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『使者たち』－アメリカのイノセンスの超越

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The Ambassadors: The Transcendence of American Innocence as Melodramatic Vision

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I

The word “innocence” has been a catchword among critics discussing the American characters that appear in Henry James’s works. R.W.B. Lewis finds “the peculiar American rhythm of the Adamic experience” reflected in James’s fiction, and thinks that the following movement of the Adamic innocent applies to the Jamesian characters: “the birth of innocent, the foray into the unknown world, the collision with that world, ‘the fortunate fall,’ the wisdom and maturity which suffering produced.”¹ Lewis’s scheme would seem to apply perfectly to *The Ambassadors*. Oscar Cargil thinks that Strether’s innocence is “Adamic” and, echoing Lewis, concisely states the theme of the novel as follows: “The story of *The Ambassadors* is the story of the growth of man, from innocence to maturity.”² “Innocence” as a “unique American problem”³ has thus attracted due critical attention.

The word “innocence,” however, is an all-inclusive, convenient label which tends to be elusive unless defined in the concrete context of a work. American innocence, moreover, assumes various forms in Jamesian contexts, and James brings all the subtlety of his craft to define “innocence” in a particular context. What follows is an attempt to show two things: one, that in defining American innocence in *The Ambassadors* James uses conventions

of melodrama and presents American innocence as melodramatic vision, and, two, that Strether's European "ordeal" is depicted as the process of transcending the limited, innocent vision with which he comes from America.

II

Before going on to discuss American innocence as a function of the dramatic attitude, however, we need to consider briefly the term "melodrama." The English melodrama with which James was familiar developed as a distinctly separate form in the 1790's, gained popularity in the nineteenth century, and died out after the First World War. The dramatic situation of the characteristic popular melodrama of the nineteenth century, according to Eric Bentley, is: "goodness beset by badness, a hero beset by a villain, heroes and heroines beset by a wicked world."⁴ The characters in melodrama are stereotypes and life in the world of melodrama is "uncomplicated, easy to understand"; and one of the great appeals of this world is clarity: character, conduct, ethics, and situations are quite simple.⁵ The world of melodrama, therefore, is "a world of absolutes where virtue and vice co-exist in pure whiteness and pure blackness."⁶ The melodramatic vision does not recognize "the ethical grey" in which, as in human reality, virtue and vice co-exist inexorably.

James uses the melodramatic conventions briefly indicated above to define American innocence reflected in the characters from Woollett. Early in the novel, in his conversation with Maria Gostrey, Strether reveals the melodramatic vision with which he came to Europe. Maria tells him:

"I seem with this freedom, you see, to have guessed Mr. Chad. He's a young man on whose head high hopes are placed at Woollett; a young man a wicked woman has got hold of and whom his family over there have sent you out to rescue. You've accepted the mission

of separating him from the wicked woman. Are you quite sure she's very bad for him?"

Something in his manner showed it as quite pulling him up. "Of course we are. Wouldn't *you* be?"⁷

Maria, of course, is parodying Strether's vocabulary. Chad and the yet-unknown Madame de Vionnet are conceived at this stage as types: the hopeful beset by a wicked woman. Strether does not correct Maria's statement, and his vision is perfectly "clear": Chad is an American innocent in need of an American rescue party, and the "wicked" European woman, according to Strether, is "base,—out of the streets" (Vol. I ; 55). Underlying this conception of the relationship between Chad and "his woman" is a simple conviction that Europe is "evil" and America "untarnishable goodness." Unambiguous morality and uncomplicated vision of human affairs are characteristics of melodrama. Strether's judgment thus far is both spontaneous and intuitive, and he is unaware that his vision is rather paranoid--another characteristic, according to Bentley, of melodramatic vision.⁸ His fear of Europe is expressed, for example, in the following passage: "It was by little Bilham's amazing serenity that he had at first been affected, but he had inevitably, in his circumspection, felt it as the trail of the serpent, the corruption, as he might conveniently have said, of Europe. . ." (Vol. I; 125).

Strether's is the kind of vision that distorts and simplifies the realities of life. His certitude is unsubstantiated; it is not supported by the actualities of life. The melodramatic vision is closed to rich possibilities of human relationships. Strether's certitude and Maria's healthy skepticism, accordingly, form a striking contrast, and James is underscoring at this stage Strether's vision of the world (both Europe and America). Maria, who insists on comprehending the world experientially, is rather amused by Strether's vision: "One can only judge on the facts. Yours are quite new to me . . ." (Vol.

I ; 54). Maria is underlining Strether's immature fantasy here.

The nature of Strether's vision is again exposed by Maria, who in the novel clarifies and marks every step that Strether takes:

"What I was thinking of," she explained, "is the possible particular effect on him of his *milieu*.

"Oh his *milieu*--!" Strether really felt that he could imagine it better now than three hours before.

"Do you mean it can only have been so lowering?"

"Why that's my very starting-point."

"Yes, but you start so far back. . . ."

.....
". . . But there are . . . two quite distinct things that--given the wonderful place he's in--may have happened to him. One is that he may have got brutalized. The other is that he may have got refined."

Strether stared--this *was* a novelty. "Refined?"

"Oh," she said quietly, "there *are* refinements"

(Vol. I ; 69).

Maria's teasing comment ("but you start so far back") and her ironically tutorial annotation ("the wonderful place he's in") underline both Strether's (and Woollett's) extreme simplification of Chad's situation and his penchant for seeing Europe as a dark world. His vision, naturally, excludes the possibility of Chad's "refinement," and Maria's suggestion startles him as if it were a stream of brilliant sunlight that suddenly shoots into a dark, sordid world. Strether's vision, in short, is melodramatic. The following remark by Eric Bentley basically explains the nature of Strether's vision : [in the melodramatic vision] the reality principle is flouted right and left, one is oneself the supreme reality, [and] one's innocence is axiomatic. . . ."⁹

Strether's modification of the melodramatic vision first takes place in Gloriani's garden. Strether realizes that in Paris "the imagination reacted before one could stop it" (Vol. I ; 96), and his reaction at Gloriani's garden points up his responsiveness to external forces which not only threaten but

also trigger individual expansion:

This assault of images became for a moment, in the address of the distinguished sculptor, almost formidable. . . . Strether in contact with that element as he had never yet so intimately been, had the consciousness of opening to it, for the happy instant, all the windows of his mind, of letting this rather grey interior drink in for once the sun of a clime not marked in his old geography. He was to remember again repeatedly the medal-like Italian face, in which time told only as tone and consecration; and he was to recall in especial, as the penetrating radiance, as the communication of the illustrious spirit itself, the manner in which, while they stood briefly, in welcome and response, face to face, he was held by the sculptor's eyes. He was n't soon to forget them, was to think of them, all unconscious, unintending, preoccupied though they were, as the source of the deepest intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed. . . . The deepest human expertness in Gloriani's charming smile--oh the terrible life behind it--was flashed upon him as a test of his stuff (Vol. I ; 196-197).

In *The Ambassadors*, something incomprehensible, overwhelming, or mysterious tends to be depicted in terms of "depth." Chad's manner, for example, is "the fathomless medium" to Strether (Vol. I ; 172); and half-jokingly, half-seriously, Strether admits to feeling "abysses" in Maria Gostrey (Vol. I ; 37). Although Strether's conversation with Chad and Maria help to expand Strether's consciousness, it is undoubtedly the "external forces" at Gloriani's garden that trigger a drastic expansion in Strether. Gloriani represents a depth, and his presence and the whole European aesthetic tradition converging in him overwhelm Strether. An expansion is achieved when the self is exposed to a depth, threatening and overwhelming as it may be, from which the self returns with an epistemological gain.¹⁰

Madame de Vionnet, even more powerfully than Gloriani, attracts and overwhelms Strether, and meeting her gives Strether the momentous opportunity to discard his melodramatic vision. Although Madame de

Vionnet remains at this stage a mystery to be probed into, her immediate psychological effect on Strether is immense: “ he gave it out that. . . he had been overturned into the upper air, the sublimer element with which he had an affinity and in which he might be trusted a while to float” (Vol. I ; 216).¹¹ The upper air is Strether’s expression of the psychological expansion that he intuited at the moment of meeting Madame de Vionnet.

Thus the melodramatic vision is gradually modified. The overwhelming qualities of the Europeans are largely instrumental in expanding Strether’s consciousness, and Strether’s strong imagination flexibly benefits from the initial contacts with them. After meeting Madame de Vionnet Strether admits to the kind of vision that he imposed on Europe:

“I didn’t come out to see *this* sort.”

She [Maria] had a wonderful look at him now. “Are you disappointed she is n’t worse?”

He for a moment entertained the question, then found for it the frankest of answers. “Yes. If she were worse she’d be better for our purpose. It would be simpler.”

.....
“Ah you know,” he promptly replied, “I did n’t come out. . .for the pleasant.”

“Precisely. Therefore I say again what I said at first. You must take things as they come” (Vol. I ; 233).

This passage clearly shows the substance of Strether’s innocence: the melodramatic vision of life, which may be summed up as the ethical and aesthetic simplification of the potentially rich, complicated phenomena of life. Strether actually feels that “his odious ascetic suspicion of any form of beauty” is preventing him from reaching “the truth” (Vol. I ; 193-94). The task of reaching “the truth,” however, requires transcendence of the melodramatic vision, and James, thus, early in the novel presents American innocence as melodramatic vision.

Strether is a complex man. He shows acuteness of perception and rare flexibility, which James carefully contrasts with those of Sarah and Waymarsh. Strether, however, as a spectator of and a performer in “a melodrama,” reveals a negative kind of innocence. His melodramatic vision is incapable of comprehending Europe—a world of wider experience and ambiguous values and ethics. James writes in his notebook that his story will deal with “the revolution” that takes place in his elderly protagonist.¹² “The revolution,” needless to say, is the loss of innocence, that is, Strether’s rejection of the melodramatic vision of life and his subsequent attainment of a balanced vision which enables him to see through the complexity of Europe. More significantly, Strether’s new, balanced vision eventually makes him see his own hidden identity and the reality of Woollett (and, by extension, of America). It is indeed an immense revolution to take place in an elderly character.

Strether’s growth is depicted in dramatic terms. Paris, as F.O. Matthiessen puts it, is presented in this novel as “the center of an ethical drama,”¹³ and Strether becomes the hero of this difficult drama. Earlier in the novel, Paris has manifested itself as the epistemological unknown or the ethically perilous, and Strether’s anxiety arises from his unconscious reluctance to accept its charm and to grapple with its depth:

His greatest uneasiness seemed to peep at him out of the imminent impression that almost any acceptance of Paris might give one’s authority away. It hung before him this morning, the vast bright Babylon, like some huge iridescent object, a jewel brilliant and hard, in which parts were not to be discriminated nor differences comfortably marked. It twinkled and trembled and melted together, and what seemed all surface one moment seemed all depth the next (Vol. I; 89).

Yet his subsequent development enables Strether to accept himself as the

hero of "an ethical drama." Miss Barrace, in place of the absent Maria, clarifies Strether's situation:

"We know you as the hero of the drama, and we're gathered to see what you'll do."

Strether looked at her a moment with a light perhaps slightly obscured.

"I think that must be why the hero has taken refuge in this corner. He's scared at his heroism--he shrinks from his part."

"Ah but we nevertheless believe he'll play it" (Vol. II; 179).

The conversation shows Strether's perception of the difficulty of his new role. As I have indicated earlier, his "role" is rather "simple" when he arrives in Europe as a spectator and performer of "a melodrama." He is the redeemer of an American innocent, and he naively believes that he can "act" without moral complications. His new role, however, is a novelty to him; characters, ethics, conduct, and situations involved in the new drama are no longer simple. They must be handled with extreme care. And Strether, as a spectator and hero of "the ethical drama," knows the weight of his responsibility. He has already told Chad to "stay on" with him (Vol. II; 34), and he has also become deeply conscious of his true "mission": "I came out to find myself in presence of new facts--facts that have kept striking me as less and less met by our old reasons" (Vol. II; 43). Strether is honest enough to perform the difficult role, which eventually leads to his maturity. His vision has significantly widened, and James carefully contrasts the flexibility of one former American innocent with the rigidity of the second ambassador --Sarah Pocock.

III

As I have indicated earlier, all the characters from Woollett come to Europe with a melodramatic vision of Europe. Sarah exhibits the

melodramatic vision deprived of flexibility, which in Strether proves to be the redeeming force. The nature of Sarah's vision is fully exposed when it is contrasted with Strether's new, modified vision. Sarah meets Madame de Vionnet; and Chad introduces her to Paris. Sarah, in short, is free to experience Paris as widely and deeply as she wants. The clash of the old and the modified visions, then, takes place after Sarah is allowed to form her opinions on the phenomena about her. Sarah attacks Strether's "conduct," and Strether protests:

"Why when a woman's at once so charming and so beneficent—" "You can sacrifice mothers and sisters to her without a blush, and can make them cross the ocean on purpose to feel the more, and take from you the straighter, *how* you do it?"

. . . "I don't think there's anything I've done in any such calculated way as you describe. Everything has come as a sort of indistinguishable part of everything else. Your coming here belonged closely to my having come before you, and having come was a result of our general state of mind. Our general state of mind had proceeded, on its side, from our queer ignorance, our queer misconceptions and confusions--from which, since then, an inexorable tide of light seems to have floated us into our perhaps still queerer knowledge" (Vol. II; 200-201).

Strether is exposing the danger inherent in American innocence, and the passage shows that now he is capable of probing into "the grey area" in which goodness and vice co-exist inexorably. Strether has at least discarded his old vision, and his tutorial statement ironically reminds the reader of Maria Gostrey's early voice. The contrast between the two visions is complete when Sarah's crude comment on Madame de Vionnet is thrown out to Strether: "Do you consider her even an apology for a decent woman" (Vol. II; 202). For Strether Madame de Vionnet represents "something new and rather good" which has been traditionally absent from Woollet (and, by extension, from America). Sarah's inability to appreciate the European

woman's charm, of course, is born of her rigid adherence to the melodramatic vision, and James presents here American innocence at its extreme. And at its extreme, the melodramatic vision is nothing but a sterile morality divorced from human sympathy and aesthetic sensitivity. Chad's transformation judged solely by a moral standard is nothing but "hideous" (Vol. II ; 205). Sarah's obstinacy, her double standard of conduct, and her self-righteousness finally make the reader aware that she is a Malvolio who, as a moral monster, threatens to spoil Strether's rich European "holidays." Her triumph, if any, is an illusion. Incapable of attaining maturity, her vision of Europe remains melodramatic and, as Robert N. Hudspeth puts it, the reader understands that "the evil of Woollett resides within its innocence."¹⁴

Waymarsh and Jim Pocok also exhibit, to a lesser extent, the melodramatic vision. From the outset Waymarsh's vision is closed to Europe. Waymarsh on meeting Strether confesses that he cannot feel anywhere "in tune" (Vol. I ;29). According to Strether, Waymarsh hates "Anything. Europe" (Vol. I ;42). Unlike Strether, who basks in European culture, Waymarsh complacently thinks that he has had enough of it. Note the tone of the authorial comment on Waymarsh: "Whymarsh hadn't come with them; he had seen plays enough, he signified, before Strether joined him--an affirmation that had its full force when his friend ascertained by questions that he had seen two and a circus" (Vol. I ; 49). Moreover, the meaning of Europe for Waymarsh is typified in the following image: "Europe was best described, to his mind, as an elaborate engine for dissociating the confined American from that indispensable knowledge. . ." (Vol. I ; 78). Waymarsh's penchant for suspecting European civilization renders him ludicrous. As Miss Barrace reports to Strether, Waymarsh is totally out of place: "I show him Paris, show him everything, and he never turns a hair. He's like the Indian chief one reads about, who, when he comes up to Washington to see the Great Father, stands wrapt in his blanket and gives no

sign" (Vol. I ; 206). Well-meaning though his secret communication with Mrs. Newsome is, his action is based on his phobia of Europe which appears to him to be corrupting Strether irredeemably. Strether tells Maria: "he must have written to Woollett that I'm in peril of perdition" (Vol. II ;39). The melodramatic vision in Waymarsh never allows him to see the complexity of life in Europe.

For Jim Pocock, Europe represents "pleasure" divorced from moral responsibility, of which he intends to take full advantage. His interest in "The Varieties," "a play of innuendo," and his aggressive elbow (Vol. II ;288) all point to the image of Europe that his melodramatic vision has most crudely distorted.

American innocence as melodramatic vision is also shared by another minor yet important character--Mamie Pocock. Hers is a redeeming quality, the positive aspect of American innocence. Mamie's growth in Europe parallels, to a lesser degree, that of Strether. Although they both come to Europe with the melodramatic vision of Chad's affair, they quickly see through the transformation of Chad and its implications. The outcome of Mamie's "mission" is summarized by Little Bilham:

"But she came over with ideas. Those she got at home. They had been her motive and support in joining her brother and his wife. She was to *save* our friend."

"Ah like me, poor thing?" Strether also got to his feet.

"Exactly--she had a bad moment. It was very soon distinct to her to pull her up, to let her down, that, alas, he was, he *is*, saved. There's nothing left for her to do."

"Not even to love him?"

"She would have loved him better as she originally believed him" (Vol. II ; 171).

Mamie's "mission" is frustrated. She is, however, the only one among the second group of Americans that clearly sees Chad's situation. She does

not, like Sarah, obstinately adhere to the melodramatic vision, and her flexibility renders her a more sympathetic character. Critics tend to criticize "Woollett" severely;¹⁵ yet "the true inwardness" (Vol. II; 153) of Woollett's manner is embodied in Mamie.

Mamie makes Strether homesick, and the following fantasy of Strether's is worthy of analysis:

She made him, as under the breath of some western whiff, homesick and freshly restless; he could really for the time have fancied himself stranded with her on a far shore, during an ominous calm, in a quaint community of shipwreck. Their little interview was like a picnic on a coral strand; they passed each other, with melancholy smiles and looks sufficiently allusive, such cupfuls of water as they had saved (Vol. II; 152).

The passage reminds the reader of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and Ronald Wallace points out "a similar archetypal structure and meaning"¹⁶ in the two works. Accordingly, Strether is the Prospero of *The Ambassadors*, a "shipwrecked" character. And, beside Strether, little Bilham and Mamie are also "shipwrecked" characters.¹⁷ Bilham, according to Strether, hadn't saved from shipwreck a scrap of anything but "his beautiful intelligence" (Vol. I; 26). One of the themes of the Shakespearean play is that of reality and illusion, and the three Jamesian characters mentioned above are, unlike Sarah, Waymarsh, and Jim Pocock, free from illusion. Strether, like Prospero, tries to marry the young Americans, and the image of Miranda and Ferdinando may be slightly superimposed on them. The shipwrecked characters have all experienced disillusionment, and yet we may hasten to say that they collectively embody positive aspects of America--they are capable of freeing themselves from the sterile rigidity of the melodramatic vision.

IV

Strether's shedding of the melodramatic vision and the attainment of a mature, balanced vision is gradual--it is indeed an "ordeal" for him (Vol. II ; 274) in Europe. Chad's attack on the melodramatic vision, "our theory" (Vol. I ; 158), is a severe blow to Strether: "Do you think one's kept only by woman. . .I must say then you show a low mind" (Vol. I ;159). Strether accepts that "It was exactly as if they imputed to him a vulgarity. . ." (Vol. I ; 160). A reaction then sets in, one that is, however, excessive. Upon discarding the melodramatic conception of Chad's situation in Paris, Strether begins to idealize Chad's relationship with Marie de Vionnet. Having met her, Strether tells little Bilham:

"She's a tremendously clever brilliant capable woman, and with an extraordinary charm on top of it all--the charm we surely all of us this evening know what to think of. It is n't every clever brilliant capable woman that has it. In fact it's rare with any woman. So there you are," Strether proceeded as if not for little Bilham's benefit alone. "I understand what a relation with such a woman--what such a high fine friendship--may be. It can't be vulgar or coarse, anyway--and that's the point" (Vol. I ; 280).

The aestheticism of Europe and his own unconscious dread of the European abyss are swinging his vision to another extreme--idealization. Strether here is attempting to persuade himself of the correctness of his impression. His dread of the possible sexual relationship between Chad and Marie de Vonnet is hastily repressed ("such a high fine friendship"), and his awkward assertion conversely points up his internal conflict. Strether is conscious of his old vision of the relationship between Chad and Marie de Vionnet, and he is excessively expiating his former melodramatic vision.

Strether's "idealizing" vision is born both of his dread of knowing and of his Puritan conscience. The mode of Strether's perception is vividly revealed

in his accidental encounter with the French woman at Notre Dame:

The moments had already. . . drawn their deepest tinge from the special interest with the person whose attitude before the glimmering altar had so impressed him. This attitude fitted admirably into the stand he had privately taken about her connection with Chad on the last occasion of his seeing them together. It helped him to stick fast at the point he had then reached; it was there he had resolved that he *would* stick, and at no moment since had it seemed so easy to do so. Unassailably innocent was a relation that could make one of the parties to it so carry herself. If it was n't innocent, why did she haunt the churches?--into which, given the woman he could believe he made out, she would never have come to flaunt an insolence of guilt. She haunted them for continued help, for strength, for peace--sublime support which, if one were able to look at it so, she found from day to day (Vol. II; 9-10).

This mode of perception may be called "a willing suspension of skepticism," and the false syllogism conceals Strether's unconscious dread of knowing. By suspending his skepticism, by checking his analytical impulse, Strether can let European aestheticism flood himself. Seen thus through Strether's idealizing eyes, European aestheticism, supremely represented by Madame de Vionnet, no longer threatens and, by diving into this ambiguous depth, Strether, self-deluded as he is, can immerse himself for the first time in his life in the sensuous pleasure of Europe:

. . . for an hour, in the matter of letting himself go, of diving deep, Strether was to feel that he had touched the bottom. He was to feel many things on this occasion, and one of the first of them was that he had travelled far since that evening in London--when his dinner with Maria Gostrey between the pink-shaded candles, had struck him as requiring so many explanations (Vol. II; 13).

Madame de Vionnet, however, has yet to reveal a more profound depth than Strether can imagine at this stage. Although she is an idealized figure

whose presence reminds Strether of the whole history of European civilization, she nevertheless remains a source of anxiety with her ambiguous depth: "The manner of this speech gave Strether such a sense of depths below it and behind it as he hadn't yet had--ministered in a way that almost frightened him to his dim divinations of reasons. . . ." (Vol. II; 106). The romantic or idealizing vision which Strether attains at this stage cannot probe sharply into the complex core of the reality. The "depths," the overwhelming vagueness and the epistemological unknown, frighten Strether constantly. Yet, despite his self-delusion, he is forced to probe into the depths--he must descend into the abyss--and, in so doing, he can attain a third, more balanced vision which will sublimate the first two visions.

The recognition and the negation of the melodramatic vision take place earlier than the final vision. Strether is now capable of looking back objectively at his old vision and its originator:

"And yet Mrs. Newsome--it's a thing to remember--has imagined, did, that is, imagine, and apparently still does, horrors about what I should have found. I was booked, by her vision--extraordinarily intense, after all--to find them; and that (I did n't,) that I could n't, that, as she evidently felt, I would n't--this evidently did n't at all, as they say, 'suit' her book. It was more than she could bear. That was her disappointment."

"You mean you were to have found Chad himself horrible?"

"I was to have found the woman."

"Horrible?"

"Found her as she imagined her."

"She imagined stupidly. . . ."

"Stupidly? Oh !" said Strether.

But she insisted. "She imagined meanly."

He had it, however, better. "It could n't but ignorantly."

"Well, intensity with ignorance--what do you want worse?"
(Vol. II ; 241-242)

The behavior of the American characters from Woollett has been influenced

by the unseen Mrs. Newsome, a “large iceberg in a cool blue northern sea” (Vol. II; 240). Strether’s initial ludicrous insistence on the melodramatic conception of Chad’s affair directly echoes Mrs. Newsome’s vision. In the center of her vision is paranoia: the innocent corrupted by the horrible. Leon Edel finds Mrs. Newsome “an implacable, immobile force, intransigent and exigent.”¹⁸ When “ignorance” and “horrors” are fused with the rigidities of New England, the melodramatic vision, or, in Strether’s words, “the theory of the horrible” (Vol. II; 242), is born. Strether’s flexibility enables him to shed his old vision, and he eventually returns to America as an initiate who has discovered both America and Europe.

Strether’s recognition of Mrs. Newsome as the source of the melodramatic vision is followed by the revelation of the nature of Chad’s relationship with Madame de Vionnet. The “impressionist” world--the “idealized” world of Lambinet that Strether basks in--suddenly falters with a note of violence when Strether’s ripe “impressionistic” vision catches a boat in the framework:

It was a sharp fantastic crisis that had popped up as if in a dream, and it had only to last the few seconds to make him feel it as quite horrible. They were thus, on either side, *trying* the other side, and all for some reason that broke the stillness like some unprovoked harsh note. . . . Chad dropped afresh to his paddles and the boat headed round, amazement and pleasantry filling the air meanwhile, and relief, as Strether continued to fancy, superseding mere violence. Our friend went down to the water under this odd impression as of violence averted--the violence of their having “cut” him, out there in the eye of nature, on the assumption that he would n’t know it (Vol. II; 257-258).

The boat and the two figures in it indeed “had been wanted in the picture” (Vol. II; 256): they complete the idealizing, impressionistic vision, and the completion at the same moment enables Strether to transcend emotionally

the blurred, idealizing vision. In the subsequent moment of meditation, staring like Isabel Archer into the darkness before him, Strether learns that “he had really been trying all along to suppose nothing” (Vol. II; 260); he perceives “a *lie* in the charming affair” (Vol. II; 262). A crisis of moral identity ensues: “This was a deeper depth than any, and with no foresight, scarcely with a care, as to what he should bring up. He almost wondered if he didn’t *look* demoralized and disreputable . . .” (Vol. II; 273). This is an abyss that opens at the most unsuspected moment. Seeing indeed is losing, and yet only from struggle and punishment in the abyss comes an expansion of the self.

Then the final, most profound penetration into the mystery of Europe *and* human complexity is achieved. Strether’s admiration of Madame de Vionnet has verged on apotheosis: “He could have compared her to a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud, or to a sea-nymph waist-high in the summer surges” (Vol. I; 270). She reminds him of the prototype of feminine complexity--“Cleopatra in the play, indeed various and manifold” (Vol. I; 271). And Madame de Vionnet’s room gives Strether an impression of “altar”--the altar of European aestheticism--with “a pair of clusters of candles” (Vol. II; 274). Strether, however, has in the same room “the sharpest perception” (Vol. II; 284) that even Madame de Vionnet has to suffer in the mire of the human passion: “it was like a chill in the air to him, it was almost appalling, that a creature so fine could be, by mysterious forces, a creature so exploited” (Vol. II; 284). It is only Strether’s strong imagination, his rare capacity to grapple with the void, that redeems Madame de Vionnet at their last meeting. Madame de Vionnet, the converging point of all European history and yet the ultimate emptiness, now resides only in Strether’s capable imagination.

The following depiction of Madame de Vionnet reflects the kind of vision that Strether has finally achieved. Strether enters her “slippery”

antechamber, and then descends into the depth of her salon:

She was older for him: tonight, visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet; and yet he could see her there as vulgarly troubled, in very truth, as a maidservant crying for young man (Vol. II; 286).

Strether gains simultaneously a deep insight and healthy disenchantment and, momentarily, Madame de Vionnet dangerously reminds the reader of the ugly ghost that Strether's melodramatic vision has conceived. Repulsion, however, is balanced by human sympathy, and the passage vividly reflects Strether's strong imagination and flexibility capable of returning from the emptiness with a balanced vision. Yes, Woollett in its conception of Chad's relationship with Madame de Vionnet was "right." Mrs. Newsome's paranoid vision, however, has never penetrated thus far; it has only short-circuited human complexity. Madame de Vionnet now arrested in Strether's balanced vision is much more "various and manifold" than the kind of woman whom Mrs. Newsome in New England has conceived, and Strether's last vision of the French woman deepens the gulf between Mrs. Newsome and her first ambassador. As F. W. Dupee puts it, Strether sees "What Woollett. . .refuses to see: the amount of sheer sacrifice, the blood and tears, entailed in the perpetuation of any culture worth the name."¹⁹

Seeing, however, is losing. Although Strether's descent into the European abyss enables him to attain a mature, balanced vision, with this new vision his confidence in America is gone: "'I see it all,' he absently echoed, while his eyes might have been fixing some peculiarly large iceberg in a cool blue northern sea. 'It's magnificent!' he then rather oddly exclaimed" (Vol. II; 240). Mrs. Newsome, despite Strether's insistence that he sees through her, emerges at the end of the novel as another source of anxiety.

She is still half-hidden and, despite the narrative ambiguity, the iceberg appears as if it were the crystalization of his deep anxiety. Not only does the iceberg suggest the cold rigidity of Mrs. Newsome, but it also implies Strether's fear of America, which has become an uncertain future.

Strether has seen through part of Mrs. Newsome--that is, America--and he is finally allowed to see through Madame de Vionnet, who represents Europe, with a mature vision capable of holding full human complexity without distortion and simplification. The final, balanced vision is full of anxiety, and yet Strether, we might say, has transcended the peculiarly American innocence--the melodramatic vision.

Notes

¹ R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 153.

² Oscar Cargil, *The Novels of Henry James* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 313.

³ Roberr N. Hudspeth, "The Definition of Innocence: James's *The Ambassadors*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 6 (1964-65), 354. Hudspeth's paper is in many ways provocative, and I agree with him in many points. Hudspeth, for example, offers the following observation: "Americans, in their innocence, judge from 'types,' from preconceived forms, not from individual instances" (355); yet Hudspeth does not analyze American innocence in *The Ambassadors* in terms of melodrama.

⁴ Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (New York: Atheneum, 1964), p. 200.

⁵ Michael R. Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), p. 14.

⁶ Booth, p. 14.

⁷ Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, The New York Edition, (1909), Vol. I., 54. All quotations from *The Ambassadors* are taken from this edition; subsequent references appear in parentheses in my text.

⁸ Bentley, p. 202.

⁹ Bentley, p. 217.

¹⁰ This passage reminds the reader of the "transparent eyeball" passage in Emerson's *Nature*. Doubtlessly, to be responsive to an overwhelming

presence, to let the threatening entity penetrate oneself and thereby achieve an expansion, is an Emersonian stance. Gloriani as an agent for an individual expansion, however, definitely marks the distance between Emerson and James. A “penetrating radiance” comes from Gloriani, and it is a human light that makes Strether ecstatic. The Emersonian “Universal Being” which penetrates the self is replaced by the overwhelming qualities of Gloriani, a god-like figure of European aestheticism.

¹¹ Again the reader notices the “Emersonian” pattern here. Instead of the Emersonian fusion of “the Universal Being” and the self, however, we witness the ecstatic Jamesian self “overtured into the upper air.” The Jamesian sublime is achieved through a human impact, through the “unfamiliar phenomenon of the *femme du monde*” (Vol. I; 213). However, the Jamesian self, like the Emersonian self that gains an instantaneous epistemological expansion at the moment of the sublime, is capable of transcending its former epistemological limits.

¹² F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds. *The Notebook of Henry James* (1947; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 277.

¹³ F.O. Matthiessen, *Henry James : The Major Phase* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1944), p. 38.

¹⁴ Hudspeth, p. 359

¹⁵ For J.N. Sharma, for example, Woollett represents “the narrow Puritanism and aesthetic wilderness.” *The International Fiction of Henry James* (Delhi: the Macmillan Company of India, 1979), p. 20.

¹⁶ Ronald Wallace, *Henry James and the Comic Form* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), p. 132.

¹⁷ Wallace, pp. 133-34.

¹⁸ Leon Edel, *Henry James, The Master: 1901-1906* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1972), p. 76.

¹⁹ F.W. Dupee, *Henry James* (1951; rpt. New York: William Morrow, 1974), p. 215.

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—論文要約—

『使者たち』—アメリカのイノセンスの超越

山 里 勝 己

イノセンス (innocence) という言葉は、ヘンリー・ジェイムズ作品の登場人物たちの分析にはひどく有効な言葉である。R.W.B. Lewis の批評に代表されるように、“American innocence” はジェイムズ批評ではひとつの鍵になる用語であろう。

しかし、イノセンスという言葉はあまりにも包括的で便利すぎる用語ではないのか。ジェイムズの諸作品の具体的な文脈のなかでイノセンスという言葉はさまざまな衣裳をまとって存在しているのではないのか。

本稿では、『使者たち』におけるイノセンスは、ジェイムズの文脈のなかでは具体的に “melodramatic vision” として表現され機能すると解釈し、この作

品は主人公ストレザー (Strether) が “melodramatic vision” を超越し成熟した
ヴィジョンを獲得していく過程を描いたものとして論じた。