The Ambassadors: The Dialectic of Action and Repose

by

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Abstract

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The thesis of this essay is that there is a dialectical process of cognition in the mind of Lambert Strether and that this dialectic is reflected in the structure and themes of the novel. Previous investigations of the modes of cognition in James's work have concentrated on the polarities of the Jamesian consciousness. This essay attempts to show how polarities are presented and resolved first, in the mind of Lambert Strether, second, in the structure of the novel in its individual parts and as a whole, and third, in the theme of "action vs. rest and repose." The essay outlines what Strether has learned through a consideration of the symbolic confrontation between the values of Woollett and Paris. The course of the novel traces Strether's growth from ignorance and self-deception to knowledge and self-awareness, and presents Strether's gradual synthesis of both action and repose while looking forward to his eventual return to action and the world of Woollett.
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Introduction

The question this essay attempts to answer is "How does Lambert Strether know?" The central focus will therefore be the processes of Strether's mind. The two major concerns of this central focus are first, how Strether's mind works, and second, what he learns.

It should be made clear at the outset, however, that the following analysis does not pretend to any rigorous philosophical precision. The essay is not intended to present a philosophical dissection of the modes of cognition in *The Ambassadors*. It is rather intended to be a literary analysis of the novel buttressed with specifically philosophical discussions of the epistemological backgrounds and relationships only where such material can aid in clarifying and corroborating the thesis presented. To say that the concern of this paper is epistemological in nature should not be misleading if it is kept in mind that the specific focus of the essay is Strether's mind in process as that process is reflected in the structure and themes of the novel.

The first chapter presents a review of the criticism which has specifically dealt with the nature of the thought processes in *James's work* as well as that criticism which adumbrates and substantiates the analysis which will follow. Because the structure of
Strether's consciousness is in one sense a reflection of the structure of the novel, I have chosen to examine in Chapter Two Strether's cognitive processes and the organization of the novel at the same time. Finally, the last chapter treats the question of what Strether learns.
Coming out of me living is always thinking,
Thinking changing and changing living, ...
"1929"
W. H. Auden

I. The Critical Background

Critical analyses of the nature of consciousness in Henry James's novels are common. One of the clearest themes to emerge from this criticism is the theory that there exists in the mind of James and his major characters an irremediable split. According to these theories, James was torn between the values of the old and new worlds and he was either unwilling or unable to resolve the contradictions of his inclinations. For this reason, James is supposed to have recreated in his novels the tension between the paired but irreconcilable opposites which constituted the fabric of his mind.

In the history of James criticism, this polarity has come to be called the "double consciousness" theme in the novels. Those critics who have pursued the various thematic poles to which James's mind was given have discovered a plethora of symbolic values in his novels. Some of the antitheses developed by various critics are: Europe/America,^1 art/life,^2 experience/innocence,^3 allegory/drama,^4 objectivity/subjectivity,^5 engagement/detachment,^6 aristocracy/democracy,^7 realism/idealism,^8 Hebraism/Hellenism,^9 independence/isolation,^10 Puritanism/humanism,^11 materialism/spirituality,^12 aesthetics/morality,^13
being/becoming,\textsuperscript{14} and finally the most elusive of all, reality/appearance.\textsuperscript{15}

All of these polarities are held in solution in James's novels; the novels therefore reflect both the multiplicity of James's vision of the world and the complexity of the conditions of life itself. As in life, James's novels represent a world of warring possibilities, and James's supreme accomplishment is supposed to be his ability to entertain these unresolved dichotomies in order to represent the complexity and ambiguity of life. Ian Watt perhaps best summarizes the attitude that James's highest achievement is the symbolic recreation of the complexity of life. In his essay on James's late prose style, Watt concludes that the late style is the perfect medium for the representation of moral complexity. "Henry James's style can therefore be seen as a supremely civilized effort to relate every event and every moment of life to the full complexity of its circumstantial conditions."\textsuperscript{16}

There is undoubtedly much truth in this statement, but such a conclusion does not do justice to the clear and dramatic resolutions which close James's works. Strether's exclamation, "Then there we are!"\textsuperscript{17} and Kate Croy's, "We shall never be again as we were!"\textsuperscript{18} draw at least as much of their impact from the clear resolution of tensions as from an acceptance of life's unresolved polarities. In
these two instances, it seems clear that James is focusing on specific moral imperatives plucked kicking from the ambiguity of experience.

It may be unfair to choose such clear-cut examples, but the purpose of doing so is to point out what seems to be a common problem in the criticism of James: the failure to distinguish the packed symbolism of James's work from the dialectic of the action. The two are inseparable in the novels, of course, but there is a distinction between the ambiguity of the symbolism and the rather clear dialectic of the events recounted. The dualities James packs into his novels are clear from the long list cited above. More important, however, is the way in which James weaves the symbols for these dualities into a highly complex and ambiguous web. For example, in The Ambassadors, Woollett and Paris are the symbolic poles of the novel. In terms of the dualities with which this paper will deal, these two poles may symbolize ignorance and knowledge, innocence and experience as well as a number of other possibilities (as the list cited above makes clear). Further, James goes to some trouble to make sure that both Woollett and Paris are invested with a full complement of moral, ethical and philosophical values. James does not fail to present the full range of good and evil inherent in the cultures these two symbols represent. Woollett may be morally narrow, but it has a certain moral vigor; Paris
may be morally suspect, but its "life" hints of great possibilities. This complement of values is one aspect of the "ambiguity" that the criticism of James's work so often turns up.

There is a great difference, however, between this ambiguity and the dialectic of the action and its resolution. For example, *The Ambassadors* opens with Strether just arrived from Woollett. The course of the novel traces his progress from England to Paris and closes with him on the verge of his return to Woollett. The novel makes it quite clear that Strether knows he must return, just as Kate Croy and Merton Densher know that they cannot marry. The reader is not sure of what Strether has learned or of why he feels the necessity to return to Woollett, but he moves towards his final resolution with a certainty implying that he understands fully, and that from this understanding no other course of action is open.

How then is it possible to maintain that the center of James's consciousness consists of a mass of unresolved contradictions? To do so implies either that James did not know what he was doing or that he was a willful obscurantist, either that the resolution of *The Ambassadors* has no basis or that James deliberately veils his meaning from the reader. Neither view is correct, I believe, and the first criticism to be made of the "double consciousness"
theories is, therefore, that they fail to account for the resolution of the novel. Strether does not seem confused and neither should the reader.

The second criticism to be leveled at these theories is that they are not true to the actual process of Strether's mind as it is presented in *The Ambassadors*. To understand why this is true, it is necessary to review those investigations which have dealt specifically with the thought processes of Jamesian characters. The first of these investigations to be dealt with here is John Henry Raleigh's analysis of the Lockean elements in James's novels and characters. Raleigh attempts to place James in the tradition of empirical thought. According to Raleigh, "the passivity and the tenuous and ambiguous quality of experience [of James's characters] are hardly accounted for by a comparison with nineteenth-century American society, and it is these two traits which so distinguish James's vision of life."¹⁹ Raleigh believes that these two traits can be understood if they are seen in relation to British empiricism: "...the ideas of British empiricism are basic to most American institutions and to the American life-attitude in its theory if not always in its practice....Henry James, Jr., perhaps quite unwittingly, constructed his novels on their [Lockean] psychological premises."²⁰ Raleigh briefly
adduces what he conceives to be Locke's fundamental assumptions concerning personality and experience and the relation of these assumptions to Henry James's novels.

In Locke's philosophy the basic entity of man was a mental substance, which was at once different in kind from all material substances, such as the body and the physical universe, and, at the same time, independent of and separate from all other mental substances. On the conscious level, the mental substance was a blank consciousness, the tabula rasa, which received impressions and thus perceived qualities in material objects. The blank was nothing in itself but did have the power of reflection which enabled it to develop epistemologically by the process of abstraction, turning particular impressions into general ideas. Practically every character trait and every interrelationship in the James's novels can be accounted for as the logical outcome of these ideas.

There are two implications of Lockeanism which seem to have been most vividly realized in James's works and which, in turn, give the works their uniqueness, for without Freudianizing James, one can show that both the passivity of his characters and the ambiguity of their relationships are both the logical outcome of the empirical assumptions on consciousness, personality, and experience.

James's beloved consciousness, the chief subject matter of his works, was nothing more than an artistic presentation of the idea of the tabula rasa being written upon by experience, or sense impressions. If the mind is a blank upon which experience writes, then it follows that personality itself is passive rather than active and that a person is more of an observer than anything else; ambiguity in human relationships is likewise a logical implication of empirical psychology. If a mental substance is absolutely independent of every other mental substance and they are all equal, they can be organized in no objective fashion, such as hierarchically, and there can be no specified relationship between them. Their relationships then must necessarily be ambiguous.

It seems clear that Raleigh has applied the premises of empirical thought to both the processes of a Jamesian
character's mind and to the nature of the relationships possible in James's novels. There are two relevant questions to be asked about this theory as it applies to Strether. First, is Strether entirely passive? The novel records several instances where he is far from passive, for example when Strether invites Madame de Vionnet to déjeuner. Further, Strether's mind is constantly active: "It was doubtless half the projection of his mind, but his mind was a thing that...he had always heedfully to reckon with." (V II, 125) Second, does not this theory merely indicate the basis from which Strether proceeds in his progress from ignorance to knowledge and omit the process of how he actually comes to know it?

Richard Poirier has advanced the thesis that classic American writers were engaged in the process of creating new forms into which they might project their vision of the American experience. He writes, "The classic American writer tries through his style to free the hero...from systems, to free them from the pressures of time, biology, economics, and from the social forces which are ultimately the undoing of American heroes...."22 The best American writers attempt to "build a world" in order to better convey the truth of their inner vision. But in the process of converting reality into their vision of it, "Their imagination of the self--and I speak now especially
of heroes in Cooper, Melville, James—has no economic or social or sexual objectification; they tend to substitute themselves for the world."23 The "perpetually greater powers of reality" refuse to conform to the shape of these momentary expansions of consciousness, and the failure of reality to do so is the undoing of American heroes and frequently of their creators.

According to Poirier, The Ambassadors "is about a series of such conversions from reality to vision, ....The Ambassadors offers remarkably beautiful instances of the hero's effort to transform the things he sees into visions, to detach them from time and from the demands of nature, and to give them the composition of objets d'art."24 Like other classic American heroes, Strether attempts to transform the things he sees into artistic visions. The "visionary scenes" in The Ambassadors, especially the scene in Gloriani's garden and the scene in the French countryside "are, as it were, pure art in being freed from the pressure of any environment but that of the mind from which they issue."25

One clear implication of Poirier's thesis is that Strether's mind is not at all the tabula rasa passively recording sense data implied by Raleigh. Rather Poirier seems to indicate that Strether approaches reality with a priori ideas with which he desires his environment to
conform. The phrases "tend to substitute themselves for the world" and "to give them the composition of \textit{objets d'art}" imply that Strether has certain preconceptions of himself and his environment with which he approaches the reality he confronts. Strether's "visions" record his attempt to see reality in terms of his ideal inner vision of self and society. There are two implications to this view of Strether which should not pass unnoticed. First, Poirier implies that Strether is reluctant to see and appreciate reality for what it is. Although the thrust of Strether's thought may be towards reshaping the reality with which he is faced, he is capable of recognizing new environmental conditions without reference to preconceived notions of what they should be. Strether tells Miss Costrey, "'I came out to find myself in the presence of new facts—facts that have kept striking me as less and less met by our old reasons. The matter's perfectly simple. New reasons—reasons as new as the facts themselves—are needed.'" (VII, 43) It would seem that Strether is capable of recognizing new forms of experience even when they do not conform to what his private vision tells him they ought to be. Second, Poirier's implication that Strether's "visions" are exclusively private and incommunicable is not totally borne out by the text. It is significant that both of
the visionary scenes cited by Poirier are public occasions, and that through the medium of Strether's consciousness the reader sees them as such: the scene in Gloriani's garden is social, the scene in the French countryside is natural. Furthermore, Strether is not the only person to distinguish the magnetism exuded by the Parisian life and inhabitants. The novel makes clear both the advantages and the disabilities of Parisian life and inhabitants. Gloriani and the transformed Chad could well be the perfections of a type; the novel describes both Chad and Gloriani as very remarkable men. There is something wonderful about the relationship between Chad and Madam de Vionnet. The relationship has served to transform Chad into a man who in some ways lives as deeply as Gloriani.

Two reservations must therefore be stated before accepting the analyses of Strether's consciousness presented by Raleigh and Poirier as final. Strether's creative imagination plays a greater role than Raleigh would have it; Strether's sense of reality is greater than Poirier indicates when he concentrates on the liabilities of private visions. But Poirier does analyze the process of Strether's cognition. Although he does not show how Strether's mind works as it proceeds from ignorance to knowledge, he correctly emphasizes the importance of
consciousness in Strether's odyssey.

The evolution of Strether's view of reality is the central concern of *The Ambassadors*. Strether is presented as engaged in a serial progression of learning processes. The importance of consciousness *per se* in the progress of this growth in knowledge has been noted by several critics. F.O. Matthiessen has argued that because of the disproportion James noted between experience and the use that could be made of it, he turned to the "expansion and intensity of consciousness" as the one absolute value in life. Consciousness is commensurate with the artist's endless cultivation of experience.26

Is it enough to say, however, that the cultivation of a finely tuned consciousness is the final value of Strether's experience in Paris? As intimated earlier, Strether seems to have learned some specific moral imperative from his experience. Morton Dauwen Zabel seems aware of both the importance and dangers of a highly refined consciousness when he writes, "James was always fascinated by the difference between 'a given appearance and a taken meaning,' and obviously, this hiatus, pushed far enough, can produce a disproportion between fact and illusion, substance and ratiocination, manners and moral truth, which is likely to end in casuistry and moral enigma."27 Zabel goes on to analyze the basis of this concern for consciousness and
presents his view of the solution James evolved for the liabilities inherent in the cultivation of subtle moral and intellectual processes.

According to Zabel, "two great tasks especially—presented themselves to the young writer of 1865 who was able to see their urgency. One was the problem of defining the point at which America had arrived in her venture of nationhood and of determining her relation to the rival civilization of Europe....The other was the recreation of the art of fiction as a form of critical intelligence by rescuing it from the debris of tradition and the compromises of popularity, thus raising it to the dignity of moral power...."28 As James went about his task, he was confronted by a body of warring oppositions which he sought to resolve. Although James

...brought to Europe a good share of his traditional innocence—in fact, he combined in himself two classic American characters, the "passionate pilgrim" and the "innocent abroad"—he also brought a shrewd curiosity and a divided sympathy. "I still love my country," he wrote his mother in 1869 from his "wondrous England," and that love, tough-rooted and ineradicable, soon defined an attitude that was to assert itself as radical. It set in motion a debate, a drama of contrasts and oppositions, that was never to subside wholly, either in his mind or in the tales he created.29 Zabel believes that James set about resolving these contrasts through the practice of his art.

Craft became for him an index of the creative intelligence, the one concrete evidence of the fact that in serious art "the moral sense and the
artistic sense lie very near together,".... In other words, [the artistic intelligence] ceased to be an idiosyncrasy and became a test of character and moral vitality, a mode of realizing what an artist's specific and inescapable function in the experience of life is. And it is by that test that he brought more than his craft—he brought his moral sensibility itself—to serve as an instrument of values.30

The exercise of the artistic consciousness as a basically moral function effected for James a reconciliation of his dual allegiances.

He seized his special privilege as a citizen of two worlds to create a classic drama of their rivalries and oppositions, but before he had finished his work he also achieved an art that transcends the international drama and becomes capable of analyzing the forces in men or societies that yield, in comedy or tragedy, the vision which is more than moral or critical: it is the vision of human and moral truth. In taking as his supreme ambition the achievement of an art "fully civilized," he assumed the task of reconciling knowledge with beauty:....That is what permitted him to realize his youthful ambition of making his work, like his life, a "prolonged reconciliation" of prejudice and truth.31

The dialectical reconciliation of contrasts through the exercise of the creative intelligence and the moral function of that exercise are the two salient conclusions arrived at by Zabel that should be emphasized.

Laurence Holland arrives at similar conclusions concerning the relationship between form and moral function. Holland believes that there is an inextricable relationship between the development of James's form and the moral lessons he wishes to convey. According to Holland, form
is function in a Jamesian novel. "The moral implications of James's fiction are to be found not only and not principally in the judgments he passes on his characters but in the fully creative function of James's form, whether comic or otherwise. His form often creates the follies it mocks, and on occasion he celebrates them rather than simply evaluating or correcting them. Like gods and other parents, authors not only confront moral problems but create them, and James constantly confessed this fact in his fiction. One of his chief contributions to the lyric dimensions of English fiction is his distinctive fusion of moral and technical concerns, which has the effect of founding his moral vision on the act and form of intimate confessions."32 Holland goes on to say, "Only by considering simultaneously James's treatment of his characters can we properly take the measure of his fiction, and this task is possible only if we make the further effort to follow the very process by which his novels come to be what they are."33 This task will be one of the aims of this essay.

These critical opinions are the touchstones of this essay. The polarities of Strether's mind as emphasized by the double consciousness theories, the central importance of the processes of Strether's mind as emphasized in varying ways by Raleigh and Foirier, the supreme im-
portance of consciousness as the locus of both form and content as emphasized by Matthiessen and Holland, and the dialectical process of Strether's mind as emphasized by Zabel (which emphasis he does not apply to the structure of character portrayal and thematic content), are the bases of this analysis. Strether's mind is the logical subject of primary interest because The Ambassadors is the recreation of events as they impinge upon and filter through it. As James wrote in the preface to the novel: "...every question of form and pressure, I easily remember, paled in the light of the major propriety, recognized as soon as really weighed; that of employing but one centre and keeping it all within my hero's compass."(V I, xvii) How then does Strether's mind work and what does he learn?
II. The Dialectic

The first aspect of what I-conceive to be Strether's consciousness is perfectly illustrated by a portion of dialogue from John Barth's *The End of the Road*. Barth's protagonist, Jacob Horner, is speaking to Joe Morgan, with whose wife Jacob has slept.

Joe: "But you think it's pretty ordinary of her, don't you? The kind of thing you'd expect a woman to do?"

"I don't have any opinion," (Jacob) said, "Or rather I have both opinions at once."¹

Jacob goes on to meditate: "One of the things I did not see fit to tell Joe Morgan (for to do so would have been to testify further against myself) is that it was never very much of a chore for me, at various times, to maintain with perfectly equal unenthusiasm contradictory, or at least polarized, opinions at once on a given subject."²

The maintenance of multiple points of view is likewise the first condition of Strether's state of consciousness. The opening pages of the novel announce, "He was burdened, poor Strether—it had better be confessed at the outset—with the oddity of a double consciousness. There was detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference." (V I, 5) This attitude should be distinguished from what might be called the "to be or not to be" syndrome. Strether is more accurately identified by
his ability to entertain the possibility of being and
not being at the same time.

James's intention of portraying Strether as a man of
multiple possibilities is corroborated by the description
of Strether given in the novel. The entire description is
calculated to convey the ambivalence of his mind and situ¬
tion in life. Strether is a "lean, slightly loose figure
of a man of the middle height and something more perhaps
than the middle age—a man of five-and-fifty, whose most
immediate signs were a marked bloodless brawnness of face,
a thick dark mustache, of characteristically American
cut, growing strong and falling low, a head of hair still
abundant but irregularly streaked with grey, and a nose
of bold free prominence, the even line, the high finish,
as might have been called, of which, had a certain effect
of mitigation." (V I, 8, italics mine) The mildly anti¬
thetical modifiers convey the impression of suspended
possibilities.

Strether is aware of this characteristic "double
consciousness" in himself. "...I think of everything," he replies to one of Maria Gostrey's queries. (V II, 113)
Furthermore, Strether understands why he is this way.
"Everything's comparative..." he declares, (V II, 120)
and later philosophizes, "It was the proportions that were
changed, and the proportions were at all times,...the very
conditions of perception, the terms of thought." (V II, 126)
It is this kind of awareness of moral and intellectual relativism which leads Strether to say, "I can't separate—it's all one;..." (V II, 233) But as Strether goes on to say, his maintenance of these multiple points of view is precisely the reason why he doesn't understand either himself or others. (V II, 233)

The maintenance of multiple possibilities in suspension has been noted by any number of critics. As mentioned above, the description of multiple points of view seems to be a leitmotif of James' criticism. On the relationship between Strether's states of mind and the late style, Dorothea Krook notes that the main achievement of James's late style "is its power to reproduce, or rather to re-enact, every minute change in tone, pace and emphasis of the mind engaged in self-reflective discourse, every bend and turn in the stream of a consciousness essentially intelligent and coherent—not, like that of the more conventional stream-of-consciousness novel, merely associative and episodic;..." The style of The Ambassadors does accomplish such a representation of Strether's cognitive processes. But the representation of "every minute change in tone, pace and emphasis" is not necessarily the representation of a mind statically exploring a complex of various possibilities. Strether's mind consistently
moves forward through these bends and turns of consciousness.

Strether himself looks for something to lead him out of the morass of conflicting opinions. He feels himself "Kept for something,...that he didn't pretend, didn't possibly dare as yet to divine; something that made him hover and wonder and laugh and sigh, made him advance and retreat, feeling half ashamed of his impulse to plunge and more than half afraid of his impulse to wait." (V II, 86) Further, he has a sense of anxiety when he is forced to maintain so many possibilities. Early in the novel, Strether tells Maria Gostrey, "'I'm always considering something else; something else, I mean, than the thing of the moment; the obsession of the other thing is the terror....'" (V I, 19) The consideration of multiple possibilities is a terror because his object is not to remain hovering between ignorance and knowledge, it is rather to resolve his confusion into a coherent resolution.

The maintenance of multiple points of view is not an end in itself; it is merely the first condition in the process of Strether's thought. All of Strether's dilemmas are resolved in a new knowledge perceived either logically or intuitively. The latter is by far the most common, but there seems a trace of the former even in the "deepest" of Strether's ruminations.
Everything which passes through Strether's mind undergoes a synthesizing process which results in new knowledge. To illustrate how this process takes place in Strether's consciousness, the first paragraph provides a good example.

Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel, was about his friend; yet on his learning that Waymarsh was apparently not to arrive till evening he was not wholly disconcerted. A telegram from him bespeaking a room "only if not noisy," reply paid, was produced for the enquirer at the office, so that the understanding they should meet at Chester rather than at Liverpool remained to that extent sound. The same secret principle, however, that had prompted Strether not absolutely to desire Waymarsh's presence at the dock, that had led him thus to postpone for a few hours his enjoyment of it, now operated to make him feel he could still wait without disappointment. They would dine together at the worst, and, with all respect to dear old Waymarsh—if not even, for that matter, to himself—there was little fear that in the sequel they shouldn't see enough of each other. The principle I have just mentioned as operating had been, with the most newly disembarked of the two men, wholly instinctive—the fruit of a sharp sense that, delightful as it would be to find himself looking, after so much separation, into his comrade's face, his business would be a trifle bungled should he simply arrange for this countenance to present itself to the nearing steamer as the first "note" of Europe. Mixed with everything was the apprehension, already, on Strether's part, that it would, at best, throughout, prove the note of Europe in quite sufficient degree. (V I, 3-4)

Ian Watt has shown how James's language is suitable to the presentation of Strether's states of mind. According to Watt, "James's late prose style is characteristically abstract;...the main grammatical subjects are very often
nouns for mental ideas,...and the verbs...tend to express
states of being rather than particular finite actions
affecting objects....The main use of abstractions is to
deal at the same time with many objects or events
rather than single or particular ones;...James's primary
objective-- Strether's mental and subjective state."

Watt also suggests that the first paragraph of the
novel presents the reader with a process of "clarification."
"The basic developmental structure of the passage, then,
is one of progressive and yet artfully delayed clarifi-
cation;...."5 The reader goes deeper into Strether's
consciousness at the same time that he learns valuable
and portentous information. This approach obscures the
fact that Strether himself is learning new knowledge; al-
though what he learns is based on old knowledge, the
synthesis he develops is decidedly new.

Thus in the first paragraph, Strether finds himself
"not wholly disconcerted" to discover that Waymarsh, who
even at this point symbolizes for Strether "home,"
(which of course the reader learns later) will not be the
first "note" of Europe. It will be noticed that two states
of consciousness are present here at the same time: first,
Strether's subconscious awareness of what Waymarsh sym-
bolizes, and second, Strether's "instinctive" reluctance
to accept Waymarsh as the meaning that Europe is to have.
Then in a sentence pregnant with implications for the process of the novel as a whole, the two states of mind are synthesized: "Mixed with everything was the apprehension, already, on Strether's part, that it [the confrontation with Waymarsh] would, at best, throughout, prove the note of Europe in quite sufficient degree." (V I, 3-4) What I wish to point out here is that the intuitive perception Strether arrives at, although based on his old knowledge, is new. As I will show, Waymarsh and what he symbolizes does finally turn out to be the note of Europe, but Strether's intuition is existentially realized only after a series of complex learning processes.

(To separate the elements of this intuitive vision in this way is to do violence to Strether's consciousness and to James's painstaking representation of it. The beauty of the passage is in the reproduction of Strether's state of mind itself. As Laurence Holland writes, speaking of the stylistic characteristics of The Ambassadors, "Indeed, the medium's rudiments, its tenses, are converted into style, for within a syntax that defines a word as past, a character presents himself, in dialogue, in the syntax of the present, and then the sentence presents a future that is at once anticipated as future and already known as past." I separate only to show the nature of this consciousness and how it operates.)
Reinforcing this interpretation are several subsequent passages in the chapter. In one of his oddly whimsical metaphors, James writes that Strether "...was like a man who, elatedly finding in his pocket more money than usual, handles it a while and idly and pleasantly chinks it before addressing himself to the business of spending." (V I, 5) The following sentence, "That he was prepared to be vague to Waymarsh about the hour of the ship's touching, and that he both wanted extremely to see him and enjoyed extremely the duration of delay--these things, it is to be conceived, were early signs in him that his relation to his actual errand might prove none of the simplest," (V I, 5) makes it clear that it is specifically towards Strether's new knowledge that this remark is referred.

More important are the several instances where the sense of the new and the sense of great change are specifically written into the text. One of Strether's first thoughts upon arrival in Europe is "Nothing could have been odder than Strether's sense of himself as at that moment launched in something of which the sense would be quite disconnected from the sense of his past and which was literally beginning there and then," (V I, 9) Further on in the first chapter Strether thinks, "He had believed he had a limit, but the limit had been transcended within
thirty-six hours," (V I, 13) and this thought is reinforced in the metaphor of the city which has broken its walls. "The tortuous wall—girdle, long since snapped, of the little swollen city, half held in place by careful civic hands—wanders in narrow file between parapets smoothed by peaceful generations,....Too deep almost for words was the delight of these things to Strether: yet as deeply mixed with it were certain images of his inward picture." (V I, 15-16) The concluding words make explicit the connection between Strether's state of mind and the metaphor of the town and its wall.

When Strether meets Maria Gostrey, he is immediately aware that she represents something completely different from anything he has ever known. "She had, this lady, a perfect plain propriety, an expensive subdued suitability, that her companion was not free to analyse, but that struck him, so that his consciousness of it was instantly acute, as a quality quite new to him." (V I, 8) In the face of this new quantity Strether is content to be passive. "She was as equipped in this particular [experience] as Strether was the reverse, and it made an opposition between them which he might well have shrunk from submitting to if he had fully suspected it. So far as he did suspect it he was on the contrary, after a short shake of his consciousness, as pleasantly passive as might be." (V I, 11)
In *The Ambassadors* action is of secondary interest. Thought does not issue into an action; action issues into thought. Strether is almost wholly passive after his initial sojourn to Europe. Strether asks himself, "Was what was happening to himself then, what already had happened, really that a woman of fashion was floating him into society and that an old friend deserted on the brink [Waymarsh] was watching the force of the current?" (V I, 11) One of the major complications of the novel is what has been done to Strether and his reaction to it. What action does occur has enormous significance, but is meager enough to have evoked Forster's accusation that James's characters are all head and no body, however much or little truth there may be in such a statement.

Richard Poirier has analyzed the relationship of the Jamesian comic hero to the characters and society which surround him. Poirier distinguishes two worlds in James's comic strategy—a "free" world and a "fixed" world. Corresponding to these two worlds are the "free spirit" and the "fool," the respective inhabitants of the two worlds. Poirier quotes James from the Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*:

Thus we get perhaps a vivid enough little example, in the concrete, of the general truth, for the spectator of life, that the fixed constituents of any reproducible action are the fools who minister, at the particular crisis, to the intensity of the free spirit
engaged with them. The fools are interesting by contrast, by the silence they acquire, and by a hundred other of their advantages; and the free spirit, always tormented and by no means triumphant, is heroic, ironic, pathetic or whatever, and, as exemplified in the record of Fleda Vetch, for instance, 'successful,' only through having remained free.  

Poirier warns against any statically schematic descriptions of the way James places his characters in relation to one another; he says rather that the distinction between free and fixed characters "help[s] us to describe what is going on at 'the particular crisis,' and to be aware of the polarities between which, in the dramatic movement of the novel, his characters may move. The one dependably placed character is the moderate man in the middle,...."  

Strether is the moderate man in the middle of The Ambassadors. In Poirier's terms, the representatives of Paris and Woollett are fixed in certain peculiarities while Strether retains his freedom and gradually transcends the values each of them represent.  

Strether's action and the means by which he transcends the other characters is an imaginative growth in knowledge. Strether is by far the most imaginative character in the book. He is "not a man to neglect any good chance for reflection;...." (V I, 89-90) Chad even suggests that Strether's problem is a surfeit of imaginative power. (V II, 225) It is certainly true that Strether
distinguishes himself from the other characters in the book by his capacity for imaginative growth. When Strether arrives in Europe, he is overwhelmed with Miss Costrey's knowledge of life. Europe strikes him as an almost entirely new quantity. But by the end of the novel, Strether surpasses even Madame de Vionnet in his imaginative powers and his knowledge of experience. The progress of the novel records the interaction of Strether's mind with his environment and his consequent growth in knowledge.

As the above analysis of the first paragraph suggests, the process of this interaction follows the pattern of a simultaneously sequential dialectic. As James represents it in the novel, Strether's mind is capable of entertaining several different points of view at the same time. The analysis of the first paragraph shows, however, that the process of Strether's cognition does follow a roughly sequential course. The nature of this process is dialectical. It is analogous to but not the same as the thesis/antithesis/synthesis process of Hegelian philosophy. In The Ambassadors the dialectic only approximates the clarity of the Hegelian theory; the dialectic of Strether's mind is more ambiguous, but is still recognizable. In Strether's mind a series of opposing ideas undergo a process of either intuitive or discursive synthesizing. From first page to last, the process regenerates itself, culminating in the
achievement of a new knowledge and self-awareness.

In general it may be said that when Strether entertains a simple multiplicity of "facts," he is most intuitive, and he is most discursive when he entertains more recognizably contradictory "facts." Some discrimination is necessary however. Strether may entertain these multiple points of view in several different ways. He may hold two opinions at the same time which seem to have little relation to each other. For example, early in the novel Strether presents Maria Gostrey with his card.

She read it over again as one who had never seen it. "'Mr. Lewis Lambert Strether'"—she sounded it almost as for any stranger. She repeated however that she liked it—"particularly the Lewis Lambert. It's the name of a novel of Balzac's."

"Oh I know that!" said Strether.
"But the novel's an awfully bad one."
"I know that too," Strether smiled. To which with an irrelevance that was only superficial; "I come from Woollett Massachusetts." (V I, 14)

The seeming irrelevance of the reply is only apparent.

As noted above, Miss Gostrey represents to Strether at this time a life full of knowledge and experience. He cannot help comparing his innocence and ignorance to her experience, and the comparison is not favorable. Strether is intensely aware of his missed opportunities. Miss Gostrey's reference to a bad Balzac novel sets off a chain reaction in Strether's mind which associates her life of experience
with his life of innocence; his life could be described as "a bad novel." Strether intuitively associates the two poles of the conversation and exclaims, "I come from Woollett Massachusetts!" Woollett is at once the symbol and cause in his mind of his unfulfilled possibilities.

Strether may entertain two contrary opinions simultaneously. Late in the novel, Strether is meditating on the meaning of the wonderful furnishings in Madame de Vionnet's apartment. "Strether had all along been subject to sudden gusts of fancy in connexion with such matters as these—odd starts of the historic sense, suppositions and divinations with no warrant but their intensity. Thus and so, on the eve of the great recorded dates, the days and nights of revolutions, the sounds had come in, the omens, the beginnings broken out. They were the smell of revolution, the smell of public temper—or perhaps simply the smell of blood." (V II, 274) The sounds and smells he hears in the midst of Madame de Vionnet's "historic" chambers are the sounds and smells of Paris. From the beginning of the novel, Paris has represented itself to Strether's imagination as a symbol of "life." If Woollett represents a life of missed opportunities, Paris ideally represents a life of captured opportunities. But by this time in the novel, Strether has come to realize that to accept life is to accept not only the romanticized
grandeur of historic events, it means also to accept the virulence, "the smell of blood," intrinsic to those events. The passage quoted records Strether's juggling with these two contraries, the grandeur and the dark foreboding of life until the final recognition caps the dialectic: Paris too has its evils.

Finally, Strether may entertain two contradictory opinions or states of mind. One example of this ability to entertain contradictory states of mind occurs when Strether is ruminating on the character of Chad. "He had been wondering a minute ago if the boy weren't a Pagan, and he found himself wondering now if he weren't by chance a gentleman. It didn't in the least, on the spot, spring up helpfully for him that a person couldn't at the same time be both. There was nothing at this moment in the air to challenge the combination; there was everything to give it on the contrary something of a flourish." (V I, 160) The course of the novel reveals that Chad is in fact both a gentleman and scoundrel but before Strether comes to that realization he must swing from one pole to the other. On the basis of Little Bilham's lie, Strether for a long time believes that the attachment between Chad and Madame de Vionnet is "virtuous." After the rendezvous in the countryside, Strether is forced to the conclusion that the beautiful relationship had been founded on a lie.
As these examples show, Strether seems at times to be more intuitive and at times more discursive. The first example shows Strether at his most intuitive, making a relation where there appears to be none. The second example is something of an amalgam; Strether finally becomes aware of a fact that another person might have known from the outset. The last example shows Strether putting two and two together on the basis of observed experience.

Austin Warren has distinguished two kinds of epistemological counterparts to the themes in James's novels. He writes,

James distinguished two modes of knowing: I shall call them dialectic and myth. One is a cerebral process, pursued by two or more minds, in contrapuntal movement of thesis, antithesis, synthesis. The topic is attacked from without; the speakers circle around it....But then there is another kind of truth to be arrived at not socially, intellectually, or analytically but personally, intuitively, imaginatively—through images and symbols....Our reasonings start from intuition, a total feeling of the nature of the world or the nature of a person; they return constantly to check themselves by that intuition; and it is an intuition upon which, finally, we act.  

This analysis is correct in distinguishing the different modes of knowing. As the above examples demonstrate, the process of Strether's cognition does include both intuitive and discursive reasoning. But the distinction Warren makes between dialectic and myth obscures the fact that all Strether's thought processes are dialectical no matter
how intuitive or discursive they may also be. They are dialectical in the sense that all his cognitive processes follow a pattern of synthetic resolution. The keynote of Strether's cognition is his ability to resolve the various data of his experience into synthetic wholes. Dorothea Krook has written that James's perceptions of the world are of a piece in just this same way. "But finally, his [James's] perceptions of the world itself and his perceptions of the logic of his perceptions of the world 'happen' simultaneously, are the parts of a single inclusive experience; and what this shows is that in James the philosophic, analytical passion is all of a piece with the poetic and intuitive; they can be distinguished but never divided." In the same way, the components of Strether's dialectical apprehension of the world can be distinguished but never divided.

The above analysis shows how Strether's mind operates in this fashion when he is confronted with discrete situations. As noted above, the whole of The Ambassadors comes to the reader through the alembic of Strether's mind. If the thesis presented above is correct, it seems logical to expect that the novel itself should reflect the dialectical processes of Strether's mind. The structure of the novel does in fact reflect the movement of Strether's mind. In support of this statement, the following pages
present a detailed analysis of "picture,"^12 "scene,"^13 structure and theme.

Austin Warren has indicated the first point to be noted in a discussion of picture and scene. The "cerebral process, pursued by two or more minds, in contrapuntal movement of thesis, antithesis, synthesis," he describes is the structural principle of organization in both picture and scene. Further, this process is also the structural principle for the alternation of picture and scene which is such a visibly apparent aspect of the novel's construction. James writes in the preface:

The material of The Ambassadors...sharply divides itself,...into the parts that prepare, that tend in fact to over-prepare, for scenes, and the parts,...that justify and crown the preparation. It may definitely be said, I think, that everything in it that is not scene (not, I of course mean, complete and functional scene, treating all the submitted matter, as by logical start, logical turn, and logical finish) is discriminated preparation, is the fusion and synthesis of picture. These alternations propose themselves all recognizably, I think, from an early stage, as the very form and figure of "The Ambassadors;".... (V I, xx)

Book I, Chapter One is a good example. Approximately the first half of Chapter One consists of what James calls picture, or discriminated preparation. In this portion of the chapter James presents Strether and Maria Gostrey. Strether is described and his state of mind is analyzed in so far as necessary to provide the proper context for his introduction to Miss Gostrey. Strether knows that "his
actual errand might prove none of the simplest," (V I, 5) and he feels himself in the presence of civilization "quite disconnected from the sense of his past and which was literally beginning there and then." (V I, 9) Miss Gostrey is presented as the type of the civilization Strether is to encounter, "...a civilization intenser was what—compatriot as he was, with the full tone of the compatriot and the resettling link not with mystery but only with dear dyspeptic Waymarsh—she appeared distinctly to promise." (V I, 10) The first paragraph indicates, however, that Waymarsh and the civilization he represents are not far from Strether's mind.

Approximately the second half of the chapter consists of scene, the justification and crown of the picture preparation. The analysis of the first paragraph presented above showed that Strether's thoughts on arriving in Europe could be interpreted as a miniature of the novel as a whole. Analogously, Chapter One could be analyzed as an elaboration of the dialectic presented in the first paragraph. Strether is the central character. He is preoccupied with two problems: Waymarsh (America) and Europe. Miss Gostrey is the first person he meets and he immediately recognizes her to be the type of Europe. She and Strether take a long walk through Chester, during which they discuss his "errand" and his past, and cement
their friendship. Their return to the hotel, however, finds them face to face with a "joyless" Waymarsh. Here as in the conclusion of the novel, Waymarsh does turn out to be the note of Strether's adventure in Europe.

The process of the scenic portion of Chapter One is composed of a series of dialectical conversations with Miss Gostrey.

He looked repeatedly at his watch, and when he had done so for the fifth time Miss Gostrey took him up, "You're doing something that you think not right."

It so touched the place that he quite changed colour and his laugh grew almost awkward. "Am I enjoying it as much as that?"

"You're not enjoying it, I think, so much as you ought."

"I see"—he appeared thoughtfully to agree. "Great is my privilege."

"Oh it's not your privilege! It has nothing to do with me. It has to do with yourself. Your failure's general."

"Ah there you are!" he laughed. "It's the failure of Woollett. "That's general."

"The failure to enjoy," Miss Gostrey explained, "is what I mean."

"Precisely. Woollett isn't sure it ought to enjoy. If it were it would. But it hasn't, poor thing," Strether continued, "any one to show it how. It's not like me. I have somebody." (V I, 16-17)

The conversation circles around Strether's ability and inability to "enjoy." Miss Gostrey makes him admit that he has an ambivalent attitude towards the stroll though the city. Strether decides that he is enjoying it very much, but Miss Gostrey immediately takes him up by saying that he is not enjoying it as much as he ought. Strether is able to resolve this difficulty with a gallant evasion,
but Miss Costley refuses to allow this and restates the
dichotomy in more general terms: the failure to enjoy is
intrinsic to Woollett. Strether accepts this momentarily;
it is a kind of resolution to his problem. He immediately
introduces a new element into the dialectic, however, by
stating that the reason for that failure is that Woollett
has no one to show it how to enjoy. It follows that if
Woollett had someone to show it how to enjoy, it would.
Strether's immediate reaction to this idea is that he
does in fact have someone to show him how and the difficulty
is resolved.

The extended conversations throughout Chapter One
show first, a series of such dialectics; and second, an
overall development on the same model. In terms of the
Waymarsh/Miss Costley antithesis intimated in the first
paragraph, Strether's conversation with Miss Costley be¬
gins with the chance remark about Waymarsh. At this point
Strether has an intuition of what Waymarsh will mean to
him. The ensuing conversation establishes the antithesis
between Strether's ignorance and Miss Costley's knowledge,
America and Europe, and closes with Miss Costley's porten-
tous exclamation of what is to be the synthesis of this an-
tithesis for Strether. "He left it to Miss Costley to
name, with the fine full bravado, as it almost struck him
of her 'Mr. Waymarsh!' what was to have been, what--he
more than ever felt as his short stare of suspended welcome took things in—would have been, but for herself, his doom." (V I, 20-21)

The manner in which this dialectical process rebounds and intensifies is one of the most striking aspects of the development of the novel. It progresses into larger and larger complexities as the novel is viewed in greater or lesser perspective. Each chapter, besides being a miniature dialectic in itself, forms one element in the larger dialectic of each Book as a whole. Each Book is in turn one element in the dialectical structure of the entire novel. For example, Book First has three chapters. The first chapter treats, in terms of the characters present, Strether and Maria Gostrey. The second chapter treats Strether and Waymarsh, while the third chapter treats Strether, Miss Gostrey and Waymarsh together in London. It is true that all the books do not follow so clear and simple a pattern as Book First. Although other books, and especially the later ones, are more complex, it is possible to show the same general process at work.

The first chapter of Book Second presents Strether and Maria at the theatre in London. The second chapter finds Strether alone in Paris. Strether's first activity on arriving in Paris is to re-establish his connection with Woollett by means of letters. The second chapter
closes with Strether's visit to Chad's apartment, and his meeting with Little Bilham "consciously leaving Waymarsh out." (V I, 99) The first chapter of Book Third treats Strether and Waymarsh at the pension in Paris and at Chad's apartment in the company of Little Bilham and Miss Barrace. In the second chapter Strether meets with Miss Gostrey at the theater, but the chapter closes with the introduction of Chad. Chapter One, Book Fourth recounts Strether's first conversation with Chad; the second chapter again finds Strether in conversation with Miss Gostrey, interrupted by another visit to Chad's (the incident during which he is deliberately deceived by Little Bilham and Miss Barrace), and closes with a final interview with Miss Gostrey. Book Fifth records the climax of the first half of the novel. Chapter One is set in Gloriani's garden; Strether is literally surrounded by the inhabitants of Paris. Confronted with the richness of life in Paris, Strether realizes what he has missed, and the second chapter records the result of this reflection: he goes to visit Madame and Jeanne de Vionnet for the first time. The last chapter again finds him with Miss Gostrey, reconstructing his past, and closes with another interview with Chad. The first chapter of Book Sixth presents Strether in private interview with Madame de Vionnet. He promises "to save her if he can." (V I, 255) The second
chapter recounts Strether's interviews with Jeanne, Gloriani and Miss Barrace; the last chapter finds Strether reaffirming his decision in conference with Madame de Vionnet.

Two conclusions may be drawn from this listing of the characters and incidents of the first half of the novel. First, it seems apparent that the alternation of characters is too regular (although not rigidly so) to be merely an accident. Further, each Book finds Strether closer to those characters who represent the deepest values of Parisian life. In order of acquaintance, Strether meets Miss Gostrey, Little Bilham, Chad, Gloriani, Jeanne and Madame de Vionnet. Waymarsh gradually fades from view as Strether becomes caught up in the life of Paris. Waymarsh's fading is indicative of the second conclusion to be drawn from the events of the first six books. Strether comes to Europe on a mission from Woollett, meets the representatives from Paris and "goes over" to the other side. The first half of the novel is then a dialectical progression both in its individual parts and as a whole.

Book Seventh begins the complex process of Strether's synthesizing of Woollett and Paris. In the same way that the first half of the novel presented Strether's gradual assimilation into the life of Paris, the second half of
the novel forcefully reintroduces the representatives of Woollett in the person of the Pococks, and traces Strether's gradual assimilation of their values. In this second half of the novel, the polarity of the action begins to fade into the synthesis with which it will conclude. The first chapter of Book Seventh presents Strether's second interview with Madame de Vionnet (he capitulatés completely). In Chapter Two Strether is informed by Waymarsh that the Pococks are coming. It is significant that this interview is the first Strether has had with Waymarsh since early in the first half of the novel; it is an intimation of what is to come. The third chapter recounts a meeting with Maria Gostrey during which Strether speculates on the outcome of his encounter with the Pococks. In Book Eighth the Pococks arrive; the primary concern of the next three books is the impact of the Pococks on Strether. The record of this confrontation is by no means confined to Strether's dealings with the representatives of Woollett, however; the regular alternation of characters is maintained throughout. But the significant action of the next three books is the effect the Pococks have on Strether. Thus the three chapters of Book Eighth find Strether in the company of Waymarsh and Chad, the Pococks (Jim Pocock in particular), Waymarsh, Madame de Vionnet and Sarah respectively. Book Ninth
contains successive interviews with Madame de Vionnet, Miss Gostrey and Kamie Pocock. The climax of the confrontation between the representatives of Woollett and Paris is reached in Book Tenth, which opens with Chad's party. Sarah is engulfed in the life of Paris, but unlike Strether, she is fixed within the world of her own values and cannot appreciate what she encounters. She and Waymarsh emerge to confront Strether in the second and third chapters. The Pococks leave Paris shortly thereafter and the last two books are the record of Strether's final reconciliation. These last books no longer maintain the careful alternation of contrasting characters; the polarities of the novel have been resolved in Strether's mind. Book Eleventh contains interviews with Chad, Miss Gostrey, Madame de Vionnet and Chad, besides the fateful solitary tour of the French countryside. The last book finds Strether meeting with Madame de Vionnet twice, once with Chad, and twice with Maria Gostrey. In his closing interview with that lady, Strether informs her that he is returning to America.

The second half of the novel is the record of the reintroduction of the antithetical forces from Woollett and Strether's reconciliation of the two in himself. Even though the Pococks cannot appreciate the life of Paris, and although Sarah repudiates him, Strether does not re-
Neither does he repudiate the inhabitants of Paris, however, being careful to settle his affairs with each of them to the best of his ability. The second half of the novel is at once the second step in the dialectic and the synthesis of the entire process. Strether rejects neither Woollett nor Paris; he attempts to reconcile himself to both. He becomes, in Auden's phrase, his admirers, becomes the ground on which the representatives of both can meet. Strether's odyssey from Woollett to Paris to the verge of return to Woollett is clear and should afford a key to an understanding of the meaning this journey is intended to represent.

It should be a key in the sense Laurence Holland means in his discussion of the relationship between plot and thematic exposition in a Jamesian novel. Holland thinks that the function of James's form is to provide the ground in which his themes may grow. He cautions against too rigid interpretations of the formal properties of James's novels because the very process of unfolding the plot is for James the exposition of theme. "If James's remarks in the prefaces can serve as a warning against ignoring the importance of plot, they should warn too against antitheses, or capsule summaries...at the cost of obscuring its very function as form of action: its function as a relational form among events, which embraces
not only motives and occasions but the full complexity of those events."

If Holland is correct in his theory that there exists an inextricable relationship between theme and form, the dialectic of the plot in *The Ambassadors* should provide a key to the understanding of the novel. The dialectic of the action suggests that the maintenance of multiple points of view is not the only result of Strether's missions. He seems to have learned what he must do and seems resolved to do it. While the ambiguity of the symbolism remains, that ambiguity need not be seen as an end in itself. One could do just as well to show that James is also interested in a clear resolution of the novel and that a synthesis emerges out of the action. If the ambiguity of Strether's multiple points of view is seen as a vehicle for the dialectic of his thought processes, it should be possible to show that there is something to be learned from *The Ambassadors* other than the complexity of life. James himself always emphasized that the province of art is to impose forms on life, to make life, to give it meaning. I have already analyzed the structural nature of this form; it remains to be seen how James goes about making his thematic relations appear to end.
III. Knowing and Becoming

To follow the dialectic of the action in *The Ambassadors* is to follow Strether's imaginative growth in knowledge. For Strether, being is pre-eminently knowing. The course of the novel reveals Strether's gradual accumulation of knowledge until he finally transcends all the other characters, learning in Maria Gostrey's words, "to toddle on by himself." The kind of knowledge Strether acquires is the intuitive knowledge described by Warren, "a total feeling of the nature of the world or the nature of a person;...it is an intuition upon which, finally, we act."\(^1\) Strether knows exactly what he must do by the end of the novel and accordingly does it.

In general, it may be said that Strether proceeds from ignorance and self-deception to knowledge and self-awareness. The symbolic counters of these polarities are Woollett and Paris. When Strether comes out from Woollett, his ignorance is the ignorance of innocence. Late in the novel he tells Sarah Pocock his interpretation of the confrontation between the ignorance of Woollett and the knowledge of Paris. "Everything has come as a sort of indistinguishable part of everything else. Your coming out belonged closely to my having come before you, and my having come was a result of our general state of
mind. Our general state of mind had proceeded, on its side, from our queer ignorance, our queer misconceptions and confusions—from which, since then, an inexorable tide of light seems to have floated us into our perhaps still queerer knowledge." (V II, 200-201)

When Strether arrives in Europe, he is completely overshadowed by Miss Gostrey. But he finds that the conversations he has with her are enlarging. He is capable of growth. Strether realizes that "The further she went the further he always saw himself able to follow." (V I, 37) Strether is able to deal with the "new quantities" he is confronted with—Miss Gostrey, Chad, Madame de Vionnet and Paris. At this point in the novel, Strether "can't make out over here what people do know," (V I, 109) but he soon learns to distinguish things for himself. The process of initiation begins after the first conversations with Little Bilham and Miss Barrace. Strether begins to sense the anomalies of the situation. "This was the very beginning with him of a condition as to which, later on, it will be seen, he found cause to pull himself up; and he was to remember the moment duly as the first step in a process. The central fact of the place was neither more nor less, when analysed—and a pressure superficial sufficed—than the fundamental imprropriety of Chad's situation,..." (V I, 116)
Strether begins to see how "deep" the situation is; he cannot yet see the implications of his intuition. He must still follow in the wake of Miss Gostrey's insights. The situation is compounded when Little Bingham deliberately lies to him about the propriety of Chad's and Madame de Vionnet's relationship. It must be noted, however, that by this time Strether is well on his way to being won over to the life of Paris; he wants to believe that the relation is virtuous. He is not yet ready to admit that the very purpose of his coming over was to find out all, and to know all is to know that such a relation cannot be morally unassailable.

Strether begins to "throw caution to the winds" in Paris. He finds himself capable of his freshest imaginative flights. "Poor Strether had at this very moment to recognize the truth that wherever one paused in Paris the imagination reacted before one could stop it." (V I, 96) But there are still things he refuses to see. He wants to believe that Madame de Vionnet is wonderful even before he meets her. This self-deception is the cause of his inability to understand himself. "What was it that had suddenly so cleared up? It was just everybody's character; that is everybody's but--in a measure--his own." (V I, 237)

By the end of volume one Strether is beginning to
surpass some of the Parisians in his understanding. He still does not understand Chad or Madame de Vionnet, but he has surpassed Little Bilham as the famous speech in Gioriani’s garden makes clear. (It may be objected that because Strether’s misapprehension of the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet is based on Little Bilham’s lie, Little Bilham still surpasses Strether in understanding. But the passage in question revolves around Strether’s sense of missed opportunity. Although Strether’s sense of what he has missed is founded on his misapprehension of Madame de Vionnet’s and Chad’s relationship, the sentiments he expresses have meaning for Little Bilham apart from that relation. Little Bilham is only a little artist man who finds that he can’t accomplish anything anymore. Strether articulates the meaning Little Bilham has not yet realized such a life can have; Strether shows a greater awareness of the meaning of missed opportunities.) When Strether “goes over” to Madame de Vionnet, he attains new heights of intellectual freedom and soon surpasses even Miss Gostrey. Shortly after the encounter, Strether thinks, “...for an hour, in the matter of letting himself go, of diving deep, Strether was to feel he had touched bottom. He was to feel many things on this occasion, and one of the first of them was that he had travelled far since that evening in London,
before the theatre, when his dinner with Maria Gostrey, between the pink-shaded candles, had struck him as requiring so many explanations. He had at that time gathered them in, the explanations—he had stored them; but it was at the present as if he had either soared above or sunk below them—he couldn't tell which;...." (V II, 13) Maria Gostrey is now relegated to the position of following Strether's imaginative thrusts during the course of their conversations. It is he who now leads her. "She [Miss Gostrey] expressed it repeatedly: he was already far beyond her, and she must prepare herself to lose him." (V I, 49)

Most important of all, however, Strether does not understand himself. After going over to Madame de Vionnet, Strether feels a vague uneasiness. "He liked always, where Lambert Strether was concerned, to know the worst, and what he now seemed to know was not only that he was bribeable, but that he had been effectually bribed. The only difficulty was that he couldn't quite have said with what." (V II, 69) Strether does not know that he has succumbed to Madame de Vionnet's great charm and beauty and that for that reason he is unable to admit to himself what the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet must be.

Some of his tension is relieved by the break with the
Pococks. For quite some time Strether has successfully kept any thought of Waymarsh's disapproval of his conduct from his mind. When Sarah informs him that all is at an end, his "immediate feeling was all relief." (V II, 183)

The entire mass of contradictions is resolved when Strether discovers Chad and Madame de Vionnet in the country. "He was, at that point of vantage, in full possession, to make of it all that he could. He kept making of it that there had been simply a lie in the charming affair...." (V II, 262) Strether recognizes "at last that he had really been trying all along to suppose nothing. Verily, verily, his labour had been lost." (V II, 266) He at last sees Madame de Vionnet as she really is, at last realizes that he had been overwhelmed by her charm and grace, he "felt life," and had for that reason misjudged her relation with Chad. Late in the novel he visits her for the last time. The interview concludes: "'What's cheerful for me,' she replied, 'is that we might, you and I, have been friends. That's it—that's it. You see how, as I say, I want everything. I've wanted you too.' 'Ah but you've had me!' he declared, at the door, with an emphasis that put an end." (V II, 288) Strether has surpassed Madame de Vionnet (and Chad) in his understanding. He now understands their relationship better than she had herself.
Further, he at last understands himself.

Strether has come full circle from his original self-deception and ignorance to self-awareness and knowledge. He has been able to synthesize the principles of Woollett and those of Paris. "He had absolutely become, himself, with his perception and mistakes, his concessions and his reserves, the droll mixture, as it must seem to them, of his braveries and his fears, the general spectacle of his art and his innocence, almost an added link and certainly a common priceless ground for them to meet upon," (V II, 278) The shock has fallen, but Strether does not fall back on the principles of Woollett. (V II, 296) He finally realizes that in the end all things are mysterious, but his ignorance is now the ignorance of experience, an awareness of the mystery and evil inherent in life. Strether declares that he has no ideas, but the meaning of his declaration is that he has no preconceived ideas about his life; he has learned to accept it as it is. This knowledge of himself stands behind his decision to return to Woollett. Strether knows that he cannot repudiate the principles of Woollett, that they are part of his character no matter how much they have been tempered by his experience in Paris. He does not reject the principles of Paris; he simply recognizes that he cannot be what he is not. 'It isn't so much his being right; it is his horrible sharp eye
for what makes him so. Strether knows exactly what is right for him.

The reader may well ask whether Strether's self-discovery is sufficient justification for a reading of the novel. Is it enough to say that the portrayal of Strether's progress from ignorance to knowledge is the final justification of the book? Does Strether learn anything that may be of more relevance than the folly of self-deception? T.S. Eliot once remarked that Henry James had a mind too fine to be violated with an idea. Notwithstanding the truth contained in such a statement, it can have vicious results if it is misinterpreted. The reader of James may too easily fall back on an appreciation of the "felt life," the masterful artistry of his novels instead of attempting to discover what James wished "all beautifully" to say. W.H. Auden once said, "Without an exception, the characters in Henry James are concerned with moral choices. The Beast in the Jungle...is the shrinking of the subject's will from decisive choice....The interest itself is in the freedom of the will. Deny this freedom... and your interest vanishes."^2 What then is the moral choice Strether is confronted with?

In order to uncover one of the moral confrontations treated in the novel, I have chosen to analyze the theme of "action" versus "rest and repose" from the standpoint
of the dialectical process outlined above. As the analysis will show, the space given it in the novel indicates that James considered this theme to be of some importance. What Strether learns from the confrontation of two distinct modes of approaching reality conditions his final decision to leave Paris and return to Woollett.

Schematizing briefly, it may be said that ignorance and America are represented by action; knowledge and Europe are represented by rest.

When Strether arrives in England, he is exhausted by the rigor of life in Woollett. "...I had pretty well run down before I did start," he says, and later arrives at "...the inevitable recognition of his having been a fortnight before one of the weariest of men." (V I, 28 & 82) Waymarsh is oppressed by his inability to find rest. "I was dog-tired," Waymarsh returned, "when I arrived, and it's this wild hunt for rest that takes all the life out of me...." (V I, 29) Like Strether, Waymarsh is one of the weariest of men. "What it Waymarsh's head expressed at midnight in the gas-glaring bedroom at Chester was that the subject of it had, at the end of years, barely escaped, by flight in time, a general nervous collapse." (V I, 26) Waymarsh impresses Strether as "...extremely, as almost wilfully uncomfortable; yet what had this been for Strether, from that first glimpse of him disconcerted
in the porch of the hotel, but the predominant note?"

(V I, 24) Waymarsh is the type of America; he will never find rest. Strether and Miss Gostrey recognize that Europe will fail him. (I, 22) "'It's the sacred rage,'" (V I, 46) pronounces Strether; it is his formulation of Waymarsh's impulse towards perpetual motion.

Strether himself, however, finds that he is capable of rest. "Waymarsh seemed to sit stiffer and to hold his elbows tighter. "Why not—if I can't sleep?" [Strether]/ 'Because, my dear man, I can!'" (V I, 31) In his ignorance, Strether believes that Europe will satisfy his desire for peace. At this point in the novel Strether can enjoy the calm of Europe because he has no notion of the forces seething beneath the surface. Meanwhile he pins his hopes on the promise that Europe will give him peace. "Everything he wanted was comprised moreover in a single boon—the common unattainable art of taking things as they come. He appeared to himself to have given his best years to an active appreciation of the way they didn't come; but perhaps—as they would seemingly here be things quite other—this long ache might at last drop to rest." (V I, 82)

Almost the first activity Strether engages in is a leisurely tour of London with Maria Gostrey. "They had stopped, in the afternoon sunshine—constantly pausing, in their stroll, for the sharper sense of what they saw—
and Strether rested on one of the high sides of the old stony groove of the little rampart. He leaned back on this support with his face to the tower of the cathedral, now admirably commanded by their station, the high red-brown mass, square and subordinately spired and crocketed, retouched and restored, but charming to his long-sealed eyes and with the first swallows of the year weaving their flight all round it." (V I, 17) Whenever he walks with Miss Gostrey, Strether loses his anxious awareness of passing time. "They walked, wandered and a little, lost themselves; Strether hadn't had for years so rich a consciousness of time—a bag of gold into which he constantly dipped for a handful." (V I, 112)

Strether's move to Paris involves him in a life where he feels his greatest sense of repose. For Strether, Paris represents the great good place, a place in which he may enjoy life to the full without suffering the anxiety of restlessness. Paris is soft, vague, sweet and timeless: "...the great hum of Paris coming up in softness, vagueness—for Strether himself indeed already positive sweetness...." (V I, 112) "The strolls over Paris to see something or call somewhere were accordingly inevitable and natural, and the late sessions in the wondrous troisième, the lovely home, when men dropped in and the picture composed more suggestively through the haze of tobacco,
of music more or less good and of talk more or less polyglot, were on a principle not to be distinguished from that of the mornings and the afternoons. Nothing, Strether had to recognize as he leaned back and smoked, could well less resemble a scene of violence than even the liveliest of these occasions." (V I, 173) Strether sees and feels only the calm repose of the city; he has not yet appreciated the depth of life beneath its surface.

Nevertheless, the repose Parisian life affords him confirms his liking for the city. "...yet he had none the less...caught himself in the act--frivolous no doubt, idiotic, and above all unexpected--of liking it." (V I, 51) "'You feel,' Chad asked in a tone of his own, 'the charm of life over here?' 'Immensely,' Strether faced it." (V II, 34) The paradox of life in Paris is that at the same time that Strether feels himself most at peace, he is also capable of his most imaginative thinking. In the Parisian atmosphere, Strether is calm yet capable of his "freshest" flights of imagination and of living life to the full. Paris provides "...a starting-point for fresh backward, fresh forward, fresh lateral flights." (V I, 51) Paris is the apex of life made over into art; its very air "had a taste of something mixed with art." (V I, 79)

All the characters who reside in Paris--Maria Gostrey, Madame de Vionnet, Chad Newsome, Little Bilham and Miss
Barræce—are described as having a sense of repose. Furthermore, when Strether is in their presence, he too becomes relaxed, and comes to the height of his intuitive powers. Strether's first interview with Miss Costrey sets the tone for each succeeding interview. He finds himself "as pleasantly passive as might be" in her presence. (V I, 11) He repeatedly engages in relaxed excursions about her apartment, which is later described by Strether as "a haunt of ancient peace." (V II, 320) "...the rose-coloured shades and the small table and the soft fragrance of the lady—had anything to his mere sense ever been so soft?" (V I, 50)

Strether's encounters with Chad and Madame de Vionnet are remarkable for the sense of serenity and quiet which they evoke. "...Chad's receptive attitude was that of a person who had been gracefully quiet while the messenger at last reaching him has run a mile through the dust." (V I, 147) At their first meeting, Strether realizes that Chad "was altogether easy about it, and this made Strether now see how at bottom, and in spite of the shade of shyness that really cost him nothing, he had from the first moment been easy about everything....Was all the difference therefore that he was actually smooth? ...He had formerly, with a great deal of action, expressed very little; and he now expressed whatever was necessary
with almost none at all." (V II, 151-152) Chad has developed into a type completely opposite to that of Woollett. "It would have been hard for a young man's face and air to disconnect themselves more completely than Chad's at this juncture from any discerned, from any imaginable aspect of a New England female parent." (V I, 140)

Madame de Vionnet is the perfection of a type—the femme du monde. Strether's first encounter with her is described thus: "She was seated, near the fire on a small stuffed and fringed chair, one of the few modern articles in the room; and she leaned back in it with her hands clasped in her lap and no movement, in all her person, but the fine prompt play of her deep young face....Madame de Vionnet, while Strether was there, wasn't to shift her posture by an inch." (V I, 247) Further, Madame de Vionnet's serenity is contagious. "She had replied with indulgence that he [Strether] was in too great a hurry, and had remarked soothingly that if she knew how to be patient surely he might be. He felt her presence, on the spot, he felt her tone and everything about her, as an aid to that effort; and it was perhaps one of the proofs of her success with him that he seemed so much to take his ease while they talked." (V II, 112)

Whenever Strether is forced to do the business of Woollett, he feels constrained by an anxious tension.
On his arrival in Paris, Strether goes to pick up the packet from Woollett: "...the growth of restlessness might have been marked in him from the moment he had assured himself of the superscription of most of the missives it contained. This restlessness became therefore his temporary law;..." (V I, 78-79) The highpoint of this tension is reached when Strether meets Chad at the theatre; the necessity of discharging his duty has become almost intolerable. "The importance of this he had indeed begun to feel before they left the theatre; it had become a wild unrest, urging him to seize his chance." (V I, 143) Strether appeals to Chad to "ease off the strain of this decent but none the less acute suspense in which I've for so many days been waiting for you, and let me turn in to rest. I shall leave you with my blessing and go to bed in peace." (V I, 152-53)

The course of the novel reveals a gradual heightening of Strether's sense of repose. He begins to "let himself go" and gains a sense of peace. "This note indeed the next thing overflowed for Strether into a quiet stream of demonstration that as soon as he had let himself go he felt as the real relief. It had consciously gathered to a head, but the reservoir had filled sooner than he knew, and his companion's [Little Bingham in Gloriani's garden] touch was to make the waters spread."
There were some things that had to come in time if they were to come at all. If they didn't come in time they were lost for ever. It was the general sense of them that had overwhelmed him with its long slow rush." (V I, 216) He develops a large patience for Waymarsh. "He was patient with the dear man now and delighted to observe how unmistakeably he had put on flesh; he felt his own holiday so successfully large and free that he was full of allowances and charities in respect to those cabined and confined: his instinct toward a spirit so strapped down as Waymarsh's was to walk round it on tiptoe for fear of waking it up to a sense of losses by this time irretrievable." (V II, 57)

The climactic point of this process occurs when Strether "goes over" to Madame de Vionnet by inviting her to déjeuner. Madame de Vionnet asks Strether if he fears the consequences his actions are likely to provoke from the inhabitants of Woollett. Strether replies, "'I don't fear it.' [Madame de Vionnet] 'What then do you?' [Strether] 'Nothing now.' And he leaned back in his chair." (V II, 16-17, italics mine) Strether's immediate reaction to his decision is relief. "He himself did what he hadn't done before; he took two or three times whole days off—irrespective of others, of two or three taken with Miss Gostrey, two or three taken with
Little Bilham: he went to Chartres and cultivated, before the front of the cathedral, a general easy beatitude;...." (V II, 59-60)

In terms of the narrative, the immediate consequence of this decision is the introduction of the representatives from America. Woollett and Milrose symbolize the antithetic process of crowded activity which had made Strether the "weariest of men," and from which he has found some measure of relief in Paris.

Mrs. Newsome is the antithesis of everything Paris stands for. "...with Mrs. Newsome,...there had been no little confronted dinner, no pink lights, no whiff of vague sweetness,...." (V I, 50) Although Woollett is described as a society of women, its femininity is hard and masculine. Mrs. Newsome is "very handsome. She's moreover highly nervous--and not at all strong." (V I, 56-57) She is characterized as an iceberg in some cool blue northern sea whose "sacred hush" is the eye out of which the maelstrom develops.

Sarah Pocock comes out as the representative of Mrs. Newsome. Strether's first glimpse of her "had given a brief but vivid accent to her resemblance to her mother; he could have taken her for Mrs. Newsome while she met his eyes as the train rolled into the station. It was an impression that quickly dropped; Mrs. Newsome was
much handsomer,...." (V II, 73) She too is described in clear precise masculine terms. "It had come moreover in the flash of an eye; it had come in the smile with which Sarah, whom, at the window of her compartment, they had effusively greeted from the platform, rustled down to them a moment later, fresh and handsome from her cool June progress through the charming land." (V II, 72) Sarah has "...a thin lipped smile,....[a] rather remarkably long chin,....[a] high clear forehead,....[and a certain] dry glitter that recalled...a fine Woollett winter morning." (V II, 73, 74 & 96)

Sarah's actions are characterized by a certain rushed and chilly quality. There is "something fairly hectic in Sarah's face." (V II, 90) Her repose is the opposite of that of Madame de Vionnet's; Sarah's apparent composure is that of self control. "Her calculation was sharp in the immobility with which she held her tall parasol-stick upright and at arm's length, quite as if she had struck the place to plant her flag; in the separate precautions she took not to show as nervous; in the aggressive repose in which she did quite nothing but wait for him." (V II, 96) She makes Strether fidget; he had none of the sense of repose Madame de Vionnet inspires when he is in Sarah's presence.

As the hour of inevitable confrontation gets closer,
Strether grows nervous. "What he dreaded was the effect of a single hour of Sarah Focock, as to whom he was visited, in troubled nights, with fantastic waking dreams. She loomed at him larger than life; she increased in volume as she drew nearer; she so met his eyes that, his imagination taking, after the first step, all, and more than all, the strides, he already felt her come down on him, already burned, under her reprobation, with the blush of guilt, already consented, by way of penance, to the instant forfeiture of everything. He was himself, under her direction, recommitted to Woollett as juvenile offenders are committed to reformatories." (V II, 61) Strether knows that the end of Sarah's mission will be his demise. "She would alight from her headlong course more or less directly upon him; it would be appointed to him, unquestionably, to receive her entire weight." (V II, 162)

The conflict is resolved at Chad's party, where Sarah is "up to her eyes" in the life of Paris; but she emerges to land on Strether with all the precision and strength of her "high firm definite purpose." "What is your conduct but an outrage to women like us? I mean your acting as if there can be a doubt—as between us and such another—as of his [Chad's] duty?" (V II, 199) Sarah declares that all is at an end.

The result of this encounter is paradoxically an
overwhelming sense of rest. "It most of all came home to him, as he lay on his back on the grass, that Sarah had really gone, that his tension was really relaxed; the peace diffused in these ideas might be delusive, but it hung about him none the less for the time." (V II, 248) Strether thinks he is touching bottom, but as he himself intimates, the impression is a delusion.

The process of Strether's journey from action to repose parallels that of his progress from ignorance to knowledge. Before Strether can share the deep-seated serenity of the inhabitants of Paris, he must understand that their peace is founded on a knowledge and acceptance of both the good and evil of life. Originally, Strether's innocence is an inability to understand that the weight of European civilization rests on a foundation of both grandeur and virulence. In the beginning of the novel, Strether sees only the grandeur of Paris and the magnificence of Chad's transformation. The course of the novel traces the progress of Strether's slow growth in knowledge and self-awareness. As his understanding deepens, so does his sense of repose. The last pages chronicle the depths of knowledge and repose Strether is capable of, depths greater than those of any other character in the book.

The increasing repose Strether begins to feel after
the departure of the Pococks reaches its culmination when Strether learns the truth about Chad and Madame de Vionnet. At the same time that Strether understands the depth of his misunderstanding, he attains his deepest sense of repose, almost an utter stillness. "Strether didn't quite see that even at an hour or two past midnight, even when he had, at his hotel, for a long time, without a light and without undressing, sat back on his bedroom sofa and stared straight before him." (V II, 262) Strether feels himself ready for death. "It amused him to say to himself that he might for all the world have been going to die--die resignedly; the scene was filled for him with so deep a death-bed hush, so melancholy a charm." (V II, 293)

Strether has at last touched bottom. "What struck him now rather was the ease of it--for nothing in truth appeared easier. It was an ease he himself fairly tasted of for the rest of the day; giving himself quite up; only idling, lounging, smoking, sitting in the shade, drinking lemonade and consuming ices...so that by evening his irresponsibility, his impunity, his luxury, had become--there was no other word for them--immense." (V II, 272-273) The last pages of the novel make it clear that his sense of repose had surpassed even that of the inhabitants of Paris. Strether's repose has become so large and free that
the inhabitants of Paris are either enclosed or dis-composed by it. Maria Gostrey has long since given her-self over to him. "She left questions unasked—she who for so long had been all questions; she gave herself up to him with an understanding of which mere mute gentleness might have seemed the sufficient expression." (V II, 292) Earlier, Strether's acuity had penetrated Little Bilham's serenity. "Little Bilham sat staring before him; then he sprang up as if his friend's penetration, recurrent and insistent, made him really after all too nervous." (V II, 171) Strether's last conversation with Chad closes: "Chad's fingers continued to twiddle, but he had something of a drop....'You're restless.' [said Strether] 'Ah,' returned Chad as they parted, 'You're exciting.'" (V II, 317 & 318) Madame de Vionnet breaks down momentarily on the occasion of her last interview with Strether and tells him, "'...it's only your beautiful patience that makes one forget one's manners....'" (V II, 286)

As Strether idles his time away in Paris, the synthesis of his new knowledge becomes apparent. He recognizes repose for the virtue it is at the same time that he realizes he must go back because for him repose is "disreputable." He is both "lucid and quiet;" he under-stands and he is at peace. Strether returns to Maria Gostrey's apartment and their conversation clarifies
what is his final realization. He is now neither "Woollett" nor "Paris." Maria Gostrey meditates on the difference between her knowledge and Strether's original innocence. It occurs to her that Strether has all along been without that special knowledge of life which would have insured him against capitulation to the forces of Woollett. She marvels at Strether's ability to sustain the shock of acquiring that knowledge which could make such a difference in his life. "The difference for him might not inconceivably be an arrest of his independence and a change in his attitude—in other words a revulsion in favour of the principles of Woollett. She had really prefigured the possibility of a shock that would send him swinging back to Mrs. Newsome. He hadn't it was true, week after week, shown signs of receiving it, but the possibility had been none the less in the air. What Maria accordingly had had now to take in was that the shock had descended and that he hadn't, all the same, swung back." (V II, 296)

Strether has given all, however, and is utterly spent. "...he had given all he had to give; he was a depleted as if he had spent his last sou." (V II, 315) Miss Gostrey offers him peace; "'What's this,' he asked as he looked about him, 'but a haunt of ancient peace?' 'I wish with all my heart,' she presently replied, 'I could make you
treat it as a haven of rest." (V II, 320) But Strether has his reservation. "...I'm not," he explained, leaning back in his chair, but with his eyes on a small ripe round melon—'in harmony with what surrounds me.'" (V II, 320) Strether knows that he must return. "That's the way that—if I must go—you yourself would be the first to want me. And I can't do anything else." So then she had to take it, though still with her defeated protest. 'It isn't so much your being 'right'—it's your horrible sharp eye for what makes you so.'" (V II, 325-327)

Strether must return because he has understood that there is no absolute in life; life is a continual process of becoming. Maria Gostrey cannot understand, but Strether realizes that for him the end is the beginning. The "melancholy charm" of the last chapter, and Strether's readiness for death, is a disillusion with the life of sound and fury. At the same time, however, it is a clear recognition that life is process in the absence of absolutes, and it is a forthright if weary acceptance of that condition. Only in the sense that Strether now finds himself capable of encompassing both action and repose may it be said that the conclusion of the novel presents a dual allegiance. Strether's decision to return is an option in favor of all that is symbolized in action, tempered as it may be by a realization of the worth of
It is significant, however, that the novel closes with Strether on the verge of departure and not yet departed. The dialectical process of the novel contains within itself what William James called "the propulsive force" of dialectical thinking. Every idea contains within itself a regenerative power. The regenerative power of dialectical thinking has an exact parallel in the unfolding of plot and theme. As the above analysis shows, Strether begins his adventure in a state of ignorance and self-deception, searching for repose. The course of the novel traces his gradual transformation from innocence and anxiety to knowledge and peace. The synthesis Strether achieves at the end of the novel is the symbolic reconciliation of Europe and America. But the synthesis of the symbolic values implied by action and repose contains within itself the regenerative power of expansion. If Strether has found peace, he also knows that utter stillness is not possible this side of death. The novel accordingly leaves him poised on the brink of return to America, poised on the edge of becoming. Relations stop nowhere.
Footnotes

I. The Critical Background


6 Beebe, p. 215.

7 Beebe, p. 223.


14 Sherman, p. 245.


20 Raleigh, p. 110.

21 Raleigh, pp. 110-112.


27 Zabel, p. 131.

28 Zabel, p. 124.

29 Zabel, p. 126.

30 Zabel, p. 127.

31 Zabel, pp. 142-143.


33 Holland, p. xi.
II. The Dialectic


2 Barth, p. 139.


4 Watt, p. 256.

5 Watt, p. 266.

6 Holland, pp. 229-230.


11 Krook, p. 412.

12 As James speaks of it in the prefaces, "picture" consists of all those portions of his novels which are concerned with the necessary background for the narrative. The picture portions of his novels are those cast in narrative rather than in dramatic form.

13 The "scenes" in James's novels are those sections which advance the narrative process, 'fusing and synthesizing' the matter presented in the picture portions of the novel. The scenic portions of James's novels are those cast in dramatic rather than narrative form.

14 Holland, p. 17.
III. Knowing and Becoming

1Warren, p. 147.


3Holland, pp. 157, viii, ix.
Bibliography

Books


Articles


