“The Mysteries of Mimicry” Sublimity and Morality in *The Golden Bowl*

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> Even depravities and moral failings often bear, for all that, some features of the sublime or beautiful, at least so far as they appear to our sensory feeling without being tested by reason… The amorous inclination (*coquetterie*)… in an otherwise decorous person is perhaps reprehensible but still beautiful, and usually is set above the respectable, earnest bearing.
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> Kant, *On the Feeling of the Beautiful And Sublime*

I

In his last complete novel, *The Golden Bowl* (1904), Henry James outdoes himself in piling up his insistent lexicon of crisis-saturated and sacrificial terminology. The words “sacrifice,” “scapegoat,” “martyr,” “victim,” and their many variants occur, especially in Volume Two, even more frequently here than in *The Bostonians* (1886) or *The Princess Casamassima* (1886): somewhere, that is, between forty-five and fifty times or about once every ten pages over the narrative as a whole.[(1)] (Similar vocabulary registers with much less frequency in *The Tragic Muse* [1890] and *The Wings of the Dove* [1902] although these belong also to the major phase.) Once again, in *The Golden Bowl,* as in those earlier “sacrificial” novels, James explores the way in which even the smallest and seemingly most sophisticated human sodality tends to establish and maintain itself through the expulsion – the sacrifice – of a guiltless hence quite arbitrary victim; and in the present instance, in what by consensus critics take as his *magnum opus,* he pares down the sodality to a genuine, to a clinical, minimum – to the Verver household with its complicated family romance and the extrafamilial married pair Fanny and Bob Assingham. While other late novels likewise confine themselves to a small number of character-agents, one feels that the Ververs *et al* present an especially isolated case. So susceptible is the billionaire milieu to the lapse into scapegoating that, its refined modernity aside, it begins to resemble a primitive setting in

which everything is driven by the charisma of the alpha male, ensconced in a precarious centrality, on which all mimetically converge. James shows, then, how mediated desire (the longing, it matters not for what, copied from another) drives the crisis of marriage-in-dissolution, turning models into rivals and forcing bootless confrontations that can only humiliate the initiator. But James likewise demonstrates, through the moral discretion of his central character, "how to re-establish a violated order" (477) *without* submitting a scapegoat (even a genuinely guilty one) to public and spectacular "humiliation" (552). The response to adultery, in this studious scenario, is not the "brutal domination of others" (*The Cambridge Companion to Henry James* 223), as Margery Sabin has recently concluded, nor the "rise to a connubial authoritarianism" (*Henry James and the Jacobites* 332), as Maxwell Geismar put it thirty years ago; but rather the careful, if determined, resettlement of two disrupted marriages.

In its peculiar way, *The Golden Bowl* thus differs rather starkly from (even while resembling) *The Bostonians,* with its direct and psychologically violent rivalry between Olive Chancellor and Basil Ransom over Verena Tarrant, and *The Princess Casamassima,* with its culmination in Hyacinth Robinson's suicide by pistol-shot; for despite the plenitude of violent metaphor which it shares with those two earlier novels, *The Golden Bowl* exhibits indeed only one moment of overt, and arguably "sacrificial," violence. That is when Fanny Assingham, who has abetted the adulterous transgression (and not altogether unwittingly), learns that the Princess, formerly Miss Maggie Verver, at last *knows* that her husband and Charlotte Stant (a childhood friend now, by odd happenstance, Maggie's step-mother) have in secret consummated a romantic involvement, which they recklessly and destructively sustain. The deceitful partners even reason to themselves that they are "a perfectly passive pair" whom others have forced, as "victims" and "against their will into a relation of mutual close contact that they had done everything to avoid" (244).[(2)]

The symbolically charged Golden Bowl of the novel's title – an ungainly *objet-d'art* which probably possesses its prototype in a certain cracked urn in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* – has, by its baroque agency, brought forth this revelation. Some time before, when they made their first illicit foray together on the very eve of Maggie's marriage to her groom, Charlotte and the Prince had entered a Bloomsbury shop; Charlotte had found fascination in the golden bowl, but, as the Prince declared it flawed, left without buying it. Much later – the time is four years after the wedding – Charlotte casually alludes to the antiquarian interest of Bloomsbury and thereby plants a "seed" in Maggie's "romantic" (432) imagination: For, as James divulges, the Princess always attended closely to her step-mother's speech and "always so long retained… any observation of Charlotte's, however lightly thrown off" (432). (In prior times, James adds in order to mark the fact, "Maggie had no use for" what the Prince calls "the *antiquarii*" [109]; it is Charlotte's interest that stimulates Maggie's own.) Wandering through London one afternoon, Maggie thus not entirely by coincidence finds herself in the same odd shop as the adulterous pair and, like Charlotte, quickly settles her delight on the alluring titular object; only our dear naive

Maggie, fooled by appearances and lacking a better judge to advise her, shies not from its ostentation but buys the thing on impulse. She guesses not at all, as the Prince cannily discerned and as Charlotte learned from him, that the bowl, while superficially integral, contains a concealed fracture. Its beauty extends but a gilded layer deep.

The shopkeeper, however, in a fit of commercial remorse, pays Maggie a visit to confess having cheated her. In the parlor, he notices photographs of Charlotte and the Prince and remembers aloud having seen them on his premises on that past occasion (461). A long-simmering suspicion on Maggie's part – an "outbreak of the definite" (441), James calls it – now boils over as, undeceived, she understands the worst, including importantly her own prior refusal to see the obvious. These details will bear revisitation. The immediate point to be made here is Fanny's reaction, when Maggie has at last painted the full picture for her, to the revelation of marital perfidy. Fanny, says James:

> who had been casting about her and whose inspiration decidedly had come, raised the cup in her two hands, raised it positively above her head and from under it solemnly smiled at the Princess as a signal of intention. So for an instant, full of her thought and of her act, she held the precious vessel, and then with due note taken of the polished floor, bare fine and hard in the embrasure of her window, dashed it boldly to the ground, where she had the thrill of seeing it lie shattered with the violence of the crash. She had flushed with the force of her effort as Maggie had flushed with wonder at the sight, and this high reflexion in their faces was all that passed between them for a minute more. "Whatever you meant by it – and I don't want to know *now* – has ceased to exist," Mrs. Assingham said. (447-448).

Fanny's rashness, all at once decisive, oblique, and futile, seeks to effect what one might best refer to as a magical goal, or rather several magical goals intertwined; the phrase "casting about" is exceptionally telling, as it connotes a desperate concession to any contingent ploy that might show itself in the diminishing instant.

In the first place, Fanny attempts, through so melodramatically smashing the object-catalyst of Maggie's new consciousness, to efface the knowledge around which that consciousness has so implacably crystallized; it is as if Fanny would suppress the revelation of perfidy by superimposing an arbitrary violence which absorbs the specific and damning knowledge into its own scenic abruptness: the act, so Fanny must intend, will permanently divert Maggie's attention from the troubling discovery. In its audacious transgression of every bourgeois canon, the act certainly invokes a type of sublime in the Burkean sense of an abrupt enormity producing "astonishment" so that "the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it" (*A Philosophical Inquiry* 53). One thinks back to the "wonder" (Mull) that

Maggie appears to invest in the Prince in the novel's first half, and of the awe that the Prince experiences in his contemplations of Adam. In any case, the precipitation of the bowl conveys a "thrill" to the perpetrator, and makes both women momentarily mute. Earlier, in Book Fourth, Maggie had thought of her father's blithe trust in the rightness of things specifically as a "sublimity" (353). Two types of sublimity thus confront one another: That of transgression and that of the remote noninvolvement of something that excludes one from it – from imitating it or appropriating it. Adam blandly trusts; while Fanny's precipitating the bowl constitutes an essay in diverting discovery back into ignorance when trust has slipped beyond possibility. Thus, in describing Fanny as "full of her thought and her act," James reveals not lucidity but a state of panicked self-accusation which can utter itself only through a displaced annihilation.

In the second place and quite paradoxically, then, Fanny would express and expunge, by her tactical iconoclasm, the weighty moral case mounting up against her for her own role in the affair, for she (Fanny) has undeniably aided the adulterers by protecting them, and has several times lied to Maggie in order to dissimulate nagging suspicions and more-than-suspicions of her own; in this sense, the act is merely petulant and self-serving, as though guilt and complicity could be expiated by destroying the fetish that represents them. In doing so, Fanny fulfills her expostulation to her husband, in Book Third, that no matter what the suspect couple might have done: "I shall never know. Never, never – because I don't want to and nothing will induce me" (305). Fanny at once knows and wills herself not to know, just as the Prince and Charlotte must when they argue to themselves that others have made them do it. In myths and fairytales, as Walter Burkert points out in *The Creation of the Sacred* (1998), this type of "magical flight" from danger, either real or perceived, is common. The "swift adversary," corresponding here to Maggie's implacable insistence on the unpleasant facts, can only be stopped by means of a magical object or gesture: "Throw a comb and it will grow into a forest or a mountain range" (44); throw a piece of flint and it "grows into a cliff" (45). Fanny behaves as though she existed in a fairytale world and could avert unpleasantness by magic; Maggie has left the fairytale world and Fanny's magic does not affect her.

A third goal implied by the smashing of the bowl consists of Fanny's wanting to seem, in Maggie's eyes, to underscore a reasoned argument with an instrumental gesture of phatic import. Indeed, in a prior moment, as Maggie brought forth, bit by bit, what she had learned, Fanny had "inwardly blushed" (435) at her own prior reticence about the affair, the "abysses of confidence" (55) in which she has consigned herself first by match-making the marriage and then by reintroducing the otherwise forlorn Charlotte to the Verver milieu. Shortly afterward, the Prince will see himself trapped in the "labyrinth" (454) of his own mendacity. Both terms imply victimary status – radical isolation and entrapment under threat – but neither Fanny nor the Prince is a victim. Maggie is the victim. Fanny fails to redeem her "cowardice" (435), however, by coming clean about the facts; she indeed extends and compounds cravenness by making speciously exculpatory asseverations on the

Prince's behalf; when Maggie asserts that Charlotte and the Prince have known each other intimately "more than I ever dreamed" (435), Fanny lamely interposes the quibbling question "of what one considers intimate" (435-36). She insists that she still *believes* (442) in the Prince and urges loudly to her interlocutor that "your husband has never, never, never – !" (447), when she knows quite well that he indeed has done precisely and calculatedly what she cannot bring herself to utter. Fanny's stuttering denial inevitably breaks off, indicating by its very incompletion that the truth is still damningly there. Maggie, increasingly convinced of the Prince's perfidiousness, deflects Fanny's "easy glosses" (447), whereupon Fanny, yielding to her desperate and specious "inspiration," seizes that offending piece of "evidence" (448) the bowl and consigns it to would-be oblivion. James takes us swiftly from the broken utterance to the breaking of the gold-plated curiosity that has so wondrously arranged all the hidden facts in revealing clarity all about it.

One can further fill out the character of Fanny's strategy by saying that she is trying to induce Maggie to share, to imitate, her own pretence of blithe ignorance and trust. (And it is, by this point, a pretence merely.) For a bare instant, James suggests, that hopeless result might actually be achieved, for Fanny "had flushed with the force of her effort as Maggie had flushed with wonder at the sight, and this high reflexion in their faces was all that passed between them for a minute more." In the unspecifiable because absolutely compact emotion generated by "the violence of the crash" and reflected in their mutual coloration, the two women momentarily become one, their union expressed paradoxically by their dilatory silence. Fanny, if but crudely, has called forth a type of sublimity in which the forensic clarity of the case, the true disposition of moral differences and the full assignment of causes and effects, transiently returns to its pre-articulate compactness – that mere and aphonic suspicion of offense. But the Prince, breaking in on the silent awe, dispels the speechless unanimity and by his appearance – in every sense of the term – verifies to both women his now indisputable implication in the betrayal.[(3)] In James's Hawthornesque metaphor, Maggie sees "the red mark of conviction flaming there in his beauty" (450) and finds in it the corroboration of her surmise. "Murder will out" (418), as Colonel Assingham, Fanny's husband, had recently predicted. But Fanny's hope that Maggie can be manipulated into denying what the facts – circumstantial though they might be – tell her does not stem from nothing. For as long as Fanny has known Maggie, the latter has exhibited a willingness to be impressed by others, a susceptibility to influence exemplified by her having peregrinated into the antiquarian's shop in Bloomsbury in response to a casual word dropped by Charlotte. Until the sacrificial moment of the shattered bowl, Maggie has in fact hardly ever been herself; she has been, on the contrary, the blank creature of others, taking her cues from them and molding herself to please them. Fanny's precipitation of the gilded cup produces, in this way, a real if unforeseen consequence: An authentic and autonomous Maggie who coalesces in the very instant when the cup breaks into three great slivers on the hard floor. The Prince himself suddenly perceives that Maggie has become "deep" (463) and Maggie agrees that, for the first time in her dutiful and naive life, she possesses "real

knowledge" (463). Without design, then, Fanny's deed has "redoubled… beyond its intention" (450), giving rise to what she designed it to prevent, namely the grim matriculation of Maggie's long stunted acuity.

It will be productive to borrow an insight from Eric Gans, who has noted on many an occasion that resentment, entailing a consciousness of one's emissary status, can actually be constitutive of the self; expulsion entails the sudden perception of ontological equivalence between one individual and another and the simultaneous perception that, existentially, such equivalence has suffered a disruption. In *The End of Culture,* discussing the breakdown of pre-modern society, Gans notes that "resentment may be defined as the scandal of the peripheral self at the centrality of the other which transforms the equality of the original scene of representation into an absolute polarity of difference" (174). Maggie's expulsion from her own marriage – or rather her discovery of that expulsion – certainly seems to produce such an effect, although it should quickly be added that her resentment is transient and itself quickly undergoes a transformation. In any case, a certain*"Imperium"* (43), on which the Prince meditated in *The Golden Bowl*'s opening paragraph, has suddenly and decisively passed from the Prince to his Princess, from the cynical manipulator to the moral adjudicator, and the former possessor shall not regain it. (*"Imperium"* perfectly fits the "absolute polarity of difference" to which Gans alludes in the passage just quoted.) The key terms by which Amerigo formerly thought of Maggie – "pursuit" and "capture," he the pursuer and she the captive (44) – now by reversal apply to him. The true sublime of moral conviction informed by direct and certain knowledge here replaces the false sublime of ignorance, in which thinking comes to a stop in the diverting contemplation of some impressive but vague object.

II

The filiations of mimesis in *The Golden Bowl* twist about one another in complicated strands and they occasionally tighten into fantastic knots; the convergence of multiple parties on singular objects, the contention of plural persons for unique status, the constant fishing by one character after the thoughts, dispositions, and preferences of another to satisfy a want of authentic motive: these repeatedly provoke crises, major and minor, which in their complexity constitute what James labels both "the mysteries of mimicry" (160) and "the mysteries of pride" (528). When James first reveals the Prince, for example, at the beginning of Book First, he puts him strolling in Bond Street in a "restless" (43) state, pausing now and then to gaze at the goods, "the loot of far-off victories" (43) as he imagines, that the shopkeepers have set on display in their windows. The Prince's impending marriage appears to him as a "crisis" (54) in the sense that it forecloses the erotic "possibilities in faces" (43) that he sees about him as he meanders and observes. (One should not underestimate the predatory character of the Prince.) The shop-windows, past which Amerigo peers, signify those external barriers to impulse and appropriation – marriage being the case in point – which *libido* can only regard under the enemious figure of "the iron shutter of a shop…

rattl[ing] down at the turn of some crank" (52-53). Such an aversion to exchange, to *the market,* will establish itself as a recurring theme in the novel; moral judgments will turn on whether one can assimilate oneself to the old principle of *do ut des.* The Prince both wants his marriage (not least for its cash value) and yet fears it as a "monster" (58) which must, under its *Imperium* (rather than *his*), foreclose all other possibilities. In this state of indecision (this balking before the demand to forsake all others), he requires guidance, a word from some source that will indicate what he should do. Despite his imposing effect on others, he lacks a satisfying fund of inner conviction. Such is the fragility of charisma. He makes his way, therefore, to the one who has already managed so much for him.

The Prince's interview with Fanny Assingham, in her home in Cadogan Place, (Book First) suggests Amerigo's not so subtle mimetic dependence on this lady-mentor. Fanny stands as mastermind behind the nuptial arrangements: "You had the conception," the Prince says to her, "you had it first [and] you had it the most" (60). Again, the Prince says that "I can do pretty well anything I see" and then quickly adds that he has nevertheless "got to see it first" (61); the unstated corollary of this admission is that the Prince experiences difficulty in originating his own desires, or at least in specifying them. *Seeing through Fanny's eyes* – James ascribes the metaphor to his character – will teach the Prince not only what he should *like* but what he "mayn't like" (62); and such knowledge will help him settle into what Maggie had earlier referred to as his "particular self" (47). It is the case, however, that the Prince has not yet sufficiently made out what others, particularly his father-in-law-to-be, expect of him; he has discerned only a "large bland blank assumption of merits" (56). The Prince, says James, "wouldn't know himself" (56) until he had somehow resolved that "blank assumption" into its particulars. (When he does so, it will be cynically *parti pris;* it will entail taking but no giving and will therefore violate *do ut des.*) Charlotte for her part, as Fanny says to her husband, "wants to be magnificent" (98), the model of magnificence for this girl in "want of means" (77) being the Verver household, particularly her friend Maggie. Fanny herself, as her machinations attest, lives a good deal through others, finds her *being* elsewhere than in herself. She once divulges that she is wholly "mixed up" (100) with others, a phrase which commingles semantically with the idea of adultery as a form of adulter*ation.*

James more than hints, by opening the novel amidst the shop-windows of a London street, that *The Golden Bowl* will treat the world-at-large, the modern world of the consumer and the producer, as founded in a separation, or at least a perceived separation, between the wanting state and a *being* displaced into an elsewhere of yearning and humiliation. The great question concerns how one might come to terms with such an inherent frustration; how, so to speak, one might negotiate the market of esteem without violating its well-founded rules. How wrong Geismar is when he asserts that James's novel has "nothing to do with the modern world" or "with any conceivable world of social reality" (323). That world, non-hierarchical and predicated on negotiation by autonomous parties, lies everywhere at hand and forces the representatives of the vestigial medieval world, especially the Prince, to

accept its terms. One must give, therefore, if one would later get. Symmetrical exchange is the profoundest of laws. James will make the case emphatically that it is the refusal of the market – and of the principle of reciprocity which informs the workings of the market – that stokes frustration and leads to a corrosively antinomian "pride" (541). The "currents of the market" (143) operate according to mimesis, and thus establish the pervasive mimetic background for the novel's action.

Yet the primary, perhaps one should call it the originary, mimetic case in *The Golden Bowl* is oddly a negative one, the absence of the mother who might otherwise have provided for Maggie a useful model of feminine autonomy. In the case of the deceased mother, the problems of mimesis and of displaced and inaccessible being come together. One might recall that a similar lack in an earlier James novel, *Washington Square* (1881), leads protagonist Catherine Sloper to the disaster of embittered spinsterhood; but Adam Verver, Maggie's father, corresponds – fortunately – to a somewhat different species than the grim and reserved Austin Sloper, despite the fact that both qualify as self-conscious aesthetes. Sloper stood close to his deceased wife but remains distant from his daughter; Adam Verver stood distant from his deceased wife but remains close, rather too close, perhaps, to Maggie. Sloper withholds his largesse, or at least threatens to do so; Adam spreads his freely around. In enjoying Adam's magnanimity, however, all the partakers in it enjoy indirectly what one might call a troubling relation to the deceased first wife and mother. This relation deserves to be examined in some detail, for it concerns the origin of the sublimity which endows Adam with his powerful and attractive charisma; the relation is nevertheless not sinister, but merely fortuitous – and yet it remains generative of an array of important effects.

One might begin by underscoring the fact that the death of the wife, like the smashing of the bowl, generates unforeseen and ironically positive results. As Milly Theale says to Susan Stringham in *The Wings of the Dove,* speculating on the certainty of her own death: "You'll never really know where I am. Except indeed when I'm gone; and then you'll only know where I'm not" (183). In *The Golden Bowl,* once one becomes aware of her having existed, one remains aware of just how conspicuously the first Mrs. Verver is absent. Not stemming from old money, Adam must have produced his fortune during the period of his first marriage, so that elementary fairness of judgment would necessarily attribute to her a measure of shared credit in the making of it. "Behind every great man…" as the cliché puts it (and not without cause). Adam indeed not only owes some part of his fortune to the original Mrs. Verver; he owes his defining sense of himself as a genuine initiate of the arts to her death – a grim and perhaps unrepayable debt. If Adam now ranks as "equal somehow with the great seers, invokers and encouragers of beauty," it remains the case that "he had been nothing of the kind before" (140). In Book Second, meditating alone in the billiard room of Fawns, his retreat in the English countryside, Adam Verver arrives at a sudden understanding of the causation by which he has become, in his own estimation, nearly "infallible" in aesthetic judgment and a man than whom none other "in Europe or America,

he privately believed, was for such estimate less capable of vulgar mistakes" (139).

A self-made billionaire (57) from the Midwest, Adam has given himself over, in early retirement, to the obsessive acquisition of painting, sculpture, luxurious ornament, and architectural fragment. He thinks to himself that:

> apart from the natural affections he had acquainted himself with no greater joy of the intimately personal type than the joy of his originally coming to feel, and all so unexpectedly, that he had in him the spirit of a connoisseur. He had, like many other persons, in the course of his reading, been struck with Keats's sonnet about stout Cortez in the presence of the Pacific; but it was probable that few persons had so devoutly fitted the poet's grand image to a fact of experience. It consorted so with Mr Verver's consciousness of the way in which at a given moment he had stared at *his* Pacific that a couple of perusals of the immortal lines had sufficed to stamp them in his memory. His 'peak in Darien' was the sudden hour that had transformed his life, the hour of his perceiving with a mute inward gasp akin to the low moan of apprehensive passion that a world was left him to conquer and that he might conquer it if he tried. (139)

James adds that "the light, in his mind, had so broken" only "during his first visit to Europe *after* the death of his wife" (140 [emphasis added]). Adam attributes his prior obtuseness to the undue influence of the deceased helpmate, whose "flutter had been mainly that of ribbons, frills and fine fabrics" (140). In the days of her presence, Adam "had 'bought'" (140), but only on his wife's pattern, through her eyes, so to speak, and according to her taste: "He sometimes even wondered what would have become of his intelligence, in the sphere in which it was to learn more and more exclusively to play, if his wife's influence on it hadn't been, in the strange scheme of things, so promptly removed" (141). In his bereavement, he became "violently aware" of "the dormant intelligence" within him that only awaited its proper occasion to stir from slumber and mark him with its power. So the disappearance of the encumbering companion – the disruption of the marriage by death – while accidental or providential (the latter, as it seems, from Adam's perspective) nevertheless yields a boon and conforms therefore to the same sacrificial pattern observable in Fanny's performance with the bowl. Both entail violence; both induce what a certain subject – Adam in one case and Maggie in the other – understands as a positive metamorphosis from dormancy to awareness. Adam refers to the "intelligence," "Genius," and "Taste" as opposed to *vulgarity* (140) that his awakening has granted him, and Maggie repeatedly to "knowledge" (422) and *judgment* (440, 450) as opposed to *ignorance* (446) and *belief* (442). Yet while the oppositions are formally congruent, the categories differ significantly and contribute to the intellectual counterpoint of the narrative: Adam's pertains almost exclusively to beauty considered in an extra-moral sense (even to the extra-

moral considered, as in Kant's phrase from my epigraph, as beautiful) and Maggie's to justice considered in such a way as to subordinate merely aesthetic considerations; but this is not to say that Maggie's sense of justice pays no tribute to aesthetic notions such as proportion or seemliness – for it does indeed account for these. Maggie's view of things does not predominate, however, until the denouement; Mull has written of the "near-Platonism" (144) of Adam's thinking, and for most of the novel Adam, through pure effulgence, ordains the aesthetic criteria governing how, in his world, things shall be.

He does so by appearing to embody, in various forms, the being that others fear to lack in themselves and so seek to acquire mimetically by the closest possible association with their model. (When James transcribes Adam's self-assessment, Maggie's father is, in fact, *hiding out* from a crowd of women who have settled in as indefinite guests at Fawns.) Adam's charisma stems in part from his wealth, but in larger part from his having succeeded in making the impression, however insubstantial, of "a *real* galantuomo" (45 [emphasis in original]), as the Prince names him – an embodiment of *reality.*

Surrounding himself with an ever accumulating mass of beautiful artifacts, Adam achieves the effect, on others, of an "essential pulse of flame, brought to the highest point, yet extraordinarily contained" and impresses those around him with an "acquisitive power" that implies "the necessary triumph of all operations" (131). Flame can warm or illuminate or it can burn; the metaphor is the quintessence of the mythopoetic-sacrificial genus. And if "everyone had need of one's power," Adam nevertheless "dread[s] the imputation of greed" (133), of not wanting, that is, to share that "power." These statements imply that Adam, too, by a peculiar splitting of consciousness, is subject to his own quasi-sacred status. Like every priest or quasi-sacred creature, he has an appearance to keep up. True, his inveterate culling of the art-market carries with it the mark of generosity, for most of the stuff will eventually find its way into the Museum that this great patron intends to endow back in "American City" (49); but it also hints at a certain desperation, a haunted sense that the glamour might vanish should he cease the forward motion of his accumulative career. Adam resembles nothing so much as a Melanesian big-man, who, in his pre-civilized setting, as Eric Gans remarks in *The End of Culture* (1985), "attains communal significance by monopolizing the exchange-system function of distribution – by converting it, at least at periodic intervals, into a personal *re*distribution" (154). The big-man's "cultural centrality is founded on economic centrality" (154) but can by no means be reduced to mere economics. Wealth, as such, interests the big-man far less than the prestige that he gains by giving his wealth away, so much so, as Gans reminds us, that he provides the likely prototype of kings in the pharaonic style: "What specifically distinguishes the big-man is [not his wealth but] something else: his *individual* and non-prescribed role in the creation of… surplus. Because the big-man's difference [from everyone else] does not circulate among the other members of the community… a permanent disequilibrium emerges between his function as producer/(re)distributor and the role of consumer to which the beneficiaries of his generosity are relegated" (*Science & Faith* 35).

At the time of his great self-revelation, James writes, Adam "was a plain American citizen staying at an hotel where sometimes there were twenty others like him: but no pope, no prince of them all had read a richer meaning, he believed, into the character of the Patron of Art" (146). A certain self-inflation, our novelist adds, might well have gone "to our friend's head" where "what could it do but steadily grow and grow?" (146). Others see Adam as a protean "personage" who might be "a Pope, a King, a President, a Peer, a General, or just a beautiful Author" (185). James only unambiguously, in Book Fifth, reveals how Adam, deep down, perceives himself; but in Books First through Third, the several iterations of the metaphor of burning one's ships (192, 195) suggest a personality determined to cut itself off, somehow, from its own past – perhaps even from the foundationally deceased first wife. On one occasion Adam thinks back on "the *sacrifice* of burning his ships" (173 [emphasis added]). The textual nearness of Adam's thought about his departed *uxor* and his mental invocation of the conquistador's radical gesture make the last plausible. Early in Book Second, Adam even wonders, thinking back on it, whether his first marriage "deserved the name" (144), a thought which tends to confirm his sense of his own Emersonian self-creation.

Maggie will later think of her father as "the 'successful' beneficent person, the beautiful bountiful original dauntlessly wilful great citizen, the consummate collector and high authority" whose "quietness," "originality," "modesty," "exquisite public perversity," and "inscrutable incalculable energy" (513) mark him off as the ultimate source and model for those around him, a genius of conjoined opposites, and the *origin* (she thinks it twice) of everything around him. Of course, Adam's current plenitude of passive being disguises the fact that before he could *be* in this quasi-sacred way he had first *to do,* to create the fortune that now endows him with benign majesty. One of the problems which Maggie faces, and which she will finally overcome, is that being resists imitation, which is the primary form of doing. As Gans puts it, "to be present in the center of the scene is to be uniquely significant precisely because it is to be absent from any project of action" (*Signs of Paradox* 92). All of Adam's numinous endowments make him an overwhelming factor in the minds of those who surround him; they also render him useless as the instigator of positive mimesis. The absent mother plays a role in this: For if she were present, she would pose a counterbalance to Adam, humanize him, reveal his resemblance to ordinary mortals like Colonel Assingham, and implicate him more effectively in the immediate social world; she might even rebuke him for his runaway self-inflation.

All that glitters, then, is not gold, and while Adam possesses enough wealth to make a pharaoh envious, what people see in him is his "form" (44) and his "way" (46), terms the very vagueness of which suggests the auric, the numinous, the mysterious, the inaccessible. To marry into the Verver family means, for the Prince, not only his arrival in "the golden isles" (60), that mythic never-never land of appetitive superabundance, but the near-miraculous redemption of his fallen family's historical cumulus of monetary debt; Amerigo indeed understands Adam's free and serial reclamation of these "long-estranged…

properties… encumbered with unending leases and charges" as a series of "sacrifices" (156) made by Adam *to him*. As the young man knows that his father-in-law regards him as possessing some "hereditary privilege," some "secret" stemming from his ancestry (184), and as he also understands that Adam values the addition of this quality to the Verver household, he feels himself attached through a "principle of reciprocity" (44) to the "spell" (57), the "thickness of white air," and the "dazzling curtain of light" (56) which emanate from his in-law benefactor, quite as though he were a god or an angel in permanent epiphany.

This phenomenon depends, moreover, on "no mere measurable medium" (267). The object of desire loses its objectality and volatilizes into the nebulous idea of redemptory plenitude, within whose transforming glow all deficiencies of the subject will be made good. Immeasurableness is, moreover, a feature of the sublime as it is described both by Kant and Burke. When we contemplate vastness, Burke says, "we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated" (63); "the sublime," Kant tells us, "is sometimes accompanied with a certain dread" (47). The Prince's attribution to him of magic immensity invokes for Adam the hypsotic [sic: ?= sublime] category.

Others, besides the Prince, heed the magic as well. In Book Third, during the soirée at Matcham, Adam exudes among his guests a "pervasion" of "quantity" (267):

> Every voice in the great bright house was a call to the ingenuities and impunities of pleasure; every echo was a defiance of difficulty, doubt or danger; every aspect of the picture, a glowing plea for the immediate, and as with plenty more to come, was another phase of the spell. For a world so constituted was governed by a spell, that of the smile of the gods and the favor of their powers; the only handsome, the only gallant, in fact the only intelligent acceptance of which was a faith in its guarantees and a high spirit for its chances. (273)

The Prince thinks that conditions around Adam resemble "the state of our primitive parents before the Fall" (275), a thought that echoes Maggie's remark from Book First that "the happiest reigns… are the reigns without any history" (47), yet another reference to the Arcadian atmosphere generated by Adam's inestimable means. No one, confronting Adam, it seems, can avoid the immediate conviction that being lies elsewhere – *in Adamo* – and that insofar as one possesses it oneself one does so by way of an *influx,* an "influenza" (218), from that august individual. Maggie enjoys such influence by virtue of her filial tie; the Prince enjoys it by virtue of his espousal to Maggie. Charlotte, who knew Maggie when both were children, and who knew the Prince only a short time before, in Italy, feels left out. Early on in the narrative, James records "her recall of her birth in Florence and Florentine childhood" (78); he alludes to the "shabby" quality of her natal milieu and to the "poor convent" (78) where she took instruction. The implied *poor/rich* or *shabby/genteel* contrast

verges on the overdetermined. When the Prince, implying that she is Italian in appearance, speculates on the possibility of "some strictly civil ancestor" (78), Charlotte can only admit that she knows of none. She will continue to feel left out, different by origin, perhaps quite *un*original, even after she marries Adam. It miffs her when Maggie telegraphs congratulations not to both of them but only to her father (205). But that is to skip ahead.

Hearing of the imminent nuptials, Charlotte appears (quite uninvited) at the Assinghams, whereupon Fanny mediates the reacquaintance of the young woman and the Prince. Charlotte definitely qualifies as the outsider in the Verver milieu; she declares herself not "absolutely a pauper" but still "too poor for some things" (105), and yet she does, like Adam and indeed like Amerigo, lay claim to a certain charm of her own. While "nothing in her definitely placed her," she nevertheless strikes the Prince as "a rare, a special product," marked off from other women by "her singleness, her solitude, her *want of means,"* and exhibiting in her very deficiency "an odd precious neutrality" (77 [emphasis added]).

Yet, for the Prince, Charlotte's "mystery" (78) now suddenly partakes retroactively in the Verver enchantment: he believes that Charlotte once represented *for Maggie* "the liveliest emotion she had known before the dawn of the sentiment inspired by himself" (77). Where there is no directly observable relationship to endow someone with Verver magic, then one must, in the logic of imitation, imagine such a relationship. The Prince and Charlotte, as noted, knew each other previously, but James's prose leaves readers to suppose that, at the time, the Prince had yet to meet the Ververs (something which Fanny would stage-manage) and that Charlotte herself made no mention of them. So she formed, for him, merely another affair; and he, too, for her. If, as Fanny puts it, the Prince "*had* to have money," so, it seems, did Charlotte, for they mutually "gave each other up" (89) in the lack of it. In renewing his former interest, then, the Prince has in effect taken a cue from his wife-to-be. Part of the Verver magic has passed from Adam via Maggie to Charlotte. She is now more alluring than she might have been before; but her "want of means" additionally enables the Prince to stand to her as Adam stands to him: it enables him to imitate Adam, to exercise a similar apparently magnanimous being in respect to Charlotte.

Charlotte seeks "existence" (80), as she tells the Prince during their first conversation in Cadogan Place, repeating the word three times. She means marriage, of course, but neither merely nor exclusively. Later, as a guest at Fawns, invited by Adam himself, she proves to have "existence" of a sort already, and to exert an "influence" (176) on others all her own. As earlier noted, Adam finds himself genially besieged at Fawns by a swarm of female suitors, the bachelor-ladies Lutch (two of them, evidently) and the widow Rance, from whom he persistently and comically escapes. In short order, Charlotte, in Fanny's words, has "cleared them out" (175). Says Fanny: "One *saw* the consciousness I speak of come over the poor things, very much I suppose as people at the court of the Borgias may have watched each other begin to look queer after having had the honour of taking wine with the heads of the family" (177). Charlotte indisputably boasts "the real thing" (178) and the others,

fatalistically acknowledging the quality, leave the field; Charlotte adds up singularly to "exactly what those women themselves want to be" and "her effect on them is to make them recognise that they never will" (178). Having banished her rivals, she turns her attention to the object of her desire, Adam himself. For his part, Adam gravitates to the girl, and for a reason which fits the already several times reiterated pattern of the novel: Charlotte represents for him a "secret," like that which he perceives in his son-in-law; and he even discovers himself wondering, at one point, if that secret "had come to Charlotte, who had unmistakably acquired it, through [Amerigo's] having passed it on" (184). He thinks that Amerigo might have "coached" or "incited" Charlotte in some way, so that she might imitate the Prince's "personal system" (184). In gold-digging coquetry, of course, the Prince has, in effect, so "coached" her, but Adam remains for the present in ignorance of that fact.

Charlotte has not only been spiralling closer to Adam, repelling rivals as she nears him; she has been imitating his "way," or attempting it, since the moment she became reacquainted with the Prince under Fanny's arrangement. When she and Amerigo enter the Bloomsbury shop in Book First, her errand putatively entails making the purchase of a wedding-gift for Maggie (82), or, perhaps, of what she calls a "ricordo" (116) for the Prince which honor, however, he (more or less out of petulance) refuses. She wants to buy something beautiful to bestow on the daughter (Maggie) of the "personage" known for his extravagant and tasteful buying of endless beautiful things, or upon her former lover, now made *more interesting* than previously by his imminent espousal of the radiant Ververs; she too by such a gesture would gain the appearance of being a centrally positioned *re*distributor of largesse.[(4)] (Maggie, by contrast, until she imitates Charlotte in making the round of the Bloomsbury antiquarian shops, remains a recipient rather than a giver of goods.) After Charlotte finds herself alone with Adam, and when he begins to test her for a wife, she accompanies him from Fawns to Brighton to complete the acquisition of a set of rare tiles of Syrian origin. The dealer, a certain conspicuously Jewish Gutermann-Seuss, welcomes the couple to his house. "Our visitors," writes James, "found themselves introduced, by the operation of close contiguity, to a group of ladies and gentleman older and younger, and of children larger and smaller, who mostly affected them as scarce less anointed for hospitality and who produced at first the impression of a birthday party, or some anniversary gregariously and religiously kept, though they subsequently fell into their places as members of one quiet domestic circle, preponderantly and directly indebted for their being in fact to Mr Gutermann-Seuss" (190). (Some anticipatory irony might well be assigned to the supernumerary character of the Guterman-Seusses, to their fecundity, for Adam by his first wife had but one child, and his child produces likewise but one offspring, while he, with Charlotte, through no want of trying, produces none.)

The exchange – Adam's cheque for Gutermann-Seuss's "infinitely ancient… amethystine" (191) tiles – occurs, then, in the context of an intact community, a veritable Old Testament "tribe" (192); it is also paradigmatically an affirmation of the market. Gutermann-Seuss at one point tells Adam that he has long known of and has long wanted to meet "the great

American collector" (190). As the praise builds up Adam before himself, so it also builds him up before Charlotte, who can bask, as it were, in the radiation. Guterman-Seuss's attention to Adam proves, for Charlotte, that her companion incarnates "the aesthetic principle" (179). Adam notices, all throughout the transaction, how Charlotte appreciates the "mystic rite" (192) of the purchase; and he begins to think of her in terms of the "sacrifice" (193) of "burning his ships" (191), a metaphor drawn from those exploits of Cortez alluded to in Keats's sonnet and one which signifies a renewal of romance. There is something odd and perhaps even morbid in this, however, for Charlotte excites in Adam at this moment the reawakening of the sense of a new existence that had followed the *death* of his first wife, Maggie's mother. Adam himself betrays no awareness of the irony. He shortly proposes to Charlotte, who speaks of her desire "to have an existence" (194), and, after a coquettish deferral of a few days, accepts.[(5)] The deferral concerns her communication with the Prince – not with the Prince *and* Maggie, as she leads Adam to believe – in which she discerns that she shall not only have her "existence" but that she shall have her Prince too. *"A la guerre comme à la guerre then"* (244), the Prince has written. The announcement of impending marital union thus occurs almost simultaneously with the announcement of *war.* With the image of the Guterman-Seusses, the large and stable household, still hovering, the intention to sunder such an image constitutes a treacherous tie between the two conspirators. As the Guterman-Seusses represent the market, with its implicit rule of equivalent exchange, the declaration of bellicosity also signifies an intention to violate that rule. James opposes *war* to *the market.*[(6)]

III

In Book First, Well before Adam's espousal of Charlotte, Fanny and the Colonel between them sum up the gathering crisis in the figure of plural *"cases":* "There's Maggie's and the Prince's, and there's the Prince's and Charlotte's… there's Charlotte's and the Prince's… there's Maggie's and Charlotte's… and there's also Maggie's and mine. I think too that there's Charlotte's and mine" (94). Fanny, who does most of the adducing, represents the Verver milieu as one of shifting pairs. In fact, each one of her pairs is a trio, with Fanny herself forming the third party in all, not merely in two, of them; for Fanny arranged the engagement of Maggie and the Prince, and has already begun to encourage the re-pairing of the Prince and Charlotte. (Later, Adam will make the third party in some of these combinations: the "case" of Adam, Charlotte, and the Prince will unite the adulterous pair at the expense of the husband; the adultery indeed produces two interlocking triangles.) But something of the truth clings to Fanny's myth, so to speak, of the merely dyadic "cases": Maggie and the Prince, as husband and wife, constitute an intact pair only to the extent that all others remain excluded from the marriage; and should the Prince and Charlotte constitute a pair, it will only be through the treacherous exclusion of Maggie from the sanctity of her bond with Amerigo – now all the more sanctified through the birth of the Principino, their son. In many of the instances where James, almost always through one of his characters, deploys the term *sacrifice* (or a variant), the term refers to the problem of

exclusion; at other times it has a rather more casual definition. Finally, sacrifice will refer to the opposite of exclusion. When the Prince defines Adam's redemption of various mortgaged properties as a sacrifice (156), he is thinking casually. This, once again, is the big-man establishing solidarity by giving his goods away (while at the same reinforcing resentment against his unique capacity to eradicate debts); it is the purely material type of sacrifice. Adam, in conversation with Maggie about the way in which her marriage to the Prince excludes him, playfully refers to himself as a "martyr" (163); but Maggie later quite seriously thinks that, in marrying, she has "sacrificed a parent" (185). When the truth of betrayal has dawned on Maggie and she has resolved to put Charlotte out of the picture by packing her and Adam back to America, because she does not want to embarrass Charlotte publicly, she resolves herself to play the role of "scapegoat" (487) for the sake of familial placidity. She could, she thinks, "have yearned for it, for the straight vindictive view, the rights of resentment, the rages of jealousy" (489), but the idea of histrionics disgusts her and she has no desire to compound injuries. In effect, she sacrifices the right to retribution.[(7)]

Maggie's handling of her knowledge – her treatment of Charlotte – deserves examination, but her behavior will only make sense if one first distinguishes certain of her predispositions from certain of the Prince's and Charlotte's. James cannily arranges his story so that the two adulterers and then the betrayed wife visit that Bloomsbury shop and transact with the shopkeeper. If one were to ask, from where, in this narrative of endlessly circulating imitative desire, the ethical revelation comes that fixes the promiscuous players once again in the ordered pattern called marriage, then one would have to answer that it comes from the Italian-speaking purveyor of antiquities. Consider Charlotte and the Prince during their visit to the antiquarian. James tells us that Charlotte came away from the shop "full of impressions" and that the chief of these concerned the shopkeeper himself who struck her as "the greatest curiosity they looked at" (114). The Prince says laconically that he "hadn't looked at him" at all whereupon Charlotte notes:

> how, below a certain social plain, he never *saw.* One kind of shopman was just like another to him – which was oddly inconsequent on the part of a mind that where it did notice noticed so much. He took throughout always the meaner sort for granted – the night of their meanness, or whatever name one might give it for him, made all his cats grey. (114)

Charlotte sees the man, to be sure, but remarks him mainly because she imagines that "he cared – well, so for *them*" (114), that is, for Charlotte herself and her companion. She tells the Prince later that the man could not take his eyes off them and that this proved that he possessed "taste" (114), the quality unanimously attributed to the sublime Adam, who constitutes the metaphysically predominant model in James's narrative scheme. "We're

beautiful, aren't we?" (114) Charlotte asks rhetorically, thus illustrating to perfection René Girard's comment on coquetry in *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World:* "The coquette seeks to be desired because she needs masculine desires, directed at her, to feed her coquetry. She has no more self-sufficiency than the man who desires her, but the success of her strategy allows her to keep up the appearance of it, since it offers her a form of desire she can copy" (370). Charlotte's idea that the man notices *her,* sees in her a being that he does not possess himself, but can nevertheless recognize, strategically complements her sense that the Prince does not notice *him* – that Amerigo possesses, that is, the very being that the man lacks and therefore keenly remarks when it appears in another. In this hopeful but self-contradictory analysis of the moment of desire, Charlotte succeeds in convincing herself, but only precariously, that she radiates the same type of auric desirability which draws *her* to someone who has been *designated by another* as desirable. (The Prince has been designated by Maggie, or perhaps, through her, by Adam.) The analysis remains self-contradictory and precarious, however, because it depends simultaneously on the authority of the shopkeeper as a discerner of *beauty* and on his contemptibility as one "below a certain social plain."

Notice the emissary structure of the situation: Charlotte – in her imagination, at least – forges solidarity with the Prince by participating in his contempt for the antiquarian. In a word, she imitates him, imitates the disdain that makes him loom before her as self-sufficient. Notice also that another exclusion, more critical from Charlotte's perspective, exists underneath the immediately visible one: Maggie's exclusion from her impending nuptial sodality with the Prince. All of Charlotte's terms in her rehearsal, to Amerigo, of the Bloomsbury excursion are invidiously comparative, and Maggie, although *of course* never mentioned, must bear the detrimental burden of Charlotte's envy. Charlotte's position in her (falsely) suasory treatment with the Prince thus strangely resembles Fanny's position in her (falsely) suasory treatment with Maggie, when she picks up the bowl and hurtles it to the floor: neither one dares mention what is really going on and both must fall back on evasion and non-sequitur to convince their respective interlocutors. There is, as James puts it elsewhere in the novel, a "danger of advertising subtle processes" (397), especially where the subtlety involves elaborate concealment of one's own ontological insecurity. Charlotte's argument, when reduced to its impossible essence, takes the form of an enthymeme: *I have been designated by an ugly and undesirable party, therefore I am beautiful and desirable.*

The one real element in this abyss of desire and self-deception is Amerigo's distaste for the man, the shopkeeper, to whom Charlotte paradoxically attributes the quality of "taste." A short time after the smashing of the bowl, trapped by Maggie in his lie, he lashes out at the man. He remembers the shopkeeper only "as a horrid little beast" (460); earlier, to Charlotte, he described the man as "the swindling Jew who understood Italian" (292), an epithet which Charlotte, on the occasion, mimics contentedly *verbatim.* Maggie, by contrast, tells the Prince that, in the shopkeeper, she has found "a friend [who] took an interest in me" (460). Maggie chooses her words carefully, for the phrase *took an interest* denotes

exactly what the Prince has failed to do with regard to his wife – worse than failed. Maggie believes that she "inspired" the shopkeeper "with sympathy" (460), as she reports, remarking what "an oddity of… chance" it was that she "should have been moved… to go precisely to *him*" (460). (I have shown that it was not a matter of "chance" at all, but Maggie's mimetic response to Charlotte's suggestion.) Maggie can, she tells her husband:

> "only think of [the shopkeeper] as kind, for he had nothing to gain. He had in fact only to lose. It was what he came to tell me – that he had asked me too high a price, more than the object was really worth. There was a particular reason which he hadn't mentioned and which made him consider and repent. He wrote for leave to see me again – wrote in such terms that I saw him here this afternoon." (460)

The shopkeeper "had nothing to gain" so that his act indicated no taint whatsoever of the mercenary. From the moment of that visit, Maggie has immersed herself in learning how to be, in James's phrase, "a mistress of shades" (423). In the first shock of discovery, she had wondered to herself "who… would inevitably… in the gust of momentary selfishness, be sacrificed" (422) in atonement for the adulterous offense; now, however, drawing her ethical lesson from the reviled shopkeeper's decent act, she thinks in terms of *kindness, consideration* and *repentance.* The shopkeeper's knowledge of "how easily the bowl could be broken" (461) pricked the fellow's conscience and "worked in him" (461). If Maggie's language, like Fanny's a short time before, operates by its obliquity, it seeks a very different goal, however, than Fanny's: revelation, namely, with the intent of reconciliation rather than concealment with the intent of sustaining a betrayal. Yet Maggie's plan entails no simple forgiveness, as if nothing had happened, for she is now too much attuned to what she knows (not just about the Prince and Charlotte, but about human relations in general) to make a pretence of naivety in Polly-Anna-ish hopes for the best. The Prince and Charlotte will together have to endure a type of probation, a compensation by equivalence for their delinquency, but the erotics of exclusion will then at last be closed and the married pairs will be permanently and stably paired off as they should. Maggie takes care, above all, that Adam, if he does not already know, shall learn nothing of the sordid affair; she would preserve unruffled and unsullied the "sublime" equanimity of his "happiness" (502).

Maggie's method for carrying out what she now knows that she must do worthily solicits our critical examination, but one must first say more about the shopkeeper and his bourgeois conscience.

The shopkeeper is a Jew. It is worth recalling that the Prince's younger brother had married "a wife of the Hebrew race" (53), and that Amerigo thinks of this, in Book First, in terms which are aptly described as cynical and which thus converge with his supercilious, if not downright bigoted, reaction to the antiquarian. Judaism thus occupies a special, an

unobvious but nearly central, position in this novel about the decadence of Christendom at the close of the nineteenth century – it provides the source of morality and the model of stability. The Prince would, not implausibly, agree with the Marxian dictum in "On the Jewish Question," that "Exchange is the true god of the Jew" (*Early Writings* (239), and that both the Jew and the custom of exchange deserve contempt for this reason. James, on the other hand, might plausibly be read as taking issue, not with Marx's formal analysis, but with the value extracted by Marx from that analysis. Exchange is a formalization of reciprocity and reciprocity is the essence of morality. It is worth noting that a peculiar sentence in *The American Scene* (1907) prophesies not that the Jews will corrupt the ethical matrix of the New World but that it would likely fall out the other way around: A "portentous element" in the Yankee brew that James tasted in New York when he visited there after writing *The Golden Bowl* "reduces to inanity any marked dismay as much as any high elation" (101) on the part of immigrant incursions. Thus, while the Jews represent an *alien* presence, James places no obvious moral stigma on their alienness; the Jews, writes James, possess an "intensity" and "an unsurpassed strength of race" (100), characteristics which contrast with the corruption and decadence predicated of the Verver milieu. One symptom of these qualities of Jewry is the "blaze of shops" (103) in the Jewish neighborhoods, which returns us to the notion of an intact ethos based on exchange, hence on reciprocity. In the broken world for which the Verver household's broken marriages stand as symbol, and amidst blatant immorality on the one hand and timidity in response to it on the other, the familial solidity of the Guterman-Seusses and the scrupling conscience of the Jewish antiquarian appear as beacons in the murk. This contrast should strike readers as all the more significant given the explicitly Roman Catholic affiliation of the Verver milieu. During the outing that initiates their renewed affair, under the pretence that they want a gift for Maggie, Charlotte describes the Prince's wife-to-be not merely in terms of an enviable self-sufficiency ("she does everything herself") but as a paragon of selflessness. The Prince agrees, remarking that Maggie's goodness has something "terrible" about it, which is perhaps why he regards the imminent ceremony as a "monstrosity." Terrible in just that sense Maggie truly is, Charlotte readily and perhaps a bit censoriously admits:

> "… unless one's almost as good as she. It makes too easy terms for one. It takes stuff within one, so far as one's decency is concerned, to stand it. And nobody… is decent enough, good enough to stand it – not without help from religion or something of that kind. Not without prayer and fasting – that is without taking great care. Certainly… such people as you and I are not." (111)

The function of the Verver's (including Charlotte's) nominal Catholicism, then, is to be attenuated and nonfunctional. Nothing suggests this moderate Potemkin-morality of false fronts more than the priest, Father Mitchell, who appears at Fawns at that critical juncture in the narrative when Maggie must act on her resolve to maneuver all and every back into

lawful matrimonial settlement. The priest exhibits no quality or office that would distinguish him in any way from the other card-players at the gaming table where we find him; "good holy man" he might be, but Maggie has "found her way without his guidance" (531), and while she ponders moral action he merely *prattles* (532) over the salmon mayonnaise at dinner. The Prince's personality partakes in the same adverse judgment. Back in Book First, Amerigo admits to Maggie that his people, the Vespuccis, figure in the histories mainly for their "doings" and "marriages" and "crimes" and "follies" and "boundless *bêtises,*" not to mention for their "infamous waste of money" (47). Maggie sees Amerigo as "a creature [of] the *cinquecento*" (49), which she intends, as she utters it, to be a compliment, but which readers must revisit on the basis of later developments with an increasing sense of irony. (When Charlotte drives the other contenders for Adam's hand away from Fawns in Book Second, for example, James drops references to the Borgias and their penchant for poisoning [177]; the Prince himself, in Book Third, makes reference to "the dagger" and the "insidiously [prepared] cup" [261].) James lets pass, likewise in Book First, that Charlotte's expatriate parents, although "from the great country," were "already of a corrupt generation" (78). The very name *Fawns,* with its nod to Hawthorne, conjures the Pagan world of classical myth, to which James makes more than one explicit allusion. When Adam contemplates his proposed Museum in solitude at Fawns, he thinks of it in terms of a "Greek temple" whose steps he ascends at last to oversee "the final rites" (143). The new Arcadia cannot be pristine, nor can it be genuinely pre-moral; because it represents the collapse of that which succeeds the classically moral, it can only be willfully immoral. The notion of *bêtise,* with its connotation not just of stupidity but of the bestial, forms a telling pair with the name *Fawns:* Together they describe the emergence of the primitive amidst the modern, of the faunic amidst the human; and they portend the recrudescence of voracity amidst restraint. It is not for nothing that, long before we meet the Israelite shopkeeper, James qualifies the meddling Fanny by the otherwise incomprehensible negative of her being, despite "her richness of hue, her generous nose, her eyebrows marked like those of an actress," *not* "a Jewess" (64). Nor is it for nothing that James can describe Maggie as "a flit of a creature in an *alien age*" (172 [emphasis added]) haunted by "the ghost of the anomalous" (387). If the law of Fawns be adultery and deceit (*"à la guerre comme à la guerre then"*) as long as one can get away with it, then Maggie qualifies as thoroughly "anomalous."

One might indeed speculate that Maggie's deceased mother possessed, whatever her deficiency of high taste, a foursquare sense of morality, and that Maggie, inheriting something of it, is indeed an "alien" presence surrounded by degeneration; her liking for the golden bowl, a flawed and grotesque object according to the novel's aesthetes, might legitimately be said to tie her to her mother by her lack of connoisseurship in comparison with others. We know that Maggie takes her religion seriously in a way that her Amerigo and Adam do not. When at Fawns, she "induce[s] her husband, not inveterate in such practices, to make with her, by carriage, the… pilgrimage to the nearest altar, modest though it happened to be, of the faith – her own as it had been her mother's, and as Mr.

Verver himself had been loosely willing always to let it be taken for *his* – without the solid ease of which, making the stage firm and smooth, the drama of her marriage mightn't have been acted out" (147). I read the final clause of this curiously broken sentence as a prolepsis. In light of the Prince being "not inveterate" in his adherence to his nominal faith, furthermore, one should recall a particular imprecation which he utters during his visit to the Bloomsbury shop: *"Per bacco!"* (123) – "by Bacchus!" – an etiquette noticeably Pagan and entirely in keeping with the revealed ethos of Fawns.

But what is beautiful and what is ugly? From the romantic perspective, the consummation of the lovers' affair ought to be beautiful. It takes place at Matcham. "It's sacred," the Prince says to Charlotte:

> "It's sacred," she breathed back to him. They vowed it, gave it out and took it in, drawn, by their intensity, more closely together. Then of a sudden, through this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow straight into the sea beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled. Their lips sought their lips, their pressure and their response and their response their pressure; with a violence that had sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillnesses they passionately sealed their pledge. (259)

Later, in a musical metaphor in Book Fifth, Maggie thinks of the two as "Wagnerian lovers" (519), a reference either to Tristan and Isolde or to Siegfried and Brunnhilde (it matters little); the latter pair's love has as its background the dissolution of a world and is perhaps the more apt of the two possible allusions. The reference to Wagner establishes a dichotomy with an earlier musical citation in the novel, for during the soirée at Eaton Square in Book Third, Fanny finds herself momentarily distracted by the "genius" of a Brahms quartet, "moved," in fact, "beyond what she could bear" (269). That remark bears on the Prince and Charlotte alone at Matcham in this way: Brahms figures in cultural history as the great bourgeois composer, the defender of traditional forms, and the string quartet – with its four players always in contrapuntal movement under a harmonic order which requires resolution – can serve as the symbol of what the Verver household ought ideally to be. The term "genius," moreover, with its connotations of positivity and productivity, contrasts with the idea of "degeneration" (318) which Fanny applies jocosely to herself a short time later; it also contrasts with James's remark that Charlotte's parents belonged to a "corrupt generation" (78). It is at Eaton Square that the Prince and Charlotte first attract attention as a pair apart from their respective *sposi,* so that what Fanny so strongly notices in her transient musical rapture amounts to a sharp moral contradistinction. Whether, later on, Maggie thinks of the *Liebestod* or of the finale from *Die Götterdämmerung,* the name of Wagner signifies the dissolution of traditional forms, his lovers being all either adulterous or incestuous; the Wagnerian eros belongs not to the Judaeo-Christian but to the Pagan or neo-

Pagan dispensation. Fawns will later remind Maggie of “an old German forest” (519). In this sense, James seems to consign the Prince and Charlotte, too, to such an order, as their mutual invocation of the “sacred” as the mark of their transgression so strongly suggests. That James endows their embrace with the rhetorical indicators of sublimity only strengthens the suggestion: “Everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled”; the lovers’ passion exhibits the telling quality of “violence.” Fanny’s later smashing of the bowl echoes the necessarily disintegrative nature of what the contemporary euphemist might call an improper relationship. One ought note as well the co-presence at Matcham of Lady Castledean, who, like the Prince and Charlotte, carries on an adulterous affair. Even the Prince regards the Castledeans as belonging among “inferior people” (288), which puts them in the same category, for him, as the shopkeeper. By association, the Prince and Charlotte have enmeshed themselves in the very “bondage of ugliness” (143) that Adam, by pursuing his career of connoisseurship, hoped to escape.[(8)]

The bowl itself – I have hinted at this parenthetically – maintains a direct connection with the faunic. James discovered the well-known and, so to speak, actual prototype of the bowl during a 1902 visit to Lamb House in Sussex: an authentic golden bowl given as a christening gift by King George I to a newborn child of the Lambs; as Leon Edel puts it, “King George’s bowl… became a symbol for the theme of the novel which [James] had begun early in 1903” *Henry James,* Vol. 4 209). Virtually every commentator on *The Golden Bowl* rehearses this story. But the Georgian bowl, while it no doubt impressed James the aesthete deeply, lacks key features of its supposed fictional counterpart. The real bowl was, by the account, of solid plate, while the novelistic object covers its crystal with mere gilt; the real bowl was intact, while the novelistic object hides beneath its surface an invisible and disfiguring rupture. The Georgian bowl, finally, assumes its context in the explicitly Christian ceremony of the christening, while Maggie’s bowl partakes of the breakdown of the Christian – more properly the Judaeo-Christian – moral structure that James illustrates by his tale. The real, and the telling, prototype of the bowl may be found in Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun (1860),*
in the chapter (XXVII) where Kenyon visits Donatello in the latter’s ancestral keep. Walking in the Tuscan hills, the two come across a statuary fountain probably of Roman antiquity, “a marble basin… all covered with moss and shaggy with water-weeds” over which presides, “with an urn in her arms… a marble nymph” (243):

> *In former days (it might be a remote antiquity,) this lady of the fountain had first received the infant tide into her urn, and poured it thence into the marble basin. But now, the sculptured urn had a great crack, from top to bottom; and the discontented nymph was compelled to see the basin fill itself through the channel which she could not control, although with water long ago consecrated to her. (243)*

The nymph represented by the statue, according to Hawthorne's pseudo-myth, fell in love with a mortal youth. When her lover once "flung himself down, and washed his hands and bathed his feverish brow in the cool, pure water" of her pool, "there was the sound of woe… The water shrank away from the youth's hands"; this came about because the lover "had tried to wash off a blood-stain" and, in his guilt, "had polluted the water" (246). The crack in the urn signifies the rupture engendered by the deceit perpetrated on that "fatal noontide" (245) so long ago.

In Book Second of The Golden Bowl, Adam, meditating on his daughter's character, thinks of her as "a figure… 'generalised' in its grace, something shyly mythological and nymph-like" (172). Maggie moreover resembles another nymph-like character in *The Marble Fawn,* Hilda, and in a peculiarly relevant way. Hilda, a prideful New England Puritan in Rome, learns a reluctant but important moral lesson from a Roman Catholic priest during a despairing visit to the Vatican; Hilda, the Protestant, stands to the Catholic priest as Maggie, the Catholic, stands to the Jewish shopkeeper. In a generalized way, *The Marble Fawn* and *The Golden Bowl* tell the same basic story: The intrusion of evil into a seemingly idyllic world and the necessity for characters to come into consciousness in response to a forced separation from the cherished naivety of "the deluded condition" (484). The anodyne of delusion cannot issue from its own delusory interior; it must come from without. Where non-reciprocal and deceitful relations constitute the norm, some external agent must post notice of their inadequacy. "Non-reciprocal relations may be perfectly ethical," Gans writes, "and consecrated as such in ritual, but they are not moral. This intuition is the fundamental source of the Jewish contribution" to modernity (*The End of Culture* 172). Says James of the shopkeeper, in Book Fifth: "The partner of [Maggie's] bargain had yearned to see her again… had wished ever so seriously to return to her a part of her money" (480); and he had gone on, when Maggie refused restitution, to hope that "she hadn't, at all events, already devoted the crystal cup to the beautiful purpose so kindly and so fortunately named to him" (480). The flawed cup would not be a meet gift from daughter to father, for that is precisely a "beautiful purpose" which should not be unintentionally subverted. Whatever James's attitude toward Judaism elsewhere (it is not, I think, as clearly disdainful as commentators make out), in *The Golden Bowl* it is positive.

IV

The bowl, which the shopkeeper describes on first producing it as "of a lost time" (121), serves as a metonymy for Fawns ("wide wooded Fawns" [136]), and for the faunic ethos that prevails there until Maggie forcibly imposes a more decisive moral control. Outwardly brilliant and alluring, inwardly the bowl suffers from the fracture of its crystalline matrix. Fawns as a place is, like the bowl as an aesthetic object, timeless, as witness the cyclic reconvention there at every season of the same old company, even, in the end, the competing ladies whom Charlotte had previously driven away. But Maggie's initiation into the moral view, punctuated by her scene with Fanny, culminating in the fragmentation of

the novel's eponymous *bibelot,* has inaugurated a temporal dimension and has apprised Maggie of just how crucial is "the *business* of cultivating continuity" (381 [emphasis added]). That term, "business," again associates the moral with the commercial, and reminds us of the centrally mimetic role of the shopkeeper *for Maggie.* "The silver mist that," James says, "protected" Maggie and her husband, and that "had begun to grow sensibly thin" (358), is of a substance with the airy radiance, the illusory "beauty of appearances" (491), which has hitherto permeated Fawns.[(9)] Things will now be altered and roles will be exchanged. The former "flagrancy" (273), "hilarity" (274), and "the air of mere iridescent horizons" (273) presided over by "an infant king" (267), now yield to a grimmer atmosphere and prospect: Fawns now constitutes for Maggie a "figural void" (518), a "darkness of prowling dangers," and a "beast-haunted land" (532). Maggie herself has become "the watcher" (532) over the dangerous premises and, as such, *still* labors under the burden of an exclusion from the sodality. Watching the evening's card-game, she confronts:

> the fact of her father's wife's lover facing his mistress; the fact of her father sitting, all unsounded and unblinking, between them; the fact of Charlotte keeping it up, keeping up everything across the table, with her husband beside her; the fact of Fanny Assingham, wonderful creature, placed opposite to the three and knowing more about each, probably, when one came to think, than either of them knew of either. Erect above all for her was the sharp-edged fact of the relation of the whole group, individually and collectively, to herself – herself so speciously eliminated for the hour, but presumably more present to the attention of each than the next card to be played. (486)

Cynically throwing to the winds the moral model offered by the shopkeeper is a gesture that occurs to Maggie in a series of "vertiginous moments" in which she contemplates "the fascination of the monstrous" and during which she knows that "she might sound out their doom in a single sentence" (487). The possibility presents itself as a "temptation" (487). (For the Prince, in Book First, marriage appeared as *monstrous;* now, for Maggie, revenge qualifies under that term.) Yet our protagonist also recognizes that each person present exists in "a relation with herself, which would spare the individual the danger" (487). In formulating it that way, Maggie, or rather James through Maggie, describes the essential link between the sacrificially excluded party and everyone else – unanimity minus one. Maggie fills the role of victim anomalously (she has been "speciously eliminated"), however, because she no longer really conforms to it; she now acts as a victim who has miraculously rejected her victimage, who, in refusing to submit, confounds the plot against her and so charges herself with a charisma quite equal in quantity to that wielded by Adam in the previous stages of the narrative while being, at the same time, of a different quality: focused rather than diffuse, moral rather than aesthetic, merciful rather than cynical. The sodality

faces “the whole complexity of their peril” (487), a phrase which the notion of “her father’s wife’s lover facing his mistress,” with its blurring of otherwise decisive categories, perfectly illustrates; and only Maggie can deliver them from it, or “thus they tacitly put it” (487). She might, she thinks, “charge herself” with the responsibility as did “the scapegoat of old, of whom she had once seen a terrible picture,” but she will not go “into the desert to sink under his burden and die” (487). Against the background of deceit, duplicity, and dissimulation characteristic of the milieu at Fawns (of the faunic itself); against the multiplication of *cases,* to recall Fanny’s term, Maggie envisions herself as called by all, on the grounds of their proven moral incompetency, “to simplify” (487).

The simplification has already begun in her confrontation with the Prince, once “a proud man,” now “reduced to abjection” (483); but Maggie must now address the other factor in the adulterous equation, namely Charlotte. In confronting Charlotte, moreover, Maggie must deal with what James, throughout the novel, has referred to as *romance,* a term which I gloss as the ideology of transgression, including especially adulterous transgression. The Prince, in Book First, attached the idea of transgression to Adam, whose opulence suggests “Alexander furnished with the spoils of Darius” (54). The suggestion involves an error which the Prince must know, for Adam has *produced* his wealth, not *plundered* it from someone else; and yet Adam did at one time dream, when he awoke to his mission of connoisseurship, of “rifl[ing] the Golden Isles” (140). The nostalgia for a lost Arcadian order, outwardly idyllic while secretly predatory, informs the romanticism of *The Golden Bowl*’s characters, as does the willingness of Fanny and others to dissimulate immoral behavior when they see it; and these things, in their turn, partake in the argument made by the paramours for themselves and by others for them that they are beautifully “beyond” (261) those who surround them, that Fanny, for example, who has facilitated their assignations, now “doesn’t matter” (257). They are, from their own perspective, *jenseits von Gut und Böse.* Fanny, for her part, excuses the visible commerce of Charlotte and Amerigo on esthetic grounds: “They’re wonderful” (298), “they’re beautiful” (299), and “we’re in presence” (309), she says of them romantically. At Portland Place, the other guests see the Prince and Charlotte as “truly superior beings” (393). Having elected themselves into the extra-moral company, they begin to dispense with others, just as the Prince earlier dispensed with the shopkeeper by *not seeing* him. Such secondary betrayals, the Prince himself is made to divulge by James, belong among “the services that by all *romantic* tradition were *consecrated* to affection quite as much as to hate” (261 [emphasis added]). In this sentence, James conflates the notions of romance and the sacred, hence of sacrifice. When he tells us that Maggie’s decision to visit the Bloomsbury shop on Charlotte’s unintentional instigation has about it the air of “romantic opportunity” (432), he alloys to his notion of romance a mimetic element. Romance, as one puts these pieces together, amounts to an enabling myth for those who, out of resentment against it, wish to violate the moral norm of reciprocity; romance is the ideology of trespass and transgression, which endows vice with the attributes of virtue and gilds the mugwort, so to speak, to make it out for a lily. Those who adopt romance, in this sense, as their creed can only do so by a deliberate act of unknowing,

by what René Girard long ago named *mensonge romantique.* Fanny does exactly that when she smashes the bowl: she attempts to unknow what she knows. But when upheld for a long time, romance impairs the judgment of the romantic and becomes a moral atavism. James says almost offhand of the Prince in Book First that he had read Poe as a boy and still takes delight in *Pym.* In his essay on Baudelaire, James lets this remark drop in passing: "An enthusiasm for Poe is the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection" (*French Poets and Novelists* 5). James's term, "primitive," allows us to recognize that the romantic and the faunic, as I have been calling it, are one and the same.

By indirectly letting the Prince know what she knows ("Find out for yourself!" [465]), Maggie has guaranteed his silence with respect to Charlotte and has thus isolated her from the knowledge of what is going on; Maggie has, in effect, reduced the complexity of the adulterous triangle back to the simplicity of the hymeneal dyad. But Maggie has meanwhile concluded that two more things must be achieved in order to preserve her marriage against a relapse into, as we might now say, romance. Charlotte must receive notice, as subtly yet as powerfully as Maggie can manage it, that she has been found out, and she and Adam must take themselves back to America. Despite the fact that, in the persons of the Prince and Charlotte seated at the card-table, Maggie sees "evil… where she had only dreamed of good," she cannot, out of feelings for the totality of her family, "give them up" (489); she cannot expel them from the family structure – as they had expelled her – by humiliating them before others. Maggie does not join the game. She hovers distantly, whereupon her detached gliding at the edge of things draws Charlotte, full of a false "dignity" (493), to her. Maggie indeed fears Charlotte at this moment, worrying that "her [i.e., Maggie's own] head was already on the block… whether or no the axe had fallen" (493). After a short period of mutual hesitation, however, Charlotte reveals her plight in the form of a question to Maggie: Has anything happened, Charlotte wishes to know, "for which I'm in any degree responsible?" (496). She then unnecessarily expatiates on the idea in a mendaciously self-exculpating little speech. Maggie carefully feigns ignorance. She embraces Charlotte at a moment when the card-players have risen and come into the room where the feminine transaction has just occurred. As far as they can tell, Maggie has, in a manner, played the role of scapegoat, accepting the "abasement" (498) of a non-invidious reconciliation with her mother-in-law in order to prevent – as one might say remembering the image of the Guterman-Seusses – the scattering of her tribe. This is not to say that, "if [Maggie's] mood in fact could have turned itself at all to private gaiety it might have failed to resist the diversion of seeing so clever a creature [as Charlotte] so beguiled" (518).

Three days after the reconciliation (false on Charlotte's part, witting and sincere on Maggie's), the Princess joins Adam outdoors at Fawns. They sit together observing the weather. In a great, unfurling sentence typical of the late style, James gives us the following: "They had meanwhile been tracing together, in the golden air that toward six o'clock of a July afternoon hung about the massed Kentish woods, several features of the social evolution of her old playmates, still beckoned on, it would seem, by unattainable ideals, still

falling back, beyond the sea, to their native seats, for renewals of the moral, financial, conversational – one scarce knew what to call it – outfit, and again and forever reappearing like a tribe of Wandering Jewesses" (502). The effect of this sentence is to place Maggie at a decisive remove from the cyclicism (another way to name the mimeticism) of Fawns. The phrase "Wandering Jewesses" might strike one as odd until one reflects that Ahasuerus, the original "Wandering Jew," is a man cut off from all traffic with his fellow men, doomed to roam the world nomad-fashion until the Judgment Day. The actual Jew of James's narrative, the shopkeeper, is not a wanderer, but a settled participant in the market; he is one of those people about whom, to take a page from James's *Italian Hours,* "you can complain… only if you never cross their thresholds" (38). (The reference is to the Jewish *antiquarii* of Venice.) Maggie has crossed a "threshold" in many ways; her "old playmates" remain locked within the charismatic order signified by the word "ideals."

The conversation that Maggie now pursues with Adam concerns the abandonment of "ideals" and the espousal, so to speak, of a realistic view of their condition. Maggie asks Adam whether she has been "fatuous" (502) and then, rephrasing the question, substitutes "sublime" (502) for the former term: "Have we been sublime in *our* happiness," she asks, "as if looking down from a height?" (502). The "as if" qualifies the sublimity which is fatuity as pure illusion, best abandoned; the notion of "a height" meanwhile carries back to Adam's sense of his having once stood, in the instant of his supposed self-awakening, on his own "'Peak in Darien.'" It develops that the primary illusion consisted of Adam's hoping to penetrate English gentryhood, to secure a "place" (503) rather as Charlotte had sought to secure an "existence." So Adam, too, has humbled himself before a model which transformed into a rebuffing rival, an inassimilable being, every time he approached it; Adam's sublime is the class-bound, ultimately and archaically monarchic society of the Mother Country which has, in effect, expelled him simply by not admitting him. Not only has his attempt at admission to gentryhood failed, but he has, by default, surrendered his "reputation" to his countrymen back in American City for them sparagmatically "to tear to pieces" (509). This, of course, was always a possibility – even an inevitability – for the one who concentrated so much golden charm into his personage. What is a king, an *imperator,* after all, but a victim whose execution has been deferred? Murder will out. The king must die. To the folks back home, Adam must appear no more than rich, eccentric, and obsessive; if his conoisseurship means anything objectively, it will nevertheless mean nothing, save as a kind of pretence, to the uncultured. Yet this difference, between the august and the vulgar, the high and the low, is part of the illusion now under dispersal. In counterpoint with this topic runs another: Maggie's nagging sense of *sacrifice* and *victimhood* in connection with her father. Maggie paints Adam as a "victim" because he has devoted his whole life to her; he answers that he has merely sustained "the feelings of a father" (509). Maggie nevertheless insists, as she says, that "I sacrifice you" (509); and a moment later, she discerns that Adam "was practically *offering* himself, pressing himself upon her, as a sacrifice" (510). What Adam *offers* is to remove himself and his wife from the scene: "We *should* ship"; "we *will ship*" (512). The figure reverses an earlier one, that of *burning one's*

ships, which invariably marks Adam's assertive and ambitious – his sublime – moments in the romantic sense.

If the retreat to America be a "sacrifice," then it is the opposite of the expulsory kind; it is of the ascetic and magnanimous kind of the sort the shopkeeper may be said to have made when he offered to compensate Maggie for shoddy goods not altogether honestly sold. Where the Prince and Charlotte expel their spouses unilaterally and to the detriment of the emissary parties, Adam voluntarily quits the scene for the benefit of another. Adam will now appear to Maggie, glimpsed from afar before he departs back to his native shore, under the thoroughly humanized figure of "the little meditative man in his straw hat" (522). Charlotte, in a second meeting with Maggie, out of the sight of the familiar entourage, will pretend, from the motive of "pride" (541), to have originated the idea of *shipping.* Maggie knows, however, that Charlotte now passes through life with "a long silken halter looped about her neck" (523), captured by Adam – and even more by the introjection of a renewed moral structure into the scene.[(10)] The "golden flame" of Charlotte's affair with the Prince has turned to "a mere handful of black ashes" (553).

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To nay-say "the importance of the moral quality of a work of art," James writes in a discussion of Flaubert, "strikes us as, in two words, very childish" (*French Poets and Novelists* 64). But the work of art – no matter how modern or how secular – no doubt also boasts an ineradicable sacred quality, whose importance it would be equally childish to deny. (In denying with such vehemence the sacred element in the aesthetic – in denying, for example, that there is any such thing as literature, or that one work is indeed greater than another – contemporary critics paradoxically affirm it.) *The Golden Bowl* illustrates, and indeed it makes a theme of, the necessary tension between these two qualities. I write of the polar repulsion between the "sacred" and the "moral" rather than between the "aesthetic" and the "moral" because the aesthetic, in the literature of the turn-of-the-century, tends to stand transparently – as it does in Huysmans, for example – for a no-longer-available transcendence. But in *A rébours,* the figurality is Huysmans' or, through him, his narrator's. In *The Golden Bowl,* the figurality is rarely directly the narrator's; almost always it stems from one or another character. The Greek temples, Palladian Churches, pagodas, golden baths, coruscations of solar and purple light; the red blaze of galleons aflame, the invocations of Io, Ariadne, Tristan and Isolde: all these metaphors of sublimity, culled from the stock-in-trade of French poets and *romanciers,* signify the pandemic vanity and vertiginous confusion of Fawns. When the adulterers stay on at Matcham, they offer as their cover-story that they intend to travel the next day to visit the nearby cathedral; their mendacity reduces the religious edifice to one more image in the narcissistic passion that they refer to as "sacred." Of the novel's moral catalyst, the shopkeeper, I note here that he bears only the simple figures of verbal slight and casts them off as soon as he comes into contact with Maggie, for whom he is "kind." The simple adjective by itself suffices.

Following up her fateful meeting with that gentleman, Maggie, as we have seen, comes to grasp her milieu as a "figural void," a place divested of the dissimulating motifs of unchecked desire.

Harold Bloom, in *The Western Canon,* argues that what distinguishes great literature from mediocre and literature generally from all other species of language is its "uncanniness" (3), a phenomenon linked, in Bloom's thinking, with the sublime and necessarily at odds with the moral. When we read a masterwork, Bloom argues, we go "from strangeness to strangeness" (3). James, in *The Golden Bowl,* makes us cognizant of the fact (which Bloom never admits) that morality is just as strange as beauty – perhaps even a great deal stranger. (Keeping faith with a married partner is much more contrary to the human being than taking advantage promiscuously of sexual happenstance.) Let us remember, in closing, the Prince's sense of the shop-windows in the novel's opening scene. These transparencies, like the rules of faith, obligation, and reciprocity, *stand between* the libidinous ego and the immediate exercise of that ego's will. Restraint *is* strange to the natural, the predatory, being. For the Prince, at that moment, the window can only serve as a reminder of the metal cages that clatter down at the turn of a crank to keep out thieves at night. But does that association not imply that, deep down, he knows his own thievish – antinomian – character? The contemporary School of Resentment, as Bloom names it, certainly rebels against beauty, just as he says it does; but it rebels equally against morality (despite its own language being righteously moral), which is why no contemporary critic of James finds anything supportive to say about Maggie, la Principessa, *née* Verver. Defend marriage against adultery? Acknowledge the relevance of Hebrew morality to the postmodern present moment? Admit that a dead white male got something right? But I cede the last word to James himself, quoting again from his judgment of Flaubert: "To count out the moral element in one's appreciation of an artistic total is exactly the same as it would be (if the total were a poem) to eliminate all the words in three syllables… [a moral element] is in reality simply a part of the essential richness of inspiration" (64, 61).

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Notes

1. The importance of this vocabulary to Jamesian narrative received its first concerted notice in Elsa Nettels' "The Scapegoats and Martyrs of Henry James" (*Colby Library Quarterly,* Vol. 10, 1974, 413-427). While grasping the centrality of victims in James's novels and stories, Nettels nevertheless lacks a sufficient anthropological sense of victimage; she sees the vocabulary in question as a sign of the vestigial Christianity of James's conception. (The surfeit of sacrificial terms signifies much more than that, as the present essay will show.) More recently and more rigorously, Ralf Norrman has shown, in his chapter on "Henry James's *Daisy Miller* and the Scapegoat Mechanism" in *Wholeness Restored* (1998), how punctilious is James's eye for the anthropological details of emissary ritual: "I would argue that it is possible to recognize in the setting of James's story a situation of stress [of the type associated by René Girard with scapegoating]. The stress factor here is the insecurity of exile, the insecurity of ambiguous identity, the intolerable discomfort of being perpetually on display. Yourself being constantly under scrutiny why should you not seize the initiative and gain acceptance by instigating a scapegoating, with a recently arrived compatriot as a victim, thereby proving your allegience to the real – or imagined – values of your new place of residence?" (160).(back)

2. Critics have generally preferred this way of viewing the novel. Donald L. Mull sums up the many versions of the "it's not their fault" interpretation this way: "Adam and Maggie Verver regard Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant as 'things,'" and exhibit "a tendency to regard human beings as objects for aggrandizement and extensions of themselves rather than as autonomous individuals" (*Sublime Economy* 119). Mull, although himself favoring a somewhat reductively economic view of the Verver story, nevertheless finds such readings shallow. Despite this, Mull himself invokes "the commerciality" of "the Ververs' transactions" chastisingly and suggests that this mercantile outlook tends to "convert human beings into objects" (146).(back)

3. Maxwell Geismar, the founder of the anti-Jacobite school of Jamesian criticism and the anticipator of the postmodern indictment of James, sees in this moment merely "another theatrical coup" (324). James's "abstruse heroine," Geismar writes, "who lacks all the common hysteria and jealousy and sympathy of a betrayed woman, is chiefly concerned with the difference [her discovery of things] would make for herself: 'My possession at last, I mean, of real knowledge'" (Geismar 324).(back)

4. Charlotte assumes the role of "giver," then, purely as a pose; she is not genuinely committed to the purpose of making Maggie happy but, rather, to the goal merely of

appearing generous before the Prince. If, as Walter Burkert has argued, “reciprocity is a form of morality” (*The Creation of the Sacred* 138), then Charlotte reveals herself in the hypocrisy of her pose as delinquent from a base-line of honesty and decency. But it goes beyond this because Charlotte poses before the Prince in order to take him from Maggie, to whom he is promised, not only by his expression of commitment but by legal contract; she seeks, in fine, to disrupt an exchange. A further consideration from Burkert is relevant here: “Gift exchange appears to be one of the *universalia* of human civilizations. ‘To give’ is one of the basic verbs in most languages; the dative is established in Indoeuropean noun declension. Empirical studies have been devoted to the principle of gifts and its manifestation in so-called primitive societies. The principle of reciprocity is recognized in every case. There are of course forms of violent acquisition of goods which may be equally frequent or even more common, not to say honorable, in the same societies: robbery, piracy, cattle-stealing, wars waged for plunder, and trickery of all sorts. But the phenomena are distinct” (130-31).(back)

5. Mull, who puts money at the “symbolic center” of *The Golden Bowl,* has this to say about Adam’s courting of Charlotte among the Gutermann-Seusses: “The complexity of thr Brighton scene, in its familiar mingling of the commercial and the affectional, consummately reveals the fusions, tensions, and paradoxes which inform the novel to this point – the selflessness of Adam, which is a selfishness for his daughter; and the bargain for Charlotte, which is an opportunity for exquisite self-manifestation and exquisite duplicity” (*Sublime Economy* 146). Mull grants Adam a notable measure of good will in this passage; he does not comment, however, on the startling contrast between the Verver milieu on the one hand and that of the Jewish household on the other. James is in fact showing us poverty (chez Verver) and wealth (chez Gutermann-Seuss) as determined by ethical rather than purely economic criteria.(back)

6. Burkert notes that *giving,* in which marriage partakes (one party giving himself freely to the other in exchange for the promise of stability), “is neither disinterestedness nor pure self-interest. It rather creates some precarious balance between the two” (*Creation of the Sacred* 131). In declaring “*war*” on the marriage between Maggie and Amerigo, Amerigo and Charlotte attack the social fabric at its profoundest basis; they resemble robbers, pirates, cattle-stealers, plunderers and tricksters rather than parties to a mutual and reciprocal intention. Even after “the invention of the free market… brings changes to the system,” writes Burkert, *exchange* “remains the basic process… of bilateral profit” (131).(back)

7. Burkert points out that “the principle of reciprocity pervades the sphere of punitive justice. Punishment is accepted as just if it subsumed under the concept of reciprocal giving, of retribution. Retribution can be seen as a simple inversion of action: the culprit is to suffer what he has done” (*The Creation of the Sacred* 133). In a primitive sense, overt revenge would be permissible for Maggie; but she is precisely no longer a primitive. She

now operates according to a higher, a more merciful, an altogether more Biblical principle.(back)

8. Mull produces this meritorious comment on the scene of the Prince and Charlotte's adulterous liaison: "It is, amazingly, one of the most erotic scenes in English, and it is the ironic consummation of the form of [the adulterers'] good faith. With it all form breaks down, gives way; all values melt and mingle. *It will be Maggie's burden to perceive the chaos behind the apparent form and to shape out of that tangle of values, if not 'the bowl as it was to have been,' at least a tenable equilibrium*" (*Sublime Economy* 151 [emphasis added]).(back)

9. A remarkably similar metaphor turns up in *The Wings of the Dove,* Book Fourth, when Milly Theale and Susan Stringham (a.k.a. Susie Shepherd) meet London society at Lancaster Gate, the home of Maud Lowder. That grand lady seems to the two Americans to exude 'a fine floating gold-dust, something that threw over the prospect a harmonising blur" (162). As in the case of the hazes of light and fogs of gold that *blur the prospect* at Fawns, Mrs. Lowder's aura – a pure projection on the part of Milly and Susan – exercises a dissimulating effect.(back)

10. Ralf Norrman, author of the previously mentioned *Wholeness Restored* as well as a treatise on *The Golden Bowl* entitled *The Insecure World of Henry James's Fiction* (St. Martin's press, 1982), writes these provocative comments on Charlotte's apparent subjugation in a recent item of personal correspondence: "There is the question," Norrman says, "of whether Maggie's interpretation of Charlotte's and Adam's state of mind at the end of the novel is meant to be taken at face value or not. Maggie makes them out to be extremely unhappy, both of them, and she sees their return to America as a banishment, assuming that both Adam and Charlotte are going back entirely against their will… But if, as I believe, Maggie's moral conversion genuinely wins her husband back to her, healing her marriage, why should we not then assume that a symmetrical development takes place with Charlotte-Adam? When Maggie decides to act she puts the Prince on the spot. He abandons Charlotte (the illicit relationship) and tries to recover Maggie… Maggie now defeats her rival Charlotte (who had not been a rival as long as Maggie did not know about the affair). Charlotte is now left to herself, and so, before long, will Adam be – this is the intrinsic logic of the case. The dissolution of the illicit Charlotte-Amerigo relationship brings with it the dissolution of the paternal-filial relationship Adam-Maggie. Charlotte then, in turn, defeats her rival, i.e., Maggie, and recovers *her* husband… Since everything in this novel has been strictly diagrammatic, why should not this be so as well?" Why indeed should it not be so? I did not think of this sequence of implications, but it strikes me as brilliant, and I hasten to "buy" it at once!(back)