CHAPTER IV

EVIL

The vision of human condition is incomplete and erroneous without evil. Evil is as much a part of life as innocence. As a man cannot remain in his infancy always but should grow up into an adult, a man should inevitably grow from his state of innocence into a morally and socially mature person through an experience of evil. In short, man to be a full man should go through the fire of evil and prove his mettle. As evil or its different manifestations form an inescapable or ineluctable part of life, no writer worth his salt can hope to ignore it. Darsan Singh Maini writes,

All great writers have, sooner or later, to acknowledge the reality and mystery of evil . . . it is only when a writer confronts the massed power of evil in its various forms and aspects and knows that the time has come for him to grapple with these monsters to the utmost of his spiritual and mental power that he may be said to have attained the age of understanding . . . The history of every major writer in the English language—Shakespeare, Milton, Hawthorne, Melville, to quote a few examples, shows that the visionary breakthrough was attained only
when the nature of evil in man, in society and in nature dawned upon him . . . . If one never descended into the depths, one never ultimately attained the heights. No moral vision whose ladders did not start from the pit was likely to stand the abrasive test of reality.¹

Before delving deep into James's preoccupation with evil it may be good to see what evil is. For a Hindu evil may mean all that prevents him from the attainment of Nirvana, the merging of the individual soul with the Universal Soul. St. Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, makes enormous good sense when he says that evil is a parasite living off its host, a perversion of a wholesome creation, an idolizing of the world's beauty as if it were not transient but permanent, and thus a mistaking of the creature for the creator. According to Richard Taylor, "the things that nourish and give warmth and enhance life are deemed good, and those that frustrate and threaten are deemed bad."² R. D. Laing defines evil as "the act whereby one negates the other person's autonomy, ignores his feelings, regards him as a thing, kills the life in him."³ Paul Siwek, a Jesuit, provides the most inclusive definition of evil. According to him evil is "all that opposes the intrinsic finality of being. Therefore it is all that hinders the being's full development, all that thwarts its tendencies, all that resists the drive from the depths of that being toward full expression, toward that completion, which it would attain to in its ideal type, the archetype of its own nature."⁴ In our study of evil we are not concerned with the religious definitions of evil as James was not a believer or
practitioner of any religion. So, for our purpose, we take evil to be the essence of the last three definitions that is, evil is the malign intervention of one person in the life of another.

The notion of evil is intimately connected with the notion of initiation. The tragic hero remains innocent till he is initiated into a world of evil. Several critics are of the opinion that the discovery and knowledge of evil is the most important part of initiation. Writers like Brooks and Warren⁵ and Fielder⁶ agree that in the process of initiation the protagonists learn about good and evil and thereby gain a better understanding of themselves. The soul of an uninitiated person is undeveloped. The innocence he enjoys is rather negative as he is not in a position to make a distinction between good and evil. By initiation he descends into knowledge and the downward path into wisdom leads him ultimately to self understanding. In the words of Carl Jung, through the process of initiation man goes through an "individuation process." Carl Jung writes, "The meaning and purpose of the process is the realization, in all its aspects, of the personality originally hidden away in the embryonic germplasm, the production and unfolding of the original potential wholeness."⁷ Thus a man comes to his fullness only through an encounter with evil. The idea of initiation and experience of evil is of particular importance in American literature. As a young nation that went through the pangs of maturation, of a rite-de-passage from innocence to knowledge, the United States embodies the theme in its very history.
As we have seen in the second chapter of this thesis, Henry James possesses a profound sense of the dark, malevolent forces that confront man and evil is ubiquitous in his fictional world. J.A. Ward observes, "Evil in James is an inexorable, ever present reality that cripples and destroys; it is present at the base of every human situation and it is at least latent in everyman." James is fascinated by the power of evil in human life and he believes that failure, ugliness and the wild form lurking in the inner depths of human mind are truer than success, beauty, happiness and civilization. Being a realist in fiction James aims at the dramatization of life rather than the presentation of any religious or philosophic concept of evil. So the evil that is present in his fiction is embodied in concrete characters and situations.

Osborn Andreas in his book, *Henry James and the Expanding Horizon*, says that the worst form of evil that James treats in his book is "emotional cannibalism." By "emotional cannibalism" he means the deep-rooted illusion that one's own life can get sustenance from an emotional feeding on the lives of others. It may take the form of different kinds of intervention directed against the autonomy of the individual like outright meddling, parasitism, coercion or exploitation. J. A. Ward writes, "Many of James's critics have observed that the principal sin in James is the violation of the sanctity of the human heart. The element of personal violation which has been described as "emotional cannibalism" and by James himself as "omnivorous egotism" is
James's version of Hawthorn's "unpardonable sin" the major evil in his work. Whenever or wherever a person seeks to dominate, control or twist or mould another psyche, James sees in it a threat not only to individual freedom but also to society and to civilized existence.

Both in America and in Europe James sees the fangs of evil. America for him is primarily a land of Adamic innocence, but it does turn out to be the Satan's abode when its moral sense goes wrong and innocence is perverted. The evil of America is an intense provincialism that breeds aggressive narrow mindedness. The money making craze of the New Englanders is also looked upon unfavourably by James. James considers commercialism as hostile to experience and moral development. The wealthy businessman is usually seen as an innocent soul blighted by his work. Europe, with its vain appearance, in spite of its refining effect, is a veritable symbol of evil for James. Europe presents James with a new and revelatory environment for the innocent travellers from over-seas where they encounter the various forms of evil and sophistication. Daniel J. in his book The Crystal Cage observes.

Europe . . . is the cage of the past, of history, of stamped out arranged life dominated by a rigid tradition, by the Catholic Church, by feudalism and by, standards of conduct imposed by the unchanging dead. It is the trap of bright appearances of "things", object d' art' collections, of materialism that ironically is taken to be the spirits of
highest refinement and the masquerades as "culture" and "civilization". It is the hook of invidious display and show, invidious manners and proprieties."

The villains of James also deserve our attention. The villains of James have an air of actuality. They are not embodiments of evil like the villains of Hawthorne such as Chillingworth. Even in such an early work as The American, the villainous character, Urbain de Bellegarde, is motivated by common human desire—pride, greed and revenge. In his later works in which evil does lose its conventionally melodramatic features, his villains are lifelike. The villains of James are familiar and specific and not remote and vague as he has succeeded in translating the "unpardonable sin" into natural human action. The villains of James are seen to want something, to be after, something which the innocent victims can help them to get. Themselves intelligent and subtle, they are civilized enough to know how to appeal to the aspiring victims. Like Madame Merle and Osmond in The Portrait of a Lady, they seem veritable messengers of civilization, ready to welcome the passionate and innocent pilgrims.

James in his novels, as Quentin Anderson tries to bring out in his book The American Henry James, reveals the shallowness of Emerson's claim to Adamic innocence as a permanent human state and vindicates his father's idea that life flowers and fructifies out of the profoundest tragic depths. James
resolutely combats the notion that there is something harmful in experience and that man should not be exposed to evil. In the interest of enhanced awareness, he advocates, on the other hand, an acceptance of all experiences within one's reach. Every possible variety of experience is, in James's view, grist for the mill of the most conscious man. James holds the view that experience comes to one only through a confrontation with evil. He denies the virtues of a sheltered life and like Milton does not praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue. Just like Milton’s Eve of The Paradise Lost James says that the great virtues of faith, love and chastity are not virtues unless they are tested and found incorruptible. James believes that good will come out of evil and takes his innocents, who are thirsty for life and experience, to Europe where they will eat the fruit of the forbidden tree and thereby gain knowledge. James convinces his readers through his characters that no knowledge, awareness or consciousness is attained without an experience of evil. In short, the confrontation with evil though it shatters one’s world of illusion gives one the precious gift of moral maturity.

On the basis of the above study on evil, it may be interesting to see how the Jamesian innocents like Christopher Newman, Isabel Archer, Milly Theale and Lewis Lambert Strether confront evil in the land of their dream, namely Europe. All of them are in a world of illusion and lack a vision of evil. Evil comes to them in Europe in the form of vain appearance and treacherous and deceitful love. As Maini writes "Europe becomes for the American
protagonist a test of moral values and a ground for providing the truth of the heart and the imagination . . . . For James, then, Europe served largely as a huge spider that held the American innocents captive; and forced them to make moral and spiritual execution to free themselves. 11

Christopher Newman, the protagonist of James's first international novel is a true Emersonian character. He is as unconscious of evil like Emerson himself. J.A. Ward writes, "In the beginning he harbours the illusion that the world is good, and evil non-existent, he also assumes that he is a free agent whose responsibility is to be as happy as he possibly can."12 Newman wishes to take the best of Europe without dealing with the worst of it and he tries to take as much of it with himself without having any desire to emerge as European. James doesn't allow Newman to have his innocence and experience in Europe at the same time. The experiencing of Europe makes necessary the loss of one's innocence with an encounter with evil. James believes that evil which comes in the way of human refinement is nevertheless a necessary experience, for it is the knowledge of evil which matures and perfects a human being. So, James initiates Newman into a world of evil though he is totally oblivious of its existence and power.

The arena that James selects for Newman for his growth and education through evil is Paris. Newman comes to Paris like any American tourist to amuse himself. He spends a few hours watching the beautiful paintings of the
masters in the famous museum at Louvre and sits down "with an aesthetic headache" on the commodious ottoman, a refuge of all the weak-kneed lovers of fine arts. This is how we see Newman in the first chapter of the novel. He is a man who fails to belong to Paris, it being something beyond his comprehension. James further reveals Newman's naivete and ignorance by exposing him to the social complexity of Paris provided by the Nioches, the members of a middle class family; and the Bellegardes, the members of a very ancient noble family. Newman is also made to experience the pull and power of evil in the course of his interaction with each of them.

Through the Nioches—Noemie and her father Nioche—James exposes the moral decadence and hypocrisy of the French middle class people. Noemie, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is an enchantress in the guise of a copyist. Her sole aim is to succeed in life by hook or by crook. At first like the serpent in the Garden of Eden she draws the attention of Newman to her by her charming ways and histrionics. Newman, who is totally bereft of a vision of evil takes her to be a very sincere person trying to eke out an existence by honest toil. James, in fact, brings out the ignorance of Newman about evil by contrasting him with Valentin, his noble Parisian friend. Valentin understands Noemie fully well in his very first encounter with her. He tells Newman about her in very plain terms, "Her painting . . . is a mere trick to gain time. She is waiting for her chance; she wishes to launch herself, and to do it well. She knows her Paris" (AM.133). Later Valentin tells
Newman that Noemie has declared her goal and is now moving with a fifty year old deaf rich man. Newman feels sorry for her and tells her when he sees her next that he would have been happy to see her marry a respectable young fellow. But, Noemie, to the surprise of Newman, tells him, "I mean to succeed; that's what I mean to do" (AM.179). Newman realises that she is a hopeless case and decides to ignore her. But she again comes back to his life to teach him the power of evil. He meets her again in an opera theatre in Paris. Newman finds her very happy and complacent. Newman also sees his dearest friend Valentin and a German youth quarrelling for a place in her box. Noemie becomes jubilant as she smells a duel. She tells Newman, clapping her hand, that a duel between Valentin, a nobleman and a German, for her sake would make her a celebrity. Newman fails to prevent Valentin and a duel does take place to the great delight of Noemie. Valentin is killed in the duel and Newman realises the power of evil. Newman sees Noemie once again in the story, this time in London in the company of Lord Deepmere, the seventh cousin of Claire. The pair fill his mind with disgust. Newman sees in them two abominable, despicable creatures. Noemie has been responsible for the death of his friend Valentin and Lord Deepmere, has been instrumental in the wreckage of his marriage with Claire. There has been a secret move to coax Claire to marry Lord Deepmere instead of him. The power of evil and European lasciviousness give a rude shock to the illusion of Newman for a freer and happier life.
If Noemie initiates Newman into the lechery and heartlessness of Paris, her father Nioche reveals to him the moral hypocrisy of the place. Newman first takes him to be a righteous person. The story of his broken marriage, his worries about his coquettish daughter Noemie and his failure to find the money to marry her off touch Newman deeply. The words of Nioche, "If anything were to happen to her!... I believe, I should shoot her!" (AM.49) greatly trouble his mind. Valentin who knows his Paris tells Newman that his ideas about Nioche are all wrong. In the words of Valentin, Nioche, "would rather his daughter were a good girl than a bad one, but if the worst comes to the worst the old man will not do what Virginius did. Success justifies everything. If Mademoiselle Noemie makes a figure, her papa will feel—well... relieved" (AM.134). Newman does not believe the words of Valentin and tells him with bravado," M. Nioche and I, I believe, are the only virtuous men to be found in Paris" (AM.134) Newman later understands that he has been mistaken in his evaluation of Nioche. He learns from Noemie herself that her papa has comfortably fallen in line with her view of success in life. When Newman sees Nioche, Nioche gives him the explanation for his changed stance, "After all,... she's my daughter, and I can still look after her... I can give her the benefit... the benefit of my experience... my experience of business" (AM.180). Newman is in fact dumbfounded at his chameleonic nature. He had expected that the man would rather take a high ground and shoot himself and he confesses to Valentin that he had judged the old man
Nioche disappoints Newman and Valentin consoles him saying, "You can't go mountaineering in a flat country" (AM.181). Thus Newman finally realises that the middle class Parisians will accommodate anything and their love of morality and righteousness is only a sham.

Valentin and Claire, the innocent victims of a decadent upper class society bring Newman into contact with the kind of evil which Osbern Andreas describes as "emotional cannibalism". Both the characters have in them the potentiality to grow into free persons but they are suppressed and stifled by their mother and brother who are agents of great evil.

Valentin, as the younger son of an ancient noble family has to content with the role of a gentleman. To Newman, Valentin is the ideal Frenchman of tradition and romance. He is gallant, expansive, amusing and a master of all the distinctive social virtues. But, as Newman's acquaintance with Valentin deepens he finds Valentin to be a great victim of a heartless society. Valentin is limited and circumscribed by certain unwritten customs and conventions. He cannot go into business, make money, enter politics or marry a rich girl just because he is a member of a noble family. So he dissipates his life in low pursuits. The most pitiable thing about him is that, though he is a rebel and longs for a free existence, he allows himself to be enslaved by the foolish notions of the Parisian nobility. For example his notions about the duel which finally leads him to his doom astound Newman. He tells Newman that a duel
has a kind of picturesque charm about it and that it is a remnant of a high
tempered time and one ought to cling to it. Newman can only dismiss his idea
saying, "I don't know what you mean by a high tempered time . . . . Because
your great grandfather was an ass, is it that any reason why you should be" (AM.217). Newman finally realises the folly of everything Valentin stands
for when he sees his promising friend dying from bullet wounds sustained in a
duel fought over a tart.

Claire, Valentin's dearest sister and paragon of all virtues, is also a
victim of evil. She is virtually exploited by her mother and her elder brother
to further their selfish ends. Newman is shocked to know about her miserable
past. She had been betrothed at eighteen against her wishes to an odious
nobleman of sixty for the sake of money. The evening before the wedding
day, she had swooned away and spent the whole night in sobs. As Valentin
describes, her first marriage had ended all in smoke and bad smell. The only
redeeming feature of this marriage was that he lived only a few years. But he
bequeathed no more wealth to Claire on his death than had brought happiness
to her in life. Now after the death of her husband, Claire lives under her
maternal roof deprived of all her freedom. The custom of the family makes it
imperative on her part to fold her wings and bow her head before her mother
and her elder brother, the head of the clan. It is the duty of Claire not to do
anything to please herself but to do everything for the advantage of the family.
Incapable of coming out of her mother's design for her, she tells Newman, "I
am not made for boldness and defiance. . . . I was made to do gladly and gratefully what is expected of me" (AM.251). Like Valentin's fighting a senseless duel, her unquestioning disobedience springs from fixed notions of conduct ingrained in her by European tradition of which she is a product. Thus, in her utter submission to the wishes of her mother Claire personifies the unquestioning subjection to paternal authority of the daughters of the 19th century European aristocracy. Newman is thoroughly taken up by the exploitation of women in Paris and helplessly ejaculates, "Is it possible . . . that they do that sort of thing over here . . .?" (AM.73).

Newman is plunged into the very hell of evil in his courtship of Claire. Newman finds in Claire the ideal woman he has been searching for all these years and wishes to rescue her from the clutches of her evil mother and brother. He succeeds in winning her love against all odds and when the Bellegardes arrange a ball to introduce him to their friends and relatives Newman's joy knows no bounds. But the same ball proves to be the most calamitous one in his life, revealing to him the unscrupulous and treacherous nature of the Bellegardes. The old Madame reveals her true colour in the ball by secretly advising her nephew Lord Deepmere, who has come from London to propose to Claire. It is treachery of the meanest sort and Claire feels great sorry for the betrayal of Newman. Yet, she is aware of the irresistible power of irrational evil in human life and feels herself helpless in the face of the evil which has a firm hold on her. Unable to reconcile herself to a life of evil and
sin, she renounces the world and becomes a Carmelite nun. Newman feels thoroughly beaten and his confidence is shattered. He finds himself cornered by a hostile world of evil, corruption and moral ugliness. Thus Newman has travelled a long way from his initial phase of innocence marked by a total oblivion of evil and now he winces at its most merciless lashes.

The two villainous characters in the novel are Madame de Bellegarde and her elder son Urbain de Bellegarde. The Bellegardes, in the words of Mrs. Tristram are "terrible people . . . all mounted upon stilts a mile high and with pedigrees long in proportion" (AM.37). Referring to Claire Mrs. Tristram says, "She suffers from her wicked old mother and her Grand Turk of a brother. They persecute her" (AM.71).

Madame de Bellegarde is a very extraordinary woman. She is the daughter of an English nobleman and her family dates back to the 16th century. Newman finds in her a match to him in courage, self-control, innate dignity and personal force. But, whereas he is warmth, she is coldness; whereas he is familiar and democratic she is imperious, austere and condescending; whereas he is good, she is corrupt. The discerning Valentin has high respect for his mother and is, indeed, in some awe of this remarkable woman. And Newman even while discovering the extent of her depravity, acknowledges and admires her intrepidity. Cold majesty distinguishes the old Madame. Her eyes are blue and fine, but with a cold blueness and a cold
fineness. She speaks in chilling tones. Her courage is characterized as "steel cold pluck" (AM.296). Her smile is circumscribed, her gaze is always formidable and inscrutable and she has unshakeable poise and dignity. Even when driven to the wall, as Newman discovers, she betrays no emotion, does not flinch. Always she holds herself in iron control.

Urbain de Bellegarde resembles his mother closely but he lacks her courage and personal force. When she would simply affirm, he would appeal, and when she would simply gaze unflinching, he would betray himself with a visible terror. But he is also remarkable like his mother in several respects. He is distinguished to the tip of his polished nails, and he has a 'sustained urbanity'. But he is a man of forms, phrases and postures. There is something about him that moves Newman to call him a confounded fool and there is something distasteful in his obsequious manner with the Duchess, the chief guest of the ball arranged by the Bellegardea in honour of Newman. His manners are not natural and spontaneous as are Valentin's. He lacks the unruffled poise of his mother though he is as dangerous and as capable of something mean and underhand as she.

Even at his first meeting with them Newman feels a premonition that they are a wicked pair and he tells Mrs. Tristram about them, "she (old Madame) is wicked, she is an old sinner . . . . I shouldn't wonder if she had murdered someone—all from a sense of duty of course" (AM.152). Similarly
he speaks of Urbain that if he had never committed murder, he has at least
turned his head back and looked the other way while someone else was
committing it. Newman though he feels the pull of the power of evil in their
presence, is not in any way unsettled and feels fully composed. He is
convinced in the beginning that they are incapable of doing him any harm.
But he slowly realises that even his battlements are stormed by the force of
their evil.

Madame de Bellegarde and Urbain are depicted as stock Europeans of
the aristocratic order. The brutality underlying their veneer of sophistication
is abysmal. Twice they destroy Claire's chances of happiness, once by
heartlessly yoking her, out of greed and snobbery to the old and dissolute
Comte de Cintre and again by driving her to the convent. Even murdering
Monsieur de Bellegarde is not too much for them when they find him
inconvenient. The mother and son reveal their most wretched nature,
heartlessness and total depravity when they tell Newman in the end that they
have remained faithful to their words in allowing him to court Claire and even
win her love. But, the idea of a marriage between them has not been included
in their contract. This is certainly a strange logic that Newman does not
understand. The Bellegardes by their treachery thus commit the worst crime
against Newman, namely the violation of the sanctity of a human heart.
Newman gets a final taste of their deep-rooted evil when he confronts them
with the skeleton in their family cupboard. The old Madame asks him with
the casualness of a thoroughly unscrupulous woman: "Is that all you have to say?" (AM.297). The reaction of Urbain is also very characteristic. The Marquis gives a hiss that fairly evokes for our friend some vision of a hunched back, an erect tail and a pair of shining evil eyes. Thus in his first international novel of the early period James reveals that he is not totally liberated from the Gothic convention in his presentation of evil. Newman remains imperceptive to the evil around him in the beginning but he is steeped in it and made to experience it to the full in the second phase of his growth.

Isabel Archer of *The Portrait of a Lady* presents certainly a great improvement upon Christopher Newman. Newman is a typical American tourist in Europe with his immense desire to amuse himself and carry away with him the best in Europe without in the least being sensitive to the manners of the place. The impression we have of him right from the beginning of the story is that of a person who does not belong. But, Isabel, on the other hand, very well adjusts herself to Europe and finds no difficulty there. She leaves her grandmother's house at Albany and descends upon England and is greatly thrilled by whatever she sees and hears there. James describes her experience in England, "England was a revelation to her, and she found herself as diverted as a child at a pantomine . . . . Her uncle's house seemed a picture made real; no refinement of the agreeable was lost upon Isabel."14 The response that Isabel evokes in her old ailing uncle, Mr. Touchett is also equally suggestive of her vivacity—"Our rustling, quickly moving,
clear-voiced heroine was as agreeable to his sense as the sound of flowing water" (PL.1.75). But, being an American, a prototype of Adam and a daughter of Emerson, she is not essentially different from Newman. She is very much like him in her innocence and ignorance of evil. She is also a victim of illusion and proud and presumptuous. She imagines the world to be a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action. Although she is not altogether unfamiliar with evil, she does not yet know its power and its dynamic centrality in human life. From the beginning Isabel vaguely realises that her restlessness for knowledge will not be satisfied until she faces evil. When she tells Ralph "... I don't want to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself" (PL.1.213), she speaks of impossibilities and Ralph spots the flaw in her wish, "You want to see, but not to feel." (PL.1.213). James in the story makes Isabel drink the poisoned cup of experience. As a result, she loses her innocence and gains total knowledge. The fruit of the "Forbidden Tree" is a true initiator into a world of knowledge. But the knowledge it provides can be attained only through an encounter with the serpent. If Eve is tempted and led to her fall by Satan in the guise of a serpent, Isabel is betrayed and trapped by two expatriate Americans, Madame Merle and her erstwhile lover Gilbert Osmond, who pass for the custodians of European civilization.

James presents Madame Merle as an arch villainess though he evokes our pity for her in the end. She is a tall, fair, smooth woman of 40 years.
Everything in her person is round and replete. Her features are thick but in perfect proportion and harmony and her complexion has a healthy clearness. Though she is not pretty, her manners are charming. Her face tells of an amplitude of nature and of quick and free motions and is in the highest degree engaging. Her eyes are gray and hair thick and fair and arranged classically as if she were a bust.

Madame Merle is an old friend of Mrs. Touchett and lives mostly in Florence. When she comes to England, she stays in Gardencourt. Mrs. Touchett has the highest appreciation for Merle. According to her Merle is incapable of a mistake and she considers it a privilege to have her under her roof. Ralph however is very sarcastic about her. He calls her the cleverest woman in the world he knows. Her accomplishments and perfections often get on to his nerves. He is of the opinion that her merits are overstrained—she is too good, too kind, too clever, too learned—too everything. Ralph is aware of the not so pleasant side of her personality as well. He knows that she is very ambitious though what she has achieved is very little. She is now a widow and her marriage has been a failure. There is a secret about Merle which is known only to Gilbert Osmond, her old lover and Countess Gemini, his sister. It has been a case of adulterous love with Osmond, when both of their partners were alive. A child was also born to Merle in this affair, though Osmond made everybody believe that the child was that of his own wife who died shortly after. Now the child has grown into a girl of 15 and is called
Pansy. Merle and Osmond loved each other passionately for some six years but they could not marry as they were poor. Merle, who was very ambitious, had then a dream of marrying a rich man, which never materialised. Now Osmond and Merle, judged by externals, are not lovers but they have entered into a secret pact to respect each other's freedom and to do everything possible to help each other. Both of them are concerned about the future of Pansy and they wish to arrange a profitable marriage for her.

Isabel sees Merle first seated at the piano in her uncle's house called Gardencourt. Tall and smooth, supple and round, Merle strikes Isabel as French in aspect and perfection. Isabel feels that she has even the glamour and personality of a countess. Isabel is raw and innocent and Merle is too ripe and too finished, as James says. Mrs. Touchett warmly recommends Isabel to the company of Merle with the words, "You won't discover a fault in her... She knows absolutely everything on earth there is to know" (PL.1.277). Ralph also feels that Isabel will gain much by associating with her. He never expects any harm to issue from such an association.

Isabel and Merle become fast friends. They please each other and swear an eternal friendship. The refinement and accomplishments of Merle make a deep appeal on Isabel and she finds in her a very interesting person. Isabel opens all the doors of her heart to her even to her own alarm. Isabel says commenting on her relationship with Merle, "... it was as if she has
given to a comparative stranger the keys to her cabinet of jewels" (PL. 1.267). Merle admires Isabel's charm and candour and pays tribute to her youth, beauty and opportunity. She even exposes to the sympathy of Isabel's frank and generous psyche her own "shockingly chipped and cracked" (PL. 1.275) condition. Isabel, in her phase of innocence fails to notice any flaw in Merle and says, "I should like awfully to be so" (PL.1.270). She considers the influence of Merle on her a great blessing and says admiringly of her, "To be so cultivated and civilised, so wise and so easy, and still make so light of it—that was really to be a great lady" (PL.1.272). Finally the time comes for Merle to leave Gardencourt and the two ladies part to meet again in Florence where Mrs. Touchett has her personal residence.

Thus Isabel and Merle part as good friends. But, the beast in Merle emerges as she hears the bequest of the diseased Mr. Touchett to Isabel. The charming, generous Isabel, blessed with a handsome fortune, suddenly becomes in the eyes of Merle a worthy victim for the furtherance of her unfulfilled dream. Her own life has been a failure and now she thinks of giving Pansy, her daughter, a good life with the help of Isabel. Merle thinks that it will be possible only by marrying Isabel with her old lover Gilbert Osmond. So, she decides to use Isabel, Isabel to whom she has pledged eternal friendship and loyalty. It is a betrayal of trust and the violation of the sanctity of the human mind. But, for Merle, who is a true Machiavellian like her wicked partner, Osmond, means do not matter, the ends being the supreme
thing. Thus she commits the greatest sin in Jamesian ethics, namely the sin of manipulation. James, as a writer, believes that one should be free to mould one's destiny according to one's lights. Any attempt, therefore, to manipulate someone else's life constitutes an act of spiritual aggression. And when this manipulation takes a covert and subtle form, the nature of treachery is all the more difficult to see. This is precisely what Merle does. Isabel's generous and open impulses are turned to her own disadvantage and ruined by a scheming woman.

Once back in Florence Merle gives shape to her plot. She pays a visit to Osmond in his house and like Lady Macbeth screws up his ambition and desire to the sticking point. She tells him, "My ambition is principally for you" (PL.1.342). She goads and urges him who is at first a little indolent. He asks her "Is she beautiful, clever, rich, splendid, universally intelligent and unpredictably virtuous?" (PL.1.344). He is past his prime, he is a widower, the father of a teenaged girl; but being a man of taste, he will be satisfied only with the best woman in the world and Merle knows that and assures him that with her charm and immense wealth Isabel will certainly delight him. Osmond then asks Merle why she intends to put such a woman in his path and her reply is very characteristic, "I don't pretend to know what people are meant for, I only know what I can do with them" (PL.1.344). Osmond is amused by the prospect of an accomplished bride and the fortune she will bring with her. So, both Merle and Osmond decide to move together to
ensnare Isabel. They hope that Isabel with her money will arrange a wonderful marriage for Pansy. They also feel that Isabel will provide them with a good cover under which they can continue their old relationship as well.

Merle next pays a visit to Isabel who has come to Florence in the company of her aunt and tells her of Osmond, to whom she had made a casual reference to her during their stay in Gardenecourt. She presents Osmond as the cleverest and the most agreeable person in the world with no career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past and no future. In short, Merle presents Osmond as a man without any system, knowing full well that Isabel is looking for such a man. Isabel and Osmond meet and they become lovers. Poor Isabel does not realise that she is plotted against and the impressions she receives of Osmond are all pre-arranged. Osmond's narrow but keen interest is revealed in his shrewd operations to gain Isabel's favour. There is a special horror in his calculated abuse of Isabel's feelings. Osmond suggests Iago, as J.A. Ward observes. His conquest of Isabel is intrigue in its purest form. Like Iago he sets a series of traps and carefully plans his approach. After Osmond and Merle prearrange the marriage behind Isabel's back, each works separately to carry out the plan. The strategy is brilliant. Merle advises Isabel that the Countess Gemini (Osmond's sister) is a habitual liar, thus nullifying the Countess's strength for the latter knows of the previous liaison between Merle and Osmond and Merle fears that she may tell it to Isabel. Osmond
arranges for Isabel to visit Pansy in Florence well knowing that his daughter's innocent charm will captivate Isabel and influence her towards him. He forestalls the allegation of Mrs. Touchett and others that he is a fortune hunter by telling Isabel, "I never in my life tried to earn a penny, and I ought to be less subject to suspicion than most of the people one sees grubbing and grabbing" (PL. 11.80). Thus Osmond creates a very positive impression in the mind of Isabel and she is completely fooled. His air of distinction and his being so independent, so individual, so cultivated and intelligent are qualities which appeal to Isabel most. Osmond asks Isabel to "Go everywhere . . . do everything; get everything out of life. Be happy—be triumphant" (PL. 11.16). In short Osmond offers her a world of infinite possibilities and she is only glad to accept his proposal when he makes it to her.

Isabel realises after her marriage that Osmond's fine aestheticism, generosity, and desire for privacy have been a sham and a delusion. In place of her ideal, Isabel finds a vain and vicious brute, an all-absorbing male ego. She discovers that Osmond is orthodoxy incarnate underneath the sublime veneer of his liberality. She finds him to be a stark and sinister embodiment of egotism and fittingly he identifies himself with Machiavelli, Vettoria Colonna and Letastario. He confesses to Isabel that he envies only three people in the world—the Emperor of Russia, the Sultan of Turkey and the Pope of Rome—for the consideration he enjoys. James describes Osmond as being dry as a burned out fire for in his case the aesthetic sense is coupled
with his desire for absolute authority. Thus as James records in his notebook, "... the poor girl, who dreamed of freedom and nobleness ... finds herself... ground in the very mill of the conventional."  

The observation of Philip Sicker is very pertinent here. He writes, "Like Desdemona Isabel falls in love with the imagined sufferings her husband had borne, but she finds herself married, not to Othello, but to Iago."  

Osmond proves to be as scheming, ruthless and heartless as Iago himself.

Osmond violates the sanctity of Isabel's soul by objectifying her, by subordinating her to his requirements. He judges her value by her ability to enhance his status and position. He likes her for her having rejected Lord Warburton, "... he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by declining so noble a hand" (PL.11.9). And he prepares now to refine her very imagination as a process of amusing himself: her intelligence "was to be a silver plate ... that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value, so that talk might become for him a sort of served dessert" (PL.11.79). And he is prepared to "tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring" (PL.11.79).  

He talks to Isabel about the attempt to make life a work of art. She takes this as a process which they will create together. But Osmond takes her as a part of his pattern, she is to be certain things and not others, and he is quite prepared to sacrifice those of her ideas that he does not like. It is Osmond's apparent disregard for society that
encourages Isabel to feel she will be free from externally imposed values. But in reality she finds herself shaped by social forms and displayed each night before the vulgar and acquisitive, the blandishing and the backbiting. In her role of perpetual hostess, she is condemned to wear a mask that bears no resemblance to her inner self.

Thus Isabel's marriage with Osmond clips her wings and burns up her dream for a freer and fuller life. She loses her innocence, sincerity and spontaneity at the fatal touch of her husband. Even Ralph finds her inscrutable. He observes, "... if she wore a mask it completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity painted on it, this was not an expression, Ralph said—it was a representation, it was even an advertisement" (PL.11.142). As a specific representation or sign, Isabel is now part of a system of understood communication and action; whereas before she suggested possibilities, she now suggests a static aesthetic and social value. She becomes more public just as Merle and Pansy are public.

The evil nature of Osmond is further revealed by the way he victimizes his own daughter Pansy and his former mistress, Madame Merle. Pansy represents a model of female submissiveness and victimization. Osmond has turned her into a reflector of himself utterly devoid of any spontaneous life of her own. Being impregnated with the idea of submission Pansy remains passive even to the operation of her own fate. Even when Osmond requires
her to give up the suitor she loves her training in obedience has been so thorough that renunciation is not only a last resort for her but a satisfaction. Osmond treats her only as a precious work of art and puts her in a convent to give her "finishing touches" when she fails to come up to his expectation. Such a total appropriation of another person's life for egotistical ends is, of course, the cardinal Jamesian sin. Madame Merle, who herself is an adept manipulator, is first used and then abused by Osmond. She ends up utterly dried up, unable to cry, "you've dried up my soul" (PL.11.334). Perhaps the saddest cry in the whole novel is Madame Merle's lament, "Have I been so vile for nothing?" (PL.11.338). She is an almost tragic example of the scant rewards and plentiful shames awaiting those who live only for the world. She has worked for Osmond, plotted for him, suffered for him and she has even more than once found money for him. But in the end she is banished by him and finally Merle goes back to America bereft of all hopes, totally shattered, rejected and hated by her own daughter Pansy, who is in darkness regarding her true parentage.

Osmond, thus is a satanic character. He does nobody any good and destroys everybody he comes into contact with. Robert Weisbuch in his study on the idea of evil in James brings out a striking analogy between Osmond and Satan,
Osmond, of course, takes the money Mr. Touchett and Ralph had provided for Isabel—just as Satan takes the free will provided for humankind by God and Christ. Goodwood says Osmond possesses 'a kind of demonic imagination'. Like Satan he corrupts the Church, not only by his fantasy of becoming Pope (surely he would take the name, Innocent), but more by sending Pansy to a convent, converting it to a prison. 'His egotism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers', and like Satan, he is a disappointed, envious revenger. He has, as his faithful assistant Merle says, enacted his revenge on Isabel, who mistook the devil for an instrument for expanding freedom. 'Instead of leading to the high places of happiness, . . . it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard from above, and where it served to deepen the feeling of failure'. Life with Osmond is Hell.\(^{17}\)

Osmond is thus one of the deadliest of fiends in English fiction standing close to Hawthorne's Chillingworth. He reveals a total lack of love and sympathy in his dealings to those who are most intimate with him—with Isabel whom he marries for money; with his daughter, whose love for Edward Rosier he suppresses; and with his one time mistress Madame Merle, whom he uses as a piece of machinery to better his position.
Evil is an action and felt presence in James's fiction although the lurking beast remains half hidden from view. In *The Portrait of a Lady* James reveals the forms evil assumes in a developed society. It appears the price civilization has to pay for its being is in some manner linked to the domestication of evil. Thus money, manners and morals get inextricably mixed up in a class society. Evil exercises its sway in an indirect and subtle way. Its face wears an elegant mask, and its form partakes the form of civilization. How civilization energizes life and yet taints and corrupts it becomes the subject of James's anguished enquiry. In *The Portrait of a Lady* it is the societal aspect of evil that primarily interests James, despite the Biblical imagery of sin and fall.

Milly Theale, the American millionaires of *The Wings of the Dove*, appears at Lancaster Gate, London, accompanied by her handmaiden Mrs. Susan Stringham with a desire to live vibrantly, though life is fast ebbing out of her. "I want abysses,"\(^{18}\) tells Milly to Susan a short while after the reception party which Maud Lowder, Susan's friend gave them at Lancaster Gate. She chooses to live, attain knowledge and experience. But, just like Newman and Isabel she also lacks a vision of evil and hence takes appearance for reality. She fails to realise that the world she has come to seek life in is a complex world of vulgarity, immorality and superficial polish. Milly is, thus, an eager American Eve, in search of life and experience whose ordeal it is to make herself happy in a seeming refined world but all rotten inside. Henry
James emphasizes the validity of his paradoxical claim once again through Milly that man attains knowledge and growth only through an experience of evil, which is a destructive element. Milly enters the corrupt London world as exemplified in Lancaster Gate with her eyes wide open and suffers the consequences of her proud entry. Her fatal flaw lies in her underestimation of the power of evil. In her intensity of pride Milly takes a deliberate plunge into the foul water of corruption and unscrupulousness generated by all consuming materialism.

The world of Lancaster Gate which James chooses for the initiation of Milly into evil and the experience of knowledge is one of crass materialism. Materialism in this novel, even more extensively than in the others, serves not only as a backdrop for the action but also creeps into every corner, influences all of the relationships and values, and is reflected in character, setting, language and structure. Money and its attainment become the supreme goal in such a world and often human values are subverted by economic values, quantity invariably taking a precedence over quality. Milly is quick to find out the maddening craze of her English friends for money, though in her innocence, she doesn't suspect any harm to come to her person from it.

The high priestess of engulfing materialism as seen in Lancaster Gate is Maud Lowder. She is a rich widow aspirous of a high social position and is the aunt of Kate Croy, the supreme embodiment of evil in the story. James
presents Maud Lowder as the "Britannia of the Market Place (in whom) . . . there was a whole side of Britannia, the side of her florid philistinism, her plumes and her train, her fantastic furniture and heaving bosom, the false gods of her taste and false notes of her talk . . . " (WD.1.37). The England of Maud Lowder has found the aristocratic legacy of manners at odds with the material drive and has thus drained it of content. It finds force more effective. Imperial and gross, Maud is a lioness, she is imagined as outfitted with "a helmet, a shield, a trident and a ledger" (WD.1.37). The emblematic Maud is blind to all but mass and quantity. She is the most remarkable woman in England because she sets the tone for an empire, because she is unscrupulous and immoral in an absolute way. Aunt Maud judges everything in terms of money and persons are nothing to her but objects for use. She visualizes Kate, whom she has been keeping with her on condition that she should sever all connections with her odious father and impoverished lover Densher, as a financial hold. Maud tells Densher without mincing words, " . . . I've been keeping (Kate's presence) for the comfort of my declining years. I've watched it long; I've been saving it up and letting it as you say of investments, appreciate; and you may judge whether, now it has begun to pay so, I'm likely to consent to treat for it with any but a high bidder" (WD.1.65). Though Maud likes Densher as a person, she will not allow Kate to marry him as he does not have either riches or a title. Milly to Maud also has a negotiable value, as bribe to Densher. She thinks that if Milly develops a passion for
Densher, it is good for all. Densher can marry Milly and have her money and then Kate will be free to marry Lord Mark, an impoverished Lord, who, Maud thinks, will bring her up in the social ladder. Thus throughout the story Maud is scheming using persons as pawns to further her ends.

Lord Mark, Lionel Croy and his widowed daughter Marian Condrrip, although not effective and successful as Maud Lowder, embody in their persons the materialistic notions of Lancaster Gate.

Lord Mark is the most mercenary of all who try to exploit Milly. His outright pronouncement to Milly at the very outset, "nobody here, you know, does anything for nothing" (WJ.1.106) reveals much more than his candour his base instinct to exploit others. He cherishes a desire to marry Milly with an intention to inherit her money after her death, which he believes is very near. He proposes to her several times bargaining his title for her fortune. Milly, though innocent, easily sees through his designs and declines his proposal. Lord Mark reveals his meanness when he reveals to Milly in the end, in a bid to avenge himself on Densher, the clandestine engagement of Kate and Densher, thus taking away her desire to live.

Lionel Croy and Marian Condrrip, Kate's father and elder sister, reveal the ugliness materialism can assume when it percolates far downwards into the lower middle class people who evidently lack those subtle civilized qualities of the upper class that balance but never quite outweigh its
predatoriness. It is Lionel Croy who, in fact, introduces into the novel materialism as the force that defines relationship between characters. For example, his refusal to allow Kate to live with him is motivated by his design of profiting from the wealth and social status Kate would attain by remaining Mrs. Lowder's stooge. He is totally deprived of any family sentiment. He says, "The family sentiment, in our vulgarized, brutalized life, has gone utterly to pot" (WD.1.29). He knows only the sullen philosophy of manipulation and mutual use. He tells Kate, "I am not talking only of what you might, with the right feeling, do for me, but what you might—it's what I call your opportunity—do with me . . . . Your duty as well as your chance, if you are capable of seeing it, is to use me" (WD.1.29). He is contemptuous towards Densher whom Kates loves. He asks, "who is the beggarly sneak?" (WD.1.33). What offends him in Densher is his poverty. Lionel Croy is thus a sponger who finds his salvation in materialism. Like Gilbert Osmond of The Portrait of a Lady he is concerned with appearances and wears the mask of propriety but feels almost nothing.

Marian Condrip, Kate's widowed sister, regards Kate's family duty quite in the same materialistic way as Lionel Croy does. In fact, she scoffs at Kate's offer to live with their father when she could bring them all more money by accepting Maud Lowder's offer of residence at Lancaster Gate. Marian's attitude is the more reprehensible when it is known that Kate already gives her one hundred pounds a month, a half of Kate's inheritance from her
mother's estate. Marian is guided by the same value of her father, gives Kate the same advice that instead of marrying the penniless Densher she should submit herself to the will of Maud in selecting a husband because she knows that Densher has no prospects of being ever able to support himself; Kate, Maria, her four children and Lionel Croy. In short, Marian's governing passion in life is her sordid greed. In sum, neither Lionel Croy nor Marian Condrip respects Kate's feelings. Her love and happiness are of no importance to them. She is just an object of value for them with which to make their life secure.

Kate Croy is one of the finest creations of James providing the reader with a great insight into his vision of evil. She is by no means a brutal villainess. She is much more a living mixture of good and evil, a far more effective register of James's mature vision of human complexity. She is handsome, she has immense vitality and she is without resources. Moreover her selfish family, her widowed sister with four bouncing children and her father, poor and mean, expect her to do well by them. She is aware that material things speak strongly to her also, and, to help her family's situation and her own, she goes to live with her wealthy aunt. Kate recognizes that Aunt Maud is unscrupulous and immoral; she knows that she has been accepted into the house only as a potential social asset who must make an important marriage and she has fallen in love with Densher, a young, poor journalist. Thus, trapped by a set of materialistic relatives Kate decides to be
materialistic herself; being used by them she now decides to use others. J. A. Ward observes that "In her struggle to avoid Aunt Maud and yet gain a fortune, she becomes Aunt Maud herself."\(^{19}\)

Kate who sells her soul to things and embraces the philosophy of pragmatism very much resembles Madame Merle. Being a devotee of appearance like Madame Merle, she also fails to believe in spiritual essence of any kind or in the worth of things that are good in themselves instead of having a quantifiable value. Kate's faith in the value of the apparent makes her able to commit the same sort of crime as Madame Merle, that is to arrange a marriage between another wealthier woman and her own lover. With ambition as naively vaulting as classic hubris, she tells her lover, Densher, early in the book: "I shall sacrifice nobody and nothing, and that's just my situation that I want and I shall try for everything. That . . . is how I see myself . . . ." (W.D.1.60). Kate wants more from life than she can get. Her ideal of self image is a composite of all the possibilities. It is a Kate wealthy, dignified, of personal name, charitable in her munificence and married to Densher. She thinks she can possess everything through duplicity and still not lose her soul, but she is wrong and James traces her error as movingly as the error of those fastidious moralizers who stand closer to his heart.

Merton Densher is the least materialistic and the most innocent of the Lancastrian folk. He is a journalist by profession. He is sensitive and
perceptive. He is also highly refined and gentlemanly. He is a product of cosmopolitan upbringing and education just like James himself or Ralph Touchett in *The Portrait of a Lady*. What drags Densher into the vulpine and feral world of Lancaster Gate is his blind passion for Kate, his familiarity with Milly and her love towards him. Densher most painfully represents the disruption of noble intention by the pressure of an intricate situation. Kate, who sees in Milly a gold mine of opportunities, decides to exploit her with the help of Densher. He is easily persuaded into executing the diabolical plan of Kate who declares that she can do things which she does not like.

The arrival of Milly in Lancaster Gate opens a world of opportunity for the predators there. They are all delighted and smother Milly with their words of admiration and praise. Lord Mark compliments her triumphant conquest of London and Maud Lowder is dazzled by her huge wealth and even requests Milly to stay with them for ever. Kate envies Milly for her millions and the freedom she enjoys on account of it. Poor Milly, totally deprived of a vision of evil, is lost, for a while, in their adulations. But, she is quick to understand the money grubbing nature of Lord Mark when he proposes to her. However, Aunt Maud and Kate, to a very great extent, succeed in pulling wool over the eyes of Milly. As for Milly herself she makes the whole plan of deceiving her possible by her own readiness, her desperate need to believe that Densher's love for Kate is unrequited. Like Isabel, Milly chooses to be deceived; but unlike Isabel, trapped by her false friends but warned by her true ones, Milly
is encouraged by a conspiracy of encouragement and assistance in her delusion from true and false friends alike. And Milly, unlike Isabel, is dying and naturally gets hold of anything that will give her a taste of life before it is too late.

Kate gets the first opportunity to use Milly to further her cause soon after the arrival of Densher from America. Kate has not been prepared to abandon her love for Densher though Maud had made it a condition for her adoption. She has been thinking all the while of a way of continuing their love in a clandestine manner and the presence of Milly and her awareness that Milly loves Densher provide her with a wonderful opportunity to square Maud. Kate thinks that Milly will provide them the necessary cover under which Densher and she can continue their love quite unobtrusively. So, the first plot of Kate looks like a simple one and it is directed against Maud rather than Milly.

The plot against Milly assumes a monstrous shape once it is known that Milly is in the grip of a fatal disease. Thus the combination of Milly's wealth and her disease, of the promise of an illimitable future and the threat of an impending death makes Milly particularly vulnerable, within and without, to the deception she encounters. Milly's physician, Sir Luke Strett, tells Susan, her companion, that Milly must be made happy and happiness for Milly would be marriage to Densher. It is this that the two older women, Susan and
Maud must arrange. Susan very much wishes the marriage to take place even if it gives pain to Kate. For Susan the life of Milly means much more than the happy union of Kate with Densher. But, Maud enters into the plot with mixed feelings. She had wanted Milly to make a great marriage—not for Milly's sake, of course, but for Kate's. She finds in the plot the advantage of disposing of Densher of whom she is more afraid than she likes to admit. She has already, in fact, taken steps to persuade Milly that Kate does not care for Densher. So Maud feels that the affair of uniting Milly with Densher best suits her plan for Kate. It will put an end to Kate's infatuation with Densher and ease her position for a better match between Kate and Lord Mark.

Kate on her part, sees in the emerging situation a wonderful chance to fulfil her impossible dream of being rich and marrying Densher at the same time. Kate knows from her own experience the power of money and its charm. She believes that Milly's charm and her sense of freedom are based solely on her financial security and she determines to possess the wealth of Milly by any means before marrying Densher. She thinks of a clever plan of getting Milly's money using Milly's love for Densher. Once Kate has decided to use Densher to trap Milly through deceptive love, she plans each of her moves very carefully. She remains totally mum about her engagement to Densher and creates an impression on Milly that she is not interested in Densher. Then she drags the ignorant and noble Densher into the conspiracy even without his knowledge. At first she gives a covering of charity to her
evil design and induces Densher to be friendly with Milly as she very much
depends on his care and concern to be happy in her life. Poor Densher rather
thinks it his duty to give company to Milly as he has been friendly with her
even when he was in America during his journalistic assignments there. Kate
shrewdly guesses that Susan and Maud will do everything possible to bring
together Milly and Densher. As days pass, Milly gets more and more attached
to Densher as envisaged by Kate. Milly's decision to move over to Venice
brings all her friends together there. Densher, who knows nothing about the
plot of Kate, gets fed up with everything and asks Kate to marry him
immediately. Densher not being a materialist himself, the money of Milly
has no influence over him and what he wants is the consummation of his love
with Kate. Kate, then, plays her trump card. She tells Densher that they have
already told Milly several lies, and that if they married they would certainly
kill Milly. Densher gets a vague idea of her design and feels angry and
humiliated about his submission to her. Resentfully he decides to impose his
own will on Kate. If she submits to him physically, he will tell any lie she
wants. Kate accepts his offer, trapping Densher with his own blackmail. She
will pay for his services in advance and then he will have no choice. Now at
last the plan can be put into words between them and they do it at an evening
party arranged by Milly in her Venetian residence at Palazzo Leporelli. Milly
makes a resplendent appearance before her guests dressed all in white,
wearing a necklace of pearls. Kate and Densher admire Milly's pearls and then, slowly, carefully and deviously they come to the point:

"Since she's to die I am to marry her? . . .

"To marry her."

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

"You'll in the natural course have money. We shall in the natural course be free" (WD.11.308).

In the name of that freedom each confines the other. Kate comes to Densher's room as she has promised and then returns to England with Maud, leaving Densher to put the plan into action. Densher never gives any hope to Milly by an act of commission but by his silence and passivity he deludes her.

Thus poor Milly is trapped, betrayed and deceived by all. Susan, though she knows everything, allows Milly to be deceived as she thinks it is the only way of keeping her alive. Maud approves of the deception as it best suits her purpose. Kate, who is the chief architect of the plot, does it out of her many compulsions and personal greed. Densher gets involved in it, as J.A. Ward suggests, "not through strength of will, but through weakness of will . . . his motivation is not greed, but love."

As in *The Wings of the Dove* James through Lewis Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors* highlights the fact that evil is something ubiquitous and shared by all humanity. Strether faces two kinds of evil: the evil of America and the evil of Europe. In the process of his growth he rejects the evil of America and discovers the evil lurking behind the vain appearance of Europe.

The evil of America stems from its puritan heritage and is characterized by capitalistic values, denial of enjoyment and experience and moral absolutism.

In the early chapters of *The Ambassadors* James stresses the immoral nature of American capitalism. The Newsome fortune far exceeds that of the earlier Christopher Newman whose methods of acquisition, while perhaps undignified, were never unethical. In speaking with Maria Gostrey about the Newsome fortune, Strether says, that the source of Chad's grandfather's wealth
and of his own share in it is not particularly noble. Strether however defends Mrs. Newsome saying her money is spent and her life conceived and carried on with a large philanthropy. But Maria curtly comments that that is a kind of expiation of wrongs. James views wealth in excess as a hindrance to the expansion of one's soul just as its opposite, poverty and he considers the enslavement to wealth as one of the worst kinds of evil.

The Woollett morality equates enjoyment with evil and hence forbids experience as a contamination of life. In *The Ambassadors* James equates the New England fear of experience with evil. He delves into the psychological basis of the New England conscience and its related evils by showing them to be the manifestations of a fear of the unknown. Strether accepts his fear of the unknown as a fear inherent in his nature as a result of his Woollett conscience. As Maria Gostrey blames him for his inability to live in the present and enjoy himself, Strether confesses "Ah there you are! . . . . It's the failure of Woollett. That's general." Strether tries to conquer the fear of experience with an honest attempt to discover the truth. James in *The European* presents the inability of the Wentworth family to achieve moral maturity on account of their fear to absorb new experience and in *The Ambassadors* he exposes the limitations of the Woollett morality, which in its practice of 'cloistered virtues' suspects and fears experience, being dangerous and destructive.
Moral Absolutism breeds all kinds of evil like intolerance, prejudice, narrowness and smugness. It makes a person behave as a tyrant filled with a desire to crush down anything which he does not perceive as right. It leads to fanaticism and even to terrorism. James presents life in Woollett as oppressive because life is sought to be made to order by the rigid moral system of the place. In Europe life is delight because people take life as it comes to them, without being unduly tyrannised over by any rigid moral laws. In the kaleidoscope of human life the people of Woollett can distinguish only black and white. They are utterly incapable of understanding that there could be shades of black in white and of white in black ramifying themselves through the inevitable intermediate range of light and shade. The New England conscience and its inherent evils are embodied by Mrs. Newsome, her daughter Sarah Pocock, Waymarsh, Jim Pocock and Strether himself.

Mrs. Newsome is New England incarnate. With her piety, she assiduously seeks to expiate her late husband's shady business practices—the source of the family wealth—while strenuously waiting for her son back in Woollett to augment this wealth through the dubious trade of advertising. Thoroughly provincial and puritanical, she completely fails to appreciate the change in Chad. Her sternness reminds Strether of Queen Elizabeth I and he describes her to Maria as all cold thought. In the blackness of her moral outlook, her stubborn suspicion of pleasure, and her provinciality, she is the very antithesis of Strether. Her treatment of Strether further reveals her
officious nature. She is a managing type of woman, prim, respectful and unyielding. She is capable of serving Strether an ultimatum, of cutting off her correspondence with him abruptly, and of carrying on further negotiations behind his back. In short she uses Strether and moves him as a pawn wherever she likes.

Sarah Pocock is the avenging angel sent to Paris to punish Strether by her mother Mrs. Newsome. She represents her mother in all respects. She is as cold, priggish and smug as her mother. She is not open to the appeal of the show of appearances. She knows perfectly well in advance what she will find in Europe. She says to Strether proudly, "I know Paris" (AMB.268). Her eyes are conditioned by Woollett-myopia. To her Paris is the consecrated scene of rash infatuation; to her an attachment of a young American to a French woman is wicked by definition since it is what the Woollett image of Paris prescribes. When she decides that the time has arrived for acting, she conducts herself in the dictatorial manner of an emperor or Pope. In a blind fury she insults, threatens and viciously attacks Strether, "you can sacrifice mothers and sisters to her (Marie) without a blush, and can make them cross the ocean on purpose to feel the more and later from you (all) the straighter, how do you do it?" (AMB.348). But, we are shocked to see the same Sarah, burning with the fire of Moses falling in an affair with Waymarsh behind her husband Jim who is let loose to find pleasures of his own in Paris.
A dyspeptic cousin—German of Mrs. Newsome, Waymarsh wears his sacred rage round the clock. Uneasy and cheerless from the moment he sets foot on European soil, he never relaxes his opinion of Europe as a den of sin. He pays great homage to the severity of the New England moral code. Repressed as he is by his allegiance to the code he can let himself go only at a safe distance from its bastion. His furtive holiday from the strict Woollett regimen, while he vehemently denounces Chad's affair and Strether's approval of it, illustrates the hypocrisy characteristic of the adherents of a stern conventional code. The New England conscience is the manifestation of such a creed, and the obverse of this conscience is the New England worldliness. For Waymarsh spying on Strether for the benefit of Woollett and a safe flirtation with Sarah do not signify a breach of the severe morality which he zealously applies to Strether.

Jim Pocock, the husband of Sarah manifests the most crippling effect of New England puritanism. Just like Waymarsh he is also emotionally and morally deranged by his background and becomes an easy practitioner of evil. He lacks dignity and moral stature as a result of his own business activities and partly of his domination by the woman of the Newsome household. He lacks the ethical rigidity of his wife and mother-in-law but he is equally repulsive because of his coarseness. He is bestial and takes a raucous delight in Paris which he takes to be a centre of licentiousness and debauchery. He
forms a certain alliance with Madame de Vionnet whom he continues to see as a wicked, fascinating woman.

James reveals the adverse effect of puritanism through his protagonist, Strether also. In the beginning of the story Strether is possessed by the demon of puritanism. He is priggish and afraid of enjoying life and beauty as any in Woollett. He is also ignorant and prejudiced and accepts without serious consideration the Woollett view of Paris and Chad. His innocence about the ethics of the business which supports Mrs. Newsome and the review is cognate with his innocence about the validity of the moral system of Woollett which he accepts without challenge. When Maria Gostrey enquires about the nature of Chad's seducer, Strether replies in what is obviously the language and emotion of Mrs. Newsome: "Charming? . . . She's base, venal out of the streets" (AMB.37). Thus Strether at the outset is the very incarnation of the New England conscience; a puritan to be sure, but no common puritan, for his blindness in regard to the hard facts of life is not that of Mrs. Newsome, Sarah Pocock, Waymarsh or Jim. He is innocent and an idealist. This is his major limitation as he arrives in Europe on his appointed task. Had he been really endowed with puritan prudery and suspicion, Maria Gostrey could not easily have captured him in their first encounter. James endows Strether with imagination and discrimination. The story of The Ambassadors is the story of Strether's growing belatedly, from innocence to maturity through an experience of evil.
James presents the evil of Europe mainly through Chad Newsome and Madame de Vionnet. The evil they embody is one of deception and manipulation. They are helped in their deception of Strether by Maria Gostrey and Little Bilham. The very atmosphere of Paris and also Strether's powerful imagination play a vital role in his deception. What Paris and others lack Strether supplies with his imagination making him see things which actually are not present there at all.

Chad receives a letter probably from his sister Sarah (James does not specify it) which informs him that Strether is shortly to arrive in Paris to take him back home. Chad knows that back home in Woollett, people believe that he is held captive by a woman (which in his case is true) and he wishes everything to pass off in a smooth manner. Chad and Madame de Vionnet have been enjoying an adulterous relationship for long and Chad is now almost fed up with her, though he is very much reluctant to admit it. Chad in all probability has expressed his desire to break off with Madame de Vionnet and he thinks the arrival of Strether will help him put an end to everything in a pleasant manner. However, he gives one more chance to Madame de Vionnet to keep him in Paris if Strether permits it. So both of them decide to conceal their indecent relationship from Strether and present themselves before him with their most appealing forms and manners. As they think that Strether will take sometime to absorb the beauty of Paris and exorcise the Woollett notions
about them, they decide to leave for Cannes giving specific instructions to their friend Little Bilham as to the impressions he must put into the mind of Strether.

Fortunately for Chad and Madame de Vionnet, Strether soon after his arrival in Europe is picked up by Maria Gostrey, who helps him much in getting rid of his Woollett prejudices about Parisian life. She tells him that the woman Chad is associated with may be virtuous and her influence on him may even be beneficial to him. Strether slowly understands the inadequacy of his Woollett notions about life and feels himself rejuvenated at the sight of Paris. His visit to Chad's quarters and his meeting with Little Bilham convince him that Chad may be a better person for having acquainted himself with such beautiful places and persons. Strether learns from Bilham that Chad is associated with Madame de Vionnet and her daughter Jeanne and that their attachment is a virtuous one. But, Strether is a bit confused when Bilham tells him that Chad is now sad and thinks of going back home severing his relationship with the lady. However Strether decides to see and judge everything for himself.

When Chad feels that Bilham has done his duty well, he himself makes his appearance before Strether as he is watching a play in a French theatre in the company of Maria Gostrey. Strether is flabbergasted by the great change in Chad. He finds him greatly improved in looks and manners. After the play
Strether talks with Chad and requests him to return to Woollett leaving behind the woman he is fond of. Chad then plays his game well saying, "Do you think one's kept only by women? . . . Is that . . . what they think at Woollett? . . . I must say then you show a low mind" (AMB.112). Poor Strether feels greatly ashamed of himself and his Woollett morality. Maria Gostrey remains silent and refuses to divulge anything to Strether after her meeting with Chad. However, she tells Strether that there is a woman behind Chad and she may be an excellent one and advises him that he should not judge her in herself but by her reforming effect on Chad.

Finally Chad introduces Madame de Vionnet and her daughter Jeanne against the backdrop of the striking garden of Gloriani. Strether is greatly impressed and thinks that Chad is in love with the daughter and not with the mother. Chad then makes a request to Strether to pay a visit to Madame de Vionnet. Chad tells him, "All I ask of you is to let her talk to you . . . She's herself my hitch . . . She's too good a friend, confound her. Too good, I mean, for me to leave without -- without . . . my arranging somehow or other the damnable terms of my sacrifice" (AMB.166–167). Strether, who still thinks that Chad is in love with Jeanne and his relationship with Madame de Vionnet is a virtuous one, does not take the words of Chad as the plea of a young man who is fed up with his mistress and is eager to leave her without creating a scene. Maria Gostrey who has pledged eternal fidelity to Strether
also does nothing to clear the fogged mind of Strether although she knows the affair between Chad and Madam de Vionnet to be an adulterous one.

Strether pays a visit to Madame de Vionnet. Her old house and hereditary belongings make in him echoes of Napoleonic times. He finds in Madame de Vionnet a charming person in trouble. Her request for his help and his trust deeply touches him and he promises to save her if he can. The promise of Strether gives the lady great relief. She finds Strether to be a very amiable person and feels that by making him stay in Paris, she can continue her relationship with Chad. So she decides to manipulate Strether by her charming ways and manners. Fortunately she gets such a chance once when Strether meets her by chance in the Notre Dame Cathedral. The event further convinces Strether of her innocence and he becomes closely attached to her.

Chad feels that it is time for his next move and he informs Strether of his desire to go back home to take up the family business. He even tries to open the eyes of Strether by arranging the marriage of Jeanne in the French Style. Strether is shocked. However he makes Chad promise to stay in Paris as long as he stays there. Meanwhile Strether gets the ultimatum from Mrs. Newsome to quit Paris immediately and shortly the next set of Ambassadors arrive in Paris under the leadership of Sarah Pocock. Strether explains to Sarah that to take a woman "at once so charming and so beneficent" (AMB.348) for any thing but what she appears, characterizes merely the
Woollett state of mind, which proceeds from "our queer ignorance, our queer misconceptions and confusions' (AMB.348) whereas he has found that "the proof of the pudding is in the eating" (AMB.351). Sarah is the least convinced and takes Strether to task and asks him furiously, "What's your conduct but an outrage to women like us?" (AMB.347). Strether realises that everything is at an end. And finally to plunge him into the darkness of misery he finds that both Chad and Madame de Vionnet have been deceiving him all through. He sees them on a boat sharing intimacy with evident plans of spending the night together. The realisation of the reality underneath their decorous manners bursts upon him like lightning. Strether thus gets a rude initiation into the world of evil which provides him with the necessary moral maturity.

The foregoing study of evil on the basis of the four selected novels of James helps one realise James's mature vision of evil. It is a testimony of his maturity that a consistent artistic development can be found in his treatment of evil. The villains of his early stories like The American and some of the villains of his middle stories like the The Portrait of a Lady are simply conceived and so his own condemnation of them is unequivocal. James displays no sympathy for the Bellegardes and Gilbert Osmond. The superficial and acquired attractiveness he gives them vanishes as they are found out. But the agents of evil in his late novels remain aesthetically and intellectually superb even after they are exposed. The evil of Kate Croy of
The Wings of the Dove and that of Madame de Vionnet of The Ambassadors is tempered and thus made credible by certain admirable traits. Both Kate Croy and Madame de Vionnet are sympathetically drawn villains. They are neither gross nor base. They have a dignity and charm of their own. But they err because of their inherent human weakness and the adverse circumstances in which they find themselves.
NOTES


5 According to Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren initiation takes place when the adolescent "discovers something about the nature of evil, and tries to find some way of coming to terms with his discovery."


6 Leslie Fielder holds that "initiation is a fall through knowledge to maturity: Behind it there persists the myth of the Garden of Eden; the assumption that to know good and evil is to be done with the joy of innocence and to take on the burden of work and child bearing and death."


13 Henry James, *The American* (London: Penguin Group, 1877) 12. (All further references to the same novel will be listed parenthetically with the abbreviation *AM*).

14 Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (New York: Random House, 1951) Vol.I. 73. (All further references to the same novel will be listed parenthetically with the abbreviation *PL*).


18 Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove* (New York: University of Missouri W.W. Norton and Company, INC., 1978) Vol. I. 120. (All further references to the same novel will be listed parenthetically with the abbreviation *WD*).


20 J. A. Ward, *The Imagination of Disaster* 137.

21 Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 11. (All further references from the same novel will be listed parenthetically with the abbreviated form *AMB*).