

"one members of the  
genteel sect. but the



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“ One of the characteristics of Realism, in American literature at least, is the ironic use of perceptions of appearance vs.

reality. With this in mind, Henry James's *The Real Thing* and *The Beast in the Jungle* are two works wherein such characteristics can be shown to operate as James employs cleverly woven twists of appearance and reality in each of the plots. In James's *The Real Thing*, the plot is centered on an unnamed artist and his interactions with two sets of models: the Monarchs (members of genteel society), and Miss Churm and Oronte (members of the working class). The ironically named Monarchs are a couple who appear as though they have ten thousand a year but whose lives diverge dramatically from the literal definition of a monarch. Upon introduction to the artist, they unwittingly deceive him into initially assuming that they are interested in commissioning a portrait; in fact, the Monarchs are seeking work as sitters. The case of mistaken identity is further compounded by the artist who pretends to be a great painter of portraits but who is actually an illustrator whose depictions of nobility constitute his main source of income his pot-boilers. James's introductory interplay of character identity with appearance and reality serves as a clever backdrop for the story where reality conflicts with appearance.

While their outward social appearance and actions have an indefinable air of prosperous thrift and personify that of high-class society, the Major and Mrs. Monarch are actually penniless and no longer members of the genteel sect. But the Monarchs are unable to resolve their appearance of high society with their reality of financial destitution, and remain psychologically entrapped in a self-imposed netherworld of pseudo-culture and pseudo-class. Insistent

upon being treated as members of the high society to which they no longer belong, the Monarchs also present a conflict of appearance and reality for the artist because he is forced to allow them the social deference of portrait sitters, yet pay them as models (viewed as their superior but not their equal).

The complexity of appearance vs. reality is further illustrated when the artist realizes that while Major and Mrs. Monarch may appear to be the real thing, he is unable to transform their outward reflection of nobility onto his canvas without sacrificing his art his lifes work. The artist finds the seemingly genteel models to be flat and cold, and that somehow with all their perfections he still could not easily believe in them. The artists interactions with the Monarchs are juxtaposed with that of his relationships with his regular models Miss Churm and Oronte models who starkly contrast from Major and Mrs. Monarch. Miss Churm (a phonetically guttural name that is perhaps a word play on charm by the author) is a working class native of London and Oronte is an out-of-work penny ice vendor.

Jamess introduction of Miss Churm and Oronte to the reader is performed with divergent characterizations of appearance and reality between the two sets of models. While the Monarchs are introduced to the readers in a sterile appearance of spotless perfection, and gentility, Miss Churm (a freckled cockney who couldnt spell and loved beer) unceremoniously intrudes into the studio. And Orontes introduction leads the artist to conclude that the fellows a bankrupt orange-mongera telling comparison from the artists first impression of the Monarchs, when he believed them to be sitters. But the success of Miss Churm and Oronte as models of nobility, compared to the

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analogous failure of the Monarchs, attributes to the most ironic point of departure in James's characterizations.

The artist's ability to transform Miss Churm into everything from a fine lady to a shepherdess, and the Italian Oronte into an Englishman compared with his inability to perform the same transformation with the Monarchs serves as a poignant paradox of appearance vs. reality. On one hand, Major and Mrs. Monarch live a shallow existence, one that is constructed of and dictated by appearances, decorum and manners. Although the Monarchs appear to be the real thing, the emptiness of their lives results in a life-less canvas unrealistic illustrations devoid of emotion and feeling. On the other hand, Miss Churm and Oronte are not trapped in a world in which their social appearance conflicts with their social reality. Unlike the Monarchs, Miss Churm and Oronte are not trapped in an identity and prove to be malleable models for the artist who can successfully perform his artistic alchemy.

The hollow existence of the Monarchs is mirrored in James's *The Beast in the Jungle*, as illustrated in the protagonist, John Marcher. *James's The Beast in the Jungle* is centered around the relationship between the shallow John Marcher and May Bartram. James counters Marcher's emotional distance from reality with May Bartram's embrace of life and love. But it is through the voyeuristic glimpse into Marcher's internal machinations that readers understand the waste of a life based upon appearances. Like the Monarchs in *The Real Thing* whose marriage to appearances entrapped them in a world devoid of emotion, John Marcher's identity is innately linked to fine things, intrinsic features, pictures, heirlooms, and treasures of the arts and he is similarly constrained in a self-imposed world of apathy.

Although it appears that Marcher has an enriched life, he is actually a man with rather colourless (emphasis added) manners who is satisfied to wait for the elusive great thing to happen. Because Marcher remains afraid to confront the beast (the metaphoric unknown in life), it is not until the death of May Bartram that he realizes her love for him was the great thing, and that he was waiting for something that he unknowingly possessed. The simple truth that John Marcher recognized albeit too late is that It wouldnt have been failure to be bankrupt, dishonoured, pilloried, hanged; it was failure not to be anything. Words/ Pages : 1, 008 / 24