or artist experiments with color, light and movement within the frame, he never abandons this civilized nineteenth century stance.

Proustian pictorialism, by contrast, is an act of appropriation, a cross between a romantic immersion and a Freudian "digesting" of the world (Bersani 35). This effort to merge with the object distinguishes Proust from James and defines his pictorialism as essentially more modern; in fact, the narrator's proximity to the subject frequently suggests the viewpoint of the camera eye rather than that of the landscape artist. The Proustian picture is therefore susceptible to a different set of vulnerabilities, vulnerabilities connected to the act of perception and the inevitable distortions and confusions which arise from the close examination of only a part of the world at a time. However, the shaping of the picture in Proust, if initially based on a narcissistic desire to appropriate the subject is ultimately rescued from solipsism: Marcel's reproduction of what he sees becomes a highly disciplined aesthetic positioning of the self in relation to the work of art.

Like Henry James, Proust tells his story visually; that is, pictorial composition defines the dramatic development of the narrative, especially at key moments of heightened awareness and insight for a character.

The visual composition becomes the locus of meaning for the narrative, and dramatic development occurs through the exploration of conflicting visual images of a subject. However, the Proustian perceiver, uses sequences of pictorial images to explore the modernist notion that a single subject or character is not only multiple but essentially contradictory and possibly unknowable. Moreover, if both writers dramatize the struggle on the part of the perceiver to identify and hold onto an elusive "reality," in Proust the problem of knowledge is intrinsically more complex than it is in James. Comprehension and comparison of images for the Jamesian perceiver remains sequential and chronological where Marcel's apprehension of even a single image is based on a more fluid understanding of time: the past exists in the present, not as a series of remembered images recalled at will, but as uncontrollable, unpredictable moments of dramatic epiphany.

Proust, like Bergson, understood not only the need for new, more fluid ways of describing the act of perception and the subject; he also understood the essential pitfalls and contradictions of the project. Much of Marcel's effort concerns the struggle to piece together and render intelligible an image which can never really be seen except in fragments, which is altered by his contact with it and which is always threatening to dissolve or to elude his gaze. Proustian

pictorialism defines itself, not through a series of static images, but through a kind of slow motion narration in which the fluidity of time and subjectivity play an important part. According to Genette, Proust refuses "to allow description to come to a standstill, to spread itself out in space" (Narrative Discourse 196). Thus, whereas in James, at a given moment, the perceiver and the frame remain relatively still, and what is under scrutiny is always a single image, in Proust, the frame dissolves almost as soon as it is created and the image is always multiple, complex, prismatic. The picture in Proust is, at each moment of its creation, a portal into time.

B. The Perceiver: knowledge of subject and of self

If the Jamesian narrator refers the reader to an implied conflict between his composed image of the world and the actual reality behind it (a conflict which surfaces as the picture changes from scene to scene and as the narrator has difficulty reconciling conflicting implications about the nature of the subject), James's characters (and ultimately James himself) believe that there is such a thing as a true and knowable world; they remain intent therefore on resolving the differences among conflicting images. If the subject contributes to the distortion of the picture (and many Jamesian subjects are complicitous in this

way), it is the responsibility of the perceiver to discover this fact. One character's understanding of another is therefore subject to a process of verification which depends upon the perceiver's capacity to grow, to overcome his own limitations. Furthermore, for the Jamesian character, "blindness," the failure to see things as they are, has primarily to do with cultural and psychological constructs which the perceiver carries within himself and which interfere with his accurate perception of another. A gradual recognition of these prejudices creates the possibility of genuine (if momentary) knowledge of another and of oneself.

For Proust, the failure of a character to see clearly or accurately has more to do with the philosophical limitations of knowledge as he understands it--limitations shared by all perceivers. While, as in James, a character's psychological and cultural predispositions may affect the quality of his understanding, Proust's conclusions about the role of the perceiver are diametrically opposed to those of James. Where the general movement in James involves a stripping away of false images, Proust moves in the opposite direction, granting individual integrity to all the images we form of another, insisting on a multi-faceted picture, an ever-shifting kaleidoscopic synthesis of all the achieved images of a subject in time. Thus Proust's narrator embraces the subjective

elements of his own composition as the most necessary and real aspects of his subject. Where James is concerned to overcome the limitations (the errors) which are generated by the perceiver, Proust believes in their essential worth, that is, in the potential of subjectivity not only to enrich the picture but to endow it with its essential meaning. In the course of <u>A la recherche</u> Proust does finally make a distinction between true and false knowledge but this distinction has to do with the perceiver's ability to move from a fragmentary to a holistic understanding of the subject, an understanding which requires the developed sensibility of the artist.

C. The Essential Proust: the picture in time

Because the Proustian picture embraces so many elements that are rejected in Jamesian epistemology, elements which explore the capacity of the image to embrace time, the linear or chronological construct which assumes a progressive refinement or clarification of the picture is inadequate. If reality is a kaleidoscope, a fluid matrix which presents in an instant of vision, past, present and future images as a synthesis of the perceiver's legitimized subjectivity, then Proust's pictorialism requires an entirely new vocabulary. The theoretical problems inherent in representing human time in narrative have been analyzed

by theoreticians of both art and literature. The most basic problem is that all representation tends to spatialize time, to move contrary to the direction Proust desires, to render it static. Arnheim points out, for example, that "any organized entity, in order to be grasped as a whole by the mind, must be translated into the synoptic condition of space" (2). This presumes "a translation of the subject into visual imagery, since the sense of sight is the only one that offers spatial simultaneity of reasonably complex patterns" (2). However, in narrative, visual imagery is presented through descriptive material and, according to Genette, description is based on static models of perception: "because it lingers over objects and arrangements considered in their simultaneity, and because it envisages these processes themselves as spectacles, (description) seems to suspend the course of time and contribute to spread the narrative in space" (33). Proust very clearly understood the nature of the conflict between narrative which tends to spatialize experience and experience itself which is essentially dynamic: he sets about to establish a fluid epistemology through the creation of dynamic visual imagery.

As Roger Shattuck observes, Proust sets about to "make us see time" (7). In his insightful study of photographic and cinematic technique in _A la recherche_,

Shattuck analyses the way Proust is able "to produce the effect of motion or animation" yet at the same time to create images which rise above the flux. Shattuck explains Marcel's use of the "stereoscopic image," (51) to define the way memory allows us to see several pictures simultaneously. The vocabulary of photography and of cinema enables us to distinguish more clearly between Jamesian pictorial space which tends to be the space of landscape or theatre and Proustian space which is, initially, less holistic, less chronological and, most important, is more process oriented: it documents the perceiver's constant struggle to piece together fragments of a world in order to create a whole and endow it with meaning. Proustian drama, instead of being based on the tension between error and truth, is based on the actual struggle to create and hold onto a world. For most of _A la recherche_, therefore, the composing eye emphasizes " uncertainty," and "the difficulties of cognition," qualities Alan Spiegel defines as "characteristic discomforts of the modernist sensibility" (260).

D. The Imagery of Time: the ray of light

If Proust is successful in granting multiplicity, fluidity and temporality to his pictorial subject, then the nature of his picture will be radically different from that of James. Proust's narrator, like the

Jamesian perceiver, initially makes an effort to ground his picture, to establish a perspective, to impose a frame (the window of a hotel), an angle of vision (looking down the esplanade), or a horizon line (the background of the sea). However, the frame itself is mobile and everything within the frame is in flux. Where motion in James is limited to gesture, expression and theatrical blocking in a scene, Proust constantly emphasizes the evasiveness of the image, its refusal to be static, even for a moment, to the camera eye. His narrator recognizes, from the earliest metaphor of the magic lantern, the inescapable elusiveness of all knowledge of others. Because Proust is much more concerned to delineate the process by which images are perceived and the complex drama of knowledge which is a product of the relationship between perceiver, object and the visual field between the two, the single most important component of the Proustian picture is not the subject itself but the elusive ray of light which alternately conceals or reveals that subject.

"Light" is used both literally and metaphorically in the Proustian picture. Marcel arrives at a visualization of time through metaphor, a single, pervasive visual metaphor whose development can be traced from the beginning to the end of the novel--that of the ray of light. Marcel recognizes first of all that we rarely see more than reflections, but once he has

glimpsed that first fragmentary reflection, he begins a quest for a kind of light which would be permanent rather than ephemeral, whole rather than fragmentary. The ray of light gradually becomes a projection of Marcel's consciousness, capable of descending into time and discovering the germ of involuntary memory which is the source of art; thus it also serves as a visual bridge which links the past to the present. In the course of the novel, light expands in meaning; more than an image, more than a symbol, it comes finally to represent the personal vision of the artist, his capacity to create an image in time.

All of Marcel's initial encounters with others are depicted visually, in portraits, and it is light which creates the essential drama in the picture. In the gaze of another, Marcel apprehends meaning through light; whether it is oblique, blinding or simply capricious, light is perceived as that which establishes dramatic tension. Initially light creates an opposition between the perceiver and the subject as he struggles to overcome separateness and achieve understanding of another. If this light directs him toward the soul of an object, initially, Marcel sees only its capricious and hermetic character: its refusal to reveal itself except in glimpses, teasing the viewer with its rich promise, a golden glow behind closed shutters, translucence beneath the surface of a cheek, the "petit

pan de mur jaune" in the Vermeer painting which offers only a brief moment of clarity, a fragment of truth.

For much of A la recherche light remains essentially fragmentary and elusive, but highly reflective surfaces also evoke the illusion of depth, and they create in Marcel's mind a project and an obsession: he must discover a way of establishing genuine contact with his subject. The originality of Marcel's attitude toward the world lies in his complete commitment to pictorialism as a mode of vision and a way of understanding others. Never abandoning the perceptual stance that another being is essentially a visual object, he struggles to enter the frames of his canvases. Although this project is fraught with paradox, contradiction and irony as the image created pictorially cannot satisfy him in human terms, and, even as a visual image, it cannot be contained or stilled, the consistency of this visual stance is what leads Marcel to his vocation, to the discovery of the whole, light-filled picture.

It is, appropriately, the artists in the novel who help Marcel discover how to develop his own pictorial vision. Bergotte's discovery of "le petit pan de mur jaune," Berma's weaving of a light-filled image of Racine's poetry, Elstir's momentarily captured image of time figured in shimmering light, and Vinteuil's magnificent septet which evokes in Marcel's mind the idea

of the dawn of creation--all of these experiences lead Marcel to a new and deeper understanding of his own picture which is finally filled with the light of time, made whole and transcendent.

At the end of Proust's novel the motif of the illuminating ray of light comes to represent the privileged moment of perception by which involuntary memory enables the perceiver to draw forth the past and link it to the present. Images of a subject arising from memory and imagination are themselves light-filled "layers" of meaning, all of which are essential to the whole picture. Thus through the spatial and temporal metaphor of light, Proust defines his literary and pictorial subject as a composite of memory, current perception, and imagination, for, ultimately, knowledge is an inner creation, a reconstitution of what has been dimly and fragmentarily received by the senses. For Proust, true knowledge is a construction of the imagination as it shapes the crude material of reality into significant form. If the ordinary individual is only capable of a fleeting awareness (as is the young Marcel), the artist (which Marcel later becomes), through an ever-deepening capacity to discover and shape the light within the image, becomes capable of true insight.

Chapter 9

A Fragile Relationship: The Perceiver Gazes at his Subject

A. The Hostile Gaze and the Gaze of Love

Many readers of *A la recherche du temps perdu* have noted Marcel's uneasy response to the "look" or "gaze" of another. In key encounter scenes much of the internal drama of the narrative derives from a sustained tension between the gaze of the perceiver and that of the "other." In initial encounters Marcel is almost assaulted by the "look" of the other, and critics have long recognized the fragile, neurotic character of his response to the world. Bersani refers to the "imminent collapse" (*Marcel Proust* 27) of Marcel's ego and Fernandez describes him as feeling "useless and emptied" ("In Search of the Self" 145). If Marcel's vulnerability is neurotic, it is also, surely, existential: Sartre's now-classic analysis of the effect of "the other" on human consciousness would seem a most apt summation of Marcel's chronic fear of annihilation: "The fact of the other is incontestable and touches me to the heart. I realize him through uneasiness; through him I am perpetually in danger" (*Being and Nothingness* 251). Yet Marcel's fear of the other is only one side of his emotional response to the world. Equally important, and in constant dramatic tension

with this fear is, of course, his longing for union with the object, a tendency which other critics define as an aspect of Proustian romanticism (Cocking 10).

Marcel's response to the gaze of another, understood in its entirety, however, is by no means limited to the imminent collapse, dissolution of the self, or even a mystical desire for immersion. In fact, what characterizes Marcel's approach to others most of all is his sustained ability to control the impact and meaning of their gaze. However much the gaze of the other may seem to threaten Marcel, it is he who is consciously choosing, framing and shaping his subject, often distorting its "truth" for his own purposes, at times creating the impression that the subject has more power over the composition than he does, but, ultimately, insisting upon his own power as artist over a subject which is, from first to last, his own creation.

Marcel's acute dramatization of his personal anguish the moment his gaze meets that of another, the pervasiveness of this experience, may have led us to overlook the significance of the one gaze in the novel which does not carry the threat of annihilation but, instead, offers an all-embracing love. The real psychoanalytic source of Marcel's project lies not in what has been denied him but in the moment of complete emotional fulfillment which his grandmother has offered:

> ...je me jetai dans les bras de ma grand'mère et je suspendis mes lèvres à sa figure comme si j'accedais ainsi à ce coeur immense qu'elle m'ouvrait. Quand j'avais ainsi ma bouche collée à ses joues, à son front, j'y puisais quelque chose de si bienfaisant, de si nourricier, que je gardais l'immobilité, le sérieux, la tranquille avidité d'un enfant qui tête. (JF 294).

While the infantile adoration so explicit in this passage does underscore Marcel's arrested development, he transforms this model of love into an ideal, an ideal which he seeks but does not find in the gaze of others and which he never abandons but rather translates into an object, an image created in memory, imagination and finally in art. In Marcel's relations with others for the rest of the novel, the wholeness of his grandmother's love continues to haunt him, not simply as the loss of a primitive and primal union needed to complete the self, but as a model of spirituality, actually purified of specific, concrete qualities, dissolved in radiant light:

> Je regardais ensuite sans me lasser son grand visage decoupé comme un beau nuage ardent et calme, derrière lequel on sentait rayonner la tendresse. Et tout ce qui recevait encore, si faiblement que ce fut, un peu de ses sensations, tout ce qui pouvait ainsi être dit encore à elle, en était aussitôt si spiritualisé, si sanctifié que de mes paumes je lissais ses beaux cheveux à peine gris avec autant de respect, de précaution et de douceur que si j'y avais caressé sa bonté (JF 294).

In place of the power to annihilate, Marcel's grandmother's gaze contains the power to transform. Her gaze is thus linked not only to an ideal of love but to

an ideal of perception which will serve for Marcel as a model of the aesthetic stance. Marcel's grandmother is a perceiver who, paradoxically, appropriates the world by giving herself to it. In this way, she is a true artist and her way of seeing and loving (the two, for her, are synonymous and Marcel clearly apprehends this fact) provide him with a permanent foundation for his own development as an artist. Long before he has discovered his vocation, the model of her aesthetic appreciation imprints upon his youthful consciousness.

> En le regardant (le clocher de Saint-Hilaire), suivant des yeux la douce tension, l'inclinaison fervente des pentes de pierre qui se rapprochaient en s'élevant comme mains jointes qui prient, elle s'unissait si bien à l'effusion de la flèche, que son regard semblait s'élancer avec elle; et en même temps elle souriait amicalement aux vielles pierres usées dont le couchant n'éclairait plus que le faîte et qui à partir du moment ou elles entraient dans cette zone ensoleillée, adoucies par la lumière, paraissaient tout d'un coup montées bien plus haut, lointaines, comme un chant repris 'en voix de tête' une octave au-dessus. (SW 81).

The romantic absorption depicted here, the intimate caress which the grandmother's eyes describe as they follow the worn old stones saturated with light, illustrate for Marcel the ideal relationship between subject and object based on complete trust and love. His grandmother is able, momentarily, to obliterate the dualism between self and world without threat to her own identity. While the full meaning of these emotional and visual recollections does not

become apparent to Marcel for many years, the pattern of these memories of his grandmother can be discerned throughout the novel in all-embracing images of light, longing and, occasionally, love. In a sense, every gaze Marcel encounters in the world is measured against this ideal.

B. The Magic Lantern: implications of reflected light

The all-embracing look of love Marcel discerns in his grandmother's gaze and the ideal radiant light reflected by her is counterpointed very early in the narrative by another image of reflected light but one which is, metaphorically, the antithesis of that wholeness. The magic lantern depicts the limitations of a single image perceived at a single moment in time. However, the same dream-like quality which informs his grandmother's experience of the steeples of Saint Hilarie (an experience clearly imprinted upon Marcel) is also implicit in Marcel's first experience of the composed artifact: the framed images of reflected light cast on his bedroom wall. The lantern's reflections establish for Marcel a basic epistemology which will come to govern a multitude of future perceptions. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that Marcel situates himself within the lantern in the opening of the novel (just as he situates himself emotionally in relation to his grandmother), and that all subsequent images of the

world partake of its structure; that is, all subsequent metaphors for knowledge are governed by the implied shape and capacities of the lantern's pane.

As a metaphor for the role of the imagination, the lantern substitutes "à l'opacité des murs d'impalpables irisations, de surnaturelles apparitions multicolores." Yet the window which reveals such mysteries is "vacillant et momentané" (SW 16), always threatening to remove the magical world it has created. The actual image reflected has the power to integrate and subordinate the physical reality of Marcel's room (the window curtains and door knob become part of Golo's landscape), yet at the same time, within each frame, the image is truncated (a castle is cut off short by the circumference of the frame). Thus the same image which enables Marcel to celebrate the power of the imagination, simultaneously engenders a sense of loss as he contemplates its precariousness, and anticipates its imminent disappearance.

The experience of the lantern therefore, in contrast to that of the grandmother's gaze, forces Marcel to recognize fundamental dangers implicit in the process of knowing: the fact that the perceiver can never see more than a fragment of the whole, that the image perceived will always be superimposed on a pre-existing reality which will inevitably alter the composition, and that the perceiver, therefore, can never

fully comprehend, control, subordinate or trust what he sees. Nonetheless, in that significant moment in which Marcel discovers the power of the imagination, he is launched on a project which will be wholly governed by the structure and implications of reflected light projected on a surface and contained within a composed frame.

Each visual composition in the novel will be compared to the ideal of that first framed image of light (the grandmother), only to be discovered as flawed--fleeting, evanescent, truncated, impenetrable as in the second image (the lantern). While Marcel constantly seeks to return to the comfort, wholeness and truth of his grandmother's unconditional light and love, he is forced instead to reexperience the harsh truth which the lantern projects. In the course of his development, through images of lighted windows and illuminated gazes, Marcel must move from a maternal world to a social world and later to the world of the artist where finally his desire for a complete, transcendent image, full of light and love can be gratified.

In his initial apprehension of the world, Marcel is placed in a position of struggle which he partly resolves by attempting to duplicate the control which the reflected pictures on his wall establish over reality. All dramatization in the novel may be said to occur visually. Just as the images of the lantern

reconstitute an original picture and subordinate elements of the "real" world to their lighted glow, Marcel struggles to impose his own interpretation on the images he selects. Both the lantern and the gaze would seem to define Marcel's epistemology as essentially Platonic, a fact which has been duly noted by critics (Deleuze 2), and which is suggestively reinforced by Marcel's apprehension of his room as "cavelike." However, as Marcel struggles not only to rediscover lost images of light and love but also to create them, the reader witnesses an early idealism redefining itself as a personal recreation of what is seen.

C. Shattered Light in the Gaze of Others: some instances

All of Marcel's early encounters with others stand in absolute contrast to his original experience of love, and the images of light which continue to function as a motif seem to ironize his original project as they substitute metallic harshness, abruptness, coldness, lifelessness, and impenetrability for the gaze of love. Light narrows to a pinpoint in Legrandin's eyes, Gilberte's sidelong glance mocks him, Charlus's gaze darts about like that of a spy or a criminal, Saint Loup's eyes are lifeless mirrors, Albertine's cheek teases with roseate depth but denies him contact or knowledge. In his encounters with others, Marcel seems to be constantly frustrated by the incapacity of the

image--his visual apprehension of another individual--to give of its essential self. What he discovers instead, figured in visual metaphors suggestive of opacity, lifelessness, hostility, is that every gaze which meets his own functions like a mirror; instead of permitting contact or intimacy, it sends the narrator back to himself, filling his consciousness with a frustrated sense of rejection.

The mirror quality of many studies of faces and gazes in A la recherche, the constant transparent boundary between self and other, sets up a conflict between surface and depth through which the drama of human relations unfolds. In all of his initial encounters, Marcel experiences the gaze of another as something which is simultaneously enticing and rejecting (and, in fact, the model of all-giving love will be seen at one stage as less than desirable precisely because the dramatic tension has been lost--La prisonnière). If the surface of the other is always hard, impenetrable, it teases with moments of iridescence which allow a glimpse of hidden depths. This suggestion of inner light will be the obsessive focus of Marcel's quest for both love and understanding.

1. The Oblique Gaze: Gilberte

All of Marcel's initial encounters with others are presented as voyeuristic compositions. The other is

always seen first from a distance, often from a private vantage point and always framed pictorially. In his earliest portraits, Marcel holds onto the illusion that he can make the picture stand still. His preparation for the composition is often elaborate as he establishes both a psychological and physical setting for the experience. In his first encounter with Gilberte, Marcel's emotional state almost overwhelms him. His morbidly anxious anticipation, his concern lest the forbidden encounter be prevented, his deliberate secretiveness as he hangs back from his father and grandfather--all of these conditions contribute to the framing and hence the autonomy of the subject. When the encounter finally takes place, he is incapable of any overt response, but his imagination is prepared for an aesthetic vision.

He discovers Gilberte almost as a miracle of vision, embowered in hawthorn (reminiscent of an earlier moment wherein he imagined the hawthorn flowers to be pure young girls and even isolated one in the center for special adoration). For an instant, she is completely still, returning his gaze in silence:

> La haie laissait voir à l'intérieur du parc une allée bordée de jasmins, de pensées et de verveines entre lesquelles des giroflées ouvraient leur bourse fraîche du rose odorant et passé d'un cuir ancien de Cordoue, tandis que sur le gravier un long tuyau d'arrosage peint en vert, déroulant ses circuits, dressait, aux points où il était percé, au-dessus des fleurs dont il imbibait les parfums, l'éventail vertical et prismatique de ses

> gouttelettes multicolores. Tout à coup, je m'arrêtai, je ne pus plus bouger, comme il arrive quand une vision ne s'adresse pas seulement à nos regards, mais requiert des perceptions plus profondes et dispose de notre être tout entier. Une fillette d'un blond roux, qui avait l'air de rentrer de promenade et tenait à la main une bèche de jardinage, nous regardait, levant son visage semé de taches roses. (SW 170)

Through the hedge of hawthorn, Marcel creates a frame for the portrait and, at the same time, holds the eye back from the center of the composition, forcing it to follow the alley, to note individual colors and the motion of the multicolored droplets sent up from the sprinkler. The perceiver's eye (Marcel's and, through it, the reader's) is held to these surface impressions and then dramatically released as he presents Gilberte at the center of the composition. This image of Gilberte, placed thus amid elaborate color and motion is immediately transformed by reflected light, by the impressionistic glow created by the flowers and duplicated in the fine spray of water which reflects them. Although Gilberte is presented dramatically as the center and climax of this composition, the incredible motion within the frame suggests a blending of figure into ground, especially since her "colors" imitate those of the flowers (her reddish blond hair, her face "semé de tâches roses"). Marcel's isolation of Gilberte, his ability to separate this figure from its ground, is, in a sense, an act of his own imagination, but he presents the entire composition as something

which seems to be happening to him. In this way he seduces the reader (along with himself) into believing that it is Gilberte who defines the meaning of the composition. At the moment that he apprehends Gilberte, Marcel experiences an emotion which he describes as taking hold of his entire being; yet the suggested depth in Gilberte's gaze, the potential for contact, is lost; she becomes opaque. Gilberte now seems to take over the composition, and Marcel becomes the surface upon which she imprints her image:

> Elle jeta en avant et de côté ses pupilles pour prendre connaissance de mon grand-père et de mon père, et sans doute l'idée qu'elle en rapporta fut celle que nous étions ridicules, car elle se detourna, et d'un air indifférent et dédaigneux, se plaça de côté pour épargner à son visage d'être dans leur champ visuel; et tandis que, continuant à marcher et ne l'ayant pas aperçue, ils m'avaieant dépassé, elle laissa ses regards filer de toute leur longeur dans ma direction, sans expression particulière, sans avoir l'air de me voir, mais avec une fixité et un sourire dissimulé que je ne pouvais interpréter d'après les notions que l'on m'avait données sur la bonne éducation que comme une preuve d'outrageant mépris (SW 171).

In this second portrait of Gilberte, the subject seems to play a more active, and dramatic role. The composition is a side view, a profile, less direct than the implied frontal view shaped by Marcel previously, and the meaning of her gaze is, appropriately, ambiguous. Suddenly, the portrait is filled with implications which are threatening: Gilberte's possible rejection of Marcel is understood as fact. Her gaze now

becomes elusive, mysterious, perhaps indifferent or disdainful. At first it appears that the dramatic tension is born of Marcel's impulse to control the picture which is denied by the subject's essential otherness, its refusal to be controlled. However, it is the narrator who has manipulated us into this perspective; in fact, it is not Gilberte who has the power to resist Marcel's control but Marcel who reads her gaze falsely. Much later we learn, through a confession of Gilberte's, that her intention was to indicate her attraction to Marcel rather than to express the infinite contempt which he perceives.

This early composition of Gilberte reveals significant patterns in Marcel's visualizing process and defines his epistemology as complex, often manipulative of the reader as well as himself. He presents himself initially as the composer who selects, frames and defines the contents of the picture; he then deliberately dramatizes his own subject, projects into it a life and a power to define itself over and against his will and rendering him impotent. In this way, Marcel is deflected off the surface of the image and returned to a kind of solitude, experiencing a sense of loss and disappointment as the picture, initially flooded with light (implicitly full of the same promise as the gaze of his grandmother), now withholds its essence from him. In fact, however, both the initial

composition and the second one are essentially Marcel's creations and the ontological struggle between what Marcel first pretends to see and what he "discovers" is a false drama. He finds himself returned to solitude not so much because of the "other" but because of the nature of his own vision. Only much later will he recognize not only his solipsism but also the possibilities within it for an aesthetic transformation of life into art.

2. Blinding Light: The Duchesse de Guermantes

If all pictures Marcel composes are initially flooded with real or metaphorical light, implicitly full of the same promise as the gaze of his grandmother, all are equally full of dramatic tension deriving from his urgent need to keep them whole, pure and radiant. Marcel's first portrait of the Duchesse de Guermantes is defined in terms of a dramatic struggle between "reality"--what is suddenly placed before his eyes-- and an idealization he already carries within himself, and, while he immediately recognizes that the error of perception lies within him--that it is his imagination which has led him always to picture Madame de Guermantes "avec les couleurs d'une tapisserie ou d'un vitrail, dans un autre siècle, d'une autre manière que le reste des personnes vivantes" (SW 209)--this recognition only strengthens his solipsistic resolve to set the Duchesse "hors du reste de l'humanité dans

laquelle la vue pure et simple de sons corps me l'avait fait un instant confondre" (SW 212).

In the portrait which he now creates of her, he subordinates her red face, the pimple on her nose (brutal details which mock his ideal), and appeals instead to his original vision to return her to its context. Although he acknowledges that the two images now struggle for primacy in his consciousness "comme deux disques séparés par un intervalle," (SW 210) he never gives in to the "real." Instead, he calls upon his imagination to reapply the layers of nobility and quasi-divinity which this encounter has momentarily stripped away:

> ...je m'écriais devant ce croquis volontairement incomplet" "Qu'elle est belle! Quelle noblesse! Comme c'est bien une fière Guermantes, la descendante de Genviève de Brabant, que j'ai devant moi!" Et l'attention avec laquelle j'éclairais son visage l'isolait tellement qu'aujourd'hui, si je repense à cette cérémonie, il m'est impossible de revoir une seule des personnes qui y assistaient sauf elle...(SW 212).

Marcel admits that the idealization he seeks to impose on the Duchess is not in the picture but in himself. It is essentially, therefore, by an act of will that he resolves the struggle initiated when he first encounters Madame de Guermantes: he withdraws her from the world, enclosing her once more in a mythic frame and restoring her divinity. Once he succeeds in isolating her, Marcel projects onto the Duchesse (as he did to Gilberte) the power to control the composition.

He now becomes a passive window upon which she reflects her divine light: "ses regards flanaient ça et là, montaient le long des piliers, s'arrêtaient même sur moi comme un rayon de soleil errant dans la nef, mais un rayon de soleil qui, au moment où je reçus sa caresse, me sembla conscient" (SW 211).

Now, seemingly able to duplicate Marcel's emotional experience of his grandmother's love, the Duchesse is figured metaphorically "assise comme une mère," benevolently bestowing her nourishing warmth, yet the ray is but a single ray, a fragment, and its process of selection is more random than deliberate--and, thus, the benevolence Marcel seeks is ironically undercut. Once again, if the subject is to have the power to transform his world, it is a power given to her by Marcel who has deliberately made of himself a canvas. Like the window of the church behind Madame de Guermantes, Marcel becomes the pane of the lantern now brought to light: "ce regard qu'elle avait laissé s'arrêter sur moi... bleu comme un rayon de soleil qui aurait traversé le vitrail de Gilbert le Mauvais" (SW 213) brings about the dramatic transformation Marcel has been struggling to experience--a love which has the power to fill his whole world (not just a fragment) with light:

> Ses yeux bleuissaient comme une pervenche impossible à cueillir et que pourtant elle m'eût dédiée; et le soleil, menacé par un nuage mais dardant encore de toute sa force

> sur la place et dans la sacristie, donnait une carnation de géranium aux tapis rouges qu'on y avait étendus par terre pour la solennité et sur lesquels s'avancait en souriant Mme de Guermantes, et ajoutait à leur lainage un velouté rose, un epiderme de lumière...(SW 213).

Although the Duchesse seems to be magically transforming the sacristy before Marcel's eyes, this radiant light is not the same as the gentle transforming gaze of Marcel's grandmother. The imagery through which this light is presented is far more threatening--the sun has just been menaced by a cloud; it darts forth with all its force--imagery which violently undercuts the purity and benevolence Marcel is struggling to impose on his portrait, and hinting that his understanding of the Duchesse remains incomplete. Thus Marcel's struggle to compose an ideal vision continues to be contradicted by the actual world.

Some years later, Madame de Guermantes appears again to Marcel in an almost identical frame: the unbridgeable distance between perceiver and subject is maintained. In this new setting, Marcel's gaze travels upwards to a theatre box instead of to a church window, but the Duchesse's descending gaze is duplicated. This time, the subject's own role in composing the picture is even more strongly emphasized. If Marcel briefly notes her complicity in posing for the first portrait ("le doux étonnement de ses yeux auxquels elle avait ajouté...un sourire un peu timide," (GUER I 62)), the

calculation of the Duchesse in the second ("une douceur inconnue due à la feinte et souriante confusion" (GUER I 62)), as she enters the theatre box in the middle of Berma's performance, staging her own piece of theatre, dominates the entire composition and renders her character complex and calculating. While Marcel perceives all of these things, he continues to ignore the darker implications, focusing instead on her power to transform her surroundings:

> Je ressentais, mais ne pouvais déchiffrer le mystère de ce regard souriant qu'elle adressait à ses amis, dans l'éclat bleuté dont il brillait tandis qu'elle abandonnait sa main aux uns et aux autres, et qui, si j'eusse pu en décomposer le prisme, en analyser les cristallisations, m'eût peut-être révelé l'essence de la vie inconnue qu'y apparaissait à ce moment-là. (GUER I 62).

If the light from her gaze is brilliant, it is also blinding. It is as if Marcel's unconscious, working through the metaphor, confronts what his conscious mind ignores: the hard surface of the Duchesse reflects light but denies understanding. Marcel imagines himself reaching its essence in an equally violent metaphor of breaking up the prism into its crystalline components. Light in this portrait undergoes a kind of moral transformation: instead of representing benevolent love, it represents the power to annihilate. Although the Duchesse is enveloped in white chiffon, although her gaze creates a light which dazzles, the metaphor of the prism and its crystals betrays the

essential hardness of the Duchess with whom Marcel can only enter into contact by destroying. Extending the metaphor by imagining himself among the coarse substance which surrounds this pure crystal, he once again imagines himself struck by a shard of light: a ray illuminates the impassive current of the Duchesse's eyes and "la duchesse, de déesse devenue femme et me semblant tout d'un coup mille fois plus belle, leva vers moi la main gantée de blanc qu'elle tenait appuyée sur le rebord de la loge, l'agita en signe d'amitié" (GUER I 68).

Although the ray which descends to him momentarily humanizes the Duchesse, Marcel's perceptions never come to rest comfortably, but, instead, the counterpoint between peace and violence, between a harmonious glow and shattering light is once again reenacted: the gaze of the Duchesse ignites that of her sister, the Princesse, who now showers Marcel with "l'averse étincelante et céleste de son sourire" (GUER I 68). Light, previously emblematic of love, has undergone a series of transformations in relation to the Guermantes. In this last scene, it is defined in dramatic Olympian imagery as that which expresses the power of the gods (or Guermantes) not to love but to destroy. In a sense, Marcel has created a mythical monster. The Duchesse holds his attention but she is also increasingly dehumanized; the light imagery reverses

the original meaning of the gaze. He cannot enter into a relationship with these creatures, for to look openly upon them would be to become blind. Everything about Marcel's pictorial composition of the Duchesse underscores the unbridgeable gap between perceiver and object, between human and divine. At the same time, Marcel's imagery is in constant dramatic tension with his will: it betrays what his conscious composing denies--that the gaze of the Duchesse is not a gaze of love but a blinding reflection, the projection of a crystal whose hard surface denies him its inner life and conceals its real nature.

3. The Gaze of Apollo: Saint-Loup

Throughout the first half of _A la recherche_ especially, Marcel seems to be exploring the implications of different perspectives on a visual subject. While initially his position is always that of the unobserved observer, it is not until he composes his first portrait of Saint-Loup that he experiments with the possibility of remaining unobserved. The act of remaining hidden has profound implications for the dramatization of his subject.

Although in all of Marcel's compositions, the subject seems suddenly to spring up before him, it is also evident that this spontaneous appearance is a piece of dramatic artifice, for, in each case, not only psychological but often elaborate physical or visual

preparations have been made. This is especially true for the portrait of Saint-Loup. Marcel has been eagerly awaiting this friendship, and there exists in his consciousness a highly idealized conception of the Marquis. Marcel's visual preparation for the portrait is elaborate, as it was for the Duchess. As he stands in the dining room of the hotel at Balbec, the window of the hotel provides a complete frame which Saint-Loup now enters, filling Marcel's composition with light.

> Une après-midi de grande chaleur, j'étais dans la salle à manger de l'hôtel qu'on avait laissée à demi dans l'obscurité pour la protéger du soleil en tirant des rideaux qu'il jaunissait et qui par leurs interstices laissaient clignoter le bleu de la mer, quand, dans la travée centrale qui allait de la plage à la route, je vis, grand, mince, le cou dégagé, la tête haute et fièrement portée, passer un jeune homme aux yeux pénétrants et dont la peau était aussi blonde et les cheveux aussi dorés que s'ils avaient absorbé tous les rayons du soleil. Vêtu d'une étoffe souple et blanchâtre comme je n'aurais jamais cru qu'un homme eût osé en porter, et dont la minceur n'évoquait pas moins que le frais de la salle à manger, la chaleur et le beau temps du dehors, il marchait vite. Ses yeux, de l'un desquels tombait à tout moment un monocle, étaient de la couleur de la mer. (JF 366)

The room from which Marcel watches Saint-Loup functions as a kind of camera obscura; the gaps between the curtains through which he peeps surround the eye of his camera. If all is dark and cool within the hotel, everything without is overwhelmed with light. Saint-Loup is surrounded by light and even seems to be composed of light: the sun gilds the curtains as well as

the sea, and Saint Loup's hair and white suit have similarly absorbed its rays. As in the portrait of Gilberte, Marcel composes first the setting, holding the eye back from the center of the composition, then releasing it dramatically. Repeated use of periodic sentence structure duplicates the movement from surface to center, from Saint Loup's attire to his action. Dressed in shimmering white, he approaches Marcel like Apollo descending from another world: "Il semblait que la qualité si particulière de ses cheveux, de ses yeux, de sa peau, de sa tournure, qui l'eussent distingué au milieu d'une foule comme un filon précieux d'opale azurée et lumineuse, engainé dans une matière grossière, devait correspondre à une vie différente de celle des autres hommes." (JF 367)

If "light" is used to deify the Guermantes family, it also continues to be a light which teases Marcel with its iridescent reflective surface: it is hard, cold, and insists on these creatures' eternal separation from him. But within his darkroom, Marcel is afforded a new luxury. Remaining completely hidden, he watches his subject approach and experiences an intimacy absent from previous portraits. Despite his privacy, his low viewpoint, defined by the fact that Saint-Loup becomes the figure in the foreground and by the visually detailed description of him, creates the illusion that Marcel can enter the frame of the pic-

ture. This intense but secret proximity places Marcel in a unique relationship to his subject: he is simultaneously in the picture and outside it. It is as if he had momentarily overcome the distance between self and other by an act of composition. He permits himself to experience Saint Loup's person at such close range that he almost touches him. Thus Marcel experiences the gaze of another without risk, and he can enjoy his own idealized creation without threat it its integrity which the moment of actual contact so often brings. Saint-Loup is entirely his creation.

It remains true that Marcel cannot protect his vision from reality once he has left his private darkroom; in fact, the initial meeting between Marcel and Saint Loup immediately betrays the loss of luminosity with which Marcel has endowed his subject. In shocking dramatic contrast to the searching expression, the vivacity and lightness which fills Marcel's private version of Saint Loup's gaze, the real Saint-Loup who is finally introduced to him is mechanical and lifeless. His gaze offers neither the ironic opacity of Gilberte's nor the mystery of the Duchess of Guermantes; it is empty, blank, dead:

> Il sembla ne pas entendre qu'on lui nommait quelqu'un, aucun muscle de son visage ne bougea; ses yeux, où ne brilla pas la plus faible lueur de sympathie humaine, montrèrent seulement dans l'insensibilité, dans l'inanité du regard, une exagération à défaut de laquelle rien ne les eût différenciés de miroirs sans vie. (JF 369)

Surprisingly, Marcel's relationship with Saint-Loup, turns out to be more fulfilling than almost any other friendship in the novel; however, the actual drama of the friendship is relegated to a kind of parenthetical action, full of none of the intensity of the initial composition which precedes it. In a sense the real drama for Marcel remains that of his private composition. As he himself confesses, he does not truly appreciate Saint-Loup's company as much as he does the image created in his own darkroom, a private picture which he can enjoy and shape on his own terms: "je n'éprouvais à me trouver, a causer avec lui...rien de ce bonheur qu'il m'était au contraire possible de ressentir quand j'étais sans compagnon" (JF 375). For him, that is time actually wasted; the feeling it gives him is the opposite of the pleasure that is natural to him, "l'opposé du plaisir d'avoir extrait de moi-même et amené à la lumière quelque chose qui y était caché dans la pénombre" (JF 375). In his private portrait, Marcel has brought forth Saint Loup from his own inner darkness, and this composition is the paradigm for an essential imaginative activity which, for him, is the true "drama" of life, more meaningful than any actual encounter.

3. The Shimmering Collective Gaze: "les jeunes filles en fleurs"

In his studies of "les jeunes filles en fleurs, Marcel adopts radically new visual techniques and departs from the relatively static pictorialism which dominates his portraits of Gilberte, Madame de Guermantes and even Saint-Loup. Although in these earlier compositions there is a subtle progression from static to dynamic as the subject within the frame is visually dramatized (beginning with the "threat" of Gilberte's gaze, perceived again in the violent light imagery surrounding Madame de Guermantes and culminating in Saint-Loup's blinding descent towards Marcel), the frame is never abandoned and the distance between subject and perceiver is never truly overcome.

In his first studies of the young girls at Balbec, Marcel alters the nature of the frame and the subject within. Some of these new techniques are anticipated in earlier compositions: the blurring of the figure-ground relationship is already suggested in the portrait of Gilberte, and the aura of intense light which fills the frame is present in the studies of both the Duchesse and Saint-Loup. But in this new collective portrait, it is as if Marcel wants to test the boundaries of pictorial space and expand the possibilities of composition: the frame has been dissolved and the confusion between figure and ground remains almost constant, yet the picture retains its unity, a unity based, once again on the use of light. In fact,

light itself becomes the picture's essential frame: Marcel first identifies the group of young girls as "une tâche singulière" and every detail of his composition emphasizes the fundamental harmony of color and light:

> ...je les voyais depuis si peu d'instants et sans oser les regarder fixement que je n'avais encore individualisé aucune d'elles...elles ne m'étaient connues, l'une que par une paire d'yeux durs, butés et rieurs; une autre que par des joues où le rose avait cette teinte cuivrée qui évoque l'idée de géranium; et même ces traits, je n'avais encore indissolublement attaché aucun d'entre eux à l'une des jeunes filles plutôt qu'à l'autre; et quand...je voyais émerger un ovale blanc, des yeux noirs, des yeux verts, je ne savais pas si c'était les mêmes qui m'avaient déjà apporté du charme tout à l'heure, je ne pouvais pas les rapporter à telle jeune fille que j'eusse séparée des autres et reconnue. Et cette absence, dans ma vision, des démarcations que j'établirais bientôt entres elles, propageait à travers leur groupe un flottement harmonieux, la translation continue d'une beauté fluide, collective et mobile. (JF 439)

While their fluid motion prevents Marcel from differentiating among them, the light-filled "flottement harmonieux" which shapes and defines these girls establishes a mobile frame for his study. As the little band moves toward him, it alternates between momentary clarification and dissolution. Marcel identifies "une pair d'yeux durs, butés et rieurs," yet this feature, reminiscent of Gilberte's mocking gaze, is not attached to a particular individual and is not yet directed at Marcel. The constant blurring of the figure-ground relationship is quite different in pur-

pose from that attempted in the study of Gilberte. Here, Marcel makes no effort to isolate an individual from the group but, rather, is content to allow details to suggest themselves to him momentarily and then dissolve. In fact, he is now moving in the opposite direction from that suggested in earlier studies, away from clarification of the subject: the first portrait closes with an emphasis on the group's return to a kind of primordial unity. For Marcel, this overall unity of effect constitutes a new kind of picture.

These first studies of Albertine and her friends capture the flow of the subject as its changes are imprinted on Marcel's vision. The technique clearly imitates that of the Impressionists and reminds the reader of Monet's transformation of the picture space, in which internal elements are all "integrated into sequences of colours and tones which make no special focus on one element at the expense of any other (House 80). Monet's goal was to be able to create "figures in the open air... treated like landscapes (House 81). Marcel, in his study of young girls in a seascape, similarly harmonizes the visual details of his subject. He identifies these girls first as points of interest which help define the horizon: "ces jeunes filles qui interrompaient en ce moment devant moi la ligne du flot de leur haie légère" (JF 449). These light touches of color are then subordinated to a larger and more

unified image of the seascape itself, all light and harmony. The girls proceed like a "lumineuse comète"; only the constant use of light establishes their visual shape; only the image, "ces jeunes fleurs qui interrompaient en ce moment devant moi la ligne du flot de leur haie légère" (JF 449) gives the picture a horizon line. Although Marcel momentarily identifies specific features, they are charmingly interchangeable and constantly returning to a flux which contains its own exclusive atmosphere, "harmonieuse comme une même ombre chaude, une même atmosphère, faisant d'eux un tout aussi homogène en ses parties qu'il était différent de la foule au milieu de laquelle se déroulait lentement leur cortège" (JF 443).

Despite this new emphasis on the unity of the entire subject, the tension between Marcel's longing to enjoy its warmth and the essential coldness of that subject persists. The very unity of the little band establishes its mystery, its inaccessibility and its inhumanity. When Marcel contemplates the beauty of these young girls, he idealizes them just as he does the Guermantes, and, simultaneously, distances them irrevocably from himself: "Et n'était-ce pas de nobles et calmes modeles de beauté humaine que je voyais là, devant la mer, comme des statues exposées au soleil sur un rivage de la Grèce?" (JF 440). In this momentarily idealized image, Marcel stills the life within them;

however, it is a life which escapes and asserts itself against his composing. As the girls become more individualized, the harshness of their natures stands in contrast to the mobile harmony he has previously discerned (or created): "une fille aux yeux brillants, rieurs" employs the language of the gutter; another looks at him with an insistent stare. "Seascape with girls" now gives way to a single dramatic moment in which Marcel registers their indifference, their contempt for those around them. In a brief tableau, one of the girls leaps from the bandstand platform over the head of an old man, shouting, to the amusement of her friends, "il a l'air à moitié crevé." The girls' indifference to those around them confirms their total self-containment, the fact of an identity which does not refer to anything outside itself; the mood of this new composition is harsh and cruel, the opposite of the semi-divine image previously created. Thus Marcel's portrait may be seen as containing within itself a dramatic tension based on an opposition between the ideal and the real.

5. Discovering a Subject in Time: Albertine

It is the gaze of Albertine which finally shatters the mobile frame Marcel has composed for the little band the fragile equilibrium established by this series of studies:

> Un instant, tandis que je passais à côté de la brune aux grosses joues qui poussait une

> bicyclette, je croisai ses regards obliques et rieurs, dirigés du fond de ce monde inhumain qui enfermait la vie de cette petite tribu inaccessible inconnu où l'idée de ce que j'étais ne pouvait certainement ni parvenir ni trouver place. Tout occupée à ce que disaient ces camarades, cette jeune fille coiffée d'un polo que descendait très bas sur son front, m'avait-elle vu au moment où le rayon noir émané de ses yeux m'avait rencontré? Si elle m'avait vu, qu'avais-je pu lui représenter? Du sein du quel univers me distinguait-elle? (JF 443-4)

Instead of the assurance that the gaze reflects warmth, Marcel seems to return to his earlier, more narcissistic anxiety (what does he represent to them?), yet his reaction does not completely duplicate the despair which governed his apprehension of Gilberte. He does not even assume immediately that Albertine has seen him. Rather, the entire picture is suspended, unable to complete itself, opening itself in a series of unanswered questions. Then, instead of continuing to read from the picture to himself, Marcel tries to read into her gaze, tries to imagine the depth of her universe. "Le rayon noir" emanating from her eyes establishes for the first time a communicative passage through which he projects himself into the picture. Yet he immediately discovers that to apprehend her mysterious universe, the life to which she belongs, he must project himself not only into the picture plane, but, simultaneously, into time:

> Si nous pensions que les yeux d'une telle fille ne sont qu'une brillante rondelle de mica, nous ne serions pas avides de connaître et d'unir à nous sa vie. Mais nous sentons

> que ce qui luit dans ce disque réfléchissant n'est pas dû uniquement à sa composition matérielle; que ce sont, inconnues de nous, les noires ombres des idées que cet être se fait, relativement aux gens et aux lieux qu'il connaît--pelouses des hippodromes, sable des chemins ou, pédalant à travers champs et bois, m'eût entrainé cette petite péri, plus séduisante pour moi que celle du paradis persan--les ombres aussi de la maison où elle va rentrer, des projets qu'elle forme ou qu'on a formés pour elle; et surtout que c'est elle, avec ses désirs, ses sympathies, ses répulsions, son obscure et incessante volonté. Je savais que je ne posséderais pas cette jeune cycliste, si je ne possédais aussi ce qu'il y avait dans ses yeux. Et c'était par conséquent toute sa vie qui'inspirait du désir; désir douloureux, parce que je le sentais irréalisable, mais enivrant, parce que ce qui avait été jusque-là ma vie ayant brusquement cessé d'être ma vie totale, n'étant plus qu'une petite partie de l'éspace étendu devant moi que je brûlais de couvrir, et qui était fait de la vie de ces jeunes filles, m'offrait ce prolongement, cette multiplication possible de soi-même, qui est le bonheur. (_JF_ 444).

The portrait of Albertine, focused by her gaze, now offers a portal into time. When he imagines the life of Albertine, Marcel repeats the blurring of the figure-ground relationship employed in his first portrait of Gilberte, but now time and imagination enter the picture. Marcel imagines a series of events in the life of Albertine which he can never hope to share. He longs to enter the plane of Albertine's private consciousness, "ses désirs, ses sympathies, ses répulsions, son obscure et incessante volonté," and the door to this private self continues to be her eyes. Characteristically, he sees into Albertine only for a moment, as if a ray of light had penetrated her dark-

ness. But the illumination is only momentary and Albertine remains, finally, mysterious. The passage is a poignant meditation on the irretrievable otherness of Albertine and the existential loneliness it engenders. Marcel's composing becomes an all-encompassing metaphor for his struggle to achieve the impossible, to overcome the distance between self and other. His stance as an artist is an expression of his requirement that the subject subordinate itself entirely to his imagination and control. However, unlike his grandmother, all others in the world have an identity and a will of their own, an "incessante volonté" which defines the light in their eyes as something untameable: they will not submit to his vision.

Nonetheless, a progression is discernible in Marcel's composing. He becomes more willing to let the picture define itself to him and even to experience the pain of separateness. This "letting go" can be seen in changing pictorial techniques observable in this series of portraits. His need to control the picture is strongest early on as in the composition of Gilberte, elaborately framed, stilled and firmly interpreted. With the Duchess, Marcel begins to let go by allowing himself to become a canvas, to receive her ray of light, even though his inner consciousness experiences the threat of annihilation. Still seeking to protect himself, yet determined to gain a more intimate knowl-

edge of his subject, Marcel creates a private darkroom in which to study Saint-Loup. Although his privacy protects him, he achieves a new intimacy with his subject as he seems to enter the frame of the picture. In the series of compositions of "les jeunes filles," Marcel moves into the open air and into a new, more fluid, rhythmic relation to his subject, thus preserving the freedom and spontaneity of the sketch yet capturing the true movement of the subject. Although Marcel develops new, more varied pictorial techniques and ceases, to a degree, to impose a personal interpretation, he never ceases to regard his subject as a picture in space and time.

All of Marcel's relationships document his desire for control. It is Marcel's gaze, therefore, rather than the gaze of others, which is the real dramatic subject. No matter where he travels, psychologically, Marcel never leaves his room, never abandons the selective process by which the lantern's pane defines its subject. It is a metaphor for his commitment to dream and imagination over reality. When Marcel is able to transform the image by filling it with light, giving himself over to it rather than demanding its subordination (as he has seen his grandmother do), he breaks the boundaries created by a single frame and the limitations of solipsism which his earlier stance implies. When this happens he discovers a way of seeing which transforms the ordinary and redefines life as art.

Chapter 10

Entering the Frame: Marcel's Control of the Image

If Marcel's first encounters with a pictorial subject are presented as carefully positioned framed images, with a distant or proximate but clearly defined perspective outside the picture frame, his encounters with "les jeunes filles en fleurs," and, in particular, with Albertine, signal important changes in his apprehension of the subject. In the early stages of his development as an artist, Marcel struggles to shape, frame, and still the picture; however, when light intervenes and threatens to dissolve the composition, instead of resisting this fact, Marcel allows its surface to speak to him, to compose itself, thus seeming to become a receptor. As he regards these young girls, gone for the moment is the anxiety and disappointment that attended earlier, more composed and controlled portraits. He imagines that they are composing themselves for him and is content to enjoy their fluid shape as it resolves momentarily into individual elements and then returns again to itself, to an amorphous whole surrounded by light.

In this series of impressionistic seascapes, Marcel is much more focused on the surface elements of the composition. Textures, colors and fluid motion are all dramatized; it is as though light itself now takes over

the creation of the picture, defining its mobility and significance, and endowing a spatial subject with a temporal aspect through its motion. The surface of Marcel's canvas, just as Monet's does, now "becomes integral to the conception of the picture" (House 54); that is, visual tensions in the described picture become dramatic tensions. Correspondingly, Marcel's struggle for relationship shifts even more from the plane of action or "reality" to the picture plane. The elements of the subject are defined pictorially: it is composed of light, color, texture and motion. But Marcel continues in his efforts to enter the frame of the canvas itself. His studies of young girls now give way to a series of portraits of Albertine, and Marcel struggles to possess her without altering the nature of the picture. If he is momentarily successful in achieving this union by entering a frame he has composed, the experience alerts him to new dangers. As much as he feels he has managed to surround Albertine spatially, he discovers to his dismay that the framed image does not contain the temporal aspect of her identity he longs for: her personal history will always elude his composing. Repeatedly, he struggles to return Albertine to her full historical context by imposing his memories of her on the composed image. These memories create a kind of visual bridge (conceived technically as a stereoscope and reminding the reader

again of the lantern's projecting ray) which enables Marcel to see his subject both in its present space and, looking down the imagined beam, containing all its history. He hopes that, miraculously, his achieved vision will be a composition whose entire context, both temporal and spatial, will be present.

The drama of Marcel's struggle derives in part from the creative energy he summons in order to resolve a seemingly impossible problem, not only to enter into a relationship with an alien substance, but to do so without altering its essential nature. On a more subtle level, however, his efforts dramatize his own confusion about things he cannot yet acknowledge. At this point he cannot acknowledge, for example, that his entire project has been generated, not out of a noble pursuit of a vocation he has not yet discovered, but simply to protect himself from the suffering love entails by consistently transforming Albertine into an aesthetic ideal. Yet the consequences are unsatisfactory; he cannot enjoy an Albertine who has been transformed into the stuff of a canvas. Ultimately, however, this is a highly significant moment in Marcel's development, for as he defines love in terms of an aesthetic ideal of beauty, and as he defines beauty according to values projected from his own imagination, he begins to assume a stance which will enable him to define his own vocation as an artist.

A. Entering the Setting: "je pourrais un jour prendre place entre elles"

If, for Marcel, the first stage of letting the picture "be" is to allow the figure-ground to blur, to allow the subject to define itself to him in its fluid motion, there follows, in immediate counterpoint, what seems to be a throwback to his earlier controlling impulse, a moment when Marcel seeks to hold the subject still. Now, however, when he arrests the motion of the young girls he has been studying, a new event takes place. For the first time, he contemplates the possibility of projecting himself into the frame. Even though he knows this is literally impossible, once the idea has been conceived, it becomes a guiding impulse and announces a new way of understanding and shaping the picture.

> ...que ses yeux, dont les regards inconnus me frappaient parfois en jouant sur moi sans le savoir comme un effet de soleil sur un mur, pourraient jamais par une alchimie miraculeuse laisser transpénétrer entre leurs parcelles ineffables l'idée de mon existence, quelque amitié pour ma personne, que moi-même je pourrais un jour prendre place entre elles, dans la théorie qu'elles déroulaient le long de la mer, --cette supposition me paraissait enfermer en elle une contradiction aussi insoluble que si, devant quelque frise attique ou quelque fresque figurant un cortège, j'avais cru possible, moi spectateur, de prendre place, aimé d'elles, entre les divines processionnaires. (<u>JF</u> 445-6).

As in previous portraits of individuals, here, the moment the subject is defined, Marcel seems to give it

the power to control him. In their indifference to him, the girls play with him without knowing it; their gazes glance off him like sunlight reflecting off a wall. Their otherness, like that of Gilberte, is threatening in its indifference to him. They are composed of a substance which is inimical to his nature; it is the material of art, not life. The frieze or fresco to which they belong presents a hard inaccessible surface; yet, for Marcel, this is precisely what makes them valuable. His quest now becomes more clearly defined, more sharply focused--he must overcome this distance and enter into their world.

In the course of his relations with these young girls Marcel does establish contact with Albertine, foremost member of the little band, and, what has been conceived visually as wholly impossible takes place in the most simple and natural of encounters but one which is, for him, magical. He meets Albertine and strolls with her along the edge of the sea. What makes this simple encounter so miraculous is Marcel's persistent glossing of an ordinary moment so that, in his private dramatization, it is not simply the act of meeting a young girl at the seaside but the dramatization of his entry into a preconceived picture frame. The imagery used to describe this meeting continues to suggest a physiological blending of inimical particles, a contradiction by which Marcel enters the texture and sur-

face of a tableau or a seascape. He now views himself from outside the frame and at the same time comments upon himself as a subject within it: "Nous formions, ce matin-là, un de ces couples que piquent ça et là la digue de leur conjonction, de leur arrêt, juste le temps d'échanger quelques paroles avant de se désunir pour reprendre séparément chacun sa promenade divergente.." (JF 541). Moments later, Marcel sees Albertine's friends approaching them and imagines them to be part of a pictorial entity which will surround him and thus complete the setting, framing the composition of himself and Albertine in this seascape:

> A ce moment, comme pour que devant la mer se multipliât en liberté, dans la variété de ses formes, tout le riche ensemble décoratif qu'était le beau déroulement des vierges, à la fois dorées et roses, cuites par le soleil et par le vent, les amies d'Albertine, aux belles jambes, à la taille souple, mais si différentes les unes des autres, montrèrent leur groupe qui se développa, s'avança dans notre direction, plus près de la mer, sur une ligne parallèle. (JF 542)

Although Marcel wants the picture to complete itself, hoping they might all walk together, Albertine waves to her friends without allowing this closure to take place. Nonetheless this "riche ensemble" of girls is highly decorative; it creates a kind of visual border against the sea as it fills Marcel's picture with its colors of pink and gold. The decorative play keeps visual attention focused on the surface of the painting, reinforcing once again Marcel's paradoxical rela-

tionship with a flat but intensely immediate picture space. Thus what cannot take place in "reality" is made to occur pictorially: they do become part of his picture and the achieved composition becomes, for Marcel, a kind of visual dramatization of their relationship.

B. Narrowing the Frame: Albertine in her room

Marcel now begins to isolate Albertine as his primary subject, but he continues to discover her, concretely, in fragments, piecing together parts of her face, always primarily aware of the materials of which she is made. In each moment of encounter, he defines his growing intimacy with her not as a living relationship but as a sensory encounter with her separate components, gradually identifying the colors and textures which will enable him to create a coherent whole. He examines her cheeks, her hair, as if he is touching the surface of a painting, and the intense proximity which the sensory detail suggests is in tension with a consistent, distancing pictorial flatness: "Je regardais les joues d'Albertine pendant qu'elle me parlait et je me demandais quel parfum, quel goût elles pouvaient avoir: ce jour-là elle était non pas fraîche, mais lisse, d'un rose uni, violacé, crémeux, comme certaines roses qui ont un vernis de cire. J'étais passionné pour elles comme on l'est parfois pour une espèce de

fleurs" (JF 554).

Marcel finally succeeds in meeting Albertine, not in the open air, but, at her suggestion, in the privacy of her room. He has thus "removed" her from her original setting and created a new setting for her, one which will enable him to focus more exclusively on her person. As much as he longs for the actual moment of contact, the drama of this encounter is still filtered through a pictorial lens. The actual moment when he discovers himself kissing Albertine, interrupted because she pulls the bell, is one in which Marcel appears awkward, comic, a little sad and foolish, not only because it is in itself absurd but also because of the tension between the experience of kissing a real person and the fact that Marcel cannot cease to regard her as composed of textures which belong, not to the world, but to the palette and canvas of the artist.

> Je trouvai Albertine dans son lit. Dégageant son cou, sa chemise blanche changeait les proportions de son visage qui, congestioné par le lit ou le rhume, ou le dîner, semblait plus rose; je pensai aux couleurs que j'avais eues quelques heures auparavant à côté de moi, sur la digue, et desquelles j'allais enfin savoir le goût; sa joue était traversée de haut en bas par une de ses longues tresses noires et bouclées que pour me plaire elle avait défaites entièrement. Elle me regardait en souriant. A côté d'elle, dans la fenêtre, la valée était éclairée par le clair de lune. La vue du cou nu d'Albertine, de ces joues trop roses, m'avait jeté dans une telle ivresse...que cette vue avait rompu l'équilibre entre la vie immense, indestructible qui roulait dans mon être, et la vie de l'univers, si chétive en comparaison....le visage rond d'Albertine,

> éclairé d'un feu intérieur comme par une veilleuse, prenant pour moi un tel relief qu'imitant la rotation d'une sphère ardente, il me semblait tourner, telles ces figures de Michel-Ange qu'emporte un immobile et vertigineux tourbillon. J'allais savoir l'odeur, le goût, qu'avait ce fruit rose inconnu. (JF 606-07)

There is tremendous tension in this scene between Albertine's proximity and the fragile uncertainty of the image: "la rotation d'une sphère ardente" once again suggests the lantern's capricious and transient light. In fact, throughout the passage, the light and the rose color in Albertine's face warn Marcel that the anticipated moment of gratification will not take place. He discovers that Albertine carries the rose color of the beach within her, though somewhat deepened in the artificial light, and he sees that he cannot fully detach her from the background setting seen through the window; thus the scene is dramatically focused once again, through Marcel's consciousness of her "otherness" ("ce rose inconnu"). The imminent possibility of kissing her and thus entering her frame is nonetheless overwhelming; Marcel's equilibrium is completely lost and the imagery is violent: he feels immensely powerful yet simultaneously threatened:

> Et tout ce que la nature eût pu m'apporter de vie m'eût semblé bien mince, les souffles de la mer m'eussent paru bien courts pour l'immense aspiration qui soulevait ma poitrine. Je me penchai vers Albertine pour l'embrasser. La mort eût dû me frapper en ce moment que cela m'eût paru indifférent ou plutôt impossible, car la vie n'était pas hors de moi, elle était en moi. (JF 606)

In this moment in which reality threatens to collide with Marcel's imagination he apprehends that to enter her world may be to die. It seems appropriate, therefore, that the moment never truly completes itself; it is interrupted, truncated. The slide of the lantern, momentarily in place, figured in the inner flame which glows in Albertine's round face, is swept away the moment she rings the bell and returns Marcel from the "vertigineux tourbillon" and sends him back to a reality which does not include her.

Throughout this scene, Marcel creates an elaborate metaphor in which he imagines himself to be struggling not only with his own anxiety but with the entire universe. The tension he feels during these moments of anticipation actually translates itself into the picture plane. More powerful than previous images of appropriation and more dramatically effective than images in which he enters the frame as a passive receptor, Marcel swells to almost godlike proportions as he denies the vastness of the universe ("je jetais dédaigneusement dans un coin, ciel, mer et falaise" (JF 607) descends upon Albertine and, literally, makes a space for himself within the picture frame. In this moment he claims that the world is only a small part of his canvas: "Je n'étais pas perdu en lui, puisque c'était lui qui était enclos en moi" (JF 607). The consequences, of course, are disastrous. In his exclusive

obsession with his own picture- making, Marcel has ignored Albertine's resistance, and, as in an earlier scene during a game of ferret when he deliberately misreads her gaze, he flings himself upon her in total disregard of her autonomy, treating her wholly as his canvas, his own creation.

As if the dramatic power of this moment of encounter had exhausted his powers, Marcel returns to a safer distance, reassuming the stance of the voyeur, a position which offers him more protection, and, more important, the contemplative calm which will enable him to create a less tumultuous, more artfully composed portrait. Marcel's compositions are not limited to those deriving from immediate encounters. Toward the end of _A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs_, he becomes increasingly interested in the kind of composing which memory can assist, drawing from his inner darkroom multiple, yet distinct pictures of Albertine. In a composite study of Albertine's character, Marcel's emotional relationship with her is described wholly in relation to the textures and hues of her face:

> Certains jours, mince, le teint gris, l'air maussade, une transparence violette descendant obliquement au fond de ses yeux comme il arrive quelquefois pour la mer, elle semblait éprouver une tristesse d'exilée. D'autres jours, sa figure plus lisse engluait les désirs à sa surface vernie et les empêchait d'aller au delà; à moins que je ne la visse tout à coup de côté, car ses joues mates comme une blanche cire à la surface étaient roses par transparence, ce qui donnait tellement envie de les embrasser, d'atteindre ce

> teint différent qui se dérobait. D'autres fois, le bonheur baignait ces joues d'une clarté si mobile que la peau, devenue fluide et vague, laissait passer comme des regards sous-jacent qui la faisaient paraître d'une autre couleur, mais non d'une autre manière, que les yeux; quelquefois, sans y penser, quand on regardait sa figure ponctuée de petits points bruns et où flottaient seulement deux taches plus bleues, c'était comme on eût fait d'un oeuf de chardonneret, souvent comme d'une agate opaline travaillée et polie à deux places seulement où, au milieu de la pierre brune, luisaient, comme les ailes transparentes d'un papillon d'azur, les yeux où la chair devient miroir et nous donne l'illusion de nous laisser, plus qu'en les autres parties du corps, approcher de l'âme. Mais le plus souvent aussi elle était plus colorée, et alors plus animée; quelquefois seul était rose, dans sa figure blanche, le bout de son nez, fin comme celui d'une petite chatte sournoise avec qui l'on aurait eu envie de jouer; quelquefois ses joues étaient si lisses que le regard glissait comme sur celui d'une miniature sur leur émail rose, que faisait encore paraître plus délicat, plus intérieur, le couvercle entr'ouvert et superposé de ses cheveux noirs; il arrivait que le teint de ses joues atteignit le rose violacé du cyclamen, et parfois même, quand elle était congestionée ou fièvreuse, et donnant alors l'idée d'une complexion maladive qui rabaissait mon désir à queleque chose de plus sensuel et faisait exprimer à son regard quelque chose de plus pervers et du plus malsain, la sombre pourpre de certaines roses d'un rouge presque noir; et chacune de ces Albertine était différente, comme est différente chacune des apparitions de la danseuse dont sont transmutées les couleurs, la forme, le caractère, selon les jeux innombrablement variés d'un projecteur lumineux. (<u>JF</u> 621-3)

Marcel is infinitely more comfortable creating a composition which derives from memories rather than from a dramatic encounter, a comfort which is apparent in the unity and coherence of this picture. In creating this composite portrait of Albertine seen according

to different "lights," he is able to explore her nature as one which is composed of utter and complete contrasts, even contradictions. The portrait describes Marcel's discovery of a series of moods in Albertine's face, moving from the spiritual to the innocent to the carnal. Albertine is first seen in liturgical violet, spiritually remote, feeling "une tristesse d'exilée"; then, she is animated and kittenish in child-like innocent pink against white; a little later, she is a mature woman, "congestionnée ou fièvreuse" and, finally, carnal and mysterious in "un rouge presque noir." Albertine's face thus embraces the whole range of the red spectrum of color from violet to mauvish pink to deep purple to reddish black. Through color, Marcel imposes a harmony on these disparate images which soothes, creating a kind of visual unity that mutes the contradictory elements of which Albertine is composed. Visually, he is able thereby to reconcile that which cannot be reconciled in life; he is beginning to use pictorialism as a way of transcending life's limitations, not simply as a way of protecting himself from it.

Like Monet, whose exploration of light led him to recognize that color owes its brightness (and its dramatic effect) to force of contrast rather than to inherent qualities, Marcel now explores subtle contrasts in light both in individual images and, capi-

talizing on the capacity of narrative to compare images in time, he contrasts light in juxtaposed images. Each distinct image of Albertine is defined by color contrast within ("ses joues mates comme une blanche cire";" sa figure ponctuée de petits points bruns ou flottaient deux taches plus bleues"), by a tension between surface and depth (cheeks like "une agate opaline travaillée et polie"; but eyes like "les ailes transparentes d'un papillon azur"). These series of contrasts create a visual drama wherein fragments of light tease Marcel with their warmth, entice him with the possibility of discovery, yet constantly return him to a hard, iridescent, surface. Similes which concretize Albertine's mood reinforce this tension between surface and depth. Hard inanimate elements give way to an interiority and sensuality perceived in her cheeks ("ses joues atteignît le rose violacé du cyclamen") and figured in color alterations ("la sombre poupre de certaines roses d'un rouge presque noir"). But the threat of an unhealthy or perverse side of Albertine's nature is neutralized by its depiction on the surface of a canvas. The overall "enveloppe" of harmonious color progressing from grey to mauve to pink to rose to violet and deep red, embeds this series of conflicting images in a unity, subordinating highly individual moments in a kind of decorative harmony. Like Monet's use of the "color envelope" (House 133), Marcel uses

this technique to subordinate internal tensions implicit in Albertine's identity and to define his subject as an expression of his own personal vision.

If the conclusion to the passage unites all these Albertines in a single image of the dancer, the impulse to unify her multiplicity which the entire composition portrays is subtly undercut by a return to the motif of the lantern, leaving us with a sense of transience, of an image which is no more than a projection of Marcel's consciousness. The ray of light offers, at best, an ambiguous truth or one which, if true, because it is so fleeting and uncontrollable, confirms the impossibility of contact, relation or knowledge. It is therefore only in the picture that multiple images can be reconciled and that a "truth" can be discovered. Albertine's innocence and carnality can and do exist side by side; they can be reconciled, harmonized within the "hues" (or different "times") of the picture. Thus pictorialism, for Marcel, becomes a way for him to experience the "truths" of a person without endangering himself.

D. Removed from her Setting: Albertine in Paris

So successful is Marcel's multiple portrait of Albertine's face that it seems a logical step to bring her entire person within his frame. The consequences of this act of appropriation are explored in <u>La prison-</u>

nière, but Albertine's captivity is prefigured before her imprisonment when she comes to visit Marcel in Paris. Albertine's emergence from hazy light and from the multiple shifting kaleidoscope of Marcel's projecting gaze occurs when they are no longer at Balbec, no longer out of doors in sunlight and when, therefore, a more controlled study of her physiognomy can be undertaken. When she first appears to him in Paris, however, she seems to bring the past with her: "Elle semblait une magicienne me presentant un miroir du Temps" (GUER II 58). Yet, almost immediately, Marcel notices the solidification of an image which until now has consistently appeared to be almost translucent: "dégagés de la vapeur rose qui les baignait ses traits avaient sailli comme une statue" (GUER II 59). However, once Albertine enters this new world, she loses the value which has made her desirable. Loss of light which blurs her contours is synonymous with loss of mystery and loss of both sensual and aesthetic value. Marcel begins to recognize that when she is removed from her original setting, she is reduced to a fragment of her complete self. The movement indoors is rendered visually as a movement from seascape to close-up, from whole to fragment, and Marcel discovers that he has lost that which makes his picture aesthetically complete: the entire experience of Albertine's life.

Nonetheless, initially Marcel is ecstatic that this image of Albertine which now descends to him

"détachée du faisceau lumineux" seems to promise not only herself but everything which is attached to her, including all of his impressions from his original series of seascapes. The real Albertine, however, cannot contain all of this projected value--Marcel asks her to remember a particular moment at Balbec and she disappoints him with her answer: it does not meet the requirements of his memory or imagination. Thus, almost immediately, his hopeful apprehension of a persistently multiple Albertine who carries time and place within her is deflated, and he must call once again upon inner resources to recreate this whole: "J'aurais bien voulu, avant de l'embrasser, pouvoir la remplir à nouveau du mystère qu'elle avait pour moi sur la plage avant que je la conusse" (GUER II 74).

If she does not carry her whole context with her, Marcel tries to console himself with the knowledge of what he has achieved and to invent a new project which will fulfill his need to possess her: "ayant fait sortir de son cadre lointain le visage fleuri que j'avais choisi entre tous, je l'aurai amené dans ce plan nouveau, où j'aurai enfin de lui la connaissance par les lèvres" (GUER II 75). It is, of course, not a new project but a replication of his original attempt to kiss her. Now, however, the cosmic imagery has disappeared along with the setting. Instead, everything about this second prospect of kissing Albertine warns

against the likelihood of fulfillment. The awkwardness of the actual physical act is amplified in this second instance as he imagines human lips to be as ill-equipped to caress as a pair of horned tusks. As he approaches her, her surface is repulsive and disorienting: he sees a different pair of cheeks up close, and her neck "montra, dans ses gros grains, une robustesse qui modifia le caractère de la figure" (GUER II 76). In contrast to the beautifully composed series of faces seen in his memory and imagination, the multiple Albertines he now sees take on a monstrous character. As he bends towards her cheek, he sees ten Albertines "comme une déesse à plusieurs têtes" (GUER II 77). And, finally, the moment of contact, although not interrupted before completion, is represented as a painful and dissatisfying collision: "tout d'un coup, mes yeux cessèrent de voir, à son tour mon nez, s'écrasant, ne perçut plus aucune odeur, et sans connaître pour cela davantage le goût du rose désiré, j'appris, à ces détestables signes, qu'enfin j'étais en train d'embrasser la joue d'Albertine" (GUER II 77).

Marcel's disappointment is multilayered. It is physical, psychological and aesthetic. The actual kiss offers none of the anticipated physical satisfaction and none of the emotional nourishment hoped for. But this is less because she does not meet his expectations than because he has confused a physical and emotional

experience with an aesthetic one and has not yet discovered his appropriate relation to the picture: that of the artist rather than the lover. His portrait of Albertine, however rich sensually, remains, literally, a flat surface. When his face comes in contact with it, it is crushed. If this analysis seems to push the significance of the picture plane too far, consider the singleness of purpose and consistency with which Marcel has defined Albertine, from first to last, pictorially: "Je me rappelais Albertine d'abord devant la plage, presque peinte sur le fond de la mer, n'ayant pas pour moi une existence plus réelle que ces visions de théâtre où on ne sait pas si on a affaire à l'actrice qui est censée apparaître, à une figurante qui la double à ce moment-là, ou à une simple projection. Puis la femme vraie s'était détachée du faisceau lumineux, elle était venue à moi..." (GUER II 72). Marcel amplifies this metaphor throughout the passage which culminates in the awkward moment of the kiss, emphasizing the important role of the perceiver who detaches the image from its context: "cette image, on peut la détacher, la mettre près de soi, et voir peu à peu son volume, ses couleurs, comme si on l'avait fait passer derrière les verres d'un stéréoscope" (GUER II 73).

Marcel's pleasure in Albertine derives entirely from his aesthetic vision, from his capacity to place her beneath the lens of the stereoscope. Paradoxi-

cally, however, this is also the source of his anguish, for he admits he can truly enjoy her only when he returns her to her essential context and restores her mystery. The stereoscope is a tool which enables him to project time into the image which has otherwise been projected down to him and separated from that history. She is emotionally and aesthetically interesting to him only when she is simultaneously defined, separated yet also reabsorbed into this larger context which contains time and represents an aesthetically complete picture: "Car les connaître, les approcher, les conquérir, c'est faire varier de forme, de grandeur, de relief l'image humaine, c'est une leçon de relativisme dans l'appréciation d'un corps, d'une vie de femme, belle à réapercevoir quand elle a repris sa minceur de silhouette dans le décor de la vie" (GUER II 73-4). Finally, the stereoscope also enables Marcel to perceive Albertine as she now descends towards him on a beam of light but at the same time to capture the remembered image in time--the original Albertine at Balbec. As such it also becomes the means by which he compensates for the indeterminacy which operates each time he appropriates an image out of time.

If Marcel first identifies his pictorial subject in the open air at Balbec, his return to Paris and to his room suggests a new kind of enclosure and a narrowing of the frame for his picture. Albertine's sudden

appearance in this new location gives Marcel the opportunity to possess his subject on his own terms. In his room, Albertine is gradually transposed from the plane of reality to the picture plane. Marcel's return to his room establishes a space wherein reality is defined, not by what goes on beyond his walls, but exclusively by what is projected, shaped and defined within them. Reminiscent of the novel's opening, the first twenty pages of La prisionnière establish the primacy of imagination and memory over reality. With absolute consistency, Marcel continues to define this world and this truth through the metaphor of pictorial space.

Having made Albertine his captive, Marcel must still work to ensure both the integrity and the aesthetic value of his portrait. At each moment he contemplates her and composes her, he must reinvoke is original images, those which are associated with his earliest moments of discovery (and which always reinsert her in the picture frame): "derrière cette jeune fille, comme derrière la lumière pouprèe qui tombait au pieds des mes rideaux à Balbec... la jeune fille que j'avais vue la première fois, à Balbec, sous son polo plat, avec ses yeux insistants et rieurs, inconnue encore, mince comme une silhouette profilée sur le flot" (PR 77- 78). Despite her captivity, however, Albertine does not remain completely passive;

unexpectedly, she continues to "germinate": "il y avait eu enrichissement, solidification et accroissement de volume dans la figure jadis simplement profilée sur la mer" (PR 80). This solidification alters the original image, renders opaque what was once translucent and Albertine enters into dramatic tension with Marcel's clear and consistent shaping of his subject. Two things now threaten the integrity of his picture: the present threatens to engulf or blot out the past, and captivity threatens to deprive Albertine of her mystery and Marcel of the essential emotion necessary for love (or, more precisely, as he will later recognize, for the creative activity of the artist).

E. Possession: Albertine asleep

For an aesthetically complete portrait, he must somehow return her to the "sea" from which he has drawn her, a sea which represents both a spatial and temporal continuum. In what can only be described as a Freudian stroke of genius, he achieves this by returning her to the "sea" in an elaborate metaphor: as she sleeps on his bed, she seems to return to her original state and setting. He can now experience the emotion of not possessing her, of missing her (since she is not "present") yet, simultaneously, he can possess her completely: "son moi n'échappait pas à tous moments, comme nous causions, par les issues de la pensée inavouée et

du regard" (PR 81). And, no longer observed by her, Marcel experiences another kind of liberation: "je n'avais plus besoin de vivre à la surface de moi-même" (PR 80). As he watches Albertine sleeping, he finally overcomes the conflict between surface and depth which has been present in all his encounters with her. He can slowly approach her and enter into the rhythm of her sleep without resistance, without anxiety about the accuracy of his perception or the possibility of her denial of his image. She is simultaneously possessed and free: "Elle n'était plus animée que de la vie inconsciente des végétaux, des arbres, vie plus différent de la mienne, plus étrange et qui cependant m'appartenait davantage" (PR 81). As he listens to her breath, expiring at intervals, he imagines that he has before him, "condensed," the whole life of this charming captive. The composite image of her entire person (parallel to the animated composite image of her face) is one he can now enter into on his own terms:

> Moi qui connaissais plusieurs Albertine en une seule, il me semblait en voir bien d'autres encore reposer auprès de moi. Ses sourcils arqués comme je ne les avais jamais vus entouraient les globes de ses paupières comme un doux nid d'alcyon. Des races, des atavismes, des vices reposaient sur son visage. Chaque fois qu'elle déplaçait sa tète, elle créait une femme nouvelle, souvent insoupçonnée de moi. Il me semblait posséder non pas une, mais d'innombrables jeunes filles. Sa respiration peu à peu plus profonde soulevait regulièrement sa poitrine et, par-dessus elle, ses mains croisées, ses perles, déplacées d'une manière différente par le même mouvement, comme ces barques, ces

> chaînes d'amarre que fait osciller le mouvement du flot. Alors, sentant que son sommeil était dans son plein, que je ne me heurterais pas à des écueils de conscience recouverts maintenant par la pleine mer du sommeil profond, délibérément je sautais sans bruit sur le lit, je me couchais au long d'elle, je prenais sa taille d'un de mes bras, je posais mes lèvres sur sa joue et sur son coeur, puis, sur toutes les parties de son corps, ma seule main restée libre et qui était soulevée aussi, comme les perles, par la respiration de la dormeuse; moi-même, j'étais déplacé légèrement par son mouvement régulier: je m'étais embarqué sur le sommeil d'Albertine. (<u>PR</u> 83)

Appropriately, Marcel has set Albertine free by returning her to her primal element yet at the same time, this is perhaps his most complete moment of possession. Albertine's essential mystery has been restored: she has been returned to the sea, the primordial flux from which he has drawn her; she is, in a sense, absent to him, and he therefore experiences the emotion of loss--a necessary component of love; yet the extended metaphor by which she is part-boat, part-tide, is one which enables him to possess her completely: "Il me semblait à ces moments-là que je venais de la posséder plus complètement, comme une chose inconsciente et sans résistance de la muette nature" (<u>PR</u> 84).

Marcel's successful containment of Albertine in this moment makes it possible for him to let go; that is, to seem to give up control while not giving it up at all since this moment is completely his creation. Threatening qualities in Albertine's face (des

atavismes, des vices) are now in repose and can be contemplated without any disturbing effect. If she is still a ten-headed goddess, the moment of contact is peaceful, soothing: Albertine has been successfully transmuted into a passive subject--he can quietly embrace her in a moment of complete fulfillment, for the living Albertine does not assert herself in any way against him. For the first time, Marcel has created a living picture, that is, one which he has succeeded in possessing completely. Surface and depth are no longer in tension. He has entered the frame and to ensure the integrity of the composition, at the end of this scene, he describes Albertine awakening, not into her own world, but into his: "ce fut dans ma chambre qu'elle renaquît à la conscience et à la vie" (PR 86).

F. The Canvas and the Problem of Time

The moment of complete possession cannot be sustained: Albertine cannot sleep forever. Love, Marcel recognizes, is a demand for a whole, but a whole which includes time. The ray of light, first suggested by the gaze of another, then transmuted into light, dazzling color, and permeating all of Marcel's compositions, recognized as that aspect of the picture which communicates depth and time, is still a fragment: "Nous savons que le petit rayon qui les irise ou les grains de brillant qui les font étinceler sont tout ce que

nous pouvons voir d'une pensée, d'une volonté, d'une mémoire..." (PR 203). The moment in which Marcel imagines he possesses a whole is, in fact, fraught with contradiction: he possesses only a fragment of time, one which blots out the rest of Albertine's life.

Marcel's studies of Albertine as his captive now begin to undergo a kind of dramatic reversal, as he recognizes that visual methods of appropriation that seemed to promise fulfillment have impoverished his subject. Albertine in captivity has lost all her colors. The longer she stays with him, the more difficult it is for him to restore to her her original value: "Une fois captif chez moi l'oiseau que j'avais vu un soir marcher à pas comptés sur la digue, entouré de la congrégation des autres jeunes filles pareilles à des mouettes venues on ne sait d'où, Albertine avait perdu toutes ses couleurs.." (PR 205). He now divides her stay with him into two periods: "la première où elle était encore, quoique moins chaque jour, la chatoyante actrice de la plage; la seconde où, devenue la grise prisonnière, réduite à son terne elle-même, il lui fallait ces éclairs où je me ressouvenais du passé pour lui rendre des couleurs" (PR 206).

In his own mental canvas, Marcel continues to experiment, now isolating Albertine, now returning her to Time, to that mysterious element which alone makes her valuable. Marcel also continues to observe himself

in the canvas, but the images which depict this continue to be threateningly transient, reminiscent of the lantern's projected light, mere reflections. Marcel makes every effort to fill the canvas with Time, all the while recognizing the contradictory nature of his project. Time is only present in the picture as a projection of his own mind. However often he repeats this process of trying to restore Albertine to her full context and even to travel there with her, it is an artificial and private moment; it does not mean that the picture contains Time, only that the perceiver imagines it. Hence the problem remains: how can the canvas itself be made to reflect Time?

From this point on, Marcel gradually ceases to pursue his project from the point of view of a particular relationship. The figure or subject disappears from the frame and he begins to examine the possibilities of regarding the canvas alone, purely in terms of light. As an evolving motif, the lantern's reflection gradually becomes the one reality Marcel can believe in. In contrast to its original fragmentary and transient meaning, it grows, metaphorically from fragment to whole, as Marcel's entire canvas becomes filled with light and as he discovers his vocation in the truth of art as personal vision projected onto the world, filling it with light.

Chapter 11

Learning from Artists: the Power of Transforming Light

The fragment of light first enables Marcel to focus single images, to find some kind of order within the flux and an orientation for himself in the world; however, that fragment, a reflection discerned on the wall of his cave-like room, is always indirect and precarious. The light of his grandmother's gaze, the counterpart to this fragment and synonymous with an aesthetic apprehension of the world, is direct, whole and fulfilling; not a reflection, not precarious. Marcel's entire early experience seems to be based on the tension between the fragments he discovers and the whole he seeks. From his childhood experiences with others to his adolescent relations with Albertine, all of Marcel's pictures of the world are studies in fragmentary light. Shards of light descend and pierce him, crystallized light teases him with its essence withheld and the light in Albertine's round disc-like face shifts away from him. All of these visual fragments imitate the lantern's progress across the canvas of Marcel's mind. On numerous occasions, Marcel describes a projector "mal reglé" as though an anonymous operator is responsible for his dilemma, an operator who prevents him from focusing the image. If Marcel is always defining the shape of the world he sees, for

most of _A la recherche_, there is a separate viewer who seems to control the light. However, through his encounters with various artists in the novel, Marcel begins to define his own vocation; that is, he gradually moves behind the projector, thus controlling the light and granting his achieved picture a new kind of stability, wholeness and permanence. With Bergotte's final glimpse, albeit too late, of the "light" he should have found for his own novels, with Berma's personal interpretation of Racine figured in "layers" of light, with Elstir's captured moment in time, achieved through attention to reflected light, and, finally, with Vinteuil's music, understood by Marcel not in the original fragment, but in the whole which floods his world with light and announces the "dawn" of creation, Marcel is simultaneously returned to his own beginnings (the dawn of light in his room) and directed towards mature artistic vision. No longer in search of his grandmother's light-filled gaze, he finds it within himself and can now project it onto the world. He finally understands that it is his vocation, like these other artists, to fill his picture with light and time.

From his initial apprehension of the fragment of light to his final illuminating awareness of the presence of light in his own imagination and his new-found power to control that imagination, to regulate the projector, Marcel never departs from an essentially

visual conception of the world. Narrative and dramatic development must therefore be understood through changes in Marcel's shaping of the light-filled visual image. If his early pictorial techniques enable him to explore the dangers, pitfalls and failures of fragmentary ways of composing and apprehending the light, Marcel, imitating the techniques of his fellow artists, begins to define and use light more holistically. At the same time, like Monet, whose presence informs much of Elstir's artistic production, Marcel begins to personalize his vision. In his examination of the relationship between the perceiver and the image, Marcel, following the teachings and example of his own "Impressionist," Elstir, insists on the need to abstain from certain habits of mind which interfere with the clarity of an immediate perception. But beyond parallels to Impressionist technique which have been widely noted, Marcel actually duplicates Monet's evolving understanding of light by creating the narrative equivalent of paintings which reproduce not the object, and not simply the transitory effects of light, but the field of shimmering light between the eye and the canvas. All of Marcel's studies of les "jeunes filles" testify to the duplication of a process he recognizes in Elstir/Monet. Just as Monet moves from the visual field to a recording of images on the retina, Marcel's "paintings" also evolve from images of shimmering light

which reproduce the visual field to images existing on his own "retina" or imagination. At the last moment, however, this movement into the self is rescued from solipsism. Shattuck notes in his discussion of Monet that "impressions...whether we think of them as residing in the field out there or on the retina..." (The Innocent Eye 234) ultimately come "to mean something the artist is creating, imprinting on the canvas. At this point in the creative process, the painting surface assumes the role of a screen, a visual event in its own right blocking out the garden, or the field, or the retinal field it is presumably intended to register" (The Innocent Eye 234). For Marcel, as for Monet, the "canvas" becomes the ultimate screen (The Innocent Eye 234). In his apprenticeship to various artists, Marcel's own "gaze" undergoes a subtle transformation; the reflection which the beam of the lantern projects becomes his gaze; light is now defined as artistic vision; it is a metaphor for a personal shaping of reality according to the requirements of one's imagination. In place of the Platonic idealism which is suggested in Marcel's initial stance--the notion that a greater more complete reality lies behind the fragment he discerns, Marcel works in the latter half of A la recherche to transform the phenomenal world itself into the whole subject of his canvas. Shattuck notes that this is precisely Monet's achievement in his later

work: "In Monet's very last paintings, the world of appearances...has metamorphosed from the transitory into permanence...His paintings became truly phenomenal, for he found his salvation in phenomena themselves, in the appearances his work teaches as real, lasting, and endlessly exciting" (The Innocent Eye 239).

A: Abandoning the Single Subject

The artists in the novel also teach Marcel that he must relinquish the individual subject in order to enter into a new, more holistic relation to his canvas. Marcel's discovery of this truth emerges with his recognition that Albertine must be set free. In La prisonnière, in the course of an increasingly strained series of efforts to hold on to his prisoner, to restore her value while keeping her captive, Marcel suddenly confronts his prisoner with a seemingly irrelevant question. He asks Albertine, "Est-ce qu'il n'est pas un peu en contradiction avec son propre impressionnisme quand il retire ainsi les monuments de l'impression globale où ils sont compris, les amène hors de la lumière où ils sont dissous et examine en archéologue leur valuer intrinsèque?" (PR 198). Although he does not admit it to Albertine, the question Marcel poses is clearly directed to himself and to his own efforts to remove his subject from the light in

which she is dissolved. Repeatedly he experiences the principle of indeterminacy as a kind of personal anguish. He, too, must let go of the controlling intellectual impulse which has governed his efforts to define the picture thus far. Even though his studies of young girls seem to reflect abandonment of the frame and a willingness to let the composition speak to him, as he indirectly admits, he is still examining his subject like an archaeologist, denying it its wholeness, its full context and therefore its authenticity. His movement toward texture and surface, while successful in helping him overcome habitual ways of seeing the subject, remains an effort to define and isolate that subject, and, because of this contradiction, he is unsuccessful in bringing about a true moment of closure. Moreover, just as the camera eye substitutes a part for a whole, Marcel discovers that intense proximity to a single subject results in only fragmentary understanding. Marcel's compositions must now allow the individual human figure to disappear so that he can explore the power/capacity of pure light to explode the frame and define the subject within its context, as it truly is. As for Monet, for Marcel, now, "the object painted is of no importance; the sensation of light is the only true subject" (House 177).

B: Bergotte: "le petit pan de mur jaune"

Marcel's shift away from an individual subject and from the impulse either to isolate that subject, to bring it towards him, or to find a way to enter into its frame, is announced very subtly in another important scene, a brief inset story in the midst of his relations with Albertine. A moving account of the death of Bergotte, also establishes an important connection between moments of involuntary memory which Marcel has already experienced and the discovery of aesthetic insight. Just before his death, Bergotte hurries to see an exhibition of Vermeer paintings and discovers, literally, in a moment of illumination, the secret of art. As he gazes at Vermeer's "View of Delft," "il attachait son regard, comme un enfant à un papillon jaune qu'il veut saisir, au précieux petit pan de mur. 'C'est ainsi que j'aurais dû écrire, disait-il. Mes derniers livres sont trop secs, il aurait fallu passer plusieurs couches de couleur, rendre ma phrase en elle-même précieuse, comme ce petit pan de mur jaune'" (PR 222). Stripped of habits and preconceptions, innocent as a child, Bergotte instantly grasps the success of Vermeer and, simultaneously, his own failure: he has been unable to make his language translucent. The "petit pan de mur jaune" bears a striking resemblance to the original ray of the lantern which casts a patch of light on Marcel's bedroom wall. Bergotte now

expands the significance of that image by linking it to the secret of art. Layered light, light which illuminates a picture by suggesting depth now becomes an expanding motif which helps Marcel explore the capacity of the picture to represent layers of images in time.

Like Bergotte, Marcel has glimpsed the need for his composition to capture that corner of iridescent light; unlike Bergotte, however, Marcel has already begun to understand the need to move away from light perceived in fragmented ways, in individual subjects, and to discover a means of filling his entire picture of light. Retrospectively, it is the artists in the novel who have been hinting at this transformation of the picture all along.

C: Berma: the light filled canvas

If Bergotte's moment of illumination can be seen as a pivotal moment in which one artist understands, too late, the quality of light which is necessary for art, Bergotte still perceives only a fragment. Up to this point, Marcel, too, perceives this truth only intermittently; his conscious awareness has been as fleeting as that of the lantern's projection. Most often it is through a re-vision, a return to an experience not understood the first time, that Marcel begins to discern the light which fills the entire canvas. And, once again, it is the artists in the novel who

teach him that they alone are capable of initiating this transformation from part to whole.

In a second study of Berma, Marcel analyses the way his own preconceptions at first denied him an understanding of her art, but, since he comes to this second performance without preconceptions, he can see for the first time the rich and complex layers of meaning which constitute an artist's personal interpretation of a subject. These "layers" are precisely like the layers of light Bergotte apprehends in Vermeer. Paradoxically, they are layers which allow the truth of a subject to be revealed, and, at the same time, they are the artist's highly personal vision.

> ...son attitude en scène qu'elle avait lentement constituée, qu'elle modifierait encore...fondus dans une sorte de rayonnement où ils faisaient palpiter, autour du personnage de Phèdre, des éléments riches et complexes, mais que le spectateur fasciné prenait, non pour une réussite de l'artiste, mais pour une donnée de la vie; ces blancs voiles eux-mêmes, qui exténués et fidèles, semblaient de la matière vivante et avoir été filés par la souffrance mi-païenne, mi janséniste, autour de laquelle ils se contractaient comme un cocon fragile et frileux; tout cela, voix, attitudes, gestes, voiles, n'était, autour de ce corps d'une idée qu'est un vers (corps qui, au contraire des corps humains, n'est pas un obstacle opaque, mais un vêtement purifié, spiritualisé), que des enveloppes supplémentaires qui, au lieu de la cacher, rendaient plus splendidement l'âme qui se les était assimilées et s'y était répandue, que des coulées de substances, diverses, devenues translucides, dont la superposition ne fait que réfracter plus richement le rayon central et prisonnier qui les traverse et rendre plus étendue, plus précieuse et plus belle la matière imbibée de flamme où il est engainé. Telle

> l'interprétation de la Berma était, autour de l'oeuvre, une seconde oeuvre vivifiée aussi par le génie. (GUER I 57)

Berma's portrayal of Phèdre's suffering is layered in time: it consists of her reading of Racine's interpretation of a mythological subject (mi païenne, mi janséniste). These earlier readings are actually filtered through Berma's "corps humain" which has become their medium. Just as Vermeer made a corner of his picture translucent, so Berma has made the words of Racine into translucent layers of meaning--light-filled meaning which simultaneously refract and expose the depths of the subject. Spatial depth now becomes temporal depth as Marcel recognizes that just as his own vision contains layers of images through time so does the work of other artists. The successful artist is able to apply "plusieurs couches de couleurs," that is, who is able to create an image that contains within itself layers of time.

Berma's poses, which previously seemed artificial to Marcel, are now dissolved in a radiance in whose vibrating light she comes to life: "fondus dans une sorte de rayonnement où ils faisaient palpiter...des éléments riches et complexes." Marcel's new understanding of Berma helps him begin to define his personal aesthetic: Berma's performance suddenly illuminates the true nature of art, an art which he momentarily appreciates but is as yet incapable of

transferring to his own as yet undefined project. As such, this moment is similar to Bergotte's brief and belated moment of illumination except that, instead of simply recognizing an illuminated fragment, Berma defines the artist's true transformation of subject: the layers she spins around Racine's poetry illuminate the entire drama. The central metaphor of the passage, that of "layered light" further functions to define the deeply personal vision of the artist, legitimizing her subjectivity while at the same time suggesting an objectification of the poetry of Racine which Berma interprets. Through her layers of interpretation, Berma successfully assimilates Racine's poetry to herself, yet these layers are translucent; they reveal Berma's soul and, implicitly, the art of Racine.

The image which focuses the light in this portrait of Berma's performance is that of the imprisoned ray ("le rayon central et prisonnier"), but unlike other instances when Marcel will be frustrated by the fact that this imprisoned ray teases him with its depths but does not permit entry or knowledge (Marcel does not yet have the artist's vision), in this innocent moment of observation, Marcel discovers in the containment of light a powerful dramatic moment which unlocks the secret of art. It is as if the mounting intensity created by these layers of light "devenus translucides" brings about an explosion of light within the prism, filling the entire picture with its harmonious glow.

Marcel's understanding of Berma's art constitutes his recognition of the personal nature of artistic interpretation, for the entire portrait charts a movement which Marcel must later undertake, a movement from the world to the self and back to the world. The cocoon of veils which Berma spins around the work of Racine are an expression of her personal vision which brings to life the work of the dramatist. What Marcel slowly comes to understand through his encounters with various artists in A la recherche is that the truth of art is always a personal translation, but that an individual perspective on the world is refined and spiritualized through art.

D. Elstir: time momentarily captured

If Marcel's glimpse of Berma's art, crystallized in this early portrait, occurs too soon for him to absorb its full significance, a series of light-filled studies of Elstir's paintings help to sharpen his sense of direction. In his analysis of Elstir's use of light, Marcel discovers more concretely the way the artist transforms the world, and imprints it with his personal vision. Many passages in Marcel's analysis of Elstir's technique remind the reader of Monet's effort to rid the image of preconceptions, to create the world anew: "...si Dieu le Père avait créé les choses en les nommant, c'est en leur ôtant leur nom, ou en leur en

donnant un autre, qu'Elstir les recréait" (<u>JF</u> 492). Just as Monet "wished he had been born blind and then had suddenly gained his sight so that he could have begun to paint...without knowing what the objects were that he saw before him" (Nochlin 35), Elstir seeks to paint the impression which arises prior to our intellectual notions of a subject. It is "light" which helps him achieve this effect, and, as he deliberately uses light to blur the boundaries between objects, Marcel studies the way he effectively overturns the viewer's preconceptions: "il m'était arrivé, grâce à un effet de soleil, de prendre une partie plus sombre de la mer pour une côte éloignée, ou de regarder avec joie une zone bleue et fluide sans savoir si elle appartenait à la mer ou au ciel" (<u>JF</u> 492).

Although Marcel's first encounter with Elstir is pivotal in shaping the pictorial techniques he will use in his portraits of "les jeunes filles," it is not until much later, again, when Marcel views Elstir's work for a second time, that real insights occur which begin to shape his own conception of art. He is now able to contemplate not only the powerful effect of light in Elstir's paintings, but, he is also able to consider more deeply the actual status of the projected image, the painting, which he now defines as a literal projection of Elstir's mind on the wall of the Guermantes salon. Just as Berma's interpretation of

Racine illuminates the soul of the artist, Marcel sees before himself, "la projection de la manière de voir particulière à ce grand peintre" (GUER II 146). The artist thus becomes not only the "eye" that projects but also the achieved projection: "les parties du mur couvertes de peintures de lui...étaient comme les images lumineuses d'une lanterne magique laquelle eut été...la tête de l'artiste" (GUER II 146). As he links the self of the artist to the projected image he, of course, implies that the created image has been personalized, but he also begins to alter the meaning of his primary motif: the light from the projected ray, once ephemeral, fragmentary and precarious, now within the control of the artist, is granted a kind of permanence. The miracle for Marcel is that Elstir has created a canvas which seems to capture a fleeting moment, for all time:

> Cette fête au bord de l'eau avait quelque chose d'enchanteur. La rivière, les robes des femmes, les voiles des barques, les reflets innombrables des unes et des autres voisinaient parmi ce carré de peinture qu'Elstir avait découpé dans une merveilleuse après-midi. Ce qui ravissait dans la robe d'une femme cessant un moment de danser à cause de la chaleur et de l'essoufflement, était chatoyant aussi et de la même manière, dans la toile d'une voile arrêtée, dans l'eau du petit port, dans le ponton de bois, dans les feuillages et dans le ciel. (GUER II 148)

What Marcel sees is the marvelous unity of light and motion by which all the elements of the picture capture a moment in time without arresting it. It is

precisely the Impressionist duplication of shimmering light, repeated in all elements of the composition (water, boat, leaves, sky), which achieves this effect. However, Marcel does not leave this picture without confronting the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in this image of suspended time. Any such moment, for him, is filled with the possibility of loss, an emotion which makes it all the more precious:

> ...celui-ci (Elstir) avait su immortellement arrêter le mouvement des heures à cet instant lumineux où la dame avait eu chaud et avait cessé de danser, où l'arbre était cerné d'un pourtour d'ombre, où les voiles semblaieant glisser sur un vernis d'or. Mais justement parce que l'instant pesait sur nous avec tant de force, cette toile si fixée donnait l'impression la plus fugitive, on sentait que la dame allait bientôt s'en retourner, les bateaux disparaître, l'ombre changer de place, la nuit venir, que le plaisir finit, que la vie passe et que les instants, montrés à la fois par tant de lumières qui y voisinent ensemble, ne se retrouvent pas. (GUER II 149).

The poignancy of this passage reminds us of Marcel's repeated perception of the imminent loss of his own most important subject, the love of Albertine, and, characteristically, this picture, after impressing him with the miracle of its vision, also expresses the limitations of containing a subject in time. The iridescent light on the surface of this canvas can only capture time by imitating the vibrating effect of visual movement. However effective the achieved painting, the projected ray is still, therefore, precarious; its image is still only a single image "decoupée" from

the afternoon. What this painting teaches Marcel is that he must begin to discover a way to make the projected ray plumb the depths; this means, finally, that the ray of light must be made to explore the dimension of time. He is now synthesizing truths fleetingly apprehended through Bergotte, Berma, and Elstir. Now the lantern, instead of projecting its ray outward into space, is projected inward into the self, and through that self, into memory. What emerges from this is an entirely new kind of spatial-temporal image, plunged deeply into time.

E. Vinteuil: music and the dawn of time

When Marcel first enters the studio of Elstir, he observes that the creator is just finishing the outline of the setting sun, and, in that same scene, he meditates on the godlike character of the artist who creates the world anew for us. These references to the creator and creation are not limited to Elstir, however, and the idea of creation is more sharply defined in the latter part of A la recherche where the artist is presented as one who purifies our perceptions by returning us in time to the beginning. Perhaps the most important creator is not Berma or Elstir but Vinteuil whose music offers Marcel the most direct, unmediated experience of art. When Marcel listens to Vinteuil's septet in La prisonnière, he has already

been exposed to the sonata and, therefore, he welcomes its unexpected reappearance as one would an old memory:

> Comme quand, dans un pays qu'on ne croit pas connaître et qu'en effet on a abordé par un côté nouveau, après avoir tourné un chemin on se trouve tout d'un coup déboucher dans un autre dont les moindres coins vous sont familiers, mais seulement où on n'avait pas l'habitude d'arriver par là...je me reconnus, au milieu de cette musique nouvelle pour moi, en pleine sonate de Vinteuil; et plus merveilleuse qu'une adolescente, la petite phrase, enveloppée, harnachée d'argent, tout ruisselante de sonorités brillantes, légères et douces comme des écharpes, vint à moi, reconnaissable sous ces parures nouvelles. (PR 298)

The little phrase is enveloped in layers of light, layers of sound "légères et douces comme des écharpes," a cocoon image reminiscent of Berma's portrayal of Racine, but suddenly this comfort is removed, and Marcel finds himself "dans un pays inconnu." This second experience, in this case a totally new experience of Vinteuil, is, characteristically, the one which enables him to see clearly. For the first time, an entirely new phenomenon, not anticipated or shaped by the intellect, is capable of generating in him a pure aesthetic response. Through the septet, Marcel now experiences the creation of the world. This creation or birth is figured, appropriately, as the dawn of the entire universe:

> Tandis que la Sonate s'ouvrait sur une aube liliale et champêtre, divisant sa candeur légère mais pour se suspendre à l'emmêlement léger et pourtant consistant d'un berceau rustique de chèvrefeuilles sur des géraniums blancs, c'était sur des surfaces unies et

> planes comme celles de la mer que, par un matin d'orage, commençait, au milieu d'un aigre silence, dans un vide infini, l'oeuvre nouvelle, et c'est dans un rose d'aurore que, pour se construire progressivement devant moi, cet univers inconnu était tiré du silence et de la nuit. Ce rouge si nouveau, si absent de la tendre, champêtre et candide Sonate, teignait tout le ciel, comme l'aurore, d'un espoir mystérieux. Et un chant perçait déjà l'air, chant de sept notes, mais le plus inconnu, le plus différent de tout ce que j'eusse jamais imaginé, à la fois ineffable et criard, non plus roucoulement de colombe comme dans la Sonate, mais déchirant l'air, aussi vif que la nuance écarlate dans laquelle le début était noyé, quelque chose comme un mystique chant du coq, un appel, ineffable mais suraigu, de l'éternel matin. (PR 299).

Through the septet, Marcel seems to discover the very foundation of his picture which is now stripped of subject matter and appears before him, unmediated, a pure sensory experience of color and sound. Yet, like the composite images of Albertine, it does contain settings he has previously known, the "berceau rustique de chèvrefeuilles" where he discovered Gilberte, a seaside "matin d'orage" where he first knew Albertine. But the changing light he has seen in Albertine's face, the red of the dawn which now enters his picture, tinges "tout le ciel" and speaks to him more insistently, stridently, "déchirant l'air." This experience of Vinteuil's entire septet enables Marcel to explore further the relationship between the fragment and the whole in his own picture. Suddenly he understands that Albertine is his sonata, the fragment he must eventually leave behind but whose familiar light has

given him his beginning: "...c'était grâce à elle, par compensation, qu'avait pu venir jusqu'à moi l'étrange appel que je ne cesserais plus jamais d'entendre comme la promesse qu'il existait autre chose, réalisable par l'art" (PR 315). Yet the original fragment, whether from the lantern's projection, from the patch of yellow wall, or the pinpoint of light embedded in Albertine's gaze, like the sonata, is the germ, the essential fragment for the artist who must later move beyond that self-enclosed subject and embark on his quest for the whole. The fragment also stands for a special kind of personal memory, that of the initial experience of illumination without which the later, more complete awareness, would not be possible. In this way, fragmented light now comes to be associated with recollection and with involuntary memory: it is a portal into time. The ray of light, initially projected from a lantern, ultimately becomes a beam projected from Marcel's eye or soul, a beam which expands and deepens as Marcel discovers within himself images which personalize and at the same time objectify his picture.

F. Involuntary Memory: images of time's struggle

The creation of Marcel's whole picture, like that of the Vinteuil septet, requires a special joining of past and present images, but this is something which cannot be achieved by a simple act of willful recollec-

tion. Readers of Proust are well aware of the primary importance Marcel assigns to the role of involuntary memory, but it is equally important to note its role in relation to pictorialism. Marcel describes its emergence according to the same visual patterns he has been working with throughout <u>A la recherche</u>: memory, a fragment of light, the germ of artistic truth, stabilizes the fleeting projection of light first discerned on the wall of his room.

As Marcel begins to define the kind of temporal image he now seeks, he reverses the values assigned to the surface impression and instead defines the picture as an internal recreation, deriving from a memory, which now, with its lantern's ray, surfaces and inscribes itself on his consciousness. In the visual dramatization of this experience which occupies a major part of <u>Le temps retrouvé</u>, Marcel's mind becomes the ultimate canvas, and he defines his aesthetic quest as one in which he seeks not to draw these memories forth by a simple associative process but to submit to a reality within himself: "La seule manière de les goûter d'avantage, c'était de tâcher de les connaître plus complètement, là où elles se trouvaient, c'est-à-dire en moi-même, de les rendre claires jusque dans leurs profondeurs" (<u>TR</u> 235). Marcel now reverses the values assigned to the impression, and this constitutes the major dramatic reversal of the novel whereby all sur-

face impressions are finally rejected: "Quelques-uns voulaient que le roman fut une sorte de defilé cinématographique des choses. Cette conception était absurde. Rien ne s'éloigne plus de ce que nous avons perçu en réalité qu'une telle vu cinématographique" (TR 242).

The temporal image surfaces through involuntary memory, defined as an experience of the past which arises through a sensory link between past and present, a link which may be understood as the ray of light which plumbs the depths of time: "une heure n'est pas qu'une heure, c'est un vase rempli de parfums, de sons, de projets et de climats. Ce que nous appelons la réalité est un certain rapport entre ces sensations et ses souvenirs qui nous entourent simultanément" (TR 250). At one end of the lantern's ray stands Marcel in the present, directing his projector into the depths; at the other end rests the fragment, the involuntary memory which will arise and meet the present through this sensory link. When this happens, a struggle ensues in which the two realities fight for supremacy in his consciousness. The involuntary memory threatens to overcome and annihilate the present: "la sensation commune avait cherché à recréer autour d'elle le lieu ancien, cependant que le lieu actuel qui en tenait la place s'opposait de toute la résistance de sa masse à cette immigration...Toujours, dans ces résurrections-

là, le lieu lointain engendre autour de la sensation commune s'était accouplé un instant, comme un lutteur, au lieu actuel" (TR 232).

Although the sensory pull of the involuntary experience is strong, Marcel recognizes that if the past should win, he will lose consciousness, that is, he will cease to control the projector and will be unable to complete his picture. But for a moment, just as, earlier, when he drew closer and closer to Albertine's face until he felt himself being tossed about, then forced to collide with the surface of her cheek, so now, he loses temporal perspective, imagining himself travelling into the past and allowing the more beautiful and poignant image of the earlier experience to supplant the present. And, as in his experience with Albertine, his consciousness rescues him at the last moment. While he laments the passing of the involuntary memory, he continues to search for a way to hold onto the fleeting image of time past while remaining conscious of the present and able to shape his memory into art. Again, it is the projector and its ray which create the metaphor for this process. He must unite or "see" simultaneously the two separate images, that which belongs to his present reality and that which belongs to the past. He must look through the lantern's ray as though he is looking into time and, without relinquishing the present, discover and hold

onto the past: "la vérité ne commencera qu'au moment où l'écrivain prendra deux objets différents, posera leur rapport...et les enfermera dans les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style; même, ainsi que la vie, quand, en rapprochant une qualité commune à deux sensations, il dégagera leur essence commune en les réunissant l'une et l'autre pour les soustraire aux contingences du temps, dans une métaphore" (TR 250).

In search of the authentic picture, a composite of recollection and creation, Marcel enters his own frame, the only frame one can truly enter, yet he waits for the image to be inscribed on the canvas of his mind, the particular image which will enable him to unite the past and present outside time and thereby complete his picture in depth. By going deeper into himself, by divesting himself of all the habits of mind which blinded him to these inner truths, he is able to discover the luminosity which reveals essences:

> Ce travail de l'artiste, de chercher à apercevoir sous de la matière, sous de l'expérience, sous des mots quelque chose de différent, c'est exactement le travail inverse de celui que, à chaque minute, quand nous vivons détourné de nous-même, l'amour propre, la passion, l'intelligence, et l'habitude aussi accomplissent en nous, quand elles amassent au-dessus de nos impressions vraies, pour nous les cacher entièrement, les nomenclatures, les buts pratiques que nous appelons faussement la vie...c'est ce travail que l'art défera, c'est la marche en sens contraire, le retour aux profondeurs où ce qui a existé réellement gît inconnu de nous, qu'il nous fera suivre. (TR 258).

G. Looking Within: light-filled memories

In his fine book on landscape art, Kenneth Clark affirms that "facts become art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality; and in landscape, this all embracing love is expressed by light" (Landscape into Art 33). Marcel's pictures are, above all, a landscape of faces. The most important of these faces remains, from beginning to end, not that of Albertine but that of his grandmother. Thus the most important experience of involuntary memory, of light and of love, occurs when he suddenly remembers his grandmother's preoccupied face, that loving, selfless gaze which, for Marcel, has always been the purest, most complete image of love and of art. The setting for this moment of recollection is Marcel's room in the hotel at Balbec, where, as he is undressing, he suddenly remembers how she used to help him and how she awaited his knock on the wall for assistance. Throughout the novel, the wall has served as a canvas which allows the light to its reflection upon itself. All subsequent canvases from Albertine's face to Bergotte's vision of Vermeer's "petit pan de mur jaune" are reflections: they present a surface whose iridescence sends the artist back to himself, but not without that germ of artistic truth which the gleam of light represents. The wall (or partition) which separates Marcel from his grandmother, however, is the

one wall which allows him to pass through. After remembering her face, Marcel turns his own to the wall to escape all that reminds him of her, but, suddenly, he recognizes, to his dismay, that he now faces the partition which used to serve as the connection between them: "Je savais que je pourrais frapper maintenant, même plus fort, que rien ne pourrait plus la reveiller, que je n'entendrais aucune réponse, que ma grand'mère ne viendrait plus" (SG 187).

In this scene, the motif of light converges with that of the wall, returning Marcel to his own consciousness and his own project as artist, after rewarding him with a brief and paradoxical moment in which his grandmother is returned to him, only to show him he has lost her forever: "je venais, en la sentant, pour la première fois, vivante, véritable, gonflant mon coeur à le briser, en la retrouvant enfin, d'apprendre que je l'avais perdue pour toujours" (SG 181). But the wall does allow his grandmother to reappear, if only on the canvas of Marcel's mind. He recognizes that all that is left is the memory, the involuntary memory which will enable him to create his own light-filled canvas.

In the course of A la recherche, Marcel gradually develops the capacity to hold onto a composite image which is in fact a whole, seen in the dimension of time. And while it is abundantly clear that this is

the whole purpose of his project, few critics have examined closely the absolute clarity and consistency whereby Marcel creates this whole by projecting time, in the form of remembered images, into a hypothetical picture plane. If the plane exists only in Marcel's imagination for most of the novel, upon completion, it is possible to see this temporal image as an achieved projection, a successful pictorial representation of time.

Marcel recognizes that the idea of the temporal image can only be explained metaphorically in spatial terms: "nous ne pouvons exprimer la direction que par des comparaisons également vaines, puisque nous ne pouvons les emprunter qu'au monde de l'éspace" (TR 294). The guiding metaphor behind each example, each portrait of an individual plunged into the years is that of the lantern's ray probing the depths of time. As he examines his almost unrecognizable old friends and acquaintances, he thinks of them as puppets in time:

> Des poupées, mais que, pour les identifier à celui qu'on avait connu, il fallait lire sur plusieurs plans à la fois, situés derrière elles et qui leur donnaient de la profondeur et forçaient à faire un traivail d'esprit quand on avait devant soi ces vieillards fantoches, car on était obligé de les regarder, en même temps qu'avec les yeux, avec la mémoire. Des poupées baignant dans les couleurs immatérielles des années, des poupées extériorisant le Temps, le Temps qui d'habitude n'est pas visible, pour le devenir cherche des corps et, partout où il les ren-

> contre, s'en empare pour montrer sur eux sa lanterne magique. (TR 292-3).

H. Marcel's Last Picture: Mlle de Saint-Loup

Always Marcel returns to the flash of light which signals the earliest memory, the memory often forgotten and returning involuntarily in a moment which brings about full dramatic recognition of his subject. If the majority of recognitions in Le temps retrouvé consist of a movement from present to past as Marcel encounters someone he either does not recognize at all or only recognizes by mentally removing elements added to their physiognomy in the course of time in order to see them as they were, one portrait towards the very end of the novel reverses this process. When Marcel meets Mlle de Saint Loup, daughter of Gilberte and Saint Loup, she is a completely new person to him. He has never seen her before. Yet, miraculously, she carries within her the past of her parents and therefore, by extension, the past of Marcel. His portrait of her is, uniquely, both an entirely new image and a recollection:

> Le temps incolore et insaisissable s'était, pour que pour ainsi dire je puisse le voir et le toucher, matérialisé en elle, il l'avait pétrie comme un chef-d'oeuvre, tandis que parallèlement sur moi, hélas! il n'avait fait que son oeuvre. Cependant Mlle de Saint-Loup était devant moi. Elle avait les yeux profondément forés et perçants, et aussi son nez charmant légèrement avancé en forme de bec et courbé, non point peut-être comme celui de Swann, mais comme celui de Saint-Loup. L'âme de ce Guermantes s'était évanouie; mais la charmante tête aux yeux perçants de l'oiseau envolé était venue se poser sur les épaules de Mlle de Saint-Loup,

> qui faisait longuement rêver ceux qui avaient connu son père. Je la trouvais bien belle: pleine encore d'espérances, riante, formée des années mêmes que j'avais perdues, elle ressemblait à ma Jeunesse. (TR 422-23).

Gilberte's daughter embodies what Marcel has been unable to create or hold onto in any of his other portraits: the personal history of an individual--the mystery of time. The ray of light that seeks to bring forth that history has been crystallized in this young girl. Mlle Saint-Loup stands in contrast to the other women he has known who frustrated Marcel by their unknowability. He possesses in her the one element he was unable to possess in Gilberte or Albertine: her history as it is written on the canvas of her face. If this is Marcel's last picture in the novel, it is also, in a sense, his first. It is the first fully achieved portrait which embodies time and, with it, Marcel begins his novel.

If Marcel is launched on a pictorial project because he seeks an ideal relation to the world such as his grandmother offered him, if he subsequently uses voyeuristic strategies partly to protect himself and partly to control the subject, if he consequently confuses picture and reality and seeks unsuccessfully to enter the frame only to discover that his relationship with a pictorial subject fails to gratify his senses or his imagination, in the end Marcel transforms all these pictorial strategies into a single highly successful

one. His single-minded and consistent commitment to the germ of truth which the lantern fleetingly suggests, which is no less than his own imagination, slowly nurtures the light within the frame until that light comes to fill the picture and illuminate his subject in time.

Chapter 12

The Wonderful, Dangerous Power of the Mind: James and Proust Compared

Proust and James both use pictorial technique to dramatize their fundamental belief that to see is to know; that knowledge acquired visually has a value not to be found in more traditional approaches to the story. Rather than interacting directly with his subject, the perceiver suspends the action and frames the picture or subject to be analyzed, suggesting that such detachment will provide special insight. Whether the composer proceeds in the tradition of the nineteenth century landscape artist or the twentieth century camera eye, the question which concerns him the most is that of the truth of his findings. However, more often than not, the viewer is a character who is essentially "bewildered," to use James's word. The truth of the subject he composes is therefore immediately under suspicion, and pictorial activity is redefined as the dramatization of a struggle between the world and the perceiver. Both writers' perceivers confirm the position of contemporary theoreticians that "we cannot, with Gombrich, take for granted that the viewer is a 'given'" that "the act of recognition that painting galvanizes is a production, rather than a perception of meaning. Viewing is an activity of transforming the

material of the painting into meanings" (Bryson xiii-xiv).

In all of James's major novels and throughout Proust's long novel, the narrators present themselves ambiguously as both composers of their subjects and victims of that subject's power to assert itself against them. Although these narrators evolve in the course of the story, overcoming an early naïveté and arriving finally at a position of discernment and insight, the pictorial stance is never abandoned. Despite enormous differences in style and subject-matter, James and Proust create narrators whose approach to the world is essentially voyeuristic, who enjoy from beginning to end the contemplative space created by privacy, and who never cease to believe in the power of vision to create understanding.

Despite all these similarities, however, James and Proust ultimately use pictorialism for purposes which reflect completely opposing views of the world. James believes fundamentally in the power of the image, filtered through the subjectivity of the perceiver, to create a false reality. Proust, ultimately, does not believe in the power of the image at all but rather in the power of the self to create meaning. We may say then that if James believes the power of the mind is dangerous, Proust believes it is wonderful.

A close examination of two strikingly similar visual subjects will illuminate the different functions

of pictorial technique in these two writers. The first is a portrait of Madame de Vionnet by Lambert Strether in The Ambassadors which we have examined in Chapter 5. The second is a portrait of the Princesse de Guermantes by Marcel in Le côté de Guermantes. Both of these compositions occur at relatively early points in the respective narrators' development, and, despite the difference in "age" between Strether and Marcel, they share an idealistic naivete, both approaching their subject with intense admiration. Furthermore, each traces a process which may be seen as the "composing" of the portrait, in the course of which each seeks to define the source of the subject's effect and mystery. However, more closely observed differences in pictorial technique in these two portraits--in focus, organization and ultimate shape of the image--point to profound differences in epistemology in James and Proust.

Since his first encounter with Madame de Vionnet, Lambert Strether has been struggling to fathom her mystery and to come to terms with an uneasiness she generates in him--an internal discomfort of which he is only partly conscious but which all of his portraits betray. At a dinner party in Chad's home, Madame de Vionnet has not yet entered, but she is very much the subject of conversation between Strether and his friend, Miss Barrace who describes Chad's mysterious friend as "wonderful," as "fifty women," thus enhancing

Strether's own perception that Madame de Vionnet has turned each of their encounters into "a relation." Strether's own puritanical nature complicates his dilemma and affects the portrait he draws of Madame de Vionnet as she enters the room. How can all this complexity, all this show, be innocent?

> She had struck our friend, from the first of her appearing, as dressed for a great occasion, and she met still more than on either of the others the conception reawakened in him at their garden-party, the idea of the femme du monde in her habit as she lived. Her bare shoulders and arms were white and beautiful; the materials of her dress, a mixture, as he supposed, of silk and crape, were of a silvery grey so artfully composed as to give an impression of warm splendour; and round her neck she wore a collar of large old emeralds, the green note of which was more dimly repeated, at other points of her apparel, in embroidery, in enamel, in satin, in substances and textures vaguely rich. Her head, extremely fair and exquisitely festal was like a happy fancy, a notion of the Renaissance; while her slim lightness and brightness, her gaiety, her expression, her decision, contributed to an effect that might have been felt by a poet as half-mythological and half-conventional. He could have compared her to a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud, or to a sea nymph waist-high in the summer surge. Above all she suggested to him the reflexion that the femme du monde--in these finest developments of the type--was, like Cleopatra in the play, indeed various and multifold. She had aspects, characters, days, nights--or had them at least, showed them by a mysterious law of her own, when in addition to everything she happened also to be a woman of genius. She was an obscure person, a muffled person one day, and a showy person, an uncovered person the next. He thought of Madame de Vionnet tonight as showy and uncovered, though he felt the formula rough, because, thanks to one of the short-cuts of genius, she had taken all his categories by surprise (<u>AMB</u> 173).

Although Strether is composing the picture, from the outset, the image of Madame de Vionnet is one which seems to be imprinting itself upon him with a force of its own: "she had struck him...", and he immediately struggles to define her skillful mastery, her sophistication, but only comes up with a vague notion of a "femme du monde." Strether then moves quickly to a series of details which, visually, are little more than a sketching of her person: "her bare shoulders and arms"; "the materials of her dress." Moreover, his eye, as if imitating his confusion, presents the details haphazardly, moving incoherently from her shoulders down to her dress and back up to her head and neck. Psychologically, Strether also seems to be struggling to neutralize his discomfort at Madame de Vionnet's partial nudity: a second look at her bare shoulders covers them with "a collar of large old emeralds." In fact, the entire description, as noted earlier, alternates between images of concealment and revelation: there is an implicit tension between the two which Strether works to reconcile. Madame de Vionnet is both "goddess" and "sea nymph," artificial and natural; she is "obscure and muffled" one day but "showy and uncovered" the next, "an effect that might have been felt by a poet as half-mythological and half-conventional." Strether's efforts to resolve the conflict and take control of the portrait are tentative and awkward; the metaphors are mixed and strained.

If the composition seems to begin with a series of precise visual details, there is a subtle but rapid shift from what can be seen to what is sensed or inferred. Except for the collar of emeralds, no detail of Madame de Vionnet's attire is precisely located. Strether sees, vaguely, "the materials of her dress," but he cannot define them precisely--they are "a mixture, as he supposed of silk and crape." Madame de Vionnet's attire is defined impressionistically rather than visually. The implied textures and color harmony of her dress are "artfully composed as to give an impression of warm splendour." In place of visually precise details, Strether substitutes a catalogue of "materials vaguely rich": "silk," "crape," "emerald," "satin." What Strether actually sees is increasingly etherealized; it is her "lightness," "brightness," and "gaiety." The Jamesian admonition that the writer "show" rather than "tell" is betrayed as a skillful illusion in this portrait. Neither Strether nor the reader has seen Madame de Vionnet. What we have seen instead is a psychological portrait of Strether's enchantment.

Further undermining the objectivity of the portrait and the integrity of Strether's observations, James repeatedly reminds the reader of his character's subjectivity. "Our friend" is clearly not in control of his medium. All of his observations are qualified:

"as he supposed," "an effect that might have been felt," "he could have compared her." Instead of looking carefully at what he sees, Strether searches his own mind and draws forth a loaded literary analogy ("like Cleopatra in the play"), metaphors ("a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud"; a sea nymph waist-high in the summer surge"), and a vague foreign conceptualization (" femme du monde") which betrays his imprecise knowledge of the civilization he is attempting through Madame de Vionnet, to fathom.

It is not only Strether's consciousness which interferes with the clarity of the picture, however. As the composition unfolds through his eyes, it becomes clear that Madame de Vionnet's most powerful trait is precisely the one Strether is not fully conscious of--her complicity in creating her own portrait. We see this, ironically, through Strether's admiring acknowledgment of her skill: she is "artfully composed"; her "gaiety, her decision" contribute "to an effect"; "she happened...to be a woman of genius." It is as if Marie de Vionnet is the true creator of her portrait; Strether is merely interpreting her prepared copy. The dramatic development of the portrait may now be understood as a struggle not only within Strether's consciousness (as New England Puritanism and French civilization do battle), but between Strether and Madame de Vionnet who wishes to remain "various" and

"multifold," and thereby successfully oppose his efforts to understand her.

Although the composition of Madame de Vionnet is a clear instance of Jamesian portraiture--the action of the story is suspended while the subject is isolated, framed and visually brought into being by the perceiver--pictorial technique, instead of creating objectivity, imitates Strether's confusion and lack of control. The technical aspects of portraiture which are brought into play in the course of this character sketch imitate precisely Strether's movement away from clarity, towards an increasingly subjective reading and finally, to the abandonment of the effort to define the subject. From the beginning to the end of the portrait, Madame de Vionnet stands without a concrete setting (except that suggested by Strether's marine imagery); she seems to emerge mysteriously from an unknown mythic location, from a cloud or from the sea. Strether's catalogue of colors, textures, materials and subjective metaphors keeps her surrounded by "lightness" and "brightness, yet also keeps her disembodied, a figure without a ground. If Strether consciously defines Madame de Vionnet as a cultural goddess emerging from the "summer surge" and deigning to share her beauty and art with the world, his marine imagery, on a level he is not conscious of, betrays his confused impressions of her and contributes to the vagueness and dissolution

of the image and the fragmentation of meaning. Thus, within a deliberately composed and unified frame, Strether's portrait is all chaos. This undermining of visual unity and coherence, of course, serves James purpose in depicting Strether's inner conflict and provides the germ for the real drama to come when Strether will have to abandon his felicitous enchantment for a more rigorous study of Madame de Vionnet's character in a psychological and moral sense. If, for the moment, Strether is not unhappy that he can that he cannot define Madame de Vionnet but must simply embrace her complexity as a facet of her genius, his images of exposure and betrayal suggest an unconscious awareness of a side to her character he cannot yet acknowledge: all of these elements are present in the portrait.

In James, the initial impulse of a character to create a portrait and to use this portrait as an aid to knowledge or insight must be understood as dangerous. The power of the perceiver's imagination and the potential of the subject to help manipulate the perceiver are greater than any truth that might be discerned in a visual examination of a subject. All of James's major characters discover the limitations and liabilities of this mode of perception. Nonetheless, James uses pictorialism at all stages of dramatic development, first showing the way the perceiver "blunts" what he sees but later using the picture as the locus of recognition,

allowing it to reverse the process. As the Jamesian hero or heroine defines more clearly his own contribution to the portrait, he can renounce that tendency and begin to see true. In the end, Jamesian pictorialism brings the perceiver into correspondence with reality such as it is defined by the nineteenth century novelistic world, for James ultimately believes in the truth of that world.

Proustian pictorialism seems to do precisely what James himself argues for in his critical discussion of the novelist's method: it shows rather than tells. Marcel's camera-like objectivity, on the surface, traces the movement of the perceiver's eye as it frames the subject and then, step-by-step, brings it into being. Like Strether, Marcel discovers his subject in the midst of a larger occasion (a theatrical performance rather than a dinner party) and proceeds to isolate that subject from its surroundings. Marcel has long admired the illustrious family of Guermantes and now, as he awaits without great interest to see Berma perform in Phèdre, he overhears a gentleman ask for the Duchesse's box and, from this moment on, the primary stage in the theatre is occupied by the Princesse de Guermantes. For this new and more interesting subject, Marcel creates an elaborate metaphorical setting--a subaqueous marine residence whose fluid darkness is intermittently penetrated by light. For a period of

time, as he gazes upward, he cannot clearly identify anyone, but gradually his studied attention bears fruit: he begins to apprehend vaguely human forms which detach themselves from the depths; his portrait finally discovers its central focus, the Princesse de Guermantes:

> Comme une grande déesse qui préside de loin aux jeux des divinités inférieures, la princesse était restée volontairement un peu au fond sur un canapé latéral rouge comme un rocher de corail, à côté d'une large réverbération vitreuse qui était probablement une glace et faisait penser à quelque section qu'un rayon aurait pratiquée perpendiculaire, obscure et liquide, dans le cristal ébloui des eaux. A la fois plume et corolle, ainsi que certaines floraisons marines, une grande fleur blanche, duvetée comme une aile, descendait du front de la princesse le long d'une de ses joues dont elle suivait l'inflexion avec une souplesse coquette, amoureuse et vivante, et semblaiat l'enfermer à demi comme un oeuf rose dans la douceur d'un nid d'alcyon. Sur la chevelure de la princesse, et s'abaissant jusqu'à ses sourcils, puis reprise plus bas à la hauteur de sa gorge, s'entendait une résille faite de ces coquillages blancs qu'on pêche dans certaines mers australes et qui étaient mêlées à des perles, mosaïque marine à peine sortie des vagues qui par moments se trouvait plongée dans l'ombre au fond de laquelle, même alors, une présence humaine était révélée par la motilité éclatante des yeux de la princesse. La beauté qui mettait celle-ci bien au-dessus des autres filles fabuleuses de la pénombre n'était pas tout entière matériellement et inclusivement inscrite dans sa nuque, dans ses épaules, dans ses bras, dans sa taille. Mais la ligne délicieuse et inachevée de celle-ci était l'exact point de départ, l'amorce inévitable des lignes invisibles en lesquelles l'oeil ne pouvait s'empêcher de les prolonger merveilleuses, engendrées autour de la femme comme le spectre d'une figure idéal projetée sur les ténèbres. (<u>GUER I</u> 47-8).

Marcel's attitude towards his subject, his isolation of the Princesse from her surroundings, the Princesse's implied complicity in artfully presenting herself, and the concluding celebration of the ultimate mystery of the subject as that which defines her beauty--all of these elements are strikingly similar to the portrait of Madame de Vionnet created by Strether. In fact, however, these parallels enable us to examine the profound differences in these two composers' visions and in these two writers' use of pictorial technique.

Like Strether, Marcel initially envisions his subject as a goddess and defines her otherworldliness through marine imagery, but his imagery is more sustained and more unifying. Once conceived it is never abandoned and, unlike Strether's, it is never tentative or exploratory. In his use of imagery, and in other ways, Marcel is more concrete and decisive throughout the composition. Where Strether's marine imagery remains hypothetical ("he could have compared her") and defined only by a single metaphor ("a sea nymph waist high in the summer surge") and by marine colors ("silvery grey," "the green note"), Marcel's use of such imagery is much more precise visually and almost baroque in its sustained elaboration. The details of the setting all confine the Princesse to her underwater residence, from the sofa, "rouge comme un

rocher de corail" to the mirror behind her which resembles "une large réverbération vitreuse," to the "mosaïque marine" of white shells which covers her head. In fact, so completely does the imagery take over the composition that Marcel's own role in the composing activity is gradually effaced so that, at a key moment, the portrait seems to be generated by the setting itself: "une grande fleur blanche...descendait du front de la princesse le long d'une de ses joues dont elle suivait l'inflexion avec une souplesse coquette, amoureuse et vivante."

If fragmentation and indeterminacy in Strether's portrait can be seen in his mixture of metaphors, his randomly moving eye and tentative qualifications that remind the reader of his struggle to define his elusive subject, fragmentation in Marcel's portrait, understood as the piecing together of the image, serves an opposite purpose: it creates the illusion of an almost scientific and detached objectivity. Marcel's sequential focus on a single aspect of the Princesse at a time, in contrast to Strether's subjective impressionism, creates a slowly emerging mosaic and contributes to a seeming objectivity in Marcel's portraiture. As the eye enacts the coming into being of the picture, the very technique of camera-like fragmentation paradoxically creates a unified whole which comes together at the end.

What distinguishes Marcel's composing most from Strether's is precisely his success in creating this illusion of objectivity. All of his techniques contribute to this effect: the singleness and decisiveness of the imagery, the activation of an element of the setting as having a set of emotions, an attitude toward the subject, the shift from product (the achieved portrait) to process (its gradual emergence), and even the passive construction of certain key sentences which make the subject seem to emerge according it its own conditions. Instead of the picture being shaped by a perceiver whose vision has been shaped by his own subjectivity, by his impressions of a culture as Strether's is, Marcel represents himself as being controlled by a series of optical facts, by a sort of conspiracy whereby light as an optical truth takes control of the composition, deciding when the human presence of the subject will be revealed, when it will be submerged in its element. Thus it is not the Princesse who conspires against Marcel, not one human subjectivity against another, but rather, the entire visual world which defines itself to him according to its own objective terms. This is a marvelous instance of sleight of hand (or eye) on Marcel's part. The reader has completely forgotten that this is Marcel's composition and that he is fully as much under the spell of the Princesse de Guermantes as Strether is victim of Madame de Vionnet's charms.

The seeming objectivity of the portrait derives most of all from the science of optics through which Marcel rigorously defines the way he apprehends the subject. It is the optical effect of light reflecting off a mirror behind the Princesse which rigidly controls the eye of the viewer and defines the precise focus of his attention. As this light penetrates the darkness, half-concealing, half-disclosing this mysterious, other worldly creature whose "présence humaine" is only intermittently and eerily revealed by "la motilité éclatante des yeux," the perceiver's eye is focused at the point where her waist disappears into the depths. Although Marcel's subject thus emerges as a product of almost perfect photographic realism, interestingly, it is this same light in the picture which ironizes the objectivity and, at the end, suggests that the Princesse may be no more than a reflection.

Thus the absolute clarity of Marcel's vision is not carried through to completion in this portrait. He can no more define the ultimate mystery of his subject than Strether can, and his composition concludes with the same admiration for his subject's capacity to elude him, to retain its essential mystery, as Strether's does. Paradoxically, it is Strether's pictorial description which convinces us of his subject's essential humanity and warmth, despite her fallibility: she

slowly moves towards him, in all her splendor, in the course of the description. In contrast, Marcel draws a portrait of someone who is, increasingly, disembodied and dehumanized. At the close of his composition, she is no more than a "spectre" of an ideal figure "projected" against the darkness; she exists, not as an objective fact or a real person, but as a reflection created magically by a set of visual circumstances upon the eye of a passive perceiver, a miracle of optics projected against a wall of darkness. All of Marcel's techniques of objectifying the image, in reality, serve the purpose of rendering it subjective, an absolute and contained product of personal vision.

Through a deceptive use of objective visual technique, Marcel legitimizes subjectivity in his composition, for he succeeds, amazingly, in creating a picture which is simultaneously an objectively verifiable reality and, at the same time, a projection of his own mind and his belief in the power of the mind to create a world. Both James and Proust explore the potential of the picture to deceive the viewer, but whereas, in James, the source of the illusion is transparent (the reader is never confused about Strether's naïveté or Madame de Vionnet's artfulness), Proust summons all of his narrative techniques to deemphasize the potential subjectivity of the perceiver. Proust thus uses pictorialism in more subtle and complex ways and is far more manipulative of the reader.

Pictorial technique in James and Proust can now be understood as supporting diametrically opposed visions of the world. James believes in the objectivity and ultimate knowability of the external world and his pictorialism always returns to the issue of correspondence. Proust uses pictorialism to detach the image from correspondence to an objective reality. "Objectivity" in Proust, therefore, is redefined as an independent holistic impression created by a perceiver, a creative portrait defined ultimately by its detachment from external correspondence. If James returns his subject to the world because it has been misappropriated pictorially, Proust successfully appropriates that subject and defends the rightness of such appropriation.

If pictorialism in James and Proust initially seems to represent a commitment to truth, it ultimately forces the perceiver to examine the preconceptions which govern the way he sees and knows a subject. In the broad sense, James may be understood as classical in orientation, never really deviating, despite modern narrative techniques, from a dualistic vision of the world. What the individual brings to his understanding of reality, personally and culturally, must ultimately be recognized as distorting and must be filtered out of the picture. To the extent that this is possible, all of James's heroes and heroines work toward this ideal:

they renounce those qualities in themselves which have betrayed them by falsifying their knowledge of the world. Proust, in contrast, shares with his contemporaries and successors, a modern, more subjective vision: what the perceiver brings to the composition not only must be integrated; it is its most important component. Proust's narrator thus ultimately overcomes the dualism between self and world by insisting on the power and rightness of the perceiver's vision.

At the end of his story, each Jamesian character examines his own visualizing process, the pictures he has created and believed in which have led him to the point where he now stands. Almost without exception, the perceiver regards these pictures ruefully, nobly recognizing the failure of his vision and its consequences. In _The Portrait of a Lady_ and _The Ambassadors_, both Isabel Archer and Lambert Strether accept responsibility for their idealism, for their naïve efforts to understand complex and subtle human beings by creating false portraits, portraits which have given less than noble characters great power over their destinies. The price they have paid for their inaccurate perceptions is high. In a final encounter between Kate Croy and Merton Densher at the end of _The Wings of the Dove_, Densher appeals to Kate to give up everything and marry him, "as we were." She replies, "We shall never be again as we were!"(457) and Densher

is forced to face the fact that the woman whose re-vision of reality has forced him to sacrifice his integrity has long since ceased to be the woman he loves. Only in The Golden Bowl, James's last completed novel, is the heroine triumphant in imposing her vision on the world. The Prince is made finally to conform to the portrait Maggie Verver has shaped, against all odds, in the course of the story. But in the last scene of the novel, what Maggie sees in Amerigo's eyes fills her with "pity and dread." She must finally come to terms with the fact that in adopting the model of behavior established by the Prince, formal illusions and the lies they embody have taken precedence over personal truth. James makes it clear that Maggie's victory is pyrrhic. In the end Prince Amerigo, standing before her, "trying, too clearly, to please her--to meet her in her own way" (548), remains all illusion, her illusion. She knows and must avert her gaze.

In absolute contrast to the recognition that picture making must ultimately be rejected, the Proustian narrator at the end of Le temps retrouvé celebrates the power of personal vision to arrive at a universal truth. This vision is defined differently in Proust because the narrator comes to occupy the privileged position of the artist. If Marcel's initial pictures explore the inadequacies of subjective ways of seeing and composing the world, this does not lead him to

abandon his pictorial method. Instead he continues to use visual metaphors to describe the artist's progressive stripping away of surface elements in order to arrive at a deeper knowledge of the subject. Like James's characters, Marcel recognizes the distortions which our habits of mind impose on a subject, but, unlike James, Proust suggests, through the struggle of his perceiver, that it is possible to descend deeper within the self and bring forth a new and truer picture. For Marcel, and for Proust, the only project which gives life meaning is that of creating this truth: "Combien me le semblait-elle davantage, maintenant qu'elle me semblait pouvoir être éclaircie, elle qu'on vit dans les ténèbres, ramenée au vrai de ce qu'elle était, elle qu'on fausse sans cesse, en somme réalisée dans un livre!" (TR 423). In Proust, pictorialism is thus used to identify not only what must be stripped away but also to discover and shape a true image of the world. So committed is he to his belief in the universality of this personal vision that he argues, finally, that his book will enable others to read this same truth within themselves: "Car ils ne seraient pas, selon moi, mes lecteurs, mais les propres lecteurs d'eux-mêmes, mon livre n'étant qu'une sorte de ces verres grossissants...mon livre, grâce auquel je leur fournirais le moyen de lire en eux-mêmes" (TR 424). At the end of Le temps retrouvé the line between

fiction and reality and between "Marcel" and Proust becomes increasingly fine; we can almost see Proust stepping out of the book and speaking to the reader and, at the same time, drawing the reader into the vision of art and life (the two have become one) he has carefully composed. The conclusion to this novel is a celebration of the wonderful power of the mind to create the only world we will ever know. Where James chastises the self that would seek to appropriate the world and have it on its own terms, Proust reifies that self, endows it with an integrity never before delineated in fiction.

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