

THE USE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MATCHMAKER  
IN REPRESENTATIVE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

If one is familiar with such Henry James novels as Roderick Hudson, Washington Square, The Portrait of a Lady, The Spoils of Poynton, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl,<sup>1</sup> then the characters Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, Madame Merle, Mrs. Gereth, Kate Croy, and Fanny Assingham should arouse a similar reaction in connection with their respective stories. Could these characters somehow become real and confront each other, they would undoubtedly find they had much in common. Each functions as a go-between, or matchmaker, by trying to arrange a marriage between a close relative or one with whom the matchmaker is intimately associated, and a mate whom the matchmaker favors. With the resulting marriage, the match-

<sup>1</sup>The edition of James's novels used in this thesis is the New York Edition. Roderick Hudson appears as Volume 1, The Portrait of a Lady as Volumes 3 and 4, The Spoils of Poynton as Volume 10, The Wings of the Dove as Volumes 19 and 20, and The Golden Bowl as Volumes 23 and 24. Because James did not include Washington Square in the New York Edition, I shall use F. O. Matthiessen's 1947 edition of The American Novels and Stories of Henry James, which does include the novel. Page references to the novels will be to the two above-cited editions and will be incorporated hereafter into the body of the thesis. For convenience hereafter, a two volume novel will be referred to as Volumes I and II.

maker feels that the effects thus produced will enhance the situations of all concerned, especially herself, in some socially prestigious or purely material way.

As the use of the matchmaker is evident in several of James's novels and becomes increasingly significant in the development of theme and meaning, it seems feasible to speculate that the employment of the character of the matchmaker was no accident, but rather a deliberate and consistent device. In the late phase of his writing, James was deeply concerned with the general theme of the disintegration and corruption of Western civilization, which he dramatized by creating his own microcosm, embodied in the high societies of American, English, and Italian aristocracy, in which their people work out his themes. While this idea of the breakdown of Western civilization is not strong in the first two phases of James's writing, the seeds had nevertheless been sown in these early periods. Bits and pieces of the idea crop up in his early novels, but the full-blown concept does not come to fruition until the completion of the three novels of the late phase. The matchmaker, therefore, may be viewed as a consistently used touchstone to the development and maturation of his fiction, especially from a moral viewpoint.

The purpose of this thesis, then, will be a two-fold study: first, to trace the general development of the matchmakers as characters of common background, characteristics, and motive, while at the same time focusing on the development of each of the six matchmakers individually; and second, to demonstrate chronologically the matchmaker as a consistently more complicated device that reveals the increasingly ominous moral overtones of such a role. While other characters in James's novels bear, as well, the burden of moral responsibility, the matchmaker is a recognizable type that can be traced in each of James's three phases of writing: the early years, 1870-1881; the middle years, 1882-1895; and the late years, 1896-1916.

Many have accused James of confining his characters to a narrow range of experience, which limits a definable semblance of reality in his fiction. In a sense, this conscious limitation on James's part is true, although the result does not prohibit an understanding of the artist's intentions. One may validly claim that James may even have written about areas of experience that he had never crossed himself, but he never allowed his drawback to stifle his creative imagination. Within the limitations of his self-created world of fiction, James included all the elements, references, and principles necessary for an

understanding of the characters who move in that world.<sup>2</sup> This microcosm that James creates is a moral universe in which the characters must work out their destinies. While the conflict of good and evil is ever present as thematic material in his novels, the more important moral issues involve people, not as individuals, but in their relationships with others.

The fact that James was the last great novelist of the twentieth century who could rely on a stable society is significant.<sup>3</sup> His characters, who people that society, become its masters or victims, as they fight it, master it, or are thrown at its mercy. Often, the uninitiated in James's novels, full of vitality, sensibility, and individuality, are thrust upon society in attempting to seek their destinies. Once, however, they manage to enter deep into the society, the society, "operating upon protective and preservative principles of its own, turns upon [them], closing around [them], as the amoeba surrounds the foreign particle."<sup>4</sup> This conception of alien forces that seem to surround the individual is like an echo of those forces of fate and destiny that were part of the Greek view of life,

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Stevenson, The Crooked Corridor: A Study of Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), pp. 22-24.

<sup>3</sup> Stevenson, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> Stevenson, p. 74.

which flourished in the time of Aristotle. In his essay on Turgenev, James said, "Life is, in fact, a battle. On this point optimists and pessimists agree. Evil is insolent and strong; beauty enchanting but rare; goodness very apt to be weak; folly very apt to be defiant; wickedness to carry the day; imbeciles to be in great places, people of sense in small, and mankind generally, unhappy."<sup>5</sup>

The world that James knew was one that appeared corrupt and materialistic. Evil to him was a very real, inevitable, and unavoidable commodity in society. Because of the nature of the world in which they live, the uninitiated in James's fiction are often destined to meet and to be defeated by the force of evil. As James's conception of evil is embodied in the forms of civilization, it becomes an ever-present reality that corrupts and destroys. In attempting to focus realistically on man as a moral creature, James found him unsatisfactory. His novels reveal a sickness of a whole civilization that manifests itself primarily in personal relations.

Moreover, as if it were not bad enough that James saw the evil present in society as a whole, he even ferrets out the evil he felt was latent in every man. Since James

<sup>5</sup>Henry James, "Ivan Turgenieff," French Poets and Novelists (London: Macmillan & Company, 1919), p. 250.

deals with the relationships between people, rather than with the individual alone, this evil takes the form of moral instead of natural evil. That is, the evil is the result of an individual's dealings with others, not something that is an inevitable part of him. And it is in terms of this moral conception of evil that the matchmaker in James's fiction assumes primary importance. By typing this character consistently in various novels, James was able to represent this moral evil through specific examples. The burden of moral responsibility that the matchmaker perverts exemplifies what is, in the fiction of James, the principal sin, the violation of the sanctity of the human heart.<sup>6</sup> In arranging marriages between fellow human beings, the matchmaker deliberately intervenes in the lives of others, deadens their sources of feeling, and prevents their pursuit of free will and happiness. This outright meddling on the part of the matchmaker is a "blindness to the fact that people are like plants that can only be watered, not touched."<sup>7</sup>

James's specific indictment, excellently adapted to

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Osborn Andreas, Henry James and the Expanding Horizon (1948; rpt. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 5.

the character of the matchmaker, is the misemployment or willful manipulation of another human being, "using" him for some unworthy purpose or end. The term "emotional cannibalism," coined by Osborn Andreas in his book Henry James and the Expanding Horizon, descriptively expresses this manipulation of others, although James himself preferred to call it "omnivorous egotism."<sup>8</sup> What James seems to see in life, as a result, is the harm that people inflict, on themselves as well as others, by such acts of emotional cannibalism. The suffering that James's matchmakers cause is not so much physical, as mental and emotional, while the toll in human damage is irreparable. The usual outcome of their machinations effectively cuts off their victims from freedom of experience and denies them a chance for happiness.

The motivation of the matchmaker easily reflects James's opinion of European high society. Despite all its social graces that James so much admired, the society withheld its true face, in which corruption and potential evil reign. And in his novels James was able to portray this appearance versus reality through his two-faced matchmakers. The evil intentions that they hide behind a mask

<sup>8</sup>Henry James, Hawthorne (New York: Harper & Bros., 1880), p. 132. See Ward, p. 11, for further reference.

of friendship and confidence were as Maggie Verver finally realizes in The Golden Bowl, "the thing hideously behind, behind so much trusted, so much pretended, nobleness, cleverness, tenderness" (II, 237). The reasons for match-making may be various, but they all reflect an essential egotism on the part of the matchmaker. Whether it derives from arrogant moral opinion, meddling, parasitism, coercion, exploitation, revenge,<sup>9</sup> or personal gain, matchmaking is an aspect of emotional cannibalism that implies a social evil.

By tracing the use of the matchmaker as one device for discovering meaning and interpreting values in the vast but complex world of James's fiction, one may chart the novelist's changing attitude towards this character and the increasing significance that the matchmaker assumes in the chronological progression of the aforementioned six novels to be discussed. Further, through a study of these Jamesian women, one discerns with each successive novel an undeniably more mature attitude in his treatment of them. While their function and many of their characteristics remain the same, there is evident a marked change from novel to novel. From Roderick Hudson to The Golden Bowl, one notices the deepening complexity and importance of

<sup>9</sup>Andreas, p. 154.

character, as well as an obvious corruption of such moral standards as James set for himself and his characters.

During the course of this study the following matchmakers will be considered: Mrs. Light in Roderick Hudson, Lavinia Penniman in Washington Square, Serena Merle in The Portrait of a Lady, Mrs. Gereth in The Spoils of Poynton, Kate Croy in The Wings of the Dove, and Fanny Assingham in The Golden Bowl. The first three will be considered together, as they are early examples of the Jamesian matchmaker, with Madame Merle as the major achievement of the early period. In the following section Mrs. Gereth and Kate Croy will be analyzed, as each is similarly motivated and Mrs. Gereth is a good introduction to the ultimate matchmaker, Kate Croy. The Golden Bowl will comprise the fourth chapter in which the emphasis will be on the effects and implications of matchmaking, rather than a detailed analysis of Mrs. Assingham, since the novel is important not for the character of the matchmaker, but for the results of what she does. Finally, in a separate chapter, the significance of the matchmaker in terms of James's use of this device will be calculated.

From consultation of bibliographical sources and secondary material on James, I have not found a study equivalent to the one I have chosen. While studies have been made of the various matchmakers in relation to their

respective novels, to each other, and as confidantes to other characters, I have not been able to find a formal undertaking of the scope I propose. The fact that a matchmaker appears so often as a character in a James novel would indicate that a study of this type should be both beneficial and valuable in the canon of Jamesian criticism. In an age of scholarship that demands ever-increasing validity and accuracy, the topic of the matchmaker combines an evaluation of a pattern or type with an interpretation of moral responsibility to which no age can afford to deny significance.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RODERICK HUDSON, WASHINGTON SQUARE, AND THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

While it has been noted earlier that the fullest expression of what James considered the corruption and moral breakdown of his society does not appear until the late phase of his writing, the seeds of his discontent can be traced to the novels of his first two phases. By charting the development of the matchmaker from Roderick Hudson (1876), to Washington Square (1880), and finally to The Portrait of a Lady (1881), one notices the deepening complexity and importance of character in these early works. Although the burden of moral responsibility that each of the three matchmakers assumes is heavy and although, in terms of background, age, and egotistical motives, these women are similar, there is evident a marked change in the matchmaker with each successive novel. The continual absurdity<sup>1</sup> and comic grotesqueness of Mrs. Light and the persistent romanticism of Aunt Penniman, who assumes the

<sup>1</sup>Richard Poirier, The Comic Sense of Henry James: A Study of the Early Novels (1960; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 21.

guise of a Fairy Godmother,<sup>2</sup> were the proving grounds for the more mature treatment of Madame Merle, a rather complex, full-blooded character who merits a substantial amount of reader sympathy by the end of The Portrait of a Lady. In the course of this chapter, the various similarities of the early James matchmakers will be described, so as to form an adequate idea of the function of these women within the moral scheme of James's fiction. Moreover, revelation of his changing attitude toward the matchmaker may serve as an index of the developing complexity of this character in his novels.

Roderick Hudson is acknowledged as James's first significant novel and provides the initial example of the matchmaker in Mrs. Light. Her introduction in the novel sets an immediate tone for her overall behavior, as she appears as a middle-aged woman with a rather pompous air. Her clothing practically drips with various types of showy ornamentation, ruffles, and other lavish trifles of dress, while the way she carries herself conveys a majestic expansiveness. When she makes her first entrance into Hudson's studio, she looms as an "imposing voluminous person who quite filled up the doorway" (p. 150), and later

<sup>2</sup>Poirier, p. 166.

it is noted that she has a "great deal of presence" (p. 153), an ambiguous yet comic statement, explained as referring to the physical presence of Mrs. Light rather than some charismatic quality she may have. Although it seems that she once had been very beautiful, Mrs. Light now is faded and must resort to make-up to revive what good looks she has left. But, despite her traces of beauty, her countenance is described as "fatuous," a fact which does little to enhance her powers of judgment and intelligence in the exploitation of her daughter.

Starting with Mrs. Light and noting later with Aunt Penniman and Madame Merle, James appears to have been concerned with the background of the matchmaker. Mrs. Light, formerly Savage by name and now a widow, was the daughter of an American painter and an English actress. Her mother was said to beat Mr. Savage with a stick and lock him up so that he would paint to earn money. The former Miss Savage met Mr. Light, an English consul, who was sent to Europe from America because of some unknown wrong-doing. The two were married soon after they met, but Mr. Light was mysteriously drowned at sea three years later. After her husband's death, Mrs. Light vowed she will not remarry without obtaining a title and a fortune. As time passes, she becomes vain, worldly, silly, and horribly scatter-brained. What money she has is the result of returning to

America and winning a lawsuit from her husband's family. More importantly in her past, however, is the secret of her daughter's parentage. Christina is the product of Mrs. Light and the genial Cavaliere, with whom Mrs. Light once had a short-lived affair and who now travels with the mother and daughter more as a servant than an equal. Mrs. Light's unhappy background, then, coupled with the secret of Christina's illegitimate birth, forms a dark spot in the past of this widow.

These facts may help to explain her particular attitude towards life. "Mrs. Light, having failed to make her own fortune in matrimony, has transferred her hopes to her daughter and nursed them until they have become a monomania" (p. 164). She seems just as concerned with finding a fortune for herself as she is with finding one for her daughter. In contracting a marriage for Christina, Mrs. Light values a fortune as more important than whether her daughter will love her chosen partner. In terms of the matchmaker and her relations with others, "love" may prove a key word. While love may have its place in the match, it becomes secondary to the personal motives of the matchmaker. If love is a fruit of the match, then so much the better, but the main goal is the procurement of the match, even if such arts as lying, deceiving, and concealing of facts are needed in the effort.

Mrs. Light has set her sights on a prince, at the least, for her daughter and, in the process, has given Christina the education of a princess, while making a career of displaying her marriageable daughter.<sup>3</sup> Referring to the professional attitude that defines Mrs. Light's attempts to marry her daughter, the gossipy yet astute Madame Grandoni reveals to Rowland Mallet that she "has opened her booth at the fair; she has her great natural wonder to show, and she beats her big drum outside" (p. 196). In her attempts to find a suitable husband for Christina, her actions appear as if she were constantly throwing out nets and then pulling them back in again to see what she has caught. Mrs. Light is obviously willing to go to great lengths to fulfill her desires. By spending large sums of money to finance a large ball in honor of Christina, she easily draws the attention of prospective husbands to "her booth at the fair."

As Mrs. Light is constantly on exhibit through the eyes of other characters and through what she herself says, the falseness of her character and her absurd actions are made clear by James. In Roderick's studio, after Christina has pronounced her dog Stenterello better than the aris-

<sup>3</sup>Walter F. Wright, The Madness of Art: A Study of Henry James (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 42.

ocracy, Mrs. Light must follow that remark with a ludicrous one of her own: "'My precious love!' exclaimed the mother in deprecating accents, but with a significant glance at Rowland which seemed to bespeak his attention to the originality of her possessing a daughter who was herself so original" (p. 153). At such an outbreak of ridiculous pomposity, Rowland "mentally made the distinction that the mother was inordinately shallow" (p. 153).

Later, while observing some sculpture that Roderick has completed, she mistakes his Adam for a gladiator and his Eve for a gypsy, then tries to cover her error by explaining that "she could never judge of such things unless she saw them in the marble" (p. 156). And at a ball which she gives for Christina, she is constantly obsequious to her aristocratic guests by bowing very low whenever she is introduced. It is during the ball, too, that Mrs. Light chooses a cavalier for her daughter and even usurps the right of Christina to accept or refuse a dance. When the cavalier, Prince Casamassima, asks Christina for the honor of a dance, it is Mrs. Light, not Christina, who responds, "Of course you may. The honor is for us" (p. 216).

James further reveals Mrs. Light's shallow and superficial handling of the matchmaking through comic overtones when she, along with the Prince and Christina, encounters Roderick Hudson and Rowland Mallet asleep under a tree in

the country. Christina remarks that she would like to be able to sleep under such a tree too, but that

" . . . it would have been unheard of."

"Oh, not quite," said the Prince, in English, in a tone of great precision. "There was already a Sleeping Beauty in the Wood."

"Charming!" cried Mrs. Light. "Do you hear that my dear?" (p. 235).

To further accent this same tendency in Mrs. Light, as the five are having dinner outside on a terrace, in the scene just previously mentioned, the desultory turns of conversation prompt her to remark casually, "Christina love, the Prince has a terrace four hundred feet long, all paved with marble" (p. 236), which is indicative of the materialistic advantages the match with the Prince must hold for the mother. More absurd is the fact that Christina reveals the intensity with which Mrs. Light dotes on the estimate of the Prince's wealth, as she keeps such information tabulated in a little book.

From other characters in the novel, additional insight is given into the character of Mrs. Light. Such information, taken as a whole, adds up to an adequate estimate of her true personality. Rowland Mallet, early in the novel, suspects that the "mama . . . is a bit of an adventuress" (p. 159). Later, speaking of the Prince to Mrs. Light, he "hope[s] you will nail him. You have played a dangerous

game with your daughter; it would be a pity not to win" (p. 254). Madame Grandoni ventures to admit that she is afraid Christina has been corrupted because of the way she has been propagandized by her mother so thoroughly, adding that "if she has not been quite ruined she's a very decent creature" (p. 164). Others see fit to remark that Mrs. Light is "a horrible mother" (p. 385), and even "such a finished fool of a mother" (p. 390). Moreover, the comment is made that she has the smile of an "old slave merchant calling attention to the 'points' of a Circassian beauty" (p. 179).

Even Christina is aware of the essential vulgarity of her mother's actions, as she validly calculates her mother's intentions: "You always get something for everything. I dare say that with patience you'll still get something for me" (p. 158). Or, as she reveals candidly yet sarcastically to Rowland: "Oh, I take it you know very well that we're hunting for a husband and that none but tremendous swells need apply. Unless you have millions, you know, you needn't apply" (p. 180). When the young girl calls off the engagement to the Prince, she tells Rowland that her mother "has been abusing me for the last twenty-four hours as if I were the vilest of the vile" (p. 406). Finally, Mrs. Light herself reveals the lack of consideration and love she has shown in her match-

making through a brilliant example of her callous logic. To her way of thinking, "she had been performing a pious duty in bringing up Christina to carry herself . . . to market" (p. 249).

Thus, Mrs. Light is far from fitting the ideal picture of motherhood. The terrible secret of Christina's illegitimate birth, which she continually holds over the head of her daughter, is a weapon finally used to force Christina to conform to her wishes. Neither does her pompous attitude of her own self-importance, nor the way she treats the real father of Christina, the Cavaliere, endear her to the reader. She will not even toast him because she despises her former lover. It seems that her "conscience has apparently told her that she could expiate one hour's too great kindness by twenty years' contempt" (p. 418). After the marriage of the Prince and Christina, she packs the Cavaliere off to Ancona, Italy, with a yearly pension. Little does she seem to care, likewise, that Christina is absolutely unhappy with her husband. Although her daughter feels no love for the Prince, Mrs. Light is "more and more imbued with the absolute primacy, to the exclusion of all moderation, of her ambitions for Christina."<sup>4</sup> James portrays her as deficient in her sense of obligations to

<sup>4</sup>Poirier, p. 31.

others and as a comic, grotesque character because she is unrelenting in her goals.<sup>5</sup> The last that is heard of Mrs. Light is enough for one to assume that time has not changed her. Near the end of the novel, in Switzerland, Rowland chances upon Christina at a church and asks her how Mrs. Light is. Christina replies that her "mother is in the enjoyment of superb health, and may be seen every evening at the Casino at the Baths of Lucca confiding to every newcomer that she has married her daughter--tremendously" (p. 491).

Although a crude, often grotesque, often burlesque figure, Mrs. Light is a rough outline for those matchmakers that follow, in her attempts to marry her daughter to a wealthy and aristocratic prince of Italy. Her fanatical determination to marry her daughter, which comprises half of the basic conflict of the novel, is outright coercion. By holding in reserve the truth of Christina's real parentage, Mrs. Light is assured of the manipulative power she holds. Moreover, the flagrant egotism of her motives, her desire for the security and prestige that wealth will bring her, locates her within the moral framework of James's evil-oriented society. Instead of a proper concern for the welfare of her daughter, she is "undeviating in her belief

<sup>5</sup>Poirier, p. 38.

in the value of those practical rewards which are an expression of traditional social hierarchies."<sup>6</sup> By not allowing Christina to express the love she properly feels for Roderick Hudson, by espousing unworthy ends in her matchmaking, and by thereby limiting the happiness of another human being, Mrs. Light is an early example of the harm and injury we actively condone in personal relations.

In Washington Square James seems to have taken a step ahead in his development of the matchmaker. The monomania and absurd behavior of Mrs. Light has given way to a more humorous portrayal of Lavinia Penniman. While many of the characteristics of Mrs. Light apply to Mrs. Penniman, Mrs. Penniman is a more integral part in the development of plot, although in a comic fashion. While she retains the same traits--her background, her own interests, her desire to help a close relative in society--Aunt Penniman breaks the mold set by Mrs. Light in that she will lie outright and deceive to promote the marriage of her niece and Morris Townsend. Nor does she have the hidden secret to keep from her niece; but she compensates for this drawback by performing her matchmaking under the guise of exaggerated romance and intrigue.

<sup>6</sup>Poirier, pp. 38-39.

Aunt Penniman, like Mrs. Light, is a middle-aged widow. She is tall, thin, fair, and rather faded, with an even-tempered disposition but with a "certain foolish indirectness and obliquity of character" (p. 166). While she tends to be overly romantic and sentimental, she "had not a high sense of humor" (p. 167) and "was not absolutely veracious" (p. 166). James regards her with a satiric "snigger" when he calls her a "woman of imagination," as is seen through his comic explanation of her conduct: "She was very fond of kissing people's foreheads; it was an involuntary expression of sympathy with the intellectual part" (p. 246). Such a statement seems to set the tone for James's treatment of her.

Having moved into the home of Dr. Sloper and his daughter Catherine, since she now had no other family, her job was to supervise the education of her niece. But by the time Catherine turned eighteen, Aunt Penniman had been unsuccessful in making a clever woman of her, causing Dr. Sloper to question her further usefulness in his household. Thus frightened by the doctor, since she had failed in this way to put the rather drab and homely Catherine "into the momentum of society,"<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Penniman resorts to matchmaking

<sup>7</sup>R. P. Blackmur, "Introduction," Washington Square and The Europeans (New York: Dell, 1969), p. 10.

in order to get Catherine married and appease Dr. Sloper. In her blind endeavor to match Catherine with a worthy gentleman, while at the same time trying to fill a void left in her own life by the death of her husband, a void in which her life is filled with constant boredom and little excitement, Mrs. Penniman schemes with the worthless Morris Townsend to win the love of her niece for Townsend.

To her, the situation that she attempts to manipulate is akin to a small drama in which she may both watch and act. But her dreams of filling a central part in an elopement and in a final reconciliation with Dr. Sloper, who detests Townsend, are selfish rather than sensible. She is easily deceived herself because a romantic haze clouds her sense of judgment, preventing her from divining how she has misjudged Morris Townsend.<sup>8</sup> She cannot see that Townsend is only after Catherine's potential fortune and is not really in love with the young girl. Relying on his good looks and his lies that he loves Catherine, he uses Aunt Penniman to get what he wants. Since he has no job or means of support, Catherine's fortune looms large to Townsend, who is characteristically parasitic and lazy.

The romanticism which dictates the actions of Aunt

<sup>8</sup>Sister M. Corona Sharp, The Confidante in Henry James (Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1963), p. xxiii.

Penniman is the closest parallel to the self-centeredness of Mrs. Light. Aunt Penniman views her whole scheme to capture Townsend for Catherine as little more than melodramatic romance. Her imagination seems to have caught fire and consumed her in the process. Despite the fact that Dr. Sloper frowned on the match of his daughter with Townsend,

Mrs. Penniman's imagination was not chilled by trifles; and of the guilty couple--she liked to think of poor Catherine and her suitor as the guilty couple--being shuffled away in a fast whirling vehicle to some obscure lodging in the suburbs, where she would pay them (in a thick veil) clandestine visits; where they would endure a period of romantic privation; and when ultimately, after she should have been their earthly providence, their intercessor, their advocate, and their medium of communication with the world, they would be reconciled to her brother in an artistic tableau, in which she herself should be somehow the central figure. (p. 218).

She takes great delight in the "sentimental shadows of this little drama" (p. 218). When she wishes the scheme to thicken progressively, her actions and advice are for the purpose of producing that result. "It was rather incoherent counsel, and from one day to another it contradicted itself; but it was pervaded by an earnest desire that Catherine should do something striking" (p. 218). Lying and deceiving seems the only way to keep her little drama alive, as she feels she is forced to conceal from Dr. Sloper many of Townsend's visits to Catherine. After a visit by Aunt Penniman to Dr. Sloper's other sister Mrs. Almond, Mrs. Almond discusses that visit later with the doctor:

"She has got such an artificial mind. She always wants me to conceal everything" (p. 184). Dr. Sloper himself is forced to confront Aunt Penniman with his notion that she was "wanting in frankness" (p. 191). Aunt Penniman reveals even her own rather selfish and callous motives in the scheme by telling Catherine, "Pray, what does it matter" (p. 189), after hearing that Dr. Sloper dislikes Morris Townsend.

True to her aspirations and duties as matchmaker, Aunt Penniman maintains an almost daily communication with Townsend, for the greater part of the romance. Since Catherine is eventually forbidden to see the man she loves, Aunt Penniman meets secretly with Townsend to keep up the illusion of romantic adventure. It is in such situations as these that she allows herself to dissemble, even at their first tryst. She tells Townsend that he and Catherine ought to elope, even though at a later meeting she changes her mind and advises a "watch and wait" attitude. Throughout the course of her relations with Morris Townsend, Catherine, and Dr. Sloper, she is forced to dissemble with each in order to make the scheme work for her. First, to Townsend she lies about Catherine's devoted interest in the young man, since so much of what Catherine does and decides depends upon her desire to please her father. Moreover, Aunt Penniman is not in the least jealous of Cather-

ine; in fact, she acts more as a mother to Townsend than a prospective romantic interest. Second, she must deceive Dr. Sloper by keeping secret as many of Townsend's visits as she can. Even after Townsend drops Catherine, Aunt Penniman further deceives Dr. Sloper by keeping him unaware of the facts of the situation. Since she is rather afraid of her brother, she feels that if she acts as though she did not know what had happened between Catherine and her lover, then she would be cleared of the charge that she had meddled. Finally, her treatment of Catherine is horrible. Realizing how much her niece loves Townsend and knowing that if she does marry him Dr. Sloper will not leave her his fortune, Aunt Penniman feels sure that Townsend should not marry without the money. Her attitude is taken with full knowledge that she is sacrificing Catherine for the sake of Morris Townsend's future.

By the end of the novel, no one, including James, thinks very highly of Aunt Penniman. Although she is supposedly helping him, Townsend eventually labels her a "humbug," for all her unsuccessful efforts. While Dr. Sloper had never particularly cared for her in the first place, Catherine's awareness is slow in coming. Gradually a sense of her aunt's unwarranted meddling makes itself clear, "and from this came a vague apprehension that she would spoil something" (p. 224). It is through James him-

self, however, that the combination of humor and moral deficiency in Aunt Penniman is revealed. After Catherine returns from her European trip with her father, she accuses her aunt to her face of being contradictory. James, as narrator, remarks that "this attack was unexpected, for Mrs. Penniman was not used, in any discussion, to seeing the war carried into her country--possibly because the enemy generally had doubts of finding subsistence there" (p. 255). At another time the narrator predicts the possible harm that Aunt Penniman might cause: "Mrs. Penniman's reflections were rarely just, and, moreover, she felt that it was not for her to depend on what Catherine might do. She was to do her duty, quite irrespective of Catherine" (p. 262).

Thus, the drama which Aunt Penniman has spun, apparently for her own fulfillment, reveals her as a close associate of Mrs. Light. Each of these widows calculates the future and attempts to control the fate of a daughter.<sup>9</sup> But in the case of Mrs. Light she is successful, as far as her own aspirations are concerned, while Mrs. Penniman fails. Furthermore, each of the manipulated young girls realizes what the matchmakers are doing. Christina shows total awareness of her mother's plans. She knows her

<sup>9</sup>Poirier, p. 182.

mother is using her maliciously, but remains indifferent to what she does. Catherine, too, finally sees her aunt as one who has with blunder upon blunder tried to marry her to Morris Townsend. "A consummate sense of her aunt's meddlesome folly had come over her . . . and she was sickened with the thought that Mrs. Penniman had been let loose, as it were, upon her happiness" (p. 276).

Despite her definite shortcomings, Mrs. Penniman exposes the comic side of James. Her romantic illusions of the love affair between Catherine and Morris Townsend and her relentless deception of everyone involved are undoubtedly humorous and comically effective. Unlike Mrs. Light, she plays a significant part of the drama of Washington Square, a role whose inconsistencies of behavior but consistency of goal serve as a catalyst for much of the action. Like Mrs. Light, she is practically unchanged from beginning to end. "She remained quite the same officious and imaginative Mrs. Penniman, and the odd mixture of impetuosity and circumspection, that we have hitherto known" (p. 284).

Blinded by the romantic fervor, however, in which she relives her own fantasies and unfulfilled wishes through the matching of others, Aunt Penniman neglects to consider the damage she may be doing to her niece. While she does not overtly coerce Catherine, her moral transgression is an

unwarranted meddling. She denies Catherine's right to freedom of choice, whether that choice be good or bad. In terms of James's purpose for the matchmaker, Aunt Penniman is a deterrent to the happiness of her niece; in terms of her moral responsibility to others, she is a failure. Paving the way for The Portrait of a Lady, Aunt Penniman becomes a primitive type of confidante, almost a pseudo-confidante or a caricature of one, as she performs the simple function of lending an ear and giving advice, however bad it may be. A schemer and a meddler, she finds it natural to "embellish any subject that she touched" (p. 173). By frustrating her dreams, by taking advantage of her comic potentialities, and by exposing her coarse sensationalism,<sup>10</sup> James uses her as a comic matchmaker and lets her bungle the information she is allowed to give.<sup>11</sup> Aunt Penniman provides another link in his chain of matchmakers, a type that was to find a most notable example in Madame Merle of The Portrait of a Lady.

A more subtle approach to the matchmaker is sketched in The Portrait of a Lady. In Serena Merle one finds neither the absurdity nor the humor that has characterized

<sup>10</sup>Poirier, p. 169.

<sup>11</sup>Sharp, pp. 247-249.

Mrs. Light and Aunt Penniman. Madame Merle is incapable of the stupidity that these first two women seem to have in abundance. Although she may have strong impulses, they are "kept in admirable order" (I, 250). While her appearance may recall that of Aunt Penniman--tall, fair, smooth--it is hardly faded. "Her features were thick but in perfect proportion and harmony, and her complexion had a healthy clearness" (I, 249). Madame Merle is an American from Brooklyn, but Isabel Archer imagines her to be French or even "a German of high degree, perhaps an Austrian, a baroness, a countess, a princess" (I, 250). Madame Merle does seem to be endowed with the features and elegance associated with classical beauty,<sup>12</sup> as well as an unshakable composure that Isabel notes while under the influence of the desire for social distinction which she hopes will open new possibilities of self-realization for her.<sup>13</sup>

It is ironic, however, that Madame Merle's composure, which appears to most as an envious virtue, has been acquired at the cost of the exclusion of any feeling or any emotion. Her grey eyes are "incapable, according to some people, even of tears" (I, 249). Although the reader

<sup>12</sup>Sharp, p. 74.

<sup>13</sup>Leo B. Levy, Versions of Melodrama: A Study of the Fiction and Drama of Henry James, 1865-1897 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press), p. 45.

gradually becomes aware of the gross insensitivity of Madame Merle, Isabel is deceived in this respect through the major portion of the novel. In probing her mind, James exposes her initial innocence: "Of course, too, she [Madame Merle] knew how to feel; Isabel couldn't have spent a week with her without being sure of that? (I, 267). She even ignores shortly thereafter a proposal by Madame Merle herself that it would be a better policy if everyone were "to cease feeling" (I, 268).

From the point of her introduction into the novel, one is made aware of Madame Merle's desire to conceal things. When Mrs. Touchett remarks to Isabel Archer concerning her birthplace, Madame Merle wishes not to divulge it.

"It's hardly worthwhile that I should tell you."

"She's too fond of mystery," said Mrs. Touchett, "that's her great fault." (I, 248).

Part of James's purpose for Madame Merle lies in this mystery. It is in her interests to hide ugly facts.<sup>14</sup> Her background is similar to that of Mrs. Light in that she is a widow who has failed to contract a second marriage. More importantly is the secret that she conceals in her dark past. She once had a love affair with another man which resulted in the birth of a child, although, because of her

<sup>14</sup>Sharp, p. 69.

desire to retain her respectability, she renounced any knowledge of the affair by allowing the child to remain solely with the father.

With Madame Merle's first meeting with the naive and rather innocent Isabel Archer, the young girl takes an immediate liking to the older woman. She sees her as the "complete" woman with many merits to her credit--charm, sympathy, intelligence, and cultivation. "Her manner expressed the repose and confidence which were from a large experience" (I, 250). For Isabel, Madame Merle is the very goal she is in search of: a mingling of charm and experience,<sup>15</sup> as it is through her that Isabel encounters the world. But one of the intrinsic ironies of James's theme is the fact that Madame Merle appeals to Isabel because of her capacity for feelings and for aesthetics, since the matchmaker uses these qualities to cover for the utilitarian purposes and power that the manipulation of people allows.<sup>16</sup> Madame Merle thus takes Isabel into her confidence by expressing an earnest desire to know the girl's history, opinions, and prospects. In

<sup>15</sup> Philip M. Weinstein, Henry James and the Requirements of the Imagination (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), p. 44.

<sup>16</sup> Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (1953; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 221.

only a short time, she manages to develop a deep and thorough influence on Isabel, and becomes the girl's major confidante. Under the expert guidance of this worldly woman, Isabel acknowledges Madame Merle as a "turning point in her life."<sup>17</sup> The young girl, however, is not completely unaware of the possible effects of such close intimacy between the two. "Sometimes she took alarm at her candor: it was as if she had given to a comparative stranger the key to her cabinet of jewels" (I, 267).

But despite Madame Merle's appearance as a woman of worldly experience, accomplished in the fine arts, and the perfect confidante for the novice socialite, there is another picture of Madame Merle, just as real, that lies underneath her polish. Her outlook on her own life seems inconsistent with the exterior she presents, but becomes valid as the novel progresses. In her words, "If we're not good Americans we're certainly poor Europeans; we've no natural place here. We're mere parasites, crawling over the surface; we haven't our feet in the soil. At least one can know it and not have illusions. A woman perhaps can get on; a woman, it seems to me, has no natural place anywhere; wherever she finds herself she has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl" (I, 280). More-

<sup>17</sup> Sharp, p. 68.

over, she sees the self as something that "overflows into everything that belongs to us. I've a great respect for things" (I, 287). In fact, Madame Merle is totally devoted to the world of things, which she speaks of in terms of "spoils"; she has been a disciple of appearance, an example of how the self may destroy itself out of a sense of misplaced devotion and ambition.<sup>18</sup> She even flatly says, "I am very ambitious" (I, 285), although her ambitions have been rooted in illusions.

After her frustrations with a loveless marriage and the episode with another man in which she sacrificed the resulting child for the sake of respectability, Madame Merle had hoped to marry a great man. She waited, watched, plotted, and prayed, but all in vain. Since her own desires can not be fulfilled, she turns to her former lover and co-partner of her secret, Gilbert Osmond, in the hopes that by working together they may contract a marriage, a fortune for themselves, and a future for Pansy, their daughter. In her matchmaking, Madame Merle continues in the pattern started by Mrs. Light and continued by Mrs. Penniman. It is a serious fault in Madame Merle that, whereas she is accomplished in the fine arts, one of these

<sup>18</sup> Pelham Edgar, Henry James: Man and Author (1927; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), pp. 72-73.

arts develops into a genius for manipulating her friends, a primary sin in James's fiction. As she explains to Osmond, "I don't pretend to know what people are meant for, I only know what I can do with them" (I, 345). And it is the social world in which Madame Merle exists that seems to provide the clue to her shortcomings. To Isabel she is not natural. "Her nature had been too much overlaid by custom and her angles too much rubbed away" (I, 273-74). For others, she is "too perfectly the social animal" (I, 274). Having sacrificed her individuality to the god of social success, Madame Merle "existed only in her relations, direct or indirect, with her fellow mortals" (I, 274).

She wastes little time bringing the newly rich Isabel Archer and Gilbert Osmond together. She begins by building up the image of Osmond for Isabel, describing him as delightful and clever, "a man made to be distinguished," although with "no career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything" (I, 281). Osmond, in fact, is similar in character to Madame Merle in terms of his lack of scruples in exploiting others for his own profit. While she desires Isabel to meet Osmond, Madame Merle practices a subtle art of deception by hinting to the young girl in the same breath that "you ought to see a great many men; you ought to see as many as possible, so as to get used to them" (I, 353). She has already picked

Osmond for Isabel and really has no reason for letting Isabel meet other men. Having captured the confidence of Isabel, she continues her deceit by telling her, "you must reward me by believing in me" (I, 290). Blind to the true nature of English society, of which Madame Merle is representative, Isabel ignores the advice of Henrietta Stackpole, who warns her: ". . . You're too fastidious; you've too many graceful illusions. Your newly-acquired thousands will shut you up more and more to the society of a few selfish and heartless people who will be interested in keeping them up" (I, 310).

Thus, with Osmond Madame Merle professionally plots a scheme that will hopefully result in the marriage of Isabel and Osmond. To win the support of her old lover she reveals all he needs to know about Miss Archer.

"She's beautiful, accomplished, generous, and, for an American, well-born. She's also very clever and very amiable, and she has a handsome fortune."

"What do you want to do with her?"

"What you see. Put her in your way . . . . I want you of course to marry her." (I, 343).

A further insight into her practically clinical and dispassionate response to the same situation describes the insensitivity of her character.

"My ambitions are principally for you," said Madame Merle.

"What good will it do me?"

"It will amuse you." (I, 343).

Through the subtle villainy and wickedness of Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond, a conspiracy has been imposed on the innocent Isabel Archer. However, it is Madame Merle who instigates the plot and who dominates Osmond. She instructs him when and where to proceed in the pursuit of the woman she has chosen for him.<sup>19</sup> It is Madame Merle, a sort of old world magician as her name implies, who leads Isabel into her tragic entrapment. And it is Madame Merle who sets Osmond after Isabel's fortune for the sake of Pansy, her daughter.

Following the engagement and marriage of Isabel and Osmond, the cunning, deceitful natures of Madame Merle and Osmond are made evident through their actions during and after the match is made. At the initial meeting of Isabel and Osmond, the actions of Madame Merle are calculated to the point that "it all had the rich readiness that would have come from rehearsal. Madame Merle appealed to her [Isabel] as if she had been on the stage" (I, 355). Madame Merle lies to Mrs. Touchett, telling her she thought ridiculous the possibility that Isabel and Osmond might be

<sup>19</sup> R. W. Stallman, The Houses That James Built and Other Literary Studies (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1964), p. 16.

romantically inclined to one another. After the engagement has been announced, Isabel defends Madame Merle against the tirade of Mrs. Touchett. Still deceived by Madame Merle's appearance of trust and confidence, she believes that "she has been a very good friend to me" (II, 56).

"Possibly," replies Mrs. Touchett; "but she has been a poor one to me. She has deceived me. She had as good as promised me to prevent your engagement" (II, 56).

The attitude of Osmond after the marriage plainly reflects the purely professional motives that guided Madame Merle and him in the procurement of Isabel and her money. Osmond "was immensely pleased with his young lady; Madame Merle had made him a present of incalculable value" (II, 79). As a collector of "things," who now has added Isabel as one of his treasures, Osmond reveals himself as equally guilty as Madame Merle of the "omnivorous egotism" that characterizes their relations with others and indicts them both as morally corrupt.

After three years of unhappy wedded life to a husband who offers no real love and after Madame Merle returns from her travels, Isabel begins to outgrow her admiration for her confidante. Unaware of what, specifically, Madame Merle has done until now, Isabel soon uncovers the treachery when, coming back to the house from a long walk, she finds her husband in a compromising situation. He is

sitting while Madame Merle stands. "Their relative positions, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected" (II, 165). From this moment is traced the progress of Isabel from ignorance to knowledge and disillusionment. Since their first introduction, Isabel has been mistaken about Madame Merle and gradually realizes the destruction of her idealistic ambitions.<sup>20</sup> During her long and now famous interior monologue in which she minutely analyzes her situation and its prospects, Isabel finds that "the infinite vista of a multiplied life" has become "a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end" (II, 189). "Madame Merle had ceased to minister to Isabel's happiness, who found herself wondering whether the most discreet of women might not also by chance be the most dangerous" (II, 278).

The young girl has run the gamut of disillusionment with Madame Merle, reaching a climax with the revelation that her confidante is Pansy's mother,<sup>21</sup> and has to conclude that "she was nearer to her than Isabel had yet discovered, and her nearness was not the charming accident

<sup>20</sup> Sharp, p. 82.

<sup>21</sup> Marion Montgomery, "The Flaw in the Portrait," Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Portrait of a Lady," ed. Peter Buitenhuis (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 65.

she had so long supposed" (II, 322). When she understands that, indeed, Madame Merle has married her to Osmond, Isabel recognizes "that she had been an applied handled hung up tool, as senseless and convenient as mere shaped wood and iron" (II, 379).

For Madame Merle, her role as villainess portends for her a dark future.<sup>22</sup> One of the closing scenes with Madame Merle and Osmond paints the deterioration of her character. With her usual devotion to "things," she tells Osmond to be careful with a precious porcelain cup, whereupon he replies that "it already has a wee bit of a tiny crack" (II, 337). The pathos of this scene is beautifully wrought as Madame Merle, who had once claimed that she was "stout porcelain" herself, goes to the mantle, looks at the cracked cup, and wonders, "Have I been so vile for nothing?" (II, 338).

The picture of Madame Merle is complete, as she receives one of the worst possible Jamesian fates, self-exile to America. She thus becomes one of James's "bad heroines," full of "tenacious egotism."<sup>23</sup> While she had

<sup>22</sup>Sharp, p. 95.

<sup>23</sup>Leon Edel, "Two Kinds of Egotism," Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Portrait of a Lady," ed. Peter Buitenhuis (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 112.

a notion of material gain, Madame Merle "found her profit not in the gross device of borrowing money, but in the more refined idea of introducing one of her intimates to the young woman's fresh and ingenuous fortune" (II, 330). But despite her cruelty, her subtle deceit, and the use of people as her instruments, there is something pathetic about her. Existing only in her relations with other people, Madame Merle yet has no capacity for love.<sup>24</sup> Her attitude towards others revolves around the aspiration for material gain, even with respect to her former lover, Gilbert Osmond. There is not even any love between them, despite the fact that they had Pansy.<sup>25</sup> Leon Edel, in his introduction to the Riverside Edition of The Portrait of a Lady, sums up well the fate of Madame Merle. She is "round-faced and bright, wandering from one great house to another, paying for her cultivation and her grasp of Europe by a kind of perpetual uprootedness that makes her at the end a figure of pathos and melancholy . . . and when we discover the reasons for her treachery behind her front, it is rather to pity her than to hate her, and to share Isabel's pity."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Poirier, p. 234.

<sup>25</sup>Maxwell Geismar, Henry James and the Jacobites (1962; rpt. New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), p. 43.

<sup>26</sup>Leon Edel, "Introduction," The Portrait of a Lady (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), p. xiii.

Madame Merle provides a key to the moral responsibility that accompanies matchmaking. In desiring the rich Isabel Archer to marry Gilbert Osmond, she willfully manipulates the destiny of another life by deceiving Miss Archer. With this novel, the ultimate harm of such matchmaking is calculated and transferred to the later novels. Madame Merle has few qualms about the fact that it is not in the best interest of Isabel that she plans to marry her to Osmond. With little guilt about the possible harmful effects of her actions, she is more concerned with materially aiding her former lover, with covering her own dark past, and with helping her illegitimate daughter Pansy. In deliberately exploiting the unknowing Miss Archer, Madame Merle treats people as "things," as objects, and, by the end of the novel, exemplifies the evil inherent in those with a potentially great capacity for good.

Of the three women portrayed in Roderick Hudson, Washington Square, and The Portrait of a Lady, Madame Merle is clearly the crowning achievement. James's use of types is more than evident in his development of the matchmaker, starting with the absurd and grotesque Mrs. Light, moving to the humorously romantic Aunt Penniman, and culminating in the rather complex and pathetic Madame Merle. James endows each of these characters with a core of similar

characteristics that link his matchmakers with common bonds, although there are noticeable differences between them from novel to novel. Each is a middle-aged widow who desires to arrange a marriage between a young woman and a man whom she, the matchmaker, highly favors. Unfortunately, the rather sterile men chosen are either drab, dull, or inherently lazy and materialistic, a fact which does little to enhance the reputation of the matchmaker. Neither does the fact that the reason for arranging each of the three marriages hinges on some selfish or egotistical motive engender the respect of the reader.

It is possible by tracing James's development of these three women to see a steady growth in the author's art. The gradual maturation of the matchmaker may easily be seen in the increasing reader identification with each character. Mrs. Light remains virtually unchanged from start to finish, as her professional attitude towards a marriage of convenience for her daughter alienates her from the reader. As for Aunt Penniman, she likewise maintains a constant attitude in Washington Square, although the boredom of life that resulted from the death of her husband may, in some small way, allow one to understand her selfishly romantic illusions of matchmaking. Finally, James treats the theme of appearance versus reality so adroitly in connection with Madame Merle that one's emotions toward

her range from initial respect to abhorrence to pity. Her complexity of character in a well-devised plot reveals her as a matchmaker, but also as a confidante and a villain. Moreover, one pities Madame Merle in the end. Although she has acted cruelly and deceitfully, her future is bleak and melancholy.

The moral aspect of James's works plays a significant role in these novels. While Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, and Madame Merle may vary within each respective novel, "they represent an attitude which had been James's from very far back; they are not the slow painful fruit of experience."<sup>27</sup> Taken together, these three women illustrate "the progression of evil to be distinguished from good chiefly in the complete egotism of its outlook."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Graham Greene, Collected Essays (New York: Viking Press, 1969), p. 24.

<sup>28</sup>Greene, p. 24.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE SPOILS OF POYNTON AND THE WINGS OF THE DOVE

By 1897, the publication date of The Spoils of Poynton, James was enjoying the full expression of his artistic abilities. Later, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl reflect a genius and perception in terms of a mature style, a complex of human relationships, and an involvement with motive and morality of character that were to carry him to the pinnacle of novelistic achievement. Through an analysis of the role of the matchmaker during this period of James's writing, specifically Mrs. Gereth in The Spoils of Poynton and Kate Croy in The Wings of the Dove, one sees the increasing insight into the human and moral condition of his modern world. While his conception of the capacity for evil has not increased, it does become more intense, more pure. As one progresses from Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, and Madame Merle to Mrs. Gereth and Kate Croy, the gradual shift from a focus on the character of the matchmaker to the matchmaker as character, representative, and victim of her society points to the harm to others, as well as herself, that inevitably results.

In dealing with Mrs. Gereth and Kate Croy, it is necessary to see the connection between these two and their predecessors. Mrs. Gereth provides the link between the early matchmakers and James's ultimate portrayal of the type in Kate Croy. While Kate seems to have little association with her matchmaking ancestors, Mrs. Gereth serves to bridge the gap. Characteristically molded in the pattern of the middle-aged widow who seeks comfort in material possession or gain, she harks back to Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, and Madame Merle, while, significantly, she also foreshadows Kate Croy, especially in terms of motives and scheme. The correspondences between Mrs. Gereth's treatment of Fleda Vetch and Kate Croy's use of Milly Theale provide the clues to the morally culpable behavior of the matchmaker with respect to the influence of deliberate manipulation of others for selfish purposes.

The initial introduction of Mrs. Gereth in The Spoils of Poynton merits attention in that, unlike the descriptions of Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, and Madame Merle, James dispenses with a summary of her physical appearance. Although, like her predecessors, she is a widow (of two years) and is also a "genuine English lady, fresh and fair," who appears "young in the fifties" (p. 13), the significance of James's description of her is that he is less concerned with what she looks like than with what she

thinks and sees. And it is this distinction between her and the other matchmakers that seems to set the keynote for James's portrait of her in the novel. This change in the development of the matchmaker towards an increasing consideration of the thoughts of his characters parallels James's overall awareness of the more significant aspects of what makes a character act rather than what he actually does, an idea especially reflected in the late phase of his writing.

In developing the motives for her matchmaking, James portrays Mrs. Gereth as one who deems herself essentially better and more cultured than the average person. Mrs. Gereth and her late husband have spent a lifetime acquiring valuable art treasures which fill their Poynton estate and thus become the "spoils" of Poynton. Although the estate now legally belongs to her son Owen, she nevertheless feels she is the rightful possessor of the treasures Poynton contains. She feels so close to them that she reveals to Fleda Vetch: "They're living things to me" (p. 30). "These are the things in the house that we almost starved for! They were our religion, they were our life, they were us!" (pp. 30-31). As a result of her long and intense association with their beauty, any other place is drab by comparison. "She held nothing in England really comparable to Poynton" (p. 12). To give up the estate so

easily after "twenty-six years of planning and seeking" (p. 13) is out of the question, because, subconsciously, the treasures are a reflection of herself, her personality. They are an extension of her own life, a necessary part of her existence. "She never denied, there had been her personal gift, the genius, the passion, the patience of the collector--a patience, an almost infernal cunning, that had enabled her to do it all with a limited command of money" (p. 13). Obviously, she has a belief in a "special sensibility," all her own, that sets her apart from the common class of people.

Since legally she has no control over the estate of her unmarried son, she must protect her possessions as best she can. And a primary consideration is to make sure that her son marries a girl who will properly appreciate and will take care of Poynton as she has done for so many years. Thus, as an early insight into her potential matchmaking, Mrs. Gereth "was always looking at girls with reference, apprehensive or speculative, to her son" (p. 4). It is essential that Owen marry someone who meets his mother's high expectations. When it becomes evident that Owen is romantically interested in Mona Brigstock, a robust, beautiful, yet unrefined and rather culturally barbaric young woman with an equally impossible mother, Mrs. Gereth instantly announces her dislike of the girl and the tragic

overtone of their possible marriage. Acting instinctively on the impulse of self-preservation, Mrs. Gereth seeks to counter Owen's choice by finding one of her own.

Meeting the young Fleda Vetch at a social gathering at Waterbath, Mrs. Gereth takes an immediate fancy to Fleda and, following close contact with her, in which mutual ideas are exchanged, concludes that this young girl is the very person to take her place at Poynton. Fleda is "in her small way a spirit of the same family as Mrs. Gereth" (p. 11). She perceives, as the widow thinks no one else has been able to, the true artistic majesty and completeness of Poynton. According to Mrs. Gereth, in the extravagance of her pride, "nobody [but Fleda] had ever, that way, cared, ever felt what she had achieved: people were so grossly ignorant, and everybody, even the knowing ones as they thought themselves, more or less dense" (p. 21). With Fleda's refined sensibility, her cultivation of artistic taste, similar to that of Mrs. Gereth, and her easily molded nature, conducive to Mrs. Gereth's designs as a matchmaker, Fleda assumes a role comparable to that of Catherine Sloper and Isabel Archer.

Just as Isabel Archer initially esteemed Madame Merle, Fleda erroneously thinks Mrs. Gereth is a sensitive and basically good woman, whom one would do well to emulate. Her initial blindness to Mrs. Gereth's true motives leads

her into the clutches of a woman who really has her own selfish interests at heart. While Mrs. Gereth does like Fleda and admires her cultured tastes, she puts the importance of Poynton and its art over the welfare of Fleda's future, as well as her son's. It does not matter whether a love interest may exist between Owen and Fleda. Mrs. Gereth's monomania in the protection of Poynton blinds her to the moral obligations she has to those over whom she desires to exercise control. The Spoils of Poynton could, in fact, be described as a morality play about the perils of collecting art objects.<sup>1</sup>

From her narrow view of the situation, Mrs. Gereth fails to see that she has abandoned herself completely to art.<sup>2</sup> And the price she pays for the over-refining of a single facet of her nature is evident in her relations with others. As an older woman, she is rather vain and condescending. "Her passion was keener now and her scruple more absent," while "she had no imagination about anybody's life save on the side she bumped against. Mrs. Gereth had really no perception of anybody's nature--had only one question about persons: were they clever or stupid?" (p. 138). Her

<sup>1</sup>Geismar, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup>James W. Gargano, "The Spoils of Poynton: Action and Responsibility," Sewanee Review, 69 (Oct.-Dec. 1961), 650-60.

blindness to the feelings of others is a moral blindness that taints her attempts at matchmaking. Unaware of the moral limitations of her scheme,<sup>3</sup> she exhibits a definite want of tact and delicacy in her struggle to arrange the marriage of her son and Fleda and thereby save Poynton. Immediately after the thought of the marriage has been firmly rooted in her mind, "Mrs. Gereth evidently thought in these days of little but things hymeneal" (p. 38). The idea becomes so strong that at breakfast one morning in the presence of both Fleda and her son, she vulgarly "offers" Fleda to Owen after the latter has indicated his intention of marrying Mona. This example of blatant and overt callousness gradually allows Fleda to see the type of woman Mrs. Gereth is. "In spite of their friendship, Fleda cannot ignore the evidence of Mrs. Gereth's spiritual barbarism,"<sup>4</sup> observes James W. Gargano.

Fleda's own opinion and judgment of Mrs. Gereth is the clearest index to the matchmaking of the widow and her moral shortcomings, as the point of view of the novel is through the young girl's eyes. Through her reactions and thoughts, one can trace an increasingly distinct and valid picture of the real Mrs. Gereth. Despite the fact that

<sup>3</sup>Ward, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup>Gargano, p. 652.

Fleda initially has a very high regard for the sensitivity and genuine friendliness of Mrs. Gereth, she does see at their first meeting that this woman "was one of those who impose, who interfuse themselves" (p. 10). Moreover, she readily recognizes the value and position in the world of Mrs. Gereth of the collected treasures of the estate and how it has affected her outlook on life. After rather intimate association with Mrs. Gereth over a short period of time, Fleda is able to estimate "the poor lady's strange, almost maniacal disposition to thrust in everywhere the question of 'things,' to read all behavior in the light of some fancied relation to them. 'Things' were of course the sum of the world" (p. 24). Much of the bitterness that accompanies her realization of the motives behind Mrs. Gereth's interest in her stems from the deceit and cunning of the widow. Fleda sees that Mrs. Gereth perceives her primarily as the only one who could be an adequate replacement as curator of Poynton, as "only a priestess of the altar" (p. 37). "Her own value in the house was the mere value, as one might say, of a good agent" (p. 36). Even in the attempts to match Owen with Fleda, Mrs. Gereth acts "with an air of holding her [Fleda's] dignity rather cheap" (p. 138), as is noted by her "offering" of Fleda to Owen. In Mrs. Gereth's determination to marry her son and to keep Poynton from Mona, Fleda receives "the impression not only

of being advertised and offered, but of being counselled, enlightened, irritated in ways she scarcely understood" (p. 140).

Inevitably, like Catherine Sloper and Isabel Archer, Fleda recognizes the effect of the meddling of Mrs. Gereth on her life: "The only word to fit Mrs. Gereth's intention was that Mrs. Gereth had designed to 'fetch' her. It was calculated, it was a crushing bribe" (p. 212). The scheme or trap that Mrs. Gereth lays for Fleda and Owen is similar to the intrigues imposed by an evil genius in Hawthorne's fiction in that she lures "Fleda and Owen into a bewildering world of ambiguity and moral chiaroscuro. In short, the passion which created Poynton will, when expended upon the medium of life, provoke discord rather than achieve harmonies."<sup>5</sup> In her monomania over the protection and preservation of Poynton, her concern with 'things' over human welfare, and her excessive egotism, James destines Mrs. Gereth for failure. Her judgment of others is consistently in error, and, while she acknowledges that she does not understand Fleda or Owen, she seems to underestimate Mona Brigstock as well.<sup>6</sup> As Fleda admits to herself,

<sup>5</sup>Gargano, p. 656.

<sup>6</sup>A. H. Roper, "The Moral and Metaphorical Meaning of The Spoils of Poynton," American Literature, 32 (May 1960), 182-96.

"the truth was simply that all Mrs. Gereth's scruples were on one side and that her ruling passion had in a manner despoiled her of her humanity" (p. 37).

It is valid to picture Mrs. Gereth as a rather vulgar, unseeing, manipulative woman whose actions are inimical to the free spirit of Fleda Vetch. James is relentless in showing the moral consequences of such a blind use of power, yet he does not withhold pity for Mrs. Gereth. Just as there is a marked attempt to inspire pity for Madame Merle, James significantly allows us pity for Mrs. Gereth as well, as she provides a key in this respect to the development of the complex Kate Croy in The Wings of the Dove. Although Mrs. Gereth is a failure through her own folly, she "still has the human power to suffer."<sup>7</sup> She toys with the lives of Fleda and her son, but she does so, she feels, under a serious commitment to the service of her estate and its spoils. And the anguish of her defeat and loss is of the same intensity as her devotion to them. Her disappointment with Fleda for not letting herself go in the battle for Owen, her frustration with the stupidity of her son, and her loss of Poynton to Mona are wounds that strike to

<sup>7</sup>Ellen D. Leyburn, Strange Alloy: The Relation of Comedy to Tragedy in the Fiction of Henry James (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 81.

the core of her being and compel pity for the seriousness of her struggles. By the end of the novel, forced to live at Ricks, a beautiful place but nowhere near the perfection of Poynton, Mrs. Gereth is reduced to near helplessness and the need of others.<sup>8</sup> But "the thing that now came out in its simplicity was that even in her shrunken state the lady of Ricks was larger than her wrongs" (p. 253).

As a tyrannical friend who poisons the spirit instead of sustaining it, Mrs. Gereth is revelatory of how the worship of "things" can turn into a curse. Her effect on Fleda--a future of isolation, the anxiety caused by the fight for Owen whom she loves, the pain of loss--culminates in a wrong that can never be completely righted.<sup>9</sup> By trying to switch the blame for the marriage of Mona and Owen from herself to Fleda, she brands Fleda with an unmerited guilt that will follow the sensitive young girl for the rest of her life. It is indicative of the pathos one attributes to Mrs. Gereth that by the end of the novel she has yet failed to respond humanly to others. In the last scene with her situated at Ricks with Fleda, her words reveal the attitude she has always assumed toward others, particularly Fleda: "Moreover, with nothing else but my four walls,

<sup>8</sup> Sharp, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> Sharp, pp. 117-118.

you'll at any rate be a bit of furniture. For that, a little, you know, I've always taken you--quite one of my best finds" (p. 245). And James leaves little doubt of the moral and intellectual limitations of such people as she.<sup>10</sup>

In revealing the attitudes of different people towards precious "things," The Spoils of Poynton describes degrees ranging from the blind, cunning deceit of Mrs. Gereth, to the greed of Mona Brigstock and her mother, to the fine example of fidelity, intelligence, and independence of Fleda Vetch.<sup>11</sup> Within the world of egotism, which taints but does not defeat her, Fleda keeps the novel from ending on a note of complete pessimism,<sup>12</sup> since there is no sense of triumph or happiness for Mrs. Gereth or in the marriage of Owen and Mona. A complex figure, Mrs. Gereth is a subtle blend of pride, monomania, and suffering. While James feels that she is clever, he gives her little credit for intelligence. Her obsession with an idea makes her all the more callous in sacrificing human beings to her cause.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Roper, p. 196.

<sup>11</sup>Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James (1918; rpt. Philadelphia: Albert Saifer, 1954), p. 233.

<sup>12</sup>Roper, p. 191.

<sup>13</sup>Leyburn, p. 78.

Like Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, and Madame Merle, in the course of the novel Mrs. Gereth is committing the cardinal sin of trying to manipulate another being. As Professor Gargano perceptively explains,

It follows that Mrs. Gereth's espousal of Fleda is conceived in the fanatic conviction that art should take precedence over the "vagrancy" of life. Like Fleda, she believes in ideal solutions, but unlike Fleda she attempts to reach solutions by dissolving established legal and humane arrangements. She interferes and intrigues instead of allowing life to reach its wayward, human, and perhaps untidy compromises. Her aim is to make reality over in the image of Poynton, and to make it so she is forced to maneuver and scheme against nature itself. Consequently all of her strenuous and involved designs and stratagems are part of a perverse war against life.<sup>14</sup>

A "gaunt and unnatural" figure, Mrs. Gereth appears unreal apart from her normal surroundings. "The mind's eye could indeed see Mrs. Gereth only in her thick, coloured air; it took all the light of her treasures to make her concrete and distinct" (p. 146). Through her selfish motives, she takes herself out of life and the normal flow of humanity. It is as if her entire life has become a continual battle, based on a personal grudge against those, like Mona Brigstock, who do not measure up to her lofty conceptions of artistic taste and the value of acquired possessions.

The Spoils of Poynton serves as a prime example of motive in matchmaking and paves the way for the more impor-

<sup>14</sup>Gargano, pp. 655-656.

tant The Wings of the Dove. Mrs. Gereth's attempts to marry her friend and confidante Fleda Vetch to her son, in order to save the valuable spoils of Poynton from Mona Brigstock, focuses on the value of material wealth over a concern for the harm done to those involved. Aside from the motive of material gain, Mrs. Gereth's matchmaking mirrors a desire for revenge, based on her pride, against Miss Brigstock for supposedly trying to take what was rightfully hers. In the intense egotism of her aim and in the disregard for the welfare of Miss Vetch, Mrs. Gereth assumes a guilt derived from a lapse of moral obligation and demands pity for her misguided aims and misplaced values, while preparing for James's development of Kate Croy in The Wings of the Dove.

With Kate Croy in The Wings of the Dove (1902), James seems to have reached a peak in his development of the matchmaker. While Kate easily fits into the mold formed by her predecessors, she nevertheless stands out from Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, Madame Merle, and Mrs. Gereth because of her more complex personality, her moral dilemmas, and the reader's more involved insight into her thoughts. In The Wings of the Dove James was partially responsible for initiating a style of writing which exhibits the internal, rather than external, consciousness of his characters and paved the way for the stream-of-consciousness technique.

As the point of view shifts from character to character, allowing the reader to see more completely into that character's mind, the personality of Kate Croy is more intimately revealed for scrutiny and study. And, coupled with this more complete insight into what Kate thinks and what others think of her, is the development of a more intricate motivation for her actions than is characteristic of the other matchmakers and the more ominous consequences that accrue as a result of her actions. Finally, one finds sympathy and pity for Kate, more so than for the other matchmakers, despite the evidence that Kate's shameful actions and moral shortcomings are greater and more damnable, which is one more indication of James's complex handling of the matchmaker in his late phase. One might well ask how James justifies this seemingly paradoxical situation in his novel, until one understands the purpose he aims for in just such a situation.

For Henry James, then, Kate Croy represents the ultimate use of the matchmaker as a device to explore and interpret the realm of his moral universe. By analyzing first her character and the motivation for her actions, then by examining her activities as a matchmaker, what is involved, and the consequences, one readily sees that Kate not only fits the pattern established in Roderick Hudson with Mrs. Light, but she also occupies a more significant

position in her story by serving a three-fold purpose: she defines a role, by which one can gauge her in relation to others of the same role; she is a character, an individual developed to full and complex proportions; and she is representative of the direction James feels man in Western civilization is heading.

In the tradition of Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, Madame Merle, and Mrs. Gereth, Kate Croy is characterized by the same traits that are representative of the James matchmaker. Kate's background, her willingness to serve as a matchmaker, and her motives all bear resemblance to her earlier colleagues. Only in terms of age does she deviate from the others, a fact that may be significant within the pattern James set for his matchmakers.

The opening scene of The Wings of the Dove allows the reader access to information concerning a family heritage that obviously weighs heavily on Kate. Besides revealing the tragedy of the early deaths of her two brothers and the plight of her sister, widowed and left with four small children, Kate's thoughts are equally burdened by the recent degradation of her father, whose life of corruption sent her mother to an early grave. The horror of the situation is heightened, since there is never any indication of the exact nature of the terrible sin or crime for which Lionel Croy is responsible. For Kate, "the whole history

of their house had the effect of some florid voluminous phrase, say even a musical, that dropped first into words and notes without sense and then, hanging unfinished, into no words nor any notes at all" (I, 4). It is this dark, unknown evil, lurking in Kate's past, that establishes her background with that of the other matchmakers. But, whereas the others appear to have reached middle age, Kate is still young. Her noticeable beauty and youth vary markedly from the rather worn and visibly aging appearances of Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, Madame Merle, and Mrs. Gereth.

James's initial description of Kate is striking in its physical depiction and all the more remarkable in its variation from the norm of the matchmaker. "Her eyes showed as blue; within, at the mirror, they showed almost as black. She was handsome, but the degree of it was not sustained by items and aids; a circumstance moreover playing its part at almost any time in the impression she produced. The impression was one that remained, but as regards the sources of it no sum in addition would have made up the total. 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" (I, 5). With this account of Kate, James clears the way

for her central importance in the novel.

While the action of the story revolves around Milly Theale, the "dove" of the novel's title, the presence and enterprise of Kate is no less significant, if not more so. Moreover, Kate's beauty and age serve a useful purpose in James's handling of the matchmaking. One of the general themes frequently incorporated within the James novel is the distinction between life styles of America and Europe, in which the naive and innocent young American travels to Europe for an education where she is usually pitted against the wiles of the worldly, experienced, and corrupted European. When Milly Theale, a fabulously rich young American girl, discovers that she has an incurable disease, she seeks to live what little life she has left to the fullest. And it is Kate Croy she sees as the key to the fulfillment of her last dreams. Milly, as the unknowing target of Kate's matchmaking, can easily identify with the latter's youth and beauty and, as a result, makes Kate her confidante and recipient of intimate secrets. While James had experimented with Madame Merle, and to a lesser degree Aunt Penniman, as both matchmaker and confidante, the situation of Kate and Milly demands special attention, as Kate appears to Milly as the most faithful of friends, but is all the while plotting a wicked plan of deception, of which the innocent and devoted Milly has absolutely no

idea. And because of the circumstances surrounding the origins of this plan, Kate's motivation as a matchmaker assumes a prominent part in the revelation of her character and in the theme of the novel.

As is the case in many of James's novels, the basic conflict is initiated by two ideas which seem to characterize, except for Milly, the central persons of the novel: a greedy and insatiable desire to cultivate everything that life might offer and a disinclination to respect or accept limitations in the acquisition of these desires.<sup>15</sup> Like her matchmaking predecessors, Kate is motivated primarily by a personal drive, as she sees the necessity of rising above her unfortunate circumstances.<sup>16</sup> Under the shadow of the sordid existence of her sister and the general disrepute of her father, Kate wishes to escape this stigma of her family and her own poor condition. She realizes that only through wealth and her own cunning can she break out of the doldrums of her present state.

Thus, early in the novel, Kate faces her first big crisis. Having been offered a chance of escape by becoming the protégé of her wealthy aunt, Maud Lowder, she must make

<sup>15</sup>Ward, p. 130.

<sup>16</sup>Sallie Sears, The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968), p. 61.

an important decision. To go to live with Aunt Maud, however, means turning her back on the fortunes of her family, with whom the aunt will have nothing to do because of their low means. So as not to endanger her social reputation, Aunt Maud makes one requirement of her niece, which Kate relates to her father: "The condition Aunt Maud makes is that I shall have absolutely nothing to do with you; never see you, nor speak nor write to you, never go near you nor make you a sign, nor hold any sort of communication with you. What she requires is that you shall simply cease to exist for me" (I, 16). It is the sole condition of Aunt Maud, one which appears particularly harsh, but one by which she assures Kate that she "shall get a great deal" (I, 17) in return. Maud's hope is to arrange for Kate a marriage with either the parasitic Lord Mark whom Maud favors or some other wealthy and socially acceptable man.

Aside from the fact that Kate is beautiful, proud, and somewhat poverty-stricken, another motivation for her matchmaking is significant. She is in love with Merton Densher, a penniless newspaper writer who foresees no immediate chance of acquiring wealth. While Kate's love for Densher is sincere, she will not marry him without financial security. When Milly Theale enters London high society with all her wealth, Kate perceives the perfect

opportunity by which she can "have her cake and eat it too, to marry the man she loves and at the same time enjoy the fortune she covets."<sup>17</sup> Knowing that Milly has not long to live, since the latter has confided in her, Kate plans to arrange a marriage between Densher and Milly, assuring herself that when Milly does die, she will leave her fortune to her husband. Subsequently, Kate can marry Densher with his newly acquired wealth, thereby fulfilling her principal wishes. An unconscious motive deriving from her desire for financial status and her lover, too, is Kate's veiled jealousy of Milly. Since the lure of wealth provides one of the dominant forces in the novel, the power with which it draws Kate is evident under her circumstances. As she is relatively poor, Kate easily identifies with Milly's fortune.<sup>18</sup> And this financial jealousy does much to mold the plot of the novel.

The initial impression of Kate Croy and of her motivation for matching Milly and Densher seems to represent her as a rather cold and calculating young woman out for as much money and social recognition as possible, and it is true inasmuch as the impression is characteristic of

<sup>17</sup>Ernest Sandeen, "The Wings of the Dove and The Portrait of a Lady: A Study of Henry James's Later Phase," PMLA, 69 (Dec. 1954), 1060-75.

<sup>18</sup>Ward, p. 127.

the motives of the Jamesian matchmaker. But in The Wings of the Dove James constructs his matchmaker in a mode that departs from the others. For example, identification with and sympathy for Kate is much more prominent and believable than for Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, Madame Merle, and Mrs. Gereth. Although James gives Kate great beauty, a sense of her own importance, and a determination of will, he places her in a miserable situation.<sup>19</sup> While the design against Milly, as well as other plans made by Kate, is decided upon out of her own free will, the plot of the novel is ultimately shaped from conditions over which the characters have less than total control.<sup>20</sup> With respect to her father and sister, Kate is well aware of the responsibilities and obligations that she should assume as one of the family. Besides paying part of her income to help her sister, she makes her one purely moral gesture in the novel in Book I when she offers to remain with and support her father, despite what he has done.<sup>21</sup> Further, Kate knows that she does have beauty and that she is the sole surviving member of the family who is not part of its

<sup>19</sup>Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 362.

<sup>20</sup>Ward, p. 130.

<sup>21</sup>Sears, pp. 65-69.

general breakdown. With an intense pride drawn from this knowledge, Kate "is the one piece of solid collateral the disgraced and distressed family possesses, the one tangible asset."<sup>22</sup> Not willing to remain within the family's present status and under pressure from her father, sister, and aunt, she accepts a position as the pawn for her relatives, as the single source that may provide an outlet from their disgrace and misery.

In Kate, therefore, there exists a will that accepts and then uses society for her own ends. Once she had made up her mind to get what she wants, she does not deviate from her plan, even though she knows she is being used by her father for his own betterment and will be equally manipulated by Aunt Maud.<sup>23</sup> While Kate, like the other matchmakers, acts in the hope of personal ambition and gain, the blame for what happens in the novel does not rest with her alone. There is no denying that, acting under her free will, she intentionally uses Milly Theale and, to a lesser extent, Merton Densher. But it appears that Kate is a somewhat unwilling victim of circumstances, trapped in an environment of evil and against whose standards she rebels by trying to outwit her aunt.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Sears, p. 66.

<sup>23</sup>Ward, p. 137.

<sup>24</sup>Wright, p. 220.

Kate's personal attributes are worthy of distinction. First, she does regard family loyalty above private gain, as witnessed by her unselfish offer to move in with her father in his time of need. Second, she does genuinely love Densher. "Kate and Merton, though terribly knowing and sophisticated, still represent 'young love'; they see each other in respect to the future, not the past, and much is forgiven them because even their least worthy actions spring from their genuine loyalty to each other."<sup>25</sup> And third, Kate favors moral freedom over moral commitment. Her desire to better her prospects for life is to be admired in the light of her circumstances and her determination. But the sad fact is that the world of her father, sister, and aunt, in which corruption and egotism are rampant, sets the tone of her existence. To attain her goals Kate has little choice but to accept the way of life Aunt Maud offers her. The dilemma that confronts her is one that James felt was representative of that facing Western man. Stephen Koch elucidates this paradoxical idea that shapes the conflict within Kate:

While James thought of "consciousness" as his most precious human and artistic possession, it nonetheless presents itself as a kind of "ordeal," relating to his view of the human condition and underlying much of the conflict in his work. Under James's obvious delight

<sup>25</sup>Sandeen, p. 1067.

in the triumphs of his art, beneath the little victories of words like "magnificent," "beautiful," and "fine," there moves a dark undertow of pessimism that has rarely been sufficiently emphasized. For his characters, full awareness is the only hope to resolve their situations and act in freedom. Private, individual sensibility is the only true sphere of his art; his characters realize and free themselves only through an understanding of the world around them derived from their own perceptions. Yet it is exactly their individuality that cuts them off from this world.<sup>26</sup>

Fortified with this knowledge of Kate's motivation, of why she does what she does, one can begin to analyze the actual process by which she attempts to arrange the marriage of Milly and Densher, as well as the ultimate consequences of such action, in order to evaluate the implications of the matchmaking role.

When Milly Theale arrives in Europe with her chaperone Susan Stringham, her purpose is to engage in as many of the cultural opportunities there as possible. As a young girl from America with a newly acquired fortune, she is rather deficient in knowledge of this part of a rich girl's education that her society expects and relishes. Armed with the means, Milly sets out to experience and gather those trappings of culture that are acknowledged as

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Koch, "Transcendence in The Wings of the Dove," Modern Fiction Studies, 12 (Spring 1966), 93-102.

marks of high society and refinement. Although Susan Stringham is competent and able as a guide for Milly, she is too much older than the girl for the two to identify easily with one another. Thus, when Milly meets the young and beautiful Kate Croy, she senses she has found in her a gateway to Europe and the source of all she needs to know. By making Kate her confidante, Milly lays the groundwork for Kate's opportunity to fulfill her own ends.

Driven by her need for wealth and for Merton Densher, Kate initiates her plan to match her lover with the innocent Milly. Seeing that Milly has taken a liking to the handsome newspaper man, whom she had met earlier in America, and knowing that Milly is doomed to die an early death because of a disease, Kate takes advantage of the situation. While speaking to Densher about Milly, she reveals the beginnings of her design: "Besides, she particularly likes us. She particularly likes you. I say, old boy, make something of that. You say we can't meet here [Milly's house], but you see it's just what we do. What could be more lovely than this?" (II, 18). Here Kate begins her manipulation of Milly. As Aunt Maud does not want her to associate with Densher because he is penniless, Kate sees Milly's residence as an opportunity for Densher and her to meet, under the pretext that Densher goes to

see Milly. With her usual insight, Kate explains the situation to her lover: "You accused me just now of saying that Milly's in love with you. Well, if you come to that, I do say it. So there you are. That's the good she'll do us. It makes a basis for her seeing you--so that she'll help us to go on" (II, 24).

By taking advantage of Milly in this way, Kate can still see Merton regularly and, at the same time, outwit Aunt Maud, who is Kate's real antagonist. She knows well that Maud is using her in much the same way that she is using Milly. And, as both of these women have strong, dominating wills which must consequently clash with each other, part of Kate's character demands that she try to deceive her aunt in order to exert her claim to individual freedom. That James places Aunt Maud in a position to assume part of the guilt for Kate's actions against Milly is significant. Kate's unconscious purpose is not so much to deceive Milly as it is to deceive Aunt Maud, who she feels is tampering with her life by so manipulating her.<sup>27</sup>

The sad part of Kate's dilemma is that, taking her cue from her aunt, James's representative of corrupt English society, she subordinates her love for Densher and her friendship with Milly to the love of wealth. In her inno-

<sup>27</sup>Cargill, pp. 363-364.

cence, Milly knows little of the material pressures that predominate in European society or of its devastating effect on the human spirit. As a result of the lack of such knowledge, Milly is slow to see that she has become an object of exploitation, especially since she has complete faith in the dedicated friendship of Kate.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Densher is either too blinded by his love of Kate to see, or else he just chooses not to see, that he, too, is deliberately used by Kate, because she does not hesitate to inform him of how she plans to use him: "I want to make things pleasant for her. I use, for the purpose, what I have. You're what I have of most precious, and you're therefore what I use most" (II, 52). Neither does Densher hesitate to inform Kate that he is at her disposal, in order that they may soon be together: "I'm doing nothing-- and shall not, I assure you, do anything but what I'm told" (II, 91).

With Densher under her command, Kate reveals to him her complete plan. When he learns that Milly will soon die, he clearly sees what his part will be:

"Since she's to die I'm to marry her?"

"To marry her."

<sup>28</sup>Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge, Mass.: The University Press, 1962), p. 204.

"So that when her death has taken place I shall in the natural course have money?"

"You'll in the natural course have money. We shall in the natural course be free." (II, 225).

As Kate puts her design into operation, James reveals her in a light practically devoid of moral obligation and sensibility. It is not that Kate is particularly immoral, but rather she is amoral. When she asks herself, "Where is the harm?," in her scheme, she actually speaks in sincerity and good faith.<sup>29</sup> There is a marked veracity in Kate's character, as she often unconsciously reveals to Milly certain qualities that might indicate her true feelings. When Milly makes Kate her confidante, the first intimate revelation she makes concerns a visit to the doctor who confirms Milly's fears about her disease.

"Will you render me to-morrow a great service?"

"Any service, dear child, in the world."

"But it's a secret one--nobody must know. I must be wicked and false about it."

"Then I'm your woman," Kate smiled, "for that's the kind of thing I love." (I, 226).

Later, Milly begins to perceive part of the true nature of Kate. While the two of them are talking of Milly's chaperone, Milly discovers that Kate cannot abide Susan Stringham, an attitude derived from a streak of

<sup>29</sup>Krook, p. 218.

brutality in Kate that allows her to treat another person with contempt because that person does not measure up to her standards.<sup>30</sup> As Milly tries to cover up her sense of this brutality in Kate, she remarks, "And yet without Susie I shouldn't have had you" (I, 282), but Kate reflects with deeper truth, "Oh you may very well loathe me yet" (I, 282). At one point Kate even tries to warn Milly about what she may be getting into as she attempts to climb the London social ladder: "We're of no use to you-- it's decent to tell you. You'd be of use to us, but that's a different matter. My honest advice to you would be to drop us while you can" (I, 281). But since Milly fails to heed the warning, Kate finds it easy to use her exposed innocence and ignorance.

In the use she makes of her own love and of her abilities and in her abuse of others lies the root of her corruption.<sup>31</sup> Even though she possesses a strong will, shrewdness, and an admirable drive for success, Kate fails to see the irrevocable harm she is doing. Her deception of Milly, her concealment of the true relations between her-

<sup>30</sup>Krook, p. 206.

<sup>31</sup>Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1958), p. 119.

self and Densher were prime factors in the deterioration of Milly's spirit and her eventual death. Nor does she realize until the end of the novel that she has almost destroyed the will of Densher. Densher's "sense of almost shame" at what he forced himself to do "was born, for that matter, partly of the conditions, those conditions that Kate had so almost insolently braved, had been willing, without a pang, to see him ridiculously--ridiculously so far as just complacently--exposed to. His question, as we have called it, was the interesting question of whether he had really no will left" (II, 177). Kate could not see the effects of her deception. To get what she wants, she adopts the policy, "I don't like it [the plan], but I'm a person, thank goodness who can do what I don't like" (II, 226).

Although the marriage of Densher and Milly is never accomplished, Milly before she dies, tells Densher that she is going to leave Kate and him a large sum of money to enable them to get married. For Densher, his experience with Milly amounts to little less than a transformation of spirit. While he seems to be in love with the dead girl's memory and despite his realization of what Kate has done, he still cares enough for Kate to want to marry her, under one condition. If she still wants to marry him, Kate must be willing to give up the small fortune Milly has be-

queathed to them. Thus, the end of the novel puts Kate back into her original dilemma by allowing her one more chance to renounce her greed for money.<sup>32</sup> In her lack of moral sensibility, she does not perceive the importance of Densher's relations with Milly. She rejects the condition that Densher set for their marriage by saying that, because of Milly, they can never be again as they had been before. Through her act of forsaking Densher for the money, she becomes free economically but a slave morally,<sup>33</sup> as James leaves her bearing the major burden of moral guilt that The Wings of the Dove seeks to interpret.

Like the attempts of the other matchmakers, Kate's matchmaking is doomed to failure of one type or another. Although Mrs. Light and Madame Merle succeed, in that their efforts result in marriage, the situations that are produced are no better than if their attempts had failed. In each of the five cases happiness or love, which ought to be a logical expectation of the outcome, is not in evidence. It seems that in the efforts of each there occurs a lapse in their humanity to others that, morally, weighs heavily on each.

<sup>32</sup>Sears, p. 96.

<sup>33</sup>Ward, p. 128.

The minor matchmaking attempt of Aunt Maud provides a subtle technical strength to the underlying scheme of Kate's own plans. The subplot of her attempts to marry Kate to Lord Mark or someone equally acceptable, serves as a parallel situation, while, at the same time, is representative of the society and its expectations over which Kate has little control. The social conventions under which Kate lives prevent her from publicly avowing her engagement to Densher, because for Aunt Maud "a person without relations (in both the family and the general sense of the word) is automatically insignificant."<sup>34</sup> Moreover, a large part of Kate's plan will hopefully serve to "square" Aunt Maud. By making Densher a rich widower, she will make him agreeable to her aunt. Through Maud, Kate is partially a victim of her environment in trying to adapt to its demands on the individual and thus become a legitimate member. To be accepted requires social prestige. And social prestige is equated with material wealth.

In terms of motive, the character of Maud reflects Kate's. Since Kate's motivation for matchmaking is of especial significance in delineating her moral shortcomings, a similar situation would strengthen the primary one.

<sup>34</sup>S. Gorley Putt, Henry James: A Reader's Guide (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1966), p. 319.

For the "rich and domineering"<sup>35</sup> Maud, the matching of couples is a distinguished game that involves Lord Mark in particular. She revolves in a world of material splendor. "Aunt Maud sat somehow in the midst of her money, founded on it and surrounded by it, even if with a clever high manner about it, her manner of looking, hard and bright, as if it weren't there. It was clear . . . that Mrs. Lowder was keeping her wealth as for purposes, imaginations, ambitions" (I, 216). Like Kate, she is terribly concerned with the importance of wealth and is "an accomplished schemer."<sup>36</sup> She manipulates Milly, just as Kate does, as well as Susan Stringham, in order to achieve her desired ends. Within a more complete analysis of Maud, conclusions would substantiate the fact that Aunt Maud and Kate have similar motivations, based on a common selfishness and greed. Although Kate and her matchmaking are the more important in the novel, James can be credited, through the matchmaking of the aunt, with a subtle reflection of the moral limitations involved in the deliberate and callous manipulation of others.

While analysis indicates that Kate Croy deserves more sympathy than her predecessors, the fact remains that her

<sup>35</sup>Putt, p. 312.

<sup>36</sup>Sharp, pp. 195-196.

faults are heinous and not to be condoned. She ventures to tamper with the soul of Milly Theale, stamping her character with "an unworthy denomination of value which in the end it was not willing to receive."<sup>37</sup> That even James feels her design to be wicked can be traced to one of the aspects of the novel's structure. Having dabbled and experimented in drama, James uses an old device of tragic drama in which the audience experiences the murder of the innocent, followed by the wicked receiving punishment in the final scene of the drama.<sup>38</sup>

Just as Kate is too sure of Densher's undying devotion to her and does not hesitate in deceiving him, too, she undervalues the sensitive feelings of Milly. During her matchmaking, Kate feels that what they are doing is more or less a game in which everyone will eventually benefit. She reasons that the courtship of Milly by Densher will be good for the dying girl, believing that she can make Milly happy while she paves the way for her own happiness.<sup>39</sup> What Kate does not comprehend is that the game is not only physically but also spiritually harmful for Milly.

<sup>37</sup>Putt, p. 326.

<sup>38</sup>Krook, p. 215.

<sup>39</sup>Sandeen, p. 1067.

Although at the end of the novel Kate declares that everything has worked out for the best, her actions belie an uneasiness. In a discussion with Densher, she tries to evade the fact that she and Densher may have been partly responsible for Milly's death. While she tells him that Milly has found peace, Densher is evidently unsure:

"Satisfied to die in the flower of her youth?"

"Well, at peace with you."

"Oh, 'peace'!" he murmured with his eyes on fire.

"The peace of having loved."

"Is that peace?"

"Of having been loved," she went on. "That is. Of having," she wound up, "realized her passion. She wanted nothing more. She had all she wanted."

(II, 332).

The irony of the situation is attested by the fact that Kate has access to the wealth that has been her primary goal and the key to social success, but yet does not feel she has triumphed. The last sentence of the novel, spoken to Kate, ascribes the victory to Milly, not Kate.<sup>40</sup>

It is characteristic of the five previously treated matchmakers that each of them, in a sense, loses, as each is defeated by his own wrongs and moral shortsightedness. But, of the five, Kate Croy stands somewhat apart in that her situation transcends that of each of the

<sup>40</sup>Krook, p. 220.

others. While there is no denial that Kate is an individual who brings about her own undoing and who is free to make her own decisions, there is an admirable quality in her courageous and inflexible character which risks everything to gain what she deems important.<sup>41</sup> For James, Kate Croy is a complex individual who represents his ultimate concept of the matchmaker. Besides her significance in the plot of the novel, she exemplifies "a range of experience which man must comprehend."<sup>42</sup> She is a larger than life representation of the moral caliber of her civilization, a world in which conduct is based on subjective aspiration rather than objective reason.<sup>43</sup> Kate's personality and motivation derive largely from extenuating circumstances and her environment, resulting in her moral fall. The perversion of values common to her society is partly responsible for her placing her passion for wealth above her love for Densher. Through an awareness of what her society expects and an adeptness in controlling appearances, her design almost succeeds. Ultimately, however, her plan is upset because her skills work mainly through

<sup>41</sup>Sears, p. 95.

<sup>42</sup>Wright, p. 222.

<sup>43</sup>Wegelin, p. 118.

these surface appearances that hide the blackness of a heart eventually brought to light.<sup>44</sup>

The use of Kate Croy as a matchmaker is one device through which the novel indicts the decadent morality of the Western world. The Wings of the Dove charts James's exploration into the interpretation and significance of morality, in which Kate's plan is essential to his spectacle of a decaying society in its consummate horror and majesty. That a plan so wicked can find such easy acceptance in a society reveals the profound unrest that must have, in part, motivated James. He feared that, as in the case of Kate Croy, people discerned that the fruit of immorality was complete self-gratification. And it is this idea that The Wings of the Dove attempts to disprove.<sup>45</sup>

As a matchmaker, Kate is James's ultimate portrayal. Her choice of money over acknowledgement of her wrong to Milly Theale condemns the matchmaker as a malicious manipulator of human destiny. While Densher eventually sees the poisonous results of his and Kate's deception and, from his new stance, cannot accept the money that Milly has left them, Kate, in her avarice and struggle for social prestige, chooses the money, even if that means breaking

<sup>44</sup>Ward, p. 137.

<sup>45</sup>Sears, p. 72.

with Densher. It is significant that in this stage of the progression of the Jamesian matchmaker, Kate Croy arouses emotions of both anger and pity. Her exploitation of Milly, totally debasing and corrupting, urges a declaration of her moral culpability for her deeds. At the same time, however, we are vicariously sympathetic to her situation. Under the influence of outside forces that dictate her behavior, Kate is guilty, yet a victim of the society in which she lives.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE GOLDEN BOWL

The Golden Bowl (1904) represents a rather radical departure from the focus of study through the first three chapters in that the matchmaker herself does not warrant the close analysis that has defined the approach to her predecessors. While Fanny Assingham assumes an integral role in James's purpose for the novel, it is not her matchmaking actions that merit attention, but the results and implications of those actions. With Kate Croy in The Wings of the Dove, James attains the peak of excellence in delineation and motivation of the matchmaker. Now, in a separate chapter, the ultimate harm that accrues from matchmaking will be calculated in a way that reveals the stigma that the author places on deception and manipulation of other human beings. The Golden Bowl thus becomes a statement, a moral evaluation of the wreckage, in terms of human lives, that results when one attempts to manipulate the destiny or will of another. From the two marriages that Fanny Assingham arranges, the damage to the two couples involved is irreparable. Although each of the four, besides Mrs. Assingham, attempts to conceal or cover

his guilt under the guise of good intention, the evil is too widespread to be hidden. Even if the characters were sincere in their dealings with one another, James's vision becomes more horrible with the ironic revelation that goodness may provoke evil through excessive pride and moral blindness.<sup>1</sup>

In the tradition of the matchmaker, Fanny Assingham is middle aged, although not a widow, with a penchant for meddling in affairs of others that are no concern of hers. Except for endowing her with the gradual awareness of her burden of responsibility in matchmaking, James leaves little room for any sort of development on her part and seems to indicate clearly the amount of respect she commands through her ludicrous name. A physical description of her is unnecessary and adds little to her role in the novel, as there are actually few initial insights into her character. One that is important, however, seems to be a distinct carryover from past matchmakers, especially Madame Merle and Mrs. Gereth. Mrs. Assingham is "covered and surrounded with 'things,' which were frankly toys and shams" (I, 34). And as concerns her friends, she treats them as if they "were in the game" (I, 34) that she continually plays, which appears to represent her attitude

<sup>1</sup>Stevenson, p. 89.

toward matchmaking.

The motivation for the matches she makes harks back to Madame Merle and especially Aunt Penniman. In the marriage between the dissipated Italian prince, Amerigo, and Maggie Verver, the daughter of an American millionaire widower, Adam Verver, the fact that it has already been arranged before the novel opens indicates the switch from the actual matchmaking to its effects in the novel. For Mrs. Assingham, Prince Amerigo has the same lure as Morris Townsend did for Aunt Penniman. First, Fanny is "perversely romantic" (I, 21) and, as her husband tells her, she has fallen in love with the prince. Since, realistically, she cannot have him, she does the next best thing by marrying him to someone else. Second, the fact that she has neither children nor great social prestige may offer more incentive to meddle in the lives of her friends and, hopefully, enhance her possibilities. Her desire to marry the prince approaches the monomania of Madame Merle and Aunt Penniman. As her husband announces to her, "it was always the prince, it was always marriage" (I, 81). At the same time, the prince, above all, is aware of her intentions: "Mrs. Assingham exactly represented and embodied his pledges--was in her pleasant person the force that had set them successively in motion. She had made his marriage,

quite as truly as his papal ancestor had made his family" (I, 20-21).

The second marriage Fanny arranges, between Charlotte Stant, a former but unrevealed lover of Prince Amerigo, and Maggie's father Adam, is motivated partially by her guilt for the disruption of the father-daughter relationship caused by the marriage of Maggie and Amerigo and partially by her desire to conceal the true relations of Amerigo and Charlotte. Her oversight in the reappearance of Charlotte immediately before the wedding of Maggie and the prince creates the need to take care of this new arrival in some way, i.e., Miss Stant's marriage to Maggie's father. Since Mr. Verver is despondent over the loss of his daughter, for whom he maintains a very strong bond of affection, the marriage will work nicely for the benefit of all, especially Fanny. She justifies her matchmaking to others, particularly Amerigo, by saying: "It will be the great thing I can do" (I, 85). "It will be in fact my duty--and I shan't rest till my duty's performed" (I, 86). Her cunning and deceit, much like that of Aunt Penniman and Madame Merle, is a subtle foreshadowing of the deceit and concealment that is amply demonstrated later by each of the members of the two marriages and that involves the major portion of the novel. However unknowingly, Fanny

is the puppet master of the whole show<sup>2</sup> and sets in motion the significant action of the story. As the novel progresses, she and her husband assume subsidiary roles. They become practically a "choric couple" who are only intermittently of interest in the novel.<sup>3</sup>

With Fanny effectively out of the mainstream of the story, except for her role as confidante to Amerigo and Maggie and her midnight conversations with her husband through which the reader receives an objective view of what is happening within the two marriages, James gives the major emphasis in the novel to the web of deceit, lies, egotism, concealment, exploitation, and manipulation that characterizes the relations between Prince Amerigo, Maggie, Charlotte Stant, and Mr. Verver. The appearance of contentment and innocence that each presents on the surface contrasts radically with the knowledge each conceals within himself which could alter his relations with the others if brought out in the open. James places his four characters on the outermost brink of destruction and confusion and lets them work out their destinies from this point. Each is imbued with a sense of a dark, evil abyss lurking

<sup>2</sup>Sears, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup>Ora Segal, The Lucid Reflector: The Observer in Henry James's Fiction (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), p. 209.

beneath the fragile surface he is trying to preserve.<sup>4</sup>  
 The illusion of freedom from recognition amid the struggle to maintain appearances makes living a trial and creates an intense individual suffering and anguish that afterwards can never be completely purged.

The mood is set at the beginning of the novel through the imagery of buying and selling that pervades the action<sup>5</sup> and reflects the spiritual manipulation in which all take part. When Mr. Assingham tells his wife that life is largely "a matter of pecuniary arrangement" (I, 67), he states the attitude of all those involved and represents the expectations of the society at large. Adam Verver, the millionaire art collector has come to Europe to gather valuable art treasures to fill a museum in his home town American City. In the same blind and innocent way that he collects art to stock his museum, he is attracted to the prospect of Amerigo for his daughter and later of Charlotte Stant for himself. The two become objects that can be bought and sold; they are important for the use that can be made of them. Because of his noble Italian ancestry, Maggie jokes, although truthfully, with Amerigo about his

<sup>4</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1944), p. 143.

<sup>5</sup>Leyburn, p. 64.

being the prize piece of her father's collection. She and Fanny even visit the British Museum expressly to check the validity and extent of the prince's nobility. As for Charlotte, Maggie and Mr. Verver discuss the reasons for having "got" her as a wife for him. Denying her her innate individuality and humanity, they want her "to give us a life" (II, 95). And, as the end of the novel makes clear, she serves as a perfect sacrifice.

What makes the situation doubtly disgusting is the passive acceptance Charlotte and Amerigo demonstrate in their roles as marriage objects rather than marriage partners. Both accept the European attitude which condones the uses that are made of marriages<sup>6</sup> and see their marriages as bargains in which they will be paid according to the value and pleasure they give their spouses. For Amerigo, the prospect of wealth is a prime motivation for entering into marriage: "What was it but history, and of their kind very much, to have the assurance of the enjoyment of more money than the palace-builder himself could have dreamed of? This was the element that bore him up" (I, 10). Further, he understands his situation and is satisfied to be considered a mere possession in the eyes of such a dispassionate collector as Adam Verver.

<sup>6</sup>Leyburn, p. 67.

Charlotte is equally precise in telling Amerigo the value of making a good marriage, even to the sacrifice of love between those involved: "In fact, you know, I want to be married. It's--well, it's the condition. It's the state, I mean. I don't like my own. 'Miss,' among us all, is too dreadful--except for a shopgirl. I don't want to be a horrible English oldmaid" (I, 219). It is easy to see that she would fit nicely into the collection Adam Verver is seeking. The prince early recognizes her value as "some wonderfully finished instrument, something intently made for exhibition, for a prize" (I, 47). With respect to the material values ascribed to by these four people, The Golden Bowl demonstrates the sinister power of sheer wealth in gathering spoils and subordinating one's life to them. While it is disturbing to watch the methodical way in which Maggie and her father buy their spouses, the willingness of Charlotte and Prince Amerigo to worship the power of wealth is equally depressing.

The golden bowl itself achieves special significance as a brilliant example of the concern with and the power of spoils or art objects in the novel and as a concrete representation of the game of appearances that the four play with each other. When Amerigo and Charlotte find the bowl in a small shop, it appears beautiful and flawless. Upon close inspection, however, Amerigo discovers a crack be-

neath its gilt and paint, and they ultimately reject the bowl as unsuitable for a wedding gift for Maggie. But its importance derives from its foreshadowing of events to follow. The concealed crack of the bowl is like the unspoken truth, the lying, and the deceit that eventually corrupt internally the two marriages. Upon revelation of the crack in the bowl, the reader associates the bowl with the marriages and thus knows where the novel is heading, despite what others say to the contrary.<sup>7</sup> The presence of the bowl becomes a source of information heretofore hidden by various characters. When Maggie herself later finds the bowl in the same shop, buys it, and uncovers the fact that Amerigo and Charlotte had been there before her, she realizes the former intimacy that existed between her husband and Charlotte. For Amerigo and Charlotte, the bowl represents their former relations as lovers. And for Fanny Assingham, it reveals the lying she has had to do to save Amerigo and Maggie from the damaging truth, since she is confidante to both, and to save herself from the others because of the times she has had to deceive them by withholding information. In the presence of Maggie she smashes the bowl to pieces, hoping that the act will serve to keep intact the false appearances that everyone assumes and to

<sup>7</sup>Geismar, p. 308.

prevent the truth from surfacing. The gold gilt covering of the flawed bowl thus gives form to the ignorance and blindness of the characters and allows them to act as if they and their marriages are still safe,<sup>8</sup> when actually their situations reflect only the illusion of safety and contentment.

Within this atmosphere of deceit and falseness, the situations that result from the marriages spawn little that is good or that may be considered optimistic. The Golden Bowl emphasizes James's concentration on the sinister rather than the beautiful or decent in society. In his depiction of the appearance, he ferrets out the reality, which is all the more horrible because withheld and unspoken. From the condition of man he dramatizes, human relations are made impossible.<sup>9</sup> By the late chapters of the novel, the reader sees through Maggie a gradual awareness of this discrepancy between the appearance and the underlying reality. Unseen as she watches Fanny, Amerigo, Charlotte, and Mr. Verver playing cards, Maggie considers the possibilities of the scene that appears "like a stage again awaiting a drama" (II, 236). With the reader's knowledge of the characters and their motivations, the

<sup>8</sup>Weinstein, p. 189.

<sup>9</sup>Ward, p. 155.

scene could be fraught "either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins, things as ugly as those formless fragments of her golden bowl she was trying so hard to pick up" (II, 236). And, as pictured here at this card-table scene, the dichotomy between what each knows and what each is willing to show is essential to our formation of a moral stance in connection with the novel.

Each of the characters desires to conceal some fact or information from the others. The actions that accompany the struggle to keep the truth hidden comprise the basic conflict of the novel and eventually reveal the hollowness and moral delinquency of both individual character and the society as a whole. Following the arrangement and consummation of both marriages, the characters are forced into deception, lying, and intrigue to cover their faults. Fanny Assingham acknowledges that she must lie for everyone to conceal from Maggie and her father her awareness of Charlotte and Amerigo's previous affair, then must lie later to prevent the latter two from finding out about Maggie's knowledge of that affair: "To lie to her, up and down, and in and out--it comes to the same thing. It will consist just as much of lying to the others too: to the Prince about one's belief in him; to Charlotte about one's belief in her; to Mr. Verver, dear sweet man,

about one's belief in every one. So we've work cut out-- with the biggest lie, on top of all, being that we like to be there for such a purpose" (II, 123). And Fanny's willingness seems to set the tone for everyone else. The Prince and Charlotte must lie about their previous affair, as well as deceive the others concerning their renewed intimacy. Maggie eventually learns of their affair but lies to the pair to conceal her knowledge, while deceiving each of them by planning revenge against Charlotte. Finally, Mr. Verver learns of the unfaithfulness of his new wife, but never reveals his awareness to anyone vocally so as not to upset his daughter or cause her undue worry.

As has been noted in the previous novels studied, selfishness and egotism are basic drives in James's depiction of the individual. Each of the main characters in The Golden Bowl, in conjunction with his lying and deception of others, seems tainted yet sustained by the power of these drives. Fanny's egotistical struggle to raise her social status through association with the Ververs reinforces her desire to participate, in some way, in the life of Prince Amerigo. Her lack of wealth and lack of children are probably the key to her self-centered motives for meddling in the lives of others. The dilettantish Prince's sense of the power Maggie's wealth may bring, combined with the sensual pleasures he derives from

Charlotte, makes him doubly selfish, while Charlotte's marriage to Mr. Verver accomplishes similar ends for her as well. Adam Verver collects people as he does art, while all he does, including his marriage, has the one selfish aim of trying to make his daughter happy, even at the expense of others. His marriage of convenience to Charlotte is more for the pleasure it affords Maggie and serves to reinstate their close and intimate father-daughter relationship.

Obviously, Maggie wishes to have her cake and eat it too. She loves the Prince and wants him as her husband, but yet does not want to lose the relationship with her father. In her selfishness, she exploits Charlotte by planning with Fanny to have the girl marry her father to cover the guilt she feels for deserting her father through marriage to the Prince. In essence, Maggie provides her husband with a companion, namely Charlotte, whenever she wants to be alone with her father. Thus, through their blind egotism and destructive selfishness, they overlook the potential harm in exploiting others for their own ends. James uses The Golden Bowl as a perceptive study of people caught in a trap of their own devising, which reflects an inversion of the virtues of commitment and fidelity.<sup>10</sup> By

<sup>10</sup> Sharp, p. 278.

the end of the novel, the five characters are isolated in their egotism. From their selfish efforts, they "create a lie between themselves which will separate them ocean-wide forever."<sup>11</sup> Under the guise of love and protection, they forge plans of deception that reveal them as false and cruel rather than noble and good. As Maxwell Geismar notes, the novel is about the wounded ego, "of the desperate manipulations of the self and of others in order to restore the favorable self-image--and of the heedless, blind triumph of this formidable type of self-love."<sup>12</sup>

The secret planning and the lying implicate each of the characters and weave a mood of ultimate distrust that no one is willing to recognize. While the first half of the novel sets forth the circumstances that result in a "wicked balance of relations,"<sup>13</sup> the second half draws the web of deceit even tighter around them, making obvious the fact that the couples cannot sustain the pretense under which they are living:

They learned fairly to live in the perfunctory; they remained in it as many hours of the day as might be; it took on finally the likeness of some spacious central chamber in a haunted

<sup>11</sup>Sears, p. 169.

<sup>12</sup>Geismar, p. 321.

<sup>13</sup>Beach, p. 256.

house, a great overarched and overglazed rotunda where gaiety might reign, but the doors of which opened into sinister circular passages. Here they turned up for each other, as they said, with the blank faces that denied any uneasiness felt in the approach; here they closed numerous doors carefully behind them--all save the door that connected the place, as by a straight tented corridor, with the outer world, and, encouraging thus the irruption of society, imitated the aperture through which the bedizened performers of the circus are poured into the ring. (II, 288-289).

The tension and agony of a struggle largely beneath the surface and all the more terrible because of the unspoken truth which each hides finally breaks in a scene between Maggie and Charlotte that Gorley Putt says is equivalent to the missing scene, fraught with significance, between Kate Croy and Milly Theale if they had met at the end of The Wings of the Dove.<sup>14</sup> For Maggie, the approach of Charlotte is like that of some wild animal, escaped from its cage and dangerous. The scene represents for the naive and innocent young American girl an awareness, almost an initiation into, the power of evil in the world. Behind their masks that hide the truth, Maggie and Charlotte try to keep up the appearance of innocence as to Charlotte's affair with Amerigo. When Charlotte asks if she has done anything to hurt Maggie, the latter lies by saying, "I've

<sup>14</sup>Putt, p. 379.

not felt at any time that you've wronged me" (II, 249).

Although each lies in the hopes of deceiving the other, James makes it clear that each does know the truth.

Maggie is now sure of Charlotte's affair with Amerigo, and Charlotte realizes Maggie's awareness. From this point, nothing is ever said directly by anyone concerning the situation, but the implications of this knowledge are destructive to the four involved, culminating in the virtual loss of any chance of redemption. The influence on each of their lives precludes the thought of a happy ending and denotes an awful change in the consciousness of each.

When it becomes obvious that all four know the truth and the roles that each has played, the results are devastating. The greatest change is in Maggie. Initially innocent, she represents James's often used motif of the young American who comes to Europe for her education. As is usually the case, her education is the slow and painful awareness of the inherent evil in man. Unfortunately, because of her new knowledge, she does not remain aloof from what she learns but becomes a practitioner of its worst aspects. By the end of the novel Maggie is a complete and deliberate manipulator and exploiter of others.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Geismar, p. 323.

After she realizes that she has been victimized and betrayed by Charlotte and Amerigo, revenge becomes the keynote of her response. With a cunning that matches that of Kate Croy and Madame Merle, Maggie sacrifices both her father and Charlotte in her plan to get her husband back, while punishing Charlotte in the process. Her open hostility to Charlotte and her wounded pride blind her to what harm she might be doing to others. As deceiver, aggressor, and mistress of intrigue, Maggie uses evil in attempting what she considers a worthy end, the return of her husband.<sup>16</sup> But the price she pays is steep. Besides the suffering and anguish that she, as well as the others, has experienced, the damage to each of their lives can not be remedied. Charlotte becomes the scapegoat for the rest of them and is separated from both lover and Europe by being "exiled" to America (possibly the worst of Jamesian fates) with Mr. Verver, while the latter loses the intimate and valued relationship with his daughter Maggie. Prince Amerigo loses Charlotte, whom he really loves, and must be content to remain with Maggie in Europe, although it is doubtful whether he sees anything in her except her wealth. Besides the loss of her father, Maggie must live with the anxiety and pain of

<sup>16</sup>Ward, p. 153.

loving Amerigo, while continually doubting and questioning the reciprocity of his love. The ambiguity of the final scene of the novel between the two exposes the cloud of doubt that hangs over her head. Although Amerigo confesses to Maggie that he sees nothing but her, "the truth of it had with this force after a moment so strangely lighted his eyes that as for pity or dread of them she buried her own in his breast" (II, 353). Although she gets Amerigo back again, away from Charlotte, the undeniable impression is that their marriage is not really saved. She may love Amerigo, but "love is not enough to redeem a world like Maggie Verver's, as we can tell by a single glance ahead at the inevitably futile existence that any such prince and princess must continue to lead."<sup>17</sup> Maggie wins her battle, but at the cost of using others for her purpose and trying to control their destinies. While her experiences have been an initiation for her, making her "more fully human,"<sup>18</sup> they have meant her participation in the moral folly of deception and cruelty.

The disparity between the goodness and the moral evil of each of the characters, between the appearance of what they do and the truth of their hidden knowledge,

<sup>17</sup>Matthiessen, p. 102.

<sup>18</sup>Leyburn, p. 68.

results in an ambiguous situation through which, however, James exposes human relationships and indicates the moral corruption of modern society. Especially in terms of the intimacy between Maggie and her father and Charlotte and Amerigo, the implications of their behavior reflect grave undertones of a diseased and decaying people. Although F. R. Leavis sympathizes with Amerigo and Charlotte by stating that theirs is the only decent passion in the novel--"in a stale, sickly, and oppressive atmosphere they represent life"<sup>19</sup> --James seems to see adultery as disgusting and a universal human weakness.<sup>20</sup> The illicit affair between these two people, married to others, can do no good, can only lead to harm, as Maggie's passion for revenge makes clear.

Even more curious and potentially destructive is the relationship between Maggie and Mr. Verver. It is obvious that they have always been extremely close to each other and depend heavily on, even demand, a good deal of time together alone. One of the prime motives for having Mr. Verver marry Charlotte is to provide entertainment for Amerigo so that Maggie and her father will not have their

<sup>19</sup>R. P. Blackmur, "Introduction" to The Golden Bowl, cited in Putt, p. 385.

<sup>20</sup>Ward, p. 147.

time together interrupted. Part of the horror of this situation lies in the unconscious responsibility of the father and daughter for the renewed intimacy between Amerigo and Charlotte, since the latter two are thrown together so often and left to their own amusement.

The quasi-incest theme is a frightening consideration, but one which should not be overlooked, even if it was an unconscious development in James's construction of the novel. Maggie's absorption in her father makes her blind to the cruel and deceitful control she exerts over others. Her revenge against Charlotte and her misdirected pride in winning back her own husband seem to arise from her ties with her father. Philip Weinstein remarks that one may even see the innocence and good faith between Maggie and Mr. Verver, yet still find it "deeply perverse,"<sup>21</sup> while Maxwell Geismar is more concerned with the curious undertones that exist between the "peculiarly paternal" father and "the passionately filial" daughter.<sup>22</sup> For Gorley Putt, the relationship is not helped by Maggie's phallic visions of her father:

Book Second opens with Maggie musing on the "high felicity" of a marriage in which she had "surrendered herself to her husband without the shadow of a reserve or a con-

<sup>21</sup>Weinstein, p. 177.

<sup>22</sup>Geismar, p. 299.

dition, and yet she had not, all the while, given up her father by the least little inch." Into all this meditation is introduced so elaborate an image of a "strange tall tower" or "outlandish pagoda" in "the garden of her life" that one stirs uneasily at the suggestion that father-fixation and convenient princely substitute are being equipped with an outsize phallic symbol.<sup>23</sup>

What makes the situation even more disturbing is Charlotte's implication that Mr. Verver is sexually impotent or sterile. By the end of the novel, despite all that has happened, Maggie still seems to cherish a rather perverse relationship with her father. In probing Maggie's mind, James's narrator reveals: "They [she and her father] were husband and wife--oh so immensely--as regards other persons. They had after all, whatever happened, always and ever each other; each other--that was the hidden treasure and the saving truth--to do exactly what they would with: a provision full of possibilities. Who could tell as yet what, thanks to it, they wouldn't have done before the end?" (II, 255). No matter what one tries to make of the situation, the reader is inescapably "being continually forced back into a fusty atmosphere of collective incest."<sup>24</sup> While some would argue that to read this incest theme into the novel is to read too deeply,

<sup>23</sup>Putt, p. 372.

<sup>24</sup>Putt, p. 374.

the text supports a conclusion that the idea should not be ignored. Moreover, this theme and the adultery of Charlotte and Amerigo provide concrete examples to substantiate James's conception of the moral decay and corruption of Western civilization.

A superficial reflection upon The Golden Bowl may yield to the question of where exactly the horror lies or what harm has actually been done. Maggie and Prince Amerigo have been reunited, on the surface seemingly happy, while Mr. Verver and Charlotte appear not unwilling to move back to American City to live. Everything is peaceful; everyone should be satisfied. Maggie has her husband, money, and status; Charlotte, a husband and wealth; and Mr. Verver, art relics for his museum. After wading through the conclusions as they appear on the surface, the reader has merely to consider the internal wreckage of these four people's lives to comprehend the harm done and the waste in human potential. From the meddling matchmaking of Fanny Assingham, the effects of what she has wrought taint irrevocably those who have become her victims.

The Jamesian theme of moral blindness proves to be a frequent catalyst for destructive action. Although Fanny does not see at first the harm she has caused, the significance of her eventual awareness cannot be overstated

in terms of the role of the matchmaker in James's fiction. Maggie best sums up Fanny's position: "The theory, visibly, had patched itself together for her that the dear woman had somehow from the early time had a hand in all their fortunes, so that there was no turn of their common relations and affairs that couldn't be traced back in some degree to her original affectionate interest" (II, 102). Fanny would like to believe that her intentions were good in arranging the marriages, when she says, "But I've worked for them all!" (I, 377), but she is finally able to say what the other matchmakers have not been willing to admit: "One was no doubt a meddling fool; one always is, to think one sees people's lives for them better than they see them for themselves" (I, 388). "I always pay for it, sooner or later, my sociable, my damnable, my unnecessary interest" (I, 389). When she can see "the monstrosity of my folly" (II, 129), through her own capacity for lying and deceit, she begins to understand her obligation for the making of the marriages. "Whether from genuine repentance or from a gossipy itch to foresee the worst, Fanny Assingham recognizes her own responsibility in the dangerous affair."<sup>25</sup> This acceptance of her share of guilt implicates her and defines her within the

<sup>25</sup>Putt, p. 368.

list of previous matchmakers who desire to manipulate, use, and otherwise control other persons for selfish reasons.

While the novel may appear to end on a redemptive note with the restoration of the two marriages, James himself seems to consider it a false redemption.<sup>26</sup> The three major novels of his late phase present the human condition in its fullest development, and The Golden Bowl, as the last of the three, is a manifestation of the abysses into which the troubled human spirit falls. Its vision is one of ravage, woe, and brutality, wherein corruption and exploitation are an integral part of modern society. Although they may have preserved appearances, the ultimate horror is what finally happens inside Maggie, Amerigo, Charlotte, and Mr. Verver. Within the context of the novel, these people exist in a nightmare world. Maggie confesses that it is her nature "to tremble for my life. That's the way I live" (I, 181). Moreover, "James creates the feeling in these final scenes of her being intensely human in her own mixed feelings and in her having learned to reckon with the real world of fallible humanity, in which neither she nor her happiness can be wholly without corruption."<sup>27</sup> Her confession and reactions may

<sup>26</sup>Putt, p. 363.

<sup>27</sup>Leyburn, p. 73.

readily describe the reactions of the other characters to their plight.

While the novel is probably not a tragedy, the extent of suffering that the characters endure is tragic. As Fanny labels them, they are the "bleeding participants" of a struggle that precludes the possibility of a satisfactory ending to the situation in which they are all enmeshed. The ugliness of the struggle derives from the fact that it is carried on largely beneath the surface and survives from a suppression of word and gesture.<sup>28</sup> Osborn Andreas states the implications in a concise, lucid manner: "A situation of this character is admittedly one of the thorniest and most nerve-trying in the experience of human beings living in close relationships with one another, and it almost always inevitably ends in a crash which makes wreckage of the lives of several people."<sup>29</sup>

The conduct of the five people most directly involved in the novel is not to be condoned, but, as in the case of Madame Merle, Mrs. Gereth, and Kate Croy, not to be unalterably damned either. In their preoccupation with pride, guilt, jealousy, revenge, force, weakness, and manipulation, the moral inadequacies of the characters are

<sup>28</sup>Beach, p. 265.

<sup>29</sup>Andreas, p. 72.

obvious, while the poisonous effect of their deceit and lying is even worse. For J. A. Ward, these traits reflect on a larger scope an essential disloyalty and treason that corrupts civilization.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, however, they demand pity, in part for representing victims of social forces over which they have little control, and in part for their good intentions, which rise unfortunately from blindness and ignorance. For the reader, a final ambiguity of the novel derives from a yearning to saddle someone with the blame, but with recognition of the futility of the attempt. In essence, no one is blameless, yet by the end of the novel it is hard to pin the responsibility on any one individual for what has happened.<sup>31</sup> The guilt is there, but is more the product of the society than a natural outgrowth of the individual. And ultimately, when the reader begins to consider his own condition within the confines of such a corrupt society, it is this thought that he finds most frightening.

<sup>30</sup>Ward, p. 148.

<sup>31</sup>Sears, p. 164.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

While James maintains a consistent attitude in his depiction of the moral shortcomings of the matchmaker, his development of this role follows a pattern of increasing complexity and modification of focus that reflects the changes the author feels were needed to effectively convey meaning and values in his fiction. As the reader progresses from Roderick Hudson to The Golden Bowl, the role of the matchmaker assumes a greater significance in delineating the evil that accompanies the overwhelming desire to arrange marriages. The moral stigma that James attaches to the efforts of these women to interpose themselves in the lives of others and attempt to exert some control, however unconscious, over the exercise of free will, is undeniable. From studies of the matchmaker in Roderick Hudson, Washington Square, The Portrait of a Lady, The Spoils of Poynton, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl, the collected evidence favors a final evaluation condemning her actions as unworthy and as irrevocably destructive to those involved.

James's use of the matchmaker as a device for interpreting moral values and as a gauge for assigning guilt

for morally culpable deeds ranges chronologically from the burlesque figure of Mrs. Light, the romantically comic Aunt Penniman, the corrupt yet pitiable Madame Merle, the monomaniacal Mrs. Gereth, the young and horribly deceitful Kate Croy, to the socially-conscious Fanny Assingham. While these women differ from novel to novel as to characterization and method of development, their often similar backgrounds and their motivation provide the key that links them together and permits the speculation that the matchmaker in James's fiction is a deliberate and consistently used device. The egotism or selfishness that characterizes the six matchmakers remains basically unchanged from one novel to the next. Whether from motives of revenge, coercion, exploitation, meddling, social elevation, or material gain, matchmaking exposes the unnecessary interference of the matchmaker in the destinies of fellow human beings and implies that those self-centered motives, by which people are manipulated and used, deny others the right to happiness and to control their own lives.

It is interesting to chart the shift in focus that eventually defines James's ultimate conception of the matchmaker. In the early phase of his writing, Mrs. Light, Aunt Penniman, and Madame Merle reveal his gradual change from a concentration on the external characteris-

tics of the first two, to a subtle examination of Madame Merle's appearance in society as opposed to her deceitful inner nature. This switch from the external to the internal provides the transition to and the reader's preparation for the more complex later phase of James's fiction. From a far more detailed exploration and probe of the thoughts and internal workings of the mind, the motives of the matchmaker are more clearly and completely perceived. And it is from this aspect of James's technique and style that the two novels The Spoils of Poynton and The Wings of the Dove, which emphasize motive in matchmaking, achieve special significance. In these two novels the concern is with the "how" and "why" of matchmaking, as seen in Mrs. Gereth and Kate Croy. By the time James finished The Golden Bowl an even greater change is seen. While there is no doubt that Fanny Assingham is a matchmaker in the tradition of her predecessors, the concern of the novel is not with her as a character, but with what she has wrought. James's vision of the evil that derives from matchmaking has not been altered, but it seems more clear and more potentially powerful. The Golden Bowl is easily a statement on the ultimate moral responsibility of matchmaking, as seen through all six novels. Thus, James's moral attitude remains unchanged, but the method through which the matchmakers are presented

changes with each novel in a pattern of increasing complexity from the external to the internal and from an analysis of the character and her matchmaking schemes, to an analysis of motive in matchmaking, and finally to an analysis of its implications for the individual and the society.

As a final comment on matchmaking, The Golden Bowl paints a rather bleak picture of modern society as James saw it. In Europe, especially England and Italy, and in America, James's vision of society is one of decayed aristocracy, middle class materialism, economic and social competition, lust and greed, and irreverence and indignity.<sup>1</sup> This general pervasiveness of moral delinquency in modern society is nowhere better or more consistently demonstrated than in James's treatment of the matchmaker. Her role embodies an appearance of stability and good intentions, while her real nature, just beneath the surface, is characterized by deceit, manipulation, egotism, and exploitation. The fact that society appears to accept passively, even condone, the actions of the matchmaker and her lack of moral responsibility reflects James's belief that Western civilization was in the process of decay and disintegration. In a notebook entry James acknowl-

<sup>1</sup>Ward, pp. 146-147.

edges his concern with "this overwhelming, self-defeating chaos or cataclysm toward which the whole thing is drifting."<sup>2</sup> For him, it is not solely the characters who produce the intense moral evil of the novels; it is, rather, the entire social situation in which a man is placed, his environment and surroundings, that must assume its share of the responsibility. The individual alone is not to be saddled with all the blame.

As James deems man and his social condition part of a serious dilemma facing modern civilization, the area of human relations provides him with material well-suited to a study of man in modern society. It is the interaction between his characters that gives James's fiction a focus from which to distill the inadequacies and virtues inherent in man's social nature. All of the six novels which have been previously discussed are "about the difficulties which arise from the inadequacy of one character's judgment of another, about the efforts, mostly through various kinds of deception, by which some characters try to deflect the judgments of others."<sup>3</sup> As James's use of the matchmaker has consistently shown, a proper regard for the sanctity of

<sup>2</sup>F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds., The Notebooks of Henry James (1947; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 207.

<sup>3</sup>Geismar, p. 183.

the human soul is found lacking in many phases of human interaction. Instead of showing respect and consideration for others, many of James's characters, especially the matchmakers, are more likely to exhibit cunning, distrustfulness, scheming, or selfishness. More specifically, the matchmaker represents on the author's part a preoccupation with characters that deny to an individual a free flow of vital human emotions between his social existence and his private life.<sup>4</sup> For Osborn Andreas, James's fiction reflects the unwholesomeness of such human relations:

James's fiction, taken in its entirety, diagnoses a sickness, and a sickness not only of one country or of one class, but of a civilization. James noticed that sickness primarily as it manifests itself in personal relations, but it flourishes not only there but in all other departments of modern life as well. It is the major sickness of an era in human history, an era which began as far back as the thirteenth century, when the medieval synthesis began to break up.

The decline of the concept of the soul has been accompanied by a corresponding decline in the ability of human beings to respect one another. Mankind--at least Western man--has not yet relearned the art of mutual respect which was lost when supernatural grounds for it disintegrated.<sup>5</sup>

One of the complex yet basic aspects of existence that arise from this decadent tendency in human relations is the paradoxical relationship between desire, or good

<sup>4</sup>Geismar, p. 236.

<sup>5</sup>Andreas, p. 155.

intention, and destruction. And the matchmaker in James's fiction, with her egotism and misplaced conception of duty, provides a chief exemplification of this situation. The difficulty is that the matchmaker fails to see the necessity of compromise in dealing with others.<sup>6</sup> In neglecting to consider this alternative, because of her blindness and uncontrolled desires, she creates an atmosphere of mutual dissatisfaction and frustration for all involved in her marriage schemes by assuming the role of the vehicle of destruction.

As representatives of the worst of James's moral transgressors, the matchmakers achieve prominent positions among the evil characters in his fiction. Their failure to "see," their moral blindness to the harm and destruction they cause, makes them victims of James's reproach. In terms of understanding the emotional needs of each individual, Fanny Assingham in The Golden Bowl is not far wrong when she remarks, "What is morality but high intelligence?" (I, 88). But she fails to see that there is even a higher morality<sup>7</sup> that demands for each person respect for the rights of free will and happiness. It is this failure of awareness and respect that must ultimately indict the match-

<sup>6</sup>Sears, pp. 186-87.

<sup>7</sup>Matthiessen, p. 95.

maker and mark her as proof of the corruption in modern society.

Many critics echo the ominous overtones that James seems to imply about society and human relations. Possibly taking their cue from Prince Amerigo's words to Maggie Verver in The Golden Bowl that, "Everything's terrible, cara--in the heart of man" (II, 349), they interpret pessimism and immorality as the watchwords of James's world view. For Osborn Andreas, "James's apprehension of the world was neither intellectual nor philosophic nor scientific but aesthetic, in the sense that the main object of his examination was to determine an individual's fineness or coarseness of texture. James did not deal in causes or historical analysis; he dealt with the end product only--which is man as he is today. And this man--the composite man of his time--James found unsatisfactory, for definite reasons fully elaborated in his fiction."<sup>8</sup> Philip Weinstein even assesses our own "morally dubious world" as "close, indeed, to the world finally recognized in James's fiction from Roderick Hudson on, recognized and rejected as uninhabitable."<sup>9</sup> Sallie Sears sees James's conception of man's social predicament as "a relation of unending pain

<sup>8</sup>Andreas, p. 155.

<sup>9</sup>Weinstein, p. 194.

and hurt with his fellow creatures,"<sup>10</sup> and Arnold Goldsmith voices similar sentiments by stating that "in the pages of his fiction, characters are constantly being disillusioned about the world they live in, a social world whose matrons and dowagers are often red of tooth and claw."<sup>11</sup>

The picture as represented by these critics is bleak, but the prospect of optimism is not lost in James's fiction. In contrast to the deceit, the distrustfulness, and the manipulation of others by the matchmaker, the virtue of good faith can be found in other characters and is an integral part of James's hope for modern society. As Joseph Warren Beach recognizes, "It is, we learn, comparative good faith which is indispensable to comparative moral dignity,"<sup>12</sup> and "to have representative character it must stand for something in sentiment, in personal relations."<sup>13</sup> Thus, these qualities of dignity and good faith in the eyes of others define the moral limitations of Mrs. Light, Aunt

<sup>10</sup>Sears, p. 190.

<sup>11</sup>Arnold L. Goldsmith, "Henry James's Reconciliation of Free Will and Fatalism," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 13 (September 1958), 109-26.

<sup>12</sup>Beach, p. 140.

<sup>13</sup>Beach, p. 137.

Penniman, Madame Merle, Mrs. Gereth, Kate Croy, and Fanny Assingham. They are often found juxtaposed against such characters as Rowland Mallet, Milly Theale, and Fleda Vetch, whose virtues of unselfishness and devotion to the happiness of others represent James's hope for a corrupt society. The use of the matchmaker in James's novels achieves greatest significance as an increasingly complicated chart of the author's moral evaluation of his society, while her frequent role as a foil for virtuous and admirable characters adds a further dimension to her value as a device for discovery and meaning in Jamesian fiction.

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THE USE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MATCHMAKER  
IN REPRESENTATIVE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

by

Frank R. Vass, III

(ABSTRACT)

As a writer concerned with the obligations and responsibilities of the individual in his society, Henry James frequently dwells on the consequences of delinquent moral behavior. In order to represent the moral shortcomings of modern society, he often resorts to character types to illustrate his judgments and evaluations of the human condition. Since the novelist deemed human relations an essential element in his development of theme and meaning, one such role that seems especially appropriate in this respect is the matchmaker, or one who arranges marriages. As a device to illustrate one facet of moral blindness, the matchmaker proves an excellent example throughout James's novels, and, at the same time, reveals his increasingly complex style.

A study of the Jamesian matchmaker reveals first, the use of the matchmaker as a device for discovering meaning and interpreting moral values in James's fiction; and second, the changing attitude towards this character and

the increasing significance that the matchmaker assumes in the chronological development of the novelist's work. In James's fictional world of highly sophisticated people, the matchmaker demonstrates the capacity for evil and human destruction, evident even in those with the greatest potential for good.