CHAPTER V

JAMES THE REALIST

James is a realist and the most memorable statement of his insistence on realistic presentation appears in his essay 'The Art of Fiction' which he wrote in the year 1884:

... the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel - the merit on which all its other merits ... helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there, they are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life. The cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process, form, to my taste, the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist."

He believed in a fiction that was realistic, disinterested, self-contained and an artistic representation of life. He could himself find in the actual situation of real Americans confronting the European scene the material that best suited to express his ideas about life and the general human condition as he understood it. He had only to give a fairly faithful reproduction of life as it appeared to him at that time in order to find a realistic, rich and satisfying medium.

of expression for his truths about mankind.

In his international fiction he emerges not as an uncritical votary of either the American or the European culture. He had always emphasized that the art of the novelist flourished on contrast but was balanced in his views regarding the presentation of the other side of the coin in both the cultures. He had questioned the sufficiency for effective civilized life of the good-hearted but innocent American and at the same time also weighed the merits and weaknesses of the mannered society of the Old World into which his American protagonist is set to perform and against which his qualities are tested. Leon Edel aptly remarks that James "had ... come to see that perhaps the faults and virtues of the Americans and the English were simply different chapters of the same general subject."

He, thus, presents the flaws of both the worlds.

His American protagonists like Roderick Hudson, Isabel Archer, Maggie Verver and Strether are no doubt morally upright and innocent, but they have in them certain weaknesses of character, which, though falling short of tragic flaw, are partly responsible for their

2. Leon Edel, The Middle Years, p. 240.
sufferings in life.

'Roderick Hudson' was James's "first attempt at a novel" and deals with American artists in Europe and especially in Rome. Roderick is introduced to us at the beginning of the story in Northampton, Massachusetts. He is a young sculptor of genius who is frustrated both by the cultural poverty of his environment and by the need to devote most of his energy to earning a living. Rowland Mallett, a wealthy and cultivated American offers to remove these frustrations from Roderick's life and takes him to Rome. The central problem of the novel is thus introduced by Rowland's offer and it raises the question of what is the right line of action for a young American artist to pursue. Roderick's mother and his fiancée, Mary Garland, are opposed to Rowland's plan but they finally decide to depart for Europe.

Roderick initially flourishes in the rich atmosphere of Rome where he could find "the most breathable air in the world" (RH, V, 88). His huge accomplishment of the 'Adam and Eve' is acclaimed, and the rightness of his decision to leave America seems confirmed. He is further introduced to the beautiful Christina Light

who seems to offer him everything which the simple
Mary Garland cannot. Europe now seems to him every-
thing that America is not: the one represents satis-
faction at every point that the other frustrates him.
Both as an artist and simply as man, Roderick is
delighted by the possibilities dangling before him.
Inevitably, however, he begins to show his true New
England colours as he feels pangs of guilt over his
European enjoyment. He starts thinking of the res-
ponsibilities not only towards his mother and Mary
Garland but also towards Rowland Mellett—his patron.
He feels properly indebted to Rownand but cannot force
himself to produce works of sculpture merely to answer
that debt. And while he is certainly mindful of the
hope and trust of those at home, he feels that he
cannot deny himself the rich experience, for both man
and artist, that Europe offers him. The dilemma of
his conflicting desires plagues him severely and bec-
comes acute when his artistic inspiration fails. He
runs after the rich social experience available to
him and believes himself to be in love with Christina
Light. Neither part of the pursuit satisfies him as
man or revives his inspiration as an artist; both tend
rather to aggravate his complex feelings of guilt. His
problem seems finally to be that while the American
atmosphere was too thin to sustain him, the European
is richer than he can stand.

The question of Roderick's behaviour is to be understood both in terms of art and in terms of social sophistication. It is ultimately a moral question and though he is an artist with a faculty of expression, he lacks all refinement of moral perception. It is Rowland who finds in Mary Garland, Hudson's plain and provincial fiancée, a great beauty of the spirit. Roderick, on the other hand callously borrows Mary Garland's money to pursue the fascinating Christina Light, and when Christina is forced to marry Prince Casamassima he chooses to die virtually by his own hand. He has failed to learn those manners that are essential to make life possible in civilized society. His failure to function as an artist too reflects his moral weakness. He remains, too often, an eccentric, selfish and mannerless - as an artist, finally, as much as a man.

Christina Light is, no doubt, a lovely creature who would upset any person, especially an artist like Roderick from Northampton, Massachusetts. She inspires both the artist and the man in Roderick whose headlong pursuit of her proves to be his undoing, which, once again, suggests his personal and moral weakness.
Roderick even fails to recognize the beautiful and innocent Mary Garland who is a housewifely, loyal New England girl. He cannot return to her as his eyes are dazzled by the beautiful Christina Light. He also cannot grasp the wonderful things he has discovered in Europe and his desperate flight ends in suicide. Towards the end of the novel Roderick himself admits that an artist is "supposed to be a man of fine perceptions" (RH, XXV, 512) and when, after he has moved off, Rowland wants to know where is he going, he says:

"Oh, I don't care! To walk, to look about, to 'commune with nature'. You've given me an idea, and I nowadays have so few that I'm taking this one with me. I don't quite know what I can do with it, but perhaps I shall find out. Leave me to try - though I've already been so stupid"... "That, you know, damns me more than anything... Certainly I can shut up shop now" (RH, XXV, 512-513).

The life of Roderick thus comes to an end and though our sympathies remain with him, there is no doubt that his downfall has been the result of his own extravagance and egotism. These weaknesses contain within the germinal seeds of his ruin and the Italian atmosphere only accelerates his inevitable doom. He has failed miserably both as a man and as an artist on account of his egotism. He is selfish - as only an artist can be - and totally at the mercy of his impulses. He had also
"taken to riotous living ... at Naples - a city where amusement is actively cultivated - in very bad company" (RH, XV, 295) which are things, for him, being a man of genius and talent, he should not have done at all. He had become irresistible and other characters, Rowland, Mrs. Hudson and Mary Garland cannot do anything to help him and he disappears "below the crest of a hill" (RH, XXV, 513).

James had recalled the composition of 'The Portrait of a Lady' and said in his preface that "the 'international' light lay, in those days, to my sense, thick and rich upon the scene. It was the light in which so much of the picture hung."4 The international light, indeed, surrounds this picture in several ways. It pervades the contrast presented by Isabel's three suitors: the provincial American industrialist Caspar Goodwood, the English peer Lord Warburton, and the Italianate - American aesthete - Gilbert Osmond. It suffuses Isabel's Grand Tour of Europe and Asia, Warburton's expeditions to Europe and the Middle East, and Goodwood's and Henrietta Stackpole's shuttling back and forth across the Atlantic. But the international light falls mainly on the contrasting characters and attitudes of Isabel, the independent.

adventurous American girl, and Osmond and Madame Merle.

However the international light that shone so garishly in 'The American' has softened. The international theme is not the only concern in 'The Portrait of a Lady' as it was in 'The American'. It acquires a large moral significance by reverberating against the various other themes in the novel. Isabel Archer personifies a self-assurance and independence that need not be Emersonian, as Philip Rahv maintains, but which do distinguish the American girl in the nineteenth century from her European counterpart. She is completely sympathetic and is not only beautiful and charming but also morally incorruptible. James describes her in the following words:

The girl had a certain nobleness of imagination which rendered her a good many services and played her a great many tricks. She spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action .... She had an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong (PL, I,45).

She is, no doubt, typically innocent but her independence and her desire to be free to see life make her refuse the proposals of marriage to her by Lord

Warburton and her persistent American suitor, Caspar Goodwood. She wants to remain free and above all independent of the solicitous protection of a husband. She is also aware of her own inexperience and ignorance and wishes to repair that flaw in her life that would leave her an incomplete woman.

Isabel "had seen very little of the evil of the world" (PL, I,45) and her eagerness to see life attracts the interest of her cousin Ralph Touchett who persuades his ailing father to alter his will so as to transfer from Ralph to Isabel a bequest of £70,000, requiring only that his role in the arrangement should remain a secret. Isabel then starts formulating some of her ideas about the use of wealth and recalls vividly: "A large fortune means freedom, and I'm afraid of that. It's such a fine thing, and one should make such a good use of it" (PL, I,208).

Isabel does not require a protector but a guide to that Old World she wishes to see. In Madame Merle, with her vast experience and her knowledge of the ways of that world, Isabel seems to have found such a guide. Yet the very perfection of Madame Merle's manners make her suspect that her friend is not natural: "She had become too flexible, too useful, was too ripe and too final. She was in a word too
perfectly the social animal ..." (PL, I, 178). However, Madame Merle is a complex individual who would call Isabel "the clever creature!" (PL, I, 194) because she assumes that Isabel has schemed to disinherit Ralph. This one comment is all that is needed to depict Madame Merle herself as a scheming and an untrustworthy woman. She even tells Gilbert Osmond, a thoroughly Europeanized American, that Isabel "has a handsome fortune" (PL, I, 224) which makes us suspect that Merle and Osmond have been very close in the past and that her befriending Isabel is at best a mixed feeling.

Gilbert Osmond, an impoverished gentleman of great charm, who spends his time in a Florentine villa, is introduced to Isabel as "one of the cleverest and most agreeable men ... in Europe" (PL, I, 228). Isabel is immensely impressed with him and after the courtship has considerably advanced, she calls on him at his villa and is utterly charmed at the perfection of his home. She seems to have been fallen in love with him and we wonder as to how she is able to be taken in by a man who is not as sincere as he appears to be. The simple and innocent Isabel does not know that she has been victimized by Osmond and Madame Merle who themselves are lovers, and the marriage has been arranged in order to provide their daughter Pansy
with a dowry. But, seeing only nobility in him, Isabe-
el is certain that she has at last found the world in
which she may develop without a radical change. She
accepts Osmond's proposal of marriage because he
seems to offer her the fullest opportunity of experi-
encing life - the life she has wanted most to see,
of culture and taste and good manners. Wedded to
Gilbert Osmond, she will learn what she has most nee-
ded to know.

Ralph pays his first visit to the new Mrs.
Osmond and he is surprised to find no signs of impro-
vement in her. His impressions about her are as
follows:

She lived with a certain magnificence,
but you needed to be a member of her
circle to perceive it; for there was noth-
ing to gape at, nothing to criticise,
nothing even to admire, in the daily pro-
cedings of Mr. and Mrs. Osmond. Ralph
in all this, recognised the hand of the
master; for he knew that Isabel had no
faculty for producing studied impressions
(PL, II, 370).

And then Isabel herself appears and Ralph sees that
the "free, keen girl had become quite another person...
What did Isabel represent? Ralph asked himself; and
he could only answer by saying that she represented
Gilbert Osmond ..... He was lost in wonder at the
mystery of things" (PL, II, 370-371). On the other hand
he thought of Osmond as an individual whose greatest ambition is "to play the world a trick" and who had married Isabel, the lady representing the "gullible world" (PL, II, 371).

Isabel, for the first time, realizes the relationship between Madame Merle and Osmond, when she suddenly walks into a room where the two are talking. She receives an "impression" and notices "a sort of familiar silence" from which the knowledge of her presence would immediately interrupt them (PL, II, 384). She comes to understand that they have somehow deceived her and in this way realizes the true character of her husband. Osmond, despite his being a man of taste, of propriety and of careful manners, has been responsible for the tragic failure of Isabel's marriage with him. Isabel, on the contrary, has also practised a kind of deception as she herself admits in her famous meditative vigil:

She had known she had too many ideas; she had more even than he had supposed, many more than she had expressed to him when he had asked her to marry him. Yes, she had been hypocritical... She had a certain way of looking at life which he took as a personal offence (PL, II, 404).

She coolly analyses all the emotions, attitudes, dreams, hopes, ideas and misconceptions which had resulted in
her marriage. She has no more misconceptions about her present position and is conscious of the mistake which she is not ready to admit before the world: "... for if she had not deceived him in intention she understood how completely she must have done so in fact. She had effaced herself when he first knew her; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was" (PL, II, 401).

The famous "meditative vigil" which "was designed to have all the vivacity of incident and all the economy of picture", could throw "the action further forward than twenty 'incidents' might have done". The story of the novel comes to a close with Isabel, still a young woman of pride and ideals, returning back to Rome and to Osmond—sadder and wiser. She is indeed a portrait of a lady and has earned this title not by marrying Osmond but by suffering and growing.

James, thus, depicting the evil of Osmond and Madame Merle who are, perhaps, the most evil characters in his fiction, also does not fail to recognize Isabel Archer's deception which is, undoubtedly responsible

for the suffering in her married life. Isabel is certainly not morally blameworthy for what she has done but there is no denying the fact that she has deviated from the truth and has failed to be her real self in the face of temptation which is offered to her in the world of Europe.

Maggie Verver in 'The Golden Bowl' is typically innocent. Her innocence, however, is extreme; her unselfishness is extreme and her virtues are, in fact, exaggerated or excessive. This excess comes to constitute a positive and active evil in the novel. Her excessive love for her father with whom she shares this weakness is a disabling infatuation which is partly responsible for the failure of her married life and for her subsequent trials and tribulations.

Adam Verver, Maggie's father, is an American millionaire whose fortune has not been made through sheer unspoilt innocence: "He had wrought by devious ways, but he had reached the place, and what would ever have been straighter in any man's life, than his way, now, of occupying it?" (GB, 1, 124). He moves to Europe with an intention of collecting works of art and proceeds to indulge his collector's insatiable appetite. He is shrewd in appraising both the merit
and the price of art objects and neither of these qualities reflect adversely on his morality. But, on the other hand, he sees no difference between human beings and objects. He collects the prince as coldly as if he were a collector's item and not his prospective son-in-law. He is concerned only with the rare exquisiteness of Amerigo: "Representative precious objects, great ancient pictures and other works of art... had... so engaged all the faculties of his mind, that the instinct, the particular sharpened appetite of the collector, had fairly served as a basis for his acceptance of the Prince's suit" (GB, I, 121). He acquires Charlotte, a beautiful piece for display as well as social convenience, in a similar fashion, and his marriage with her would remove Maggie's uneasiness about his loneliness.

After the marriage, he and Maggie let Charlotte and Amerigo take care of the social scene, while they themselves remain absorbed in each other and in the Principino. Both do not know that Charlotte and the Prince and former lovers, but nonetheless Adam neglects his wife and connives at Maggie's neglect of her husband. He is aware that his and Maggie's mutual happiness is at the cost of their spouses;
... We want each other', he had further explained; 'only wanting it, each time for each other. That's what I call the happy spell; but it's also, a little, possibly, the immorality'.

"The immorality"? she had pleasantly echoed.

'Well, we're tremendously moral for ourselves - that is for each other; and I won't pretend that I know exactly at whose particular expense you and I, for instance, are happy ...' (GB, II, 362).

Adam, no doubt, has Charlotte and the Prince in mind as those at whose expense Maggie and he are having happiness. But he does nothing to change the situation because for him both the Prince and Charlotte are no more than acquisitions. His wealth and his position in London society impose certain social obligations on him. Indifferent to these obligations and devoid of the requisite social elegance, he and Maggie use the Prince and Charlotte, both the epitomes of social grace and sophistication, as their deputies in English society.

Maggie's suffering may be heroic and her patience phenomenal, but she is substantially responsible for her misery. Oscar Cargill reminds us that "it is important to observe for understanding his [Henry James's] conception of Maggie Verver that ... the daughter in the plot note for 'The Golden Bowl'
is inferior to the other woman. Maggie is a paradox. She is a loving daughter and a loving wife but is more devoted to her father than to her husband. Until her marriage, her sole function in life has been to be a daughter, and after it she is not willing to be much different. She is completely absorbed in her father and makes no demands on her husband, thus allowing him perfect freedom for an adulterous relationship with Charlotte. In the ultimate analysis she emerges as a person in whom goodness and carelessness are so mixed that it becomes as difficult to blame her for what happens as it is to exonerate her from her responsibility for it. But we cannot deny that she certainly has her share of responsibility for the liaison between the Prince and Charlotte and thus meets suffering in her married life.

However, if through her failure as a wife Maggie mars her marriage, she also redeems it through a strategy of wholesome cunning and exacting self-restraint. Her almost heroic reticence and wary manoeuvring exhibit a moral of the widest relevance. Just as her role in the marriages shows how to bring about disharmony, the way in which she restores order illustrates what may be the only desirable corrective

to disorder in a civilized state. Her approach is constructive because it is not in her nature to give up her happiness. Maggie, despite her weakness, is certainly an active character in the novel.

Strether is the central figure in 'The Ambassadors' and certainly has marks of his nationality, but they are surprisingly few and are overshadowed by his vivid individuality. He comes from Woollett, Massachusetts and has a moral independence which distinguishes him from the common American who supposedly lost his centre of moral gravity in Paris.

He comes to Paris as Mrs. Newsome's ambassador because he is going to marry her, but he also shares her suspicion of the immorality of Chad's relation in Paris. However, his moral view is far more liberal than Mrs. Newsome's and Woollett's. He goes out with Marie Costrey soon after arriving in Chester, though Woollett would not approve of it. His remark to Maria, "Woollett isn't sure it ought to enjoy" (AMB, I, 13), shows him not identifying with Woollett but making an ironic comment on it, the irony being a measure of the distance which he has always felt between Woollett and himself. He finds Chad "improved" (AMB, IV, 92) and rightly attributes the improvement to Madame de Vionnet.
He urges him not to return to Woollett for a while. Eventually, even after discovering the adulterous relationship, he forbids Chad to desert Madame de Vionnet: not because he overlooks the adultery, but because he believes that Chad owes her his loyalty for having transformed him from an awkward youth into an elegant and graceful man. His mission was to recover Chad for Woollett; when Chad is ready to return, Strether prevents him. On one plane his action is immoral and he seems to be betraying Mrs. Newsome. But he is obeying the dictates of a higher morality, one in which constancy and gratitude override the immorality of Chad’s adulterous liaison and even his own breach of faith with Mrs. Newsome.

Strether’s goodness, once again, prevents him from suspecting Chad’s selfishness. Chad might have changed his wild ways but he has developed a moral treachery within him. His essential vulgarity is not lost and his aim in Paris has been to indulge his sensuality. By the end his sexual cravings have become jaded and he is ready to return to Woollett for the money it dangles in front of him. He is now tired of Madame de Vionnet and betrays her which reminds us of the Bellegardes in 'The American'. Even more repugnant than his betrayal of Madame de Vionnet, is his low cunning with Strether. He uses Strether for his
own purposes and goes on to manipulate him. He, in the ultimate analysis, emerges as a crafty fellow when he tells Sarah that he would return to Woollett if Strether told him to, knowing full well that Strether would never do so.

Strether's experience has opened his eyes truly and has given him full consciousness of life. He eventually discerns the underlying falsehood of Woollett, which represents cold, conventional, money based, prison-like morality and makes us believe that Woollett and Paris are similar, based as they are on lies of different kinds.

James had developed Strether at the centre of consciousness and the hero's sentiments were undoubtedly his own. His novels indicate that he could not be taken in by the glamour of European culture though he highly valued its sophistication. Strether reveals this fact in his recognition of the glimpse of Chad and Madame de Vionnet on a riverside excursion:

What he saw was exactly the right thing - a boat advancing round the bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol. It was suddenly as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted, more or less, all day, and had now drifted into sight, with the slow current, on purpose to fill up the measure,... For two very happy persons he
found himself straightway taking them—a young man in shirt-sleeves, a young woman easy and fair, who... had known what this particular retreat could offer them.... they were expert, familiar, frequent—that this wouldn’t, at all events, be the first time. They knew how to do it, he vaguely felt—and it made them but the more idyllic; though at the very moment of the impression, as happened, their boat seemed to have begun to drift wide, the oarsman letting it go.... the lady in the stern had... taken account of his being there to watch them.... He too had, within the minute, taken in something, taken in that he knew the lady whose parasol, shifting as if to hide her face, made so fine a pink point in the shining scene. It was too prodigious, a chance in a million; but, if he knew the lady, the gentleman, who still showed his back and kept his distance, the gentleman, the coatless hero of the idyl... was, to match the marvel, none other than Chad (AMB, XI, 333-334).

James has made Strether realize that the glamorous affair of Chad and Madame de Vionnet is, after all, an illicit liaison. He understands that "there had been simply a lie in the charming affair—a lie on which one could now, detached and deliberate, perfectly put one’s finger" (AMB, XI, 337). The final lesson in Strether’s education has shown him that passion and deceit may lie hidden under the beauty and charm of Paris.

In a similar fashion Newman in 'The American'
becomes gradually aware of the differences between America and France and our main interest is always centered on the contrast. James never lets us forget his good-heartedness and, on the other hand, reveals the evil, depravity and conceit of the Bellegardes who were "pretending to represent the highest possible civilization" of the world. The Bellegardes are thus depicted as stock Europeans of the aristocratic order and reveal their profound brutality which underlies the veneer of their sophistication and beautiful manners.

Prince Amerigo in 'The Golden Bowl' marries Maggie Verver mainly for her money and though we should not overlook the humiliation he receives at the hands of the Ververs who treat him as a piece of property, it is a fact that his liaison with Charlotte, his step mother-in-law, betrays remnants of the inherited corruption in him. His immorality reveals the poverty, avarice, commercial vulgarity and deceit which lie behind his Italian aestheticism. In other words, the aesthetic richness in him is matched with moral poverty which undoubtedly comes to the surface and reveals his true nature.

James's realism thus prevents him from idealizing either the Americans or the Europeans and enables him to present both in their strength as well as in their weakness. The presence, however, of so many good expatriates in his fiction indicates that the seeds of viciousness are in the individual Americans themselves. Europe merely intensifies the growth.

Ned Rosier in 'The Portrait of a Lady', Maria Gostrey in 'The Ambassadors' and Fanny Assingham in 'The Golden Bowl' are the good American expatriates in Europe.

And, above all, the Touchetts themselves are expatriates who have not been tainted by European corruption. On the other hand Gilbert Osmond demonstrates the potent effects of Europeanization on a certain kind of American. He is, however, so clever and self-assertive that his does not seem to be a case of helpless exposure to the evil influence of Europe. He is best understood as one in whom Europe has only fostered, not created, his personal tendencies. Chad also, as opposed to Maria Gostrey, does not represent the best in the American character. His values are selfishness, greed and a sensuality which must seek another object once it is tired of Madame de Vionnet. Similarly, the action in 'The Golden Bowl' reflects a pattern of mixed general human behaviour and though the Prince and Charlotte have not behaved ideally,
Adam and Maggie have been gravely irresponsible and can in no way be called blameless.

James was an artist with a comprehensive vision and the strength and weakness of his Americans and Europeans reach beyond their national context to embrace fundamental human values. His vision had gradually broadened and the characterization of both the Americans and Europeans in his international fiction makes his expression of reality applicable to the human condition generally.

It is a more analytic consideration of the appearance of things. It is known by its tendency to resolve its discoveries into pictorial form. It sees the connection between feelings and external conditions, and it expresses such relations as they have not been expressed hitherto. It deserves to win victories, because it has opened its eyes fully to the fact that the magic of the arts of representation lies in their appeal to the associations awakened by things, 1
