Lambert Strether and the Boaters – Tonio Kröger and the Dancers: Confrontation and Self-Acceptance

Critical attention focussed more sharply on the famous recognition scene in the thirty-first chapter of The Ambassadors and its effect upon the growing awareness of the protagonist, when Robert E. Garis published his controversial article, ‘The Two Lambert Strethers: A New Reading of The Ambassadors.’ ¹ Conventionally, the novel had been viewed as ‘Strether’s learning “to toddle alone,”’ on his voyage from innocence to experience.’² The recognition scene, ‘This discovery of Strether’s is the final step in the Puritan’s education in “life.”’ As, by the end of the novel he is able to “see” Mrs. Newsome, so through this encounter in the country he is able to see passion.’ Thus, ‘At last he has achieved a felt vision of Chad’s wonderful change’ and so ‘has become the richest and finest consciousness in the novel.’³ By his re-encounter with Mme de Vionnet, Strether attains ‘an awareness which causes him to reject nobly the worlds of Paris and America.’⁴

Opposed to this traditional view, Garis’s new reading is essentially that Strether’s discovery in the country, far from being the crowning episode in his education, shows on the contrary that there has in fact been no education at all. James has, in effect, changed his mind about Strether, and demonstrates conclusively that Strether’s final discovery is his only discovery.⁵

By various methods critics subsequently have re-examined Strether’s ‘final discovery.’ U.C. Knoepflmacher has analyzed James’s use of imagery from Antony and Cleopatra and has found Strether helpless without his

² William M. Gibson, ‘Metaphor in the Plot of The Ambassadors,’ The New England Quarterly xxiv (1951) 297
³ Garis 306. Although this and the following citations are by authors opposed to the traditional reading of the novel, they nevertheless summarize it concisely.
⁵ Garis 307
delusions. Garis's thesis, based primarily on the imagery of the final chapters, has been undermined by D.J. Dooley, who nevertheless has found the traditionally accepted hourglass pattern of the plot lacking in the perfection E.M. Forster attributed to it. David Lodge's stylistic analysis of the two paragraphs which form the confrontation scene itself serves to vindicate the traditional reading.

I intend to follow a different tack. Rather than examining the imagery, pattern, or style of the novel to determine the validity of Garis's view of the confrontation scene, I propose to examine James's use of the plot device itself in relation to the developing self-awareness of the protagonist. As found in The Ambassadors, this plot device consists of the sudden confrontation of the protagonist with the pairing of two friends, each of whom he had come to know individually. To establish whether this scene is 'the crowning episode' in Strether's education or 'his only discovery,' I shall compare this scene with a similar scene in the eighth chapter of Thomas Mann's Novelle, Tonio Kröger, where it is quite overtly used to provoke self-analysis and eventually self-acceptance in the protagonist. Mann, as will be shown, has used all the various aspects of such an obvious coincidence in the plot to highlight his characterization of the protagonist and to lead him to self-examination. During the course of the comparison, we shall see that James also employs this plot device for this very purpose. Thus, contrary to Garis's view, the recognition scene indeed does form one of the major finishing touches in Strether's education. And the outcome of this education by confrontation, for both Tonio and Strether, is self-acceptance.

Tonio Kröger at age fourteen idealized Hans Hansen despite his glimpses of Hans's real interest in horse pictures rather than Don Carlos. At age sixteen he idealized Ingeborg Holm despite his glimpses of her admiration for the ridiculous Herr Knaak. After having become a successful writer, after having suffered from the Erkenntnisekel inherent in the artist's life, he goes off to Denmark to get away from everything for a while. As he sits in the hotel lobby, Hans and Inge, now married to each other, walk in. Tonio watches them later on as they dance and he muses about what has changed or remained the same in his attitudes toward them and toward himself. Tonio eventually accepts the dualities which had tormented him — the polarities between his aesthetic yearnings and his bourgeois origins, his perceptions as immediately felt and as artistically distanced — when he comes to recognize the creative link between them.

6 Knoepflmacher, op. cit.
Like Tonio Kröger, Lambert Strether’s first perceptions of others are exaggerated and incomplete. Although he had arrived in Europe sufficiently biased against Chad and the ‘other woman’ by Mrs Newsome, when he meets Chad in the theatre box, he is immediately struck by the ‘wonderful change’ in him from boor to *homme du monde*. Several days later Chad introduces him to the ‘other woman,’ Mme de Vionnet, who first impresses Strether as the ‘usual Woollett’ but who gradually comes to embody for him all of the culture, art, and “Social Beauty” of Paris that has transformed Chad. Having become so imbued with this ideal of ‘Social Beauty,’ Strether easily accepts Little Bilham’s lie of the ‘virtuous attachment’ of Chad and Mme de Vionnet. Significantly, he has never seen Chad with Mme de Vionnet except at large gatherings. Strether’s mental pairing of Chad with Mme de Vionnet’s daughter, Jeanne, is broken at the announcement of Jeanne’s engagement. His unwillingness to see the connection, so obvious to Woollett, alienates him from Woollett and her new emissaries. Strether leaves Paris for the country to get away from everything for a while. As he stands at an inn by a river, Chad and Mme de Vionnet, ‘coatless’ and alone together in a boat, drift by. After much embarrassment and hesitation, they pretend that this ‘chance in a million’ is ‘wonderful.’ After this encounter and during later meetings with Mme de Vionnet and with Chad, Strether muses about what has changed or remained the same in his attitudes toward them and toward himself. Strether eventually rejects the limitations both of Woollett and of Paris, but in so doing discovers and accepts his own identity.

These are the confrontation scenes and their backgrounds told with reference to their most basic elements. The structure of the scene itself, where the protagonist stands face to face with the unforeseen pairing, may be represented diagrammatically thus:

![Diagram](image)

9 Viz. Christof Wegelin, ‘The Lesson of Social Beauty,’ an extract from the author’s *The Image of Europe in Henry James* (1958), reprinted in the Norton edition of *The Ambassadors* 442–58. ‘Strether’s new vision consists in the awareness that there is a virtue which cannot be measured by the bundles of moral “notions with which he started from home”’ (p.457). He finds this social beauty embodied by Mme de Vionnet, in the way Chad enters a theatre box, in the gathering in Gloriani’s garden.
The fact that Tonio does not make actual contact with the couple as Strether does with his or that Chad and Mme de Vionnet are not married as Hans and Inge are is a difference which may be important in determining the protagonist’s character or the author’s intention, but it is not of prime significance in determining the author’s use of the device as a catalyst for self-awareness and self-acceptance in the protagonist.\textsuperscript{10} The main point is that this plot device, in its very structure, is made up of at least three separate components, (1) the pair itself, (2) the protagonist as outside the pair, (3) the protagonist in relation to the pair.\textsuperscript{11} Both Mann and James have given us sensitive protagonists who are perceptive enough and honest enough to recognize as real the aspect of reality embodied by the confrontation when such a confrontation is forced upon them. Both Tonio Kröger and Lambert Strether suffer from their modes of perception, although in different ways. Tonio is characterized by his keen perception which he feels has excluded him from participation in society; what he has forgotten before his confrontation is his real and deep love for the bourgeoisie despite his recognition of their failings. Strether is characterized by his sensitivity but also, unlike Tonio, by a half-conscious willingness to allow what he perceives to remain vague in order to preserve a sort of continuity of experience which the real facts, when discovered, do not support; his confrontation makes clear to him this tragic propensity of his. Thus, while Tonio had assumed dualities in experience (eg, art versus life), his confrontation points out what can unite them. While Strether attempts to preserve unity in experience (eg, that Chad’s liaison is not vulgar), his confrontation points out what splits this desired unity apart. In either case both arrive at greater self-knowledge and self-acceptance. Both come to realize that neither one of the dualities that they are left with is alone sufficient to characterize or determine their life. Tonio becomes aware of the insufficiencies of both his former idealized love and of his concept of artistic \textit{Erkenntnis} as misery. Strether, when finally aware of a real split in values between Woollett and Paris, sees that either world for him would be too confining. Self-knowledge and self-acceptance for Tonio is a recognition of the true source of his own creativity. For Strether it is recognition of his own independent sense of morality.

What is most fascinating is that James, like Mann, has used each of the three main components inherent in this plot device of confrontation to elicit the same, apparently ineluctable conclusions from his perceptive protagonist.

\textsuperscript{10} Tonio does make contact with Hans and Inge in his imagination, and Strether learns nothing more from his actual contact than he had imagined upon seeing them. The liaison is sanctioned by the Parisians of the novel who think nothing unusual about it.

\textsuperscript{11} There are two additional uses of the device which I shall not discuss: other parallel pairings in the works and its comic use. The former is more appropriate to an analysis of rhythm in the work (in Forster’s sense) and the latter of the tone.
in order to lead him to greater self-awareness. In the first case the unforeseen pairing of separately-known friends emphasizes what the couple has in common that the protagonist had previously glossed over. In the second case the pairing isolates the protagonist. He must recognize himself as an outsider by the simple fact that he is not part of the relationship and because something within him has prevented his coming into relation. In the third case the protagonist, by comparing himself now with himself when he knew the couple individually, learned how he has changed. By comparing himself with the couple itself, he becomes aware of a difference he must accept in order to accept himself. The resulting awareness is characterized by a sense of irony in that the aware self is able to see how incomplete its own former state of awareness actually was. As manifest in each of these three components, the confrontation with the pairing represents a confrontation of the protagonist with himself. In each case I shall emphasize what increase in awareness the protagonist gains in considering his situation from the different perspective offered by each component and how this increase is related to his development toward self-acceptance.

I WHAT THE COUPLE HAS IN COMMON

In *Tonio Kröger*, Mann quite overtly uses this aspect of his plot device to allow Tonio to perceive the essential similarities in the couple. Before the confrontation scene a certain linking of Hans and Inge had already occurred in Tonio’s mind. He tells Lisaweta that the only ones who understand him are ‘immer nur Leidende und Sehnsüchtige, und Arme und niemals jemand von den anderen, den Blauäugigen ... die den Geist nicht nötig haben!’ Tonio, then, has already seen them as members of a type, but the reality their marriage represents, the reality he must face, is their manifestly bourgeois nature. When Tonio finally does encounter them together, the characteristics that these separately-known friends share is quite clearly presented, from likeness in physiognomy to likeness in attitude:

> Tonio Kröger sah sie an, die beiden, um die er vor Zeiten Liebe gelitten hatte, – Hans und Ingeborg. Sie waren es nicht so sehr vermöge einzelner Merkmale und der Ähnlichkeit der Kleidung, als kraft der Gleichheit der Rasse und des Typus, dieser lichten, stahlblauäugigen und blondhaarigen Art, die eine Vorstellung von Reinheit, Ungetrübtheit, Heiterkeit und einer zugleich stolzen und schlichten, unberührbaren Sprödigkeit hervorrief. (TK 331)

One could scarcely choose a more obvious example of how such a pairing is

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12 Thomas Mann, *Gesammelte Werke* VIII (Frankfurt: Fischer 1960) 303. All subsequent references to *Tonio Kröger* will be to this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.
used to reveal two people as alike. Because they are side by side and can be compared, Tonio can recognize what his childish love had glossed over. He sees them now as living in 'seliger Gewöhnlichkeit.' This ironic expression suits his admiring but newly distanced attitude toward them. Before, he had idealized Hans and Inge in spite of his glimpses of their actually insipid interests and tastes. Yet, this encounter has not only emphasized for him their basic middle-class banality, but also his continued love for them. This love is hardly the absolute, categorically expressed 'love of life' that Tonio had declared to Lisaweta (TK 302) and which J.R. McWilliams has rightly criticized as unconvincing.\textsuperscript{13} This is, rather, a love for two people that is fully conscious of what they represent. McWilliams can very well point out the nostalgia and self-pity inherent in the phrase, 'Damals lebte sein Herz' (TK 281), which characterizes Tonio's childhood;\textsuperscript{14} but one must not overlook the fact that immediately following his encounter, 'sein Herz lebt' (TK 336). Having not yet realized the source of his own creativity as uniting the duality he feels between aesthetic detachment and participation in society, Tonio can admire the pair not in spite of their \textit{Bürgerlichkeit} but because of the simplicity and unity it represents.\textsuperscript{15} He sees Hans as 'regelrecht, ordnungsgemäss und in Einverständnis mit Gott und der Welt,' a man, who, unlike himself, lives 'frei vom Fluch der Erkenntnis und der schöpferischen Qual' (TK 332). Like Kierkegaard's bourgeois-looking 'Knights of Faith,' who are able 'to express the sublime in the pedestrian,'\textsuperscript{16} Hans and Inge, married, manifest the harmony with life he seeks. 'Des Lebens süsser, trivialer Dreitakt' (TK 336) is the beat to which they dance. Thus, Mann has used this unanticipated conjunction of Hans and Inge to make Tonio aware of the couple's fundamental banality that his idealizations of each apart had ignored, of the exemplary simplicity and unity their \textit{Bürgerlichkeit} represents, and of his actual, continued love for them, now conscious of what they are.

\textsuperscript{13} J.R. McWilliams, 'Conflict and Compromise—Tonio Kröger's Paradox,' \textit{Revue des Langues Vivantes} xxxii (1966) 378

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. 385

\textsuperscript{15} Erich Heller points out the need for understanding the early Mann's concept of \textit{Bürgerlichkeit} in just this way—as simplicity and morality as opposed to complexity and aestheticism. Erich Heller, \textit{Thomas Mann: Der ironische Deutsche} (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1959) 69

\textsuperscript{16} Søren Kierkegaard, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, trans. and ed. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1954) 52. Particularly interesting is Kierkegaard's distinction between the knight of faith and the knight of infinity, who sees a dichotomy of the finite and infinite, a distinction made in terms of dancing. The vacillation of the knights of infinity shows that they are not of this world; the agility of the knights of faith shows their harmony with both worlds. Heller (pp 158–64, 277–80) discusses Kierkegaard's influence on Mann.
As Tonio’s eyes are opened wider to reality by the unforeseen pairing of two friends, so are Lambert Strether’s eyes opened finally to what Chad and Mme de Vionnet had shared all along—an adulterous relationship—when he sees them at last alone together. Arriving in Europe with his pre-packed ideas from Woollett, Strether proceeds to succumb to the seemingly broadening, aestheticizing influence of Paris and especially to ‘the fact that Chad had been made over’; he feels the narrowness of Woollett’s moral judgements and the ‘need to remodel somehow his plans’ (A 104). If Chad has been made over, he thinks, she who has made him over must also be refined and good. Consequently, when Little Bilham lies that the couple’s is a ‘virtuous attachment’ (A 124), Strether falls for it. As Little Bilham had prefaced this remark to him, ‘You’re not a person to whom it’s easy to tell things you don’t want to know.’ Bilham tells Strether what Strether wants to think. Unlike Tonio, Strether at this point would prefer, despite his perceptiveness, to have reality remain a bit foggy. Yet much like Tonio, who had vacillated from his early idealizations to his belief that his Erkenntnis somehow alienates him from society, so Strether has thus vacillated from one false view to another. The river scene shows him the truth he must know and accept, whether he wants to or not.

Just like Mann’s couple, nowhere previous to this scene have the two lovers been shown alone together. They have been shown to Strether and the reader only at large parties and usually separated. Thus, although they had tentatively been mentally paired in various relationships before this scene, never had the fact of their liaison been forced upon Strether’s mind so inescapably as by their juxtaposition in isolation. Although in the Lambinet landscape Strether has wandered into such a configuration ‘had been wanted, more or less, all day’ (A 307), he still suffers from it quite as much an unmitigated ‘shock of recognition.’

As in Tonio Kröger, the protagonist recognizes the reality he has sublimated by noting the similarities in the couple by virtue of their isolated juxtaposition. The physical facts that they are alone in the same boat and that they have left their heavier clothes ‘at the place, best known to themselves’ (A 312) are obvious enough. What, however, attracts Strether’s attention to them and so to the sinfulness of their relationship is not so much these facts, but, as David Lodge points out, their great embarrassment on seeing him. Chad makes the boat ‘drift wide’ in a vain attempt to escape Strether’s view; Mme de Vionnet’s parasol shifts ‘as if to hide her face’ (A 308). Lodge shows

17 Henry James, The Ambassadors, ed. S.P. Rosenbaum (New York: Norton 1964) 95–6. All subsequent references to The Ambassadors will be to this edition and will be given in parentheses in the text.
18 Lodge 200–1
by close verbal analysis how the drifting wide of the boat brings Strether to realize the truth as it disturbs his previously harmonious vision.

Strether became aware, with this, of what was taking place – that her recognition had been even stranger for the pair in the boat, that her immediate impulse had been to control it, and that she was quickly and intensely debating with Chad the risk of betrayal. (A 308)

Upon their eventually mutual open recognition, they all must pretend that this coincidence has been a most ‘wonderful’ accident. Mme de Vionnet’s voluble defences and Chad’s passive permission of them link the two as culpable in Strether’s mind.

It was the quantity of make-believe involved, and so vividly exemplified, that most disagreed with his spiritual stomach. He moved, however, from the consideration of that quantity – to say nothing of the consciousness of that organ – back to the other feature of the show, the deep, deep truth of the intimacy revealed. (A 313)

Thus, just like Mann, James uses this aspect of the plot device, the pairing itself, to force the protagonist to confront the ‘deep, deep truth’ he had until then ignored but which he must integrate into his conception of the pair and of himself in order to accept himself. Tonio must acknowledge his continued love for Hans and Inge even in face of his present awareness of their philistinism and recognize that this somehow supercedes his concept of the artist’s Erkenntnisekel. Strether must realize that his individual sense of morality differs from the ideal of Social Beauty he thought he had embraced, since it is upheld by people capable of the basest relationships. Although Tonio can admire vulgarity while Strether abhors it, both Mann and James have used the pairing itself to the same end.

II THE PROTAGONIST AS OUTSIDE THE COUPLE

In Tonio Kröger, Mann stresses symbolically Tonio’s exclusion from the relationship of Hans and Inge. Tonio stands in the dark, stealthily peering in through a glass door at the people dancing in the light inside (TK 329–30). Although he would like to go in to say something to them he realizes that they will probably not understand him; ‘Denn ihre Sprache war nicht seine Sprache’ (TK 333). In this way, Tonio’s physical position reflects his mental position as an outsider and observer of life.

Just as Tonio feels as an artist separated from others due to his aesthetic detachment, so Strether, as an ambassador from an alien culture and an older generation, feels separate because of his function. Albert E. Stone notes that ‘Learning the pleasures and the cost of the imaginative, transnational life ...
throws Strether—necessarily into the role of an observer who lives chiefly by "seeing" into experience from the outside." 19 As he learns some of the facts of the matter and gradually becomes initiated into Parisian life, he comes falsely, as U.C. Knoepflmacher has indicated, to think himself put into relation with Chad and Mme de Vionnet. 20 During Mme de Vionnet’s interview with Sarah Peacock, Strether feels responsible for ‘helping to keep the adventurous skiff afloat’ for the Frenchwoman. ‘It rocked beneath him, but he settled himself in his place. He took up an oar, and since he was to have the credit of pulling, he pulled’ (A 220). He feels later ‘such deep identities’ between himself and Chad ‘as he might play with the idea of working free from’ (A 289). The confrontation scene does the job of working him free from such identities and of supplanting him in Mme de Vionnet’s boat.

Whereas Tonio Kröger is shown as an outsider by his inability to make contact with the pair, Strether is shown as an outsider by the pair’s hesitation to make contact with him.

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 wouldn’t know it. He awaited them with a face from which he was conscious of not being able quite to banish this idea that they would have gone on, not seeing and not knowing... had he himself taken a line to match. (A 308–9)

Although Strether does make contact with the couple, he nevertheless feels an outsider because, as he realizes that he could now have easily been deceived, he sees that he must have been deceived by them for a long time. Whereas Tonio Kröger could imagine that he and the couple would be so different that they would seem to speak different languages, Strether is shown his exclusion literally in this way when Mme de Vionnet, who had always previously spoken English with him, suddenly at the confrontation speaks only in French, ‘taking all at once little brilliant jumps that he could but lamely match’ (A 310). Strether feels the result as ‘veiling her identity, shifting her back to a mere volatile class or race’ (A 310), much as Hans’s and Inge’s blond hair and blue eyes separate them from the dark-haired Tonio as representatives of a whole unapproachable race.

Thus, both authors have used this aspect of the confrontation scene to cause the protagonist to recognize himself as an outsider by the simple fact that he is not part of the relationship of the pair or what it represents. Tonio stands behind a glass door; Strether stands on the shore. Yet, for the

20 Knoepflmacher 110
protagonist to develop self-acceptance, he must also be made aware of what it
is within him that has prevented his coming into relation. Both Tonio and
Strether, as sensitive perceivers, have intimations of what makes them
different. The confrontation scene serves to confirm what the protagonist
suspects and leads him to accept his nature when it is finally made obvious.

Tonio Kröger knows that it is his art, the Erkenntnisjekel, his detached
observation of others and himself, that separates him from others. Speaking
of artists he tells Lisaweta,

Sie fangen an, sich gezeichnet, sich in einem rätselhaften Gegensatz zu den anderen,
den Gewöhnlichen, den Ordentlichen zu fühlen, der Abgrund von Ironie, Unglaube,
Opposition, Erkenntnis, Gefühl, der Sie von den Menschen trennt, klappt tiefer und
tiefer, Sie sind einsam, und fortan gibt es keine Verständigung mehr. (TK 297)

The confrontation scene provides an actual case of these generalizations.
Before, he had sought to live in the same world with Hans and Inge. This
encounter makes him aware of the chasm between them and of his inability,
as yet, to span it. He would like to make some sort of joke with the pair in
order ‘eine kleine Gemeinschaft mit den beiden hergestellt zu haben’ (TK
333). He thinks of what he would say, but lacks the courage to say it; he
realizes that now they speak different languages. This passage follows a
pattern (to be explored further in the next section) where Tonio at first feels
the impulse he would have felt as a child – here, to speak with them; the
impulse is stopped by his own self-consciousness; then he becomes aware of
what within him has stopped it. Tonio, in fact, asks himself outright, ‘Was
aber war gewesen während all der Zeit, in der das geworden, was er nun
war?’ Just as straightforwardly he answers himself, ‘Erstarrung; Öde; Eis;
und Geist! Und Kunst!’ (TK 336). The rhythm of the sentence and the two
exclamation points indicate clearly that he knows he has changed and knows
what has changed and isolated him. Yet, while Tonio’s failure to communi-
cate shows us quite plainly the gap between him and bourgeois society, his
strong initial impulse to communicate shows us his continued love for it.
This love, when he later becomes fully conscious of it, forms the very source
of his creativity and thus spans the gap between his artistic life and society.

Lambert Strether also recognizes, periodically, that he is not in true
relation with anyone before his encounter with reality makes this painfully
obvious. His preoccupation with matters other than the ‘thing of the mo-
ment’ has put him out of relation in the past. He sees that he had neglected
his son because he had thought only of his wife’s death (A 61). He sees the
lesson of Paris as the imperative to ‘Live!’ although he feels too old for what
he sees. He tells Little Bilham how his mode of perception has made him an
outsider to life:
And it’s as if the train had fairly waited at the station for me without my having had the gumption to know it was there. Now I hear its faint, receding whistle miles and miles down the line. (A 132)

Miss Barrace says that ‘in the light of Paris one sees what things resemble’ (A 126), but Strether comes to see that the fault lies not only in the light of Paris but in his own perceptions and his moulding of them. Assaulted with images he tells Maria, ‘I can’t separate – it’s all one; and that’s perhaps why, as I say, I don’t understand’ (A 294). He also cannot ‘separate’ owing to his over-dependence on others for interpretations of ethics. His initiation into Parisian society alienates him from Mrs Newsome, the Pococks, and Waymarsh while his preoccupation with the moral standards of Woollett prevents his becoming friends with Mme de Vionnet. At times Strether considers that his impressions could actually all be false:

Was he, on the question of Chad’s improvement, fantastic and away from the truth? Did he live in a false world, a world that had grown simply to suit him, and was his present slight irritation ... but the alarm of the vain thing menaced by the touch of the real? (A 212)

Later he feels as if his ‘hands were embued with the blood of monstrous alien altars – of another faith altogether’ (A 258). Whereas before, Strether can retreat from these self-doubts, James uses the river scene to force Strether to feel ‘the touch of the real’ from which he cannot retreat.

If Tonio Kröger’s alienation is caused by his artistic detachment due to too keen a perception, Strether, on the other hand, after the revelation of the river scene, sees his alienation as caused by his half-conscious willingness to allow his perceptions of experience to remain vague and indiscriminating. Yet, although Tonio and Strether differ in the degrees of their desired perspicacity, the point is that James, like Mann, again employs this aspect of the plot device to lead his protagonist to a greater awareness of himself. What Strether must realize is not only how he has indiscriminatingly received ideas from others but also how his own notions have influenced his perceptions, just as Tonio must realize what is the basis of his own creativity. When the truth of the couple’s relationship is at last revealed to Strether,

he almost blushed, in the dark, for the way he had dressed the possibility in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll. He had made them – and by no fault of their own – momentarily pull ... the possibility, out of the vagueness; and must he not therefore take it as they had had simply ... to give it to him? The very question, it may be added, made him feel lonely and cold. With whom could he talk of such things? (A 313)
He sees that because he had subliminally moulded the couple to represent his new ideal of Social Beauty, he had also half-consciously chosen to leave the possible vulgarity of their relationship unclear. He sees that he must accept the reality symbolized by this pairing; he must take it as they give it to him. And he sees that he has, in reality, no relationship so close with anyone that he could discuss the matter. He thinks of Maria, but 'he was already a little afraid of her.' Strether's half-willed purblindness has the same effect as Tonio's unwilled perspicacity: it has cut him off from everyone, and he has no choice but to face this truth. 'He recognized at last that he had really been trying, all along, to suppose nothing' (A 313). Yet, at the same time that this passage reflects his awareness of isolation and his acceptance of his failure, it also reflects the glimmerings of his awareness of his own imaginative influence on reality, of his own identity.

James, again like Mann, has symbolically excluded the protagonist from the pair in the key scene of his work in order to lead him to an awareness of his ultimate aloneness. Tonio's initial attempt to react to Hans and Inge with his childish, idealizing love is cut short by his realization of the stronger, indissoluble bond between the two of marriage and Bürgerlichkeit. Strether's illusion of having become part of the Parisian world is cut short when he is forced to realize that the element of immorality inherent in it and symbolized by Chad's liaison repels him. Once the protagonist's illusions about his relations with others are removed, he is left to ponder what is essential to himself without these illusions.

III COMPARISON WITH THE COUPLE AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE

While Tonio comes to recognize the change he has undergone and the inevitability of his development, he also comes to recognize what has not changed - his love - and this he finally recognizes as the source of his creativity and hence the one element linking the duality he had felt between art and society. Symbolically, Mann emphasizes Tonio's change by facing him with a couple who have not changed. 'Ingeborg, die blonde Inge, war hell gekleidet, wie sie in der Tanzstunde bei Herrn Knaak zu sein pflegte. ... Hans Hansen war ganz wie immer' (TK 327). Vis-à-vis each member of the pair, Tonio at first responds as if he also had not changed. He then becomes aware of his change, acknowledges it, and accepts it. In his interior dialogue, he asks Hans if he has read Don Carlos as he had once promised; then, he immediately tells him never to read it: 'Ich verlange es nicht mehr von dir. ... Du sollst deine hellen Augen nicht trüb und traumblöde machen vom Starren in Verse und Melancholie' (TK 332). He asks if Inge would even now laugh at him, and he answers, 'Ja, das würdest du. ... Und wenn ich, ich ganz allein, die neun Symphonien, die Welt als Willie und Vorstellung und das
Jüngste Gericht vollbracht hätte...' (TK 334). The mere fact of his having
developed while his friends have remained the same creates a sense of irony.
From his newly aware viewpoint toward them, he sees that he cannot expect
them to have changed as he might have expected as a child. Previously Tonio
had told Lisaweta that his Erkenntniskekkel consisted in 'zum Wissen berufen
werden, ohne dazu geboren zu sein' (TK 300). Now, however, as a result of
this confrontation, he comes to feel born to his condition just as Hans and
Inge are born to theirs. Considering Hans, he begins to think,

Zu sein wie du! Noch einmal anfangen, aufwachsen gleich dir ... in Einverständnis
mit Gott und der Welt ... frei vom Fluch der Erkenntnis und der schöpferischen Qual
leben, lieben und loben in seliger Gewöhnlichkeit! (TK 332)

But Tonio stops this regressive reverie, recognizes the unreality of such a
dream, and sees his condition as inevitable:

Noch einmal anfangen? Aber es hülfe nichts. Es würde wieder so werden, – alles
würde wieder so kommen, wie es gekommen ist. Denn Etliche gehen mit Notwendig-
keit in die Irre, weil es einen rechten Weg für sie überhaupt nicht gibt. (TK 332)

Although he has not yet seen 'einen rechten Weg' for himself, he neverthe-
less comes to accept through this confrontation his condition as the only one
possible for him and his dance, not as the quadrille, but as 'den schweren,
schweren und gefährlichen Messertanz der Kunst' (TK 334).

In Tonio's letter to Lisaweta, Mann shows how Tonio has finally integ-
rated the knowledge gained from his encounter with reality with his concept
of himself as an artist. Tonio displays his new, balanced attitude of self-
acceptance to Lisaweta:

Ich bewundere die Stolzen und Kalten, die auf den Pfaden der grossen, der dämonis-
chen Schönheit abenteuern und den "Menschen" verachten, – aber ich beneide sie
nicht. (TK 337–8)

Tonio recognizes now what makes an artist of an homme de lettres:

Denn wenn irgend etwas imstande ist, aus einem Literaten einen Dichter zu machen,
so ist diese meine Bürgerliebe zum Menschen, Lebendigen und Gewöhnlichen. Alle
Wärme, alle Güte, aller Humor kommt aus ihr. (TK 338)

As Inge Diersen has pointed out,\(^{21}\) this passage clearly reveals Tonio's

\(^{21}\) Inge Diersen, Untersuchungen zu Thomas Mann (Berlin: Rütten & Loening 1960) 71
development toward self-acceptance when contrasted with what he had told Lisaweta before:

Das Gefühl, das warme, herzliche Gefühl ist immer banal und unbrauchbar, und künstlerisch sind blos die Gereiztheiten und kalten Ekstasen unseres verdorbenen, unseres artistischen Nervensystems. (TK 295)

Mann has used the confrontation scene to confront Tonio with himself, with the isolation in which his view of art had placed him, and with the actuality of his love of the bourgeois. His confrontation has made him acknowledge this _Bürgerliebe_ as the source of his own creativity and as the link uniting the duality which had pulled his unaware self first toward idealization then toward repudiation of the bourgeois. Through his discovery of his _Bürgerliebe_ of what is essential to himself when both his childish and professional illusions have been removed, as his creative source, he has also found the means to accept himself. Before, he had told Lisaweta that an artist had to be dead inside to create; but after the sight of Hans and Inge, ‘Sein Herz lebte’ (TK 336). He writes that his ‘tiefste und verstohlenste Liebe gehört den Blonden und Blauäugigen,’ and asks Lisaweta not to find fault with this love, as if he had regressed, because he has found it the basis of his Creativity: ‘Schelen Sie diese Liebe nicht ... sie ist gut und fruchtbar’ (TK 338). As Diersen concludes, ‘Er erkennt, dass die Kunst für die Menschen dazusein hat, dass sie ihnen dienen muss und kein isoliertes, kein ausser-menschliches Eigendasein führen darf.’ Thus has Mann employed each of the components of his plot device to serve the single end of bringing Tonio Kröger to greater self-knowledge and hence to self-acceptance.23

Robert E. Garis sees no such development in Lambert Strether:

Nor does even his momentous insight into “life” produce in Strether anything like a secure vision of tragic reality. It produces instead a sickening sequence of acts and

22 Ibid. 71–2
23 The problem of the concluding sentence of the _Novelle_, although not specifically part of the author’s use of the confrontation scene, should be mentioned primarily because it has been seen as the most obvious proof of Tonio’s lack of development (cf. Lilian Furst, ‘Tonio Kröger: A Reconsideration,’ _Revue des Langues Vivantes_ xxvii [1961] 239). As Heller has indicated, one must consider point of view in relation to this repetition of the concluding sentence of the first chapter, how Tonio ‘seinem Autor also die Worte aus dem Mund nimmt.’ Heller 66. M.W. Swales, in his stylistic analysis of the work, carefully shows how ‘Tonio Kröger’s maturity finds expression in his final assumption of the narrator’s viewpoint.’ M.W. Swales, ‘Punctuation and Narrative Mode: Some Remarks on Tonio Kröger,’ _Forum for Modern Language Studies_ vi 3 (1970) 242
attitudes devoid of imaginative energy but at the same time depressingly agile in both romantic and moralistic self-deception — produces, in brief, final evidence of Strether’s incapacity for either education or life.24

Contrary to this rather extreme attitude, our comparison has already shown that James, like Mann, has set up the plot device of the confrontation scene for the very purpose of forcing his protagonist to become aware of the most important aspect of reality for him that he has glossed over. As in Tonio Kröger, James has his protagonist respond to each component of the plot device, which because of the questions its existence raises, seems to require a response. Contrary to Garis’s view, Strether definitely does have a capacity for education in that he has responded to and learned from each of the components of the plot device so far dealt with and has responded to each in a manner parallel to that of Tonio Kröger, who quite obviously reaches a subsequent self-acceptance, although, indeed, the issues at stake for both — artistic integrity for Tonio and independent moral imagination for Strether — are different. As a result of his encounter, Strether realizes that he had dressed the affair in vagueness and had tried to suppose nothing; he realizes that he has been deceived and has not really come into relation with Chad or Mme de Vionnet; he realizes that his own notions have moulded his perceptions as much as the appearances thrust upon him. ‘They were no worse than he, in short, and he no worse than they’ (A 315). He has accepted them as they are and himself. Yet he who has managed ‘morally and intellectually’ to get rid of Mrs Newsome before his encounter (A 298), is not about to return to the confines of Woollett provincialism. As F.W. Dupee points out, Strether will no more oversimplify; if he judges anyone, it is himself.25 Just as the reality of Tonio’s confrontation with the epitome of Bürgerlichkeit tempered his idealizations but made him aware of his actual, continued love as the basis of his individual creativity, so the reality of Strether’s encounter with vulgarity tempers his idealizations but makes him aware of his own individual moral sense to which he must be true. As Lodge says, ‘Strether does not repudiate his alliance with Mme de Vionnet, with Chad, with Paris. But after the river-scene his appreciation of these things is mingled with a wry mockery of his own previous innocence.’26 James has again used this third component of the plot device, as did Mann. The couple, or more specifically in James the illicit relationship of the couple, has remained constant; what has changed is the protagonist. The resultant comparison of

24 Garis 307
26 Lodge 192
the same self with itself as formerly unaware and with itself and now aware in relation to this constant naturally creates a sense of irony.

Whereas Mann uses an 'interior dialogue' to allow Tonio to compare himself with the couple, James employs actual dialogue. Yet even before Strether meets with Mme de Vionnet, he feels the 'objection melt away.' In his mood of acceptance, he compares his older ideas with his present awareness:

He reverted in thought to his old tradition, the one he had been brought up on and which even so many years of life had but little worn away; the notion that the state of the wrongdoer, or at least this person's happiness, presented some special difficulty. What struck him now, rather was the ease of it – for nothing, in truth, appeared easier. (A 316)

Strether, like Tonio, momentarily reverts – Tonio to his childhood idealizations, Strether to his Woollett traditions – but becomes aware of the change in himself his encounter with reality has wrought. As Paris worked him free from Woollett, his encounter has worked him free from Paris. Like Tonio, he comes to see what it is within himself without his illusions that is essential. Where Tonio finds the source of his creativity, Strether finds that he has a moral imagination independent of either Woollett or Paris, an attitude toward the world which is his own. Thus, when he re-encounters Mme de Vionnet, he no longer sees her as either 'the usual Woollett' or as Cleopatra,27 but has a more complex, individual vision:

She was older for him to-night, 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 her young man. (A 323)

'Conscious of some vague inward irony,' he can see her both as 'the finest and subtlest creature' and as 'a maidservant crying for her young man,' not because he is unwilling to know the truth, but rather because both indeed are true. Neither the Woollettian nor the Parisian viewpoint alone would be able to see this reality in its actual complexity; but Strether's own point of view, independent of both, can.

As Strether considers going to see Chad, we see him aware of his own illusionless identity. He wishes

not to do anything because he had missed something else, because he was sore or

27 Knoepflmacher 108
sorry or impoverished ... he wished to do everything because he was lucid and quiet, just the same for himself on all essential points as he had ever been. (A 327)

This is, perhaps, Strether's most direct statement of self-acceptance. He is aware of his past illusions - of thinking himself part of the world of Paris, of thinking himself too old - and now he wants his future acts to reflect the lucidity and quiet he has become aware of as his essence. When Strether meets Chad again, he now sees him from the same no longer oversimplified point of view from which he saw Mme de Vionnet. He can still see Chad as the vastly improved young man who entered the theatre box; yet, he can also see that he is, after all, 'only Chad.' When Chad says that he is not a bit tired of Mme de Vionnet, Strether now perceives and acknowledges the truth behind his words.

He meant no harm; though he might after all be capable of much; yet he spoke of being 'tired' of her almost as he might have spoken of being tired of roast mutton for dinner. (A 337)

Strether can see through Chad now. He knows Chad will leave Mme de Vionnet; yet he can accept it, for he sees the irony of the situation - he will leave her because she has 'formed him to please' (A 344).

The final outcome of Strether's confrontation with reality is presented in his last conversation with Maria. His moral imagination has, because of his revelation by the river, transcended the bounds of both Woollett and Paris. As A.E. Stone says, 'Strether reenacts James's own discovery of the limits of all human societies and the higher claims of the individual imagination.'

This is why, now in Paris, he recognizes, 'I'm not ... in real harmony with what surrounds me' (A 341). Although Maria offers herself in marriage to him, Strether refuses in order to remain true to the independent self he has discovered.

"But all the same I must go." He had got it at last. "To be right. ... That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself. ... It's you who would make me wrong!" (A 344-5)

He has become independent of Mrs Newsome; he has left Mme de Vionnet; a cozy life with Maria would be too confining now. As Dupee says, 'He is only conceding frankly to the actualities of his mind, heart and time of life,' and, we might add, to the sense of independence he has acquired now

28 Stone 3
29 Dupee 246
that his confrontation with reality has worked him free of his illusions. Despite what he tells Maria, he has got something out of the whole affair:

His reward, although it is not to be Mrs. Newsome's hand and fortune, is nevertheless considerable. He who formerly felt so isolated, so useless, is now confirmed in a modest sense of self-sufficiency. 30

In my analysis I have tried to emphasize not a comparison of the characters of Tonio Kröger and Lambert Strether, but rather the great similarity in the process through which both Mann and James lead their protagonists to self-awareness. To determine the function of the plot device of confronting the protagonist with the conjunction of previously only separately-known friends as used in The Ambassadors, a question which has aroused much controversy, I have chosen as a touchstone a second work, Tonio Kröger, where this same plot device is used quite explicitly as a catalyst for self-knowledge in the protagonist. I have broken this catalyst down to its three basic components, each of which, by its very existence, suggests questions demanding some response from the protagonist. If, indeed, the author did not exploit each implication of the plot device to the fullest extent, we might tend to feel something to be artistically lacking. In fact, to support his argument that Strether learns nothing from this confrontation scene, Robert Garis is forced to assume that James had changed his mind about his protagonist in midstream, so to speak, and that 'the last seven chapters turn against annihilate the earlier ones.' 31 On the contrary, we have seen that by the same process through which Mann forces Tonio to face reality, James, having presented us with a sensitive protagonist prone to self-analysis, has this protagonist, because of his very sensitivity, respond to each of the components of his encounter. The fact that the separately-known friends are isolated together for the first time in this confrontation scene obviously raises the questions of what bond has united and isolated them and, since they are no longer separate, what is similar in each that has brought them together. Just as Tonio recognizes the marriage of his friends as a symbol of their Bürgerlichkeit, so Strether recognizes the liaison of his friends as a symbol of the actual vulgarity of those who upheld his ideal of Social Beauty. Since the two friends are shown together for the first time, the protagonist naturally can more easily recognize the similarity between them that he had overlooked when he had known them separately. As a result, his illusions about each are removed. The fact that the couple is united by a bond that excludes the protagonist is emphasized symbolically by both authors. Tonio

30 Ibid. 246
31 Garis 305
looks at the dancers through the glass; Strether looks at the boaters from the shore. This fact raises the obvious question of why the protagonist himself is not in close relation with either member of the pair. Again, just as Tonio sees his unwilled keen-sightedness as the cause of his alienation, so Strether sees his half-willed dim-sightedness as the cause of his. Since the protagonist is excluded from the bond of the pair, he must recognize himself as an outsider. As a result his illusions about himself in relation to the pair are removed. Finally, the fact that the couple seems not to have changed or to have remained in the same relationship since the protagonist first met each of them raises the questions of whether he also has not changed or whether, by the very fact that he recognizes their unchangedness, he has somehow developed beyond them. To make this comparison more explicit, after the initial encounter both authors establish a sort of dialogue between the protagonist and each member of the pair. And again, just as Tonio sees that his *Bürgerliebe* has remained the same but that as an artist he cannot directly join them, Strether sees that he has his own moral viewpoint different from that of either Woollett or Paris, one which would make him feel confined in either. Through his responses to the questions each component raises, Tonio comes to see the insufficiencies of both his youthful idealizations and cynical concept of the cold-bloodedness of the artist while Strether comes to see the insufficiencies in the moral viewpoint of both Woollett and Paris. Having thus divested both of their illusions, the experience of the encounter points out to each what element he had always had within him which is absolutely essential to him but which he had forgotten in his vacillation from one illusion to another. Tonio finds his *Bürgerliebe* as the source of his individual creativity; Strether finds his own individual moral imagination which neither the worlds of Woollett nor Paris are sufficient to characterize. Strether's discovery in the country is thus hardly 'his only discovery' as Garis states.\textsuperscript{32} Rather, Strether's mental responses to the questions raised by each of the components have led him through the stages of the same process of self-awareness and self-acceptance that Tonio Kröger experiences.

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\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. 307