The Real Thing

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY JAMES

Henry James was born on April 15, 1843 to a well-to-do family in New York City. His father, a philosopher and lecturer, had many scholarly friends and acquaintances who frequently visited the James' household, which introduced Henry to literary society from a young age. The family often moved between the United States, France, England, and Switzerland, so James studied at various schools with the aid of private tutors. He briefly attended Harvard Law School but quit to pursue writing. His career started with stories and reviews featured in multiple periodicals, including *The Atlantic Monthly*, before he published his first novel (*Watch and Ward*) in 1871. A few years later, he moved to Europe, where he would reside for the rest of his life, excepting a few trips to the United States. While living in France, he met many famous realist and naturalist writers whose work influenced his writing. Many of James's stories and novels are written in a realist style, which is to say that they are focused on depicting life as is, without embellishments or supernatural forces. He later moved to England, where he immersed himself in the local social life. James never married, and today is widely believed to have been homosexual, although this was a well-guarded secret from his friends and family. In 1878, he gained international fame with his novel *Daisy Miller*, and further established his renown with his 1881 masterpiece *The Portrait of a Lady*. After a rather unsuccessful attempt at playwriting, James returned to writing novels and essays that continued to solidify his critical reputation, although his readership was generally modest in his lifetime. James became a British citizen in 1915, shortly before he died of pneumonia in 1916.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The end of the 1800s, which was known as the late Victorian period in England, wrapped up a century of dramatic change. England had been reshaped by the Industrial Revolution and the impact of ruling a vast colonial Empire that covered the globe (at one point, the empire included a quarter of the world's population). As industrialism and global trade increased, the English population gravitated toward urban areas and the standard of living increased. The working class moved from agricultural to factory work, the financial power of the aristocracy declined, and a new social class emerged: the middle class of working professionals. Throughout the 19th century, a series of political and social reforms were passed that put more power in the hands of the lower and middle classes, further weakening the old landed aristocracy. Just as social structures changed, so did schools of thought. The latter half of the 1800s were influenced by Realism, a movement that rejected the earlier Romanticism, which had focused on emotions and the sublimity of nature. Instead, Realists sought to represent life as truthfully as possible, without subjectivity or spiritual forces. This meant that much of the artwork and literature from this period focused on everyday experiences in all their grittiness.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Henry James was greatly influenced by many leading writers of the literary movement known as Realism. Among these writers are Émile Zola, Alphonse Daudet, and Gustave Flaubert, whose novel *Madame Bovary* is one of the most famous examples of literary realism. James was close friends with the Russian author Ivan Turgenev, whose artistic prose James greatly revered and even wrote about in multiple essays. Another close friend of Henry James was Edith Wharton, an American writer who was influenced by James's realism. Her masterpieces *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth* tackled societal norms regarding class, marriage, and the role of women around the beginning of the 20th century. The role of art in society, one of the primary topics of "The Real Thing," was an issue discussed throughout the 1800s. Robert Browning's "Andrea del Sarto," a poem in which a painter creates exact replicas of his subjects but feels like his works lack artistic feeling, examines the relationship between art and reality. The frustrated artist is also explored in Émile Zola's novel *L'Œuvre*, a novel about an artist whose obsession with perfecting his masterpiece drives him to despair and, eventually, suicide. Henry James frequently revisited the relationship between artists and their products, such as in his short story "The Liar," in which a painter seeks to expose another man's corrupt soul in a portrait.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Real Thing
- **When Written:** 1891
- **Where Written:** France and England
- **When Published:** 1892
- **Literary Period:** Literary Realism
- **Genre:** Short story, Literary Realism
- **Setting:** London
- **Climax:** When the Monarchs begin cleaning the artist's studio
- **Antagonist:** This short story has no traditional antagonist
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

True story. The idea behind "The Real Thing" was suggested to Henry James by his close friend George du Maurier, an illustrator and writer. A similarly destitute lady and gentleman had visited du Maurier's studio with the intention of becoming models, as neither had any skill or craft to otherwise support themselves.

Delayed gratification. In "The Real Thing," the artist wistfully muses about the success of a fictional novelist named Philip Vincent, who, after years of being overlooked by the general public, is at last experiencing widespread renown before his death. This reflected a wish that James, who struggled with the fact that his readership was so limited in his lifetime, had for himself. Decades after his death, James's wish was fulfilled: his works were translated and read around the globe, and he was canonized as one of the greatest writers in the English language.

PLOT SUMMARY

In London, an aristocratic gentleman and lady—Major Monarch and Mrs. Monarch—visit an artist's studio. The artist, upon seeing the poised and elegantly dressed couple, assumes that they have come to commission him to paint their portrait. He begins to ask a few preliminary questions about the portrait and payment, only to quickly discover that there has been a misunderstanding—they haven't come for a portrait at all. Instead, the couple is hoping to sit as models for the artist's commercial illustrations, the artwork for books and periodicals that he does to financially support himself.

The artist is taken aback; he can't imagine such upper-class people doing as lowly a job as modeling. The couple admits that the situation is awkward, but that they are desperate to do *something*. They introduce themselves as Major and Mrs. Monarch, and they explain that they have lost their money and are now struggling to stay afloat. They figure that they could be models whenever the artist needs to depict people like them, that is to say, aristocrats. When the artist asks if they have any prior experience, they inform him that they have been **photographed** extensively.

The artist isn't convinced that they will make good models, since he doesn't care about the identity of his models, just how they give him inspiration to create a finished product. He also already works with several talented models. He tells the Monarchs this, but they are persistent, even explaining that they know that the artist has recently accepted a new project where he will illustrate a new edition of the works of novelist Philip Vincent, and they hope to be used as models. For this project, the artist will do the art for the first book and, if this work is satisfactory, he will receive the contract to do the illustrations for the following books.

Still pushing against the artist's resistance, Major Monarch inquires whether it wouldn't be best to have "the real thing" while illustrating ladies and gentlemen. This gets the artist to agree. At this moment, Mrs. Monarch bursts into tears, disclosing that she has applied to countless jobs, only to always get turned away. While the artist comforts her, plain and disheveled Miss Churm, one of the artist's favorite models, arrives for work. The Monarchs are perturbed that the artist would use such a lowly woman to pose as a princess and they leave the studio very assured of their future success. Miss Churm, meanwhile, is dismissive of them.

The Monarchs begin modeling and the artist quickly discovers that they are terrible at it. They are too stiff and, no matter how many situations and poses the artist puts them in, they look exactly like themselves, which is a problem when they are supposed to be suggesting various "types," or characters. The artist loves capturing human character and illustrating it in all its variety, so the Monarchs' monotony frustrate him and increases his appreciation for Miss Churm, who can cleverly imitate anything.

One day, while Mrs. Monarch is modeling, a young Italian man arrives. Although he can't speak English, he is able to communicate through gestures that he is looking to work as a model. Although initially skeptical, the artist is enchanted with the young man's expressions and clever mimicry, and he hires him as a servant and model. The man, whose name is Oronte, swiftly becomes another of the artist's favorite models.

The artist starts on his illustrations for the special Philip Vincent book, and uses the Monarchs as his models. While he admits that it is sometimes useful to have "the real thing" before him, he is constantly thwarted in his attempts to make realistic images with them. He asks his friend Jack Hawley, a man with fine aesthetic taste, what he thinks of his new art. Upon seeing the artwork, Hawley is disgusted and warns the artist that this new artistic phase will hurt his career.

But the artist doesn't dismiss the Monarch's yet. He feels trapped: he doesn't have the heart to fire them. Instead, he starts using Miss Churm and Oronte more and more for his illustrations. When the project's artistic director, to whom the artist had sent his illustrations of the Monarchs, issues a warning that the work is unsatisfactory, the artist finally fires the Major and his wife.

The Monarchs stop by the studio a few days after being fired, arriving right in the middle of a modeling session with Oronte and Miss Churm. While the artist works, the dejected Monarchs begin cleaning the studio. The artist is both moved and disturbed by the Monarchs' attempt to become his servants. He uncomfortably agrees to keep them on as servants, but after a week of the unnerving sight of them cleaning, he simply pays them to go away. He never sees them

again, but Hawley tells the artist that they had a damaging and permanent effect on his work. The artist doesn't deny this, but he doesn't regret the memory either.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Artist – The narrator of "The Real Thing" is an unnamed artist who is the protagonist of the story. He lives in London in a home that also contains his studio. Although he dreams of being a great portrait painter, he makes commercial illustrations for periodicals and books in order to support himself. In his art, he is interested in capturing personality and imperfections, the kinds of things that make each individual person interesting and life-like. He serves as a symbol of artists and as a representative for the middle class in late 19th century England. When the aristocratic but down-on-their-luck Major Monarch and Mrs. Monarch visit him in the hope of becoming models for his illustrations, he is initially skeptical of their potential as models (and he already has plenty of models in his employment), he agrees to take them on, thinking that it could be useful to have "the real thing" on hand when he is illustrating upper-class characters. He finds, however, that this is not the case and that, in fact, having "the real thing" as models actually works against his artistic goals. Every time he draws the Monarchs, he finds that he can't use them to inspire original work; he can only ever depict the Monarch's themselves. He relies instead on Miss Churm and Oronte, two of his lower-class models, who are able to capture a feeling or idea in their poses and so allow him to create vivid illustrations that feel authentic to the personalities and meanings that he aims to communicate. Eventually, he dismisses the Monarchs twice: once as his models and then again, later, as his servants. Even after they are gone, his work is never quite the same, and the story implies that his work with the Monarchs permanently altered his artistic vision.

Mrs. Monarch – Mrs. Monarch is an aristocrat who, with her husband Major Monarch, has fallen on hard times and is seeking employment, as they desperately need money. The two of them are used in the story to symbolize the English aristocracy in the late 19th century. She is somewhat shy and very proper. While she and the Major were perfect aristocrats and enjoyed social connections through much of their life, they have no actual skills. In these hard times, she has applied for many different positions in a variety of careers, but no one has been interested. Both she and the Major believe that their being aristocrats makes them the perfect candidates as inspiration for the artist's artwork depicting upper-class people. Unfortunately, she turns out to be a terrible model. She is too rigid, and the narrator finds that he can't use her to represent anything but herself. In fact, she won't even wear any of the artist's costume **clothes**, preferring instead to wear her own. She is so convinced that being a real lady automatically makes her the right model for upper-class characters, that she comes across as ignorant of the purpose of artistic models. Through the whole process, she is deliberate in having only professional interactions with the artist, as opposed to trying to form friendly or sociable ties with him. She dislikes the lower-class Miss Churm and Oronte, whom she believes have no business imitating characters and personages so different from themselves, particularly when she and the Major are "the real thing." When the artist dismisses her and the Major, she joins her husband in cleaning the studio, desperate to be kept on as servants in order to maintain at least some livelihood, but eventually leaves when the artist pays them to go away.

Major Monarch – Major Monarch is an aristocratic gentleman who, with his wife Mrs. Monarch, no longer has a fortune and now looks to be employed in order to have an income. With Mrs. Monarch, he is used in the story to symbolize the English aristocracy in the late 19th century. He is similar to his wife in his civility and patience, but he is more sociable than she is. He thinks extremely highly of his wife and is very supportive of her efforts. When the Monarchs first visit the artist, their primary goal is to get Mrs. Monarch a job as a model, although the Major offers his services as well. However, he is just as bad of a model as Mrs. Major; he, too, is stiff and unable to suggest anything other than himself. When not modeling, he usually accompanies his wife to the studio, as he has nothing else to do. While there, he chats with the artist, although he can't converse on topics beyond "sophisticated" subjects, such as fine drinks and fox hunting. He is desperate to feel useful and have a livelihood and begins cleaning the artist's studio when the latter fires them from their modelling roles, but he eventually leaves when the artist pays the Monarchs to leave him alone.

Miss Churm – Miss Churm is a working-class woman who works as a model for the artist. She is plain, freckled, and uneducated, although she is clever and witty. She is the artist's ideal model, as she can represent any number of types, no matter how different these personages may be from who she is. Miss Churm is used in the story to symbolize the working class in late 19th century England, and her skill as a model represents the value of adaptability and artifice (as opposed to an adherence to strict reality) in art. She develops a strong dislike for Mrs. Monarch and Major Monarch, whom she quickly comes to view as rivals.

Oronte – Oronte is an Italian immigrant who is another of the artist's favorite models. He is extremely expressive and has a knack for imitation. He doesn't speak any English, and he astonishes the artist with how well he can communicate without language, a talent that makes Oronte an especially useful model. Like the other main characters, he is also a symbol; he represents artifice (like Miss Churm) and also the working and immigrant classes. Oronte left Italy for England in the hopes of making more money. IN England, he sells ice

cream from a hand cart until his work partner abandons him. Following this, he approaches the artist for employment as a model. Although the artist initially plans to turn him away, Oronte quickly charms and impresses the artist with his expressions and zest and is hired as both a model and a servant. As time progresses, the artist substitutes Oronte for Major Monarch in modelling sessions.

Jack Hawley – Jack Hawley is a long-time friend of the artist and has a knack for art criticism. Although he is not a good painter, the artist relies on Jack's input on his work. In the story, Jack has recently returned home from traveling abroad, where he was getting a fresh artistic perspective. When the artist shows Jack his work depicting Mrs. Monarch and Major Monarch, Jack completely rejects them. Although he struggles to express exactly why he so dislikes the Monarchs and the artist's work depicting them, he is very clear in his opinion that the artist will ruin his artistic career if he continues to work with them. Even after the artist does dismiss the Monarchs, Jack believes that working with them permanently damaged the artist's artistic vision.

Artistic Advisor – The artistic advisor is an employee at the publishing house that hires the artist to create illustrations for a special edition of a series of books by the (fictional) novelist Philip Vincent. The artist is working on a trial basis with the publisher—they will drop him should his work not be satisfactory. After the artist sends illustrations depicting the Monarchs, the artistic advisor issues a warning that this artwork is inadequate, and that the artist is at risk of losing further work. This prompts the artist to dismiss Mrs. Monarch and Major Monarch.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Philip Vincent – Philip Vincent is a fictional novelist. As described in the story, Vincent had once been neglected by the public, but is now a well-known and widely-admired writer. The artist is hired to make illustrations to accompany a new edition of a set of Philip Vincent's works.

Claude Rivet – Claude Rivet is a painter of landscapes and an acquaintance of the artist. He recommends Mrs. Monarch and Major Monarch to seek modeling opportunities from the artist. He also tells them about the artist's upcoming project to illustrate Philip Vincent's books.

THEMES

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REALITY, ARTIFICE, AND ART

Henry James's short story "The Real Thing" explores the nature of art. The story opens with the arrival of an elegant gentleman and a lady—Major Monarch and Mrs. Monarch—to an unnamed artist's studio. He is surprised to learn that they have fallen on hard times and are hoping to support themselves by modeling for the artist's commercial illustrations. The Monarchs reason that the artist must often depict people of the higher class, so won't his illustrations of such types be improved if his models are an actual English gentleman and lady? After taking the Monarchs on as models, though, the artist realizes that the opposite is true: the Monarchs are so rigidly themselves—they are so "real"—that he can't use them to inspire illustrations of any type; he can only ever paint *them*. Their inflexibility is made all the more apparent when compared to the artist's other models, Miss Churm and Oronte. While these two are not genteel or noble, they are able through their natural instinct and adaptability to represent a feeling or idea that gives the artist the inspiration he needs to create powerful illustrations. The story, then, suggests that the artist's role is to interpret and reshape reality rather than document it, and that to accomplish this feat the artist requires not reality, but artifice.

James quickly establishes that the refined Major and Mrs. Monarch are incompatible with art because they can only represent themselves, and therefore leave no room for artistic interpretation. The Major and Mrs. Monarch are first introduced in the story as "A gentleman – with a lady," and this identification is the entire summation of who they are. The Monarchs are the embodiment of gentility. As they put it, they are "The *real* thing." Yet for all their elegance and manners, they have little substance. As people, the artist finds them affable but boring. And, worse, as models, they are "too insurmountably stiff," and "had no variety of expression." When working with the Monarchs the artist finds himself thwarted. When painting Mrs. Monarch, no matter how hard he tries to transform her, "[she] was always the same lady. She was the real thing, but always the same thing." The Major is just as bad. Each attempt "looked like a **photograph** or a copy of a **photograph**." When using "the real thing" as his subject, the artist finds himself documenting it exactly as is. As a result, he has no space for interpretation, which is what allows art to communicate meaning. As the artist puts it, "A studio was a place to learn to see, and how could you see through a pair of feather beds?"

In contrast to the Monarchs are Miss Churm and Oronte, the artist's other models who are ideal artistic subjects because they are able to suggest reality in a way that inspires the artist to extract and then illustrate meaning or feeling. The resulting works might be described as more real than real. Miss Churm and Oronte are foils to the Monarchs in both class and character. Both Miss Churm and Oronte are lower class; the former is uneducated and unattractive, and the latter is an

immigrant Italian street-vendor. Their realities are very far from the "types"—lords, ladies, princesses—whom the artist asks them to represent. While not particularly respectable or attractive, Miss Churm and Oronte are clever and possess the flexibility required to suggest a variety of subjects. Miss Churm regularly impresses the artist with her ability to "represent everything." Oronte, who does not speak English, is equally clever, as is illustrated by his ability to communicate solely through "graceful mimicry." He is full of expression and "caught one's idea in an instant." With their ability to express an infinite range of situations and characters, Miss Churm and Oronte allow the artist to achieve the "variety and range" that he seeks. He does not wish to copy something exactly as it is, but to creatively illustrate reality in a way that gives it meaning.

Through the artist's interactions with the Monarchs, James demonstrates that, in the realm of art, the literal is useless at best and damaging at worst. When the artist shows his Monarch-inspired work to his friend Jack Hawley, Jack immediately rejects it, declaring that working with these models was "execrable." In addition, the artistic advisor for whom the arist is making the illustrations despises the work with the Monarchs and threatens to stop working with the artist. When the artist finally dismisses the Monarchs in favor of Miss Churm and Oronte, the Monarchs make a final effort to be useful by acting as servants. Yet the Monarchs don't pretend to be servants; they actually go about cleaning the artist's house, *literally* making themselves servants. This sort of transformation—not an artistic one but an actual, real one—makes everyone uncomfortable and causes the artist to momentarily lose his creative juices. Even after ceasing to work with the Monarchs, their effect on the artist lingers. Hawley declares that they "did [the artist] permanent harm," implying that the artist's dalliance with mimicking reality rather than using artifice to interpret and re-present reality has damaged his ability to create art.

The story is clear in its position that the purpose of art is to reinterpret reality through artifice. But the story also contains a final twist on this idea, embedded in the fact that the story is itself a work of art, and made through artifice. While portraying, through nothing more than words, an artist tripped up by the pitfall of the allure of reality over artifice in the pursuit of art, James the author falls into no such trap. While the artist's tale is one of a limited kind of failure, the story itself—which is written in an extremely literary style, and yet still feels full of life—is an example of a triumph on precisely the terms that James argues are necessary for true art.

CLASS IN ENGLAND AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Henry James's "The Real Thing" was published in 1892, during the late English Victorian period, and it addresses the changing social structures of its time. At this point in English history, the Industrial Revolution—along with expanding global trade opportunities created, in part, by England's colonial empire—shifted England's workforce and economy away from agriculture (which was controlled by the landed aristocracy), towards urban manufacturing (which primarily benefited the middle and working classes). The growing economic power of the middle and working classes also led to political reforms that further increased their political power. The result was a weakened English aristocracy, but one that still clung to its own traditions and sense of self. By setting up a scenario in which a middle-class, professional artist works with two sets of models—the Monarchs (made up of Major Monarch and Mrs. Monarch), who are aristocrats fallen on hard times; and the working-class Miss Churm and poor immigrant Oronte—"The Real Thing" portrays the class tensions and changes at play in the late 19th century. In the end, the Monarchs are too rigid and unimaginative to successfully model, and the artist dismisses them. The artist's rejection of the Monarchs—who the story implies represent all of the English aristocracy—implies that the English aristocracy of this time has become paralyzed: it's losing its wealth and yet is unable to change.

James uses the Monarchs to represent the late-Victorian English aristocracy, a class whose fortune has diminished and who struggle to adapt socially and economically to the changing times. This representation is made clear from the beginning. First, they are initially introduced not as individuals, but as types: "A gentleman—with a lady." They even self-identify as types: "The real thing; a gentleman, you know, or a lady." Their name, Monarch, also suggests that they represent the entire aristocratic class. Contrary to appearances, though, they aren't wealthy. Major Monarch informs the artist that they "had the misfortune to lose [their] money," which is why they are now seeking employment. This downfall clearly parallels the fortunes of the aristocratic class more broadly, many of whom were experiencing hard times. The artist also notes that "There was something about them that represented credit," suggesting that the aristocracy are on borrowed time and money. The Monarchs are also portrayed as stuck in their customs. The artist finds them pleasant, but "so simple." Their "pathetic decorum and mysteriously permanent newness" speak to their dedication to outdated aristocratic propriety. The fact that the Monarchs make such terrible models—they are "too insurmountably stiff"—is emblematic of their general inability to change.

In contrast to the aristocracy, the middle, working, and immigrant classes (represented in the story by the artist, Miss Churm, and Oronte, respectively) all possess the flexibility that allows them to keep up with the changing socioeconomic landscape. The artist is an entrepreneurial middle-class businessman. He is both an employee (hired by newspapers, publishers, and portrait-sitters) and an employer (he hires

models). He interacts easily with people of all social classes and his studio acts as a "Bohemian" oasis. Meanwhile, the working-class Miss Churm, although not formally educated, is "really very clever" in her work. The artist applauds her as "an excellent model" who "could represent everything." Because of her talent, she is "greatly in demand, never in want of employment." Through her, James suggests that members of the working class, with their varied skill sets, vitality, and adaptability, are well equipped for success. Finally, Oronte, an Italian immigrant, stands in for immigrants to England. Almost immediately, the artist identifies Oronte as "a treasure," given his wealth of expression and ability to communicate despite not even speaking English. The artist hires him in a "double capacity" as both model and servant, which shows Oronte's ability to fulfill a variety of roles. This speaks to the elasticity of not just the working class, but the immigrant class too.

But the Monarchs don't just struggle with their cultivated rigidity and lack of professional experience; they also face the unwillingness of other classes to let them change. Miss Churm views the Monarchs as her "invidious rivals," and is "secretly derisive" of them. She immediately predicts their inability to model, saying of Mrs. Monarch "if she can sit, I'll tyke to bookkeeping." She is not the only one with this skeptical attitude; no one is interested in hiring the Monarchs. Mrs. Monarch says "There isn't a confounded job I haven't applied for . . . But they won't *look* at me." Despite the Monarchs' efforts, the professional and business classes are not interested in hiring the aristocracy, likely because the aristocrats have no concrete skills beyond being aristocrats. Eventually the Monarchs' ineptitude as models gets them fired. In response, in a moment of desperation, the Monarchs try to be useful by acting as the artist's servants: cleaning his house, washing his dishes. They are trying to do what Oronte is doing: filling dual roles. But the artist finds this transformation to be so "dreadful" that it kills his creative fervor and prompts him to give the Monarchs "a sum of money to go away." Whereas Miss Churm views the Monarchs as competition, the artist's discomfort at the Monarchs effort to work as servants is different. He sees them as "the real thing"—as the aristocracy—and the idea of them not being that real thing strikes him as dreadful.

Through the story of the Monarchs, then, James suggests that the English aristocracy are impossibly stuck: it's not simply that they won't adjust to the changing circumstances of the Victorian period, but that they can't, and nobody would accept it if they did.

MONEY, IDENTITY, AND CLASS

In "The Real Thing," Henry James explores how financial needs affect his characters' choices, their relationships to each other, and who they can be. The down-on-their-luck aristocratic Major Monarch and Mrs. Monarch need to find jobs. The unnamed artist who narrates the story would rather paint portraits, but must instead make commercial illustrations to pay the bills. And the painter's other models—Miss Churm and Oronte—must take what work they can to live, and often must work multiple jobs. Yet while financial need constrains and shapes the options available to each of the characters, the story also clearly shows that some of the characters are better at earning a living than others: the aristocratic Monarchs fail because of a lack of adaptability, while the middle-class professional painter, working class Miss Churm, and poor immigrant Oronte are each able to shift their behaviors, roles, and even their identities to make a living. Put another way, the aristocrats fail, while the members of the other classes don't, suggesting that there is something unique about the aristocratic class in this time period that makes it unable to adapt to the changing economy.

In the story, the characters' relations to each other—and therefore their identities—are defined primarily by their financial situations. When the Monarchs first show up at the artist's home, the artist initially thinks they've come to hire him to paint their portraits. But the Monarchs' loss of money has flipped the script: they've actually come in hopes that he will employ them as models. As models, the Monarchs come into social contact with the working-class Miss Churm, whom they would otherwise never encounter. It's an awkward situation. The Monarchs "didn't know how to fraternise" with Miss Churm, while Miss Churm quickly comes to see the Monarchs not as her distant betters but instead as "her invidious rivals" for work. In this way, the financial demands that the characters face have upended the traditional social order, forcing characters into new social roles and unexpected relationships with one another.

The artist, Miss Churm, and Oronte all are able to shift between identities in order to support themselves financially. While the artist aspires to be "a great painter of portraits," he must work as a commercial illustrator in order to make money. In fact, the story shows the artist only making commercial work, which suggests that financial need has shifted his true "identity" from "portrait painter" to "illustrator." While making a living thwarts his dreams, he is nonetheless able to make this shift to earn money. Miss Churm, according to the artist, is a wonderful model who can "represent everything," even "types" (or characters) that are very different from who she is. Her financial life depends on this adaptability—her talent has her "greatly in demand, never in want of employment." She also sometimes does domestic work for the artist, such as serving tea, showing that she's able to take on different jobs, as well. It's clear, then, that her flexibility is key to her financial security. Similarly, Oronte was a penniless street vendor before getting hired by the artist. For the artist, he acts "in the double capacity" of servant and model. His financial situation is such that he needs to fulfill both roles, and so he does.

But the aristocratic Monarchs lack this flexibility and, as a

result, cannot make a living. Their failure suggests that there is something unique about them—and the aristocratic class they represent—that makes them unsuitable employees. While the Monarchs need money, they are never good candidates for the positions to which they apply. Mrs. Monarch declares that "There isn't a confounded job [she hasn't] applied for . . . But they won't *look* at [her]." It seems that people are not interested in hiring a pair of down-on-their-luck aristocrats whose "advantages [are] . . . preponderantly social"—in other words, who have no skills. The Monarchs' inability to adapt makes them unsuitable for modeling, too. As the artist says of Mrs. Monarch, she is "always the same lady. She was the real thing, but always the same thing." The Monarchs make a final desperate attempt to find employment by doing the painter's household chores—by acting as his servants. However, aristocrats behaving as servants so unnerves the artist that he pays them just to go away.

The story implies that the failure of the Monarchs to adjust is directly connected to their aristocratic status. When they attempt to act as his servants, the artist says of the Monarchs, "They had accepted their failure, but they couldn't accept their fate." But no other character in the story would be described as having a "fate" at all. The Monarchs have a "fate" that the characters of other classes don't because of the different relationship between the social classes and money. If the middle-class painter were to lose his money, for instance, he would stop being middle class and become working class. His class would shift along with his money. But a poor aristocrat doesn't become middle class or working class; she's still an aristocrat, just a penniless one. The English aristocracy was traditionally wealthy, but its long history meant that it was also founded on heritage, tradition, and a cultural connection to England's past, such that an aristocrat can't ever be anything other than an aristocrat. "The Real Thing" portrays late nineteenth century as a world defined by money—financial concerns drive the characters' choices and relationships. But while the "newer" classes—whose members are defined by the money they have—can adaptably maneuver among the requirements of this word, the aristocrats can't change. They are doomed to be exactly who they are: "the real thing."

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CLOTHING

In "The Real Thing," clothing, and the changing in and out of different clothes, represents a character's identity, as well as their adaptability—in particular their ability to take on different roles or identities. When the artist meets Mrs. Monarch and Major Monarch, he pays special attention to their clothing, which is well-fitted and stiff, and indicates their status as members of the aristocratic class. In the studio, he recognizes the clothing as fine and fashionable—both things to expect from gentility—but also notes that their clothes betray their financial situation, that is, the fact that they are living on credit.

But clothing doesn't just symbolize the Monarchs' class. Their unwillingness to wear costumes demonstrates their inflexibility, which is what makes them such unsuitable models and prevents them from being anything but themselves. When the artist informs the Monarchs that being a model requires wearing various clothes to suggest different "types," or characters, they are very unwilling. They inform the artist that they will bring their own clothes, especially as they intend to be models for contemporary pieces. Although the artist is initially amused by the chance to depict the Monarchs in their fine clothes—which he recognizes as "the real thing"—this quickly turns to frustration at how the Monarchs as models never inspire him to paint anything but *them*. Their restrictions on the clothes they wear—in addition to their other traits—limit their range of potential representations. They cannot take on any other roles or identities than who they are.

In contrast to the Monarchs, Oronte and Miss Churm, two of the artist's favorite models, are willing to wear a variety of different clothes in order to suggest the various identities that they pose as. By wearing the necessary clothing while capturing a feeling or idea through their posing, lowly Miss Churm can represent a Russian princess, and Italian street-vendor Oronte can look just like an English gentleman. In this way, clothing symbolizes a character's range of identities and roles that they can take on.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography in "The Real Thing" represents the act of documenting reality, and how doing so is not creating art. In photography, a photo is an exact image of the real-life subject. Art, on the other hand, interprets reality to inspire a feeling. To Henry James, these two are opposites. To demonstrate this difference, James connects Major Monarch and Mrs. Monarch with photography, and uses it to explain why they are incompatible subjects for art.

When the artist asks the beautiful Monarchs if they have any similar experience to modeling, they tell him that they have been photographed many times. In fact, photographers "were always after [them]" to do take their pictures. As he works with the Monarchs as models, though, the artist quickly realizes that what made them such attractive photographic subjects is exactly what makes them unsuitable for the creation of art. As the artist draws the Monarchs, he realizes that, try as he might, each drawing "looked like a photograph or a copy of a

photograph." They are too stiff, always look the same, and cannot suggest anything but who they are. This is fine for a photograph, especially as the story takes place during the time in history when people had to sit motionless in order to have their picture taken, but this inflexibility and rigidity is bad for art and makes the artist's illustrations look flat and lifeless. The artist needs variety, expression, and models who can suggest other "types," or characters.

The artist's working-class models of Oronte and Miss Churm don't actually look like any of the "types" for which they model. No one would photograph them to try to represent an aristocrat, for instance. But their real appearance doesn't matter in the artist's studio. What matters is the "feeling" or idea that they capture for the artist; from that point, the "alchemy of art" can transform Oronte and Miss Churm into whatever "types" the artist needs. In short, with Oronte or Miss Churm as models, the artist can interpret (as opposed to document) what he sees to create feeling in his art. In this way, "the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal."

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Library of America edition of *Henry James: Complete Stories, 1892-1898* published in 1996.

Part 1 Quotes

❝ The hand of time had played over her freely, but only to simplify. She was slim and stiff, and so well-dressed, in dark blue cloth, with lappets and pockets and buttons, that it was clear she employed the same tailor as her husband. The couple had an indefinable air of prosperous thrift—they evidently got a good deal of luxury for their money.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Mrs. Monarch

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is located near the beginning of the story, right after Major and Mrs. Monarch have arrived in the artist's studio for the first time. This quote is significant because it establishes the symbol of clothing. Mrs. Monarch's clothing reveals part of her identity. Just by looking at her clothes, the artist is able to deduce her class, as well as her thriftiness. The fact that she and the Major still employ a tailor, even though they economize, also shows that they consider appearances important enough to spend their money to maintain them, which hints to their superficiality but also more broadly to the way that the aristocrats in general are expected to keep up appearances. Not only, then, are aristocrats easy to recognize based on what how they appear, but this very appearance makes up a good deal of what they are.

Mrs. Monarch's age is also symbolic. As the Monarchs can be seen as stand-ins for the aristocratic class, their middle age indicates something deeper. In this passage, the artist notes that time has had an effect on her, one that "simplif[ies]" her. When the story was written, the English aristocracy had lost much of its traditional power and vigor, both economically and politically. Compared to the rising middle and lower classes, the aristocracy, with no workable skills in an industrial economy, has little to offer. In this way, their social relevancy is reduced, and their role simplified—they are little more than outdated figures.

❝ (…) it was an embarrassment to find myself appraising physically, as if they were animals on hire or useful blacks, a pair whom I should have expected to meet only in one of the relations in which criticism is tacit.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Major Monarch, Mrs. Monarch

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

At this moment, the artist is looking over the Monarchs' figures to determine whether he will take them on as models. His discomfort in physically assessing the Monarchs is significant, as it shows his unwillingness to see the two aristocrats as employees. To the artist, aristocrats aren't supposed to look for work or offer themselves up for hire, so he is uncomfortable with the idea of judging them based on their fitness, which is treatment that is reserved for English society's lowest class, the exploited and oppressed Blacks, and animals. This extremely racist thinking, in which the artist associates Black people with animals and reduces them to their utility, shows that the apparently "Bohemian" artist actually possesses deep-seated prejudices. It is clear from this that he is limited in his envisioning of English society and sees it as a hierarchy with Black people at the bottom and aristocrats on top. The artist

simply doesn't imagine it any other way. In this way, the aristocrats are "stuck" in their class.

This quote also references a moment where the characters' financial situations define their relationships to each other. Had the Monarchs not been seeking employment from the artist, he could expect to only meet them in settings where they, as aristocrats would have the upper hand socially. In such an exchange, the artist would never be evaluating their usefulness and verbally passing judgment. Now, however, the roles are reversed. Because the Monarchs need money from the artist, he is instead the one in control of the conversation; their fate depends on his decision.

(...) she was, in the London current jargon, essentially and typically "smart." Her figure was, in the same order of ideas, conspicuously and irreproachably "good." For a woman of her age her waist was surprisingly small; her elbow moreover had the orthodox crook. She held her head at the conventional angle; but why did she come to *me*? She ought to have tried on jackets at a big shop.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Mrs. Monarch

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

The artist has just watched Mrs. Monarch walk across the studio to show off her figure. In terms of style and appearance, she is "the real thing." James uses the words "essentially," "typically," "orthodox," and "conventional" to emphasize that Mrs. Monarch is the embodiment of old-school respectability and even attractiveness. This tightens the symbolism of Mrs. Monarch as a representative for the aristocratic class. She is "the real thing."

But while she is very proper, this is both the sum and limit of her appeal. Being "conspicuously and irreproachably 'good'" is less of a compliment and more of a sign that Mrs. Monarch lacks any unique definitive characteristic that would indicate a talent, skill, or even a personality. The artist can see that she is a lady, but her being "the real thing" doesn't make her useful for his art. The artist isn't intending to document her exactly; his goal is to capture a feeling. She would, the artist believes, be better employed in advertising, where her being "the real thing" would attract customers who seek to imitate her appearance, respectability, and otherwise aristocratic manner.

Part 2 Quotes

Combined with this was another perversity—an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation. I liked things that appeared; then one was sure. Whether they *were* or not was a subordinate and almost always a profitless question.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38-39

Explanation and Analysis

The artist is hesitating to take on the Monarchs as models. The Monarchs' possible value as models lies in them being "the real thing"—that is, aristocrats—but the artist acknowledges that he doesn't actually care about the real identity of the models with whom he works. The artist cares far more about "the represented subject," which is the type or character that he is trying to depict. The "lack of representation" that the artist describes as applying to real-life subjects is the absence of the feeling or meaning that the artist is trying to capture. Given this lack, the artist is saying that the identity and qualities of real-life subjects aren't important, so the fact that the Monarchs are real aristocrats doesn't mean that they would make good models for aristocratic characters. In fact, their real identity might be a drawback, because their real personalities or thoughts may get in the way of whatever idea that the artist is trying to express about the aristocracy.

What the artist wants instead are models that can suggest the feeling of aristocratic types. With such models, he can create images that communicate meaning and *appear* life-like. Of course, the original subjects that he used wouldn't be the same as the characters that he is illustrating, but that is a "subordinate" and unimportant factor compared to the fact that the meaning he wishes to communicate through his art is successfully conveyed.

"There isn't a confounded job I haven't applied for—waited for—prayed for. You can fancy we'd be pretty bad first. Secretaryship and that sort of thing? You might as well ask for a peerage. I'd be *anything*—I'm strong; a messenger or a coalheaver. I'd put on a gold-laced cap and open carriage-doors in front of the haberdasher's; I'd hang about a station, to carry portmanteaux; I'd be a postman. But they won't *look* at you; there are thousands, as good as yourself, already on the ground."

Related Characters: Mrs. Monarch (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 40-41

Explanation and Analysis

Right after the artist agrees that it may be useful to have "the real thing" while depicting upper-class types, a relieved Mrs. Monarch informs him that she has applied to numerous jobs but is invariably turned away. The widespread dismissals suggest that the rejections have more to do with her than the specific jobs that she is applying for. Mrs. Monarch doesn't have any practical skills, which potential employers would assume given that she is an aristocrat. Aristocrats historically did not have to work; their livelihood was guaranteed through inherited money and land that was rented out to farmers. Now that the Monarchs need money, they are in the tricky position of applying for jobs without any practical skills or applicable work experience. It only follows that such underqualified applicants be turned away. It is also likely that these potential employers, like the artist, find it unnerving and bizarre to have an aristocrat working. The long-standing tradition of the aristocracy has secured it a lofty social ranking, one that is defined by its customs and behaviors. Because of this history, an aristocrat is an aristocrat, regardless of their financial situation. Mrs. Monarch's comparison of a secretaryship to a peerage suggests that the middle and lower classes inherit certain advantages in a similar way that aristocrats do. In the same way that the aristocrat's traditions and status are inherited, the practicality and economic vitality of the working and lower classes is inherited, thereby excluding aristocrats like the Monarchs.

Mrs. Monarch's inability to step into other roles is further suggested by the symbolic use of clothing in this passage. She mentions her willingness to put on "a gold-laced cap" to open doors by the haberdashery, establishing an association between this bit of a worker's uniform with becoming fit to work this position. But she isn't granted this opportunity and will never have the chance to don this cap or to take on this role.

> I scarcely ever saw [Miss Churm] come in without thinking afresh how odd it was that, being so little in herself, she should yet be so much in others. She was meagre little Miss Churm, but she was an ample heroine of romance. She was only a freckled cockney, but she could represent everything, from a fine lady to a shepherdess (…)

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Miss Churm

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Miss Churm interrupts the artist's conversation with the Monarchs by entering into the studio. Unattractive, uneducated, and unrefined, the working-class Miss Churm can be seen as a foil for Mrs. Monarch. Despite her unfavorable characteristics, Miss Churm is one of the artist's favorite models, because of her ability to "represent everything." Her real appearance doesn't matter to the artist's creations. What matters is that she can pose in such ways to suggest a variety of types, "from a fine lady to a shepherdess." The artist doesn't need real ladies to be models for aristocratic types when he has Miss Churm, who can inspire the *feeling* of these characters. The artist doesn't duplicate exactly what he sees in his models onto the canvas; he *interprets* what he sees and then turns it into art in a way that communicates meaning. To achieve this goal, it is more valuable to have someone artificially represent (i.e. model) the feeling that the artist intends to convey than to have someone who may be "the real thing," but doesn't suggest any underlying meaning.

Miss Churm's ability to take on so many different identities as a model also speaks to her adaptability. This malleability is what makes her such a valuable employee for the artist, as she can be used for all manner of projects and illustrations. Because in the story Miss Churm can be read as a stand-in for the working class, this flexibility can be extended to this socioeconomic group as a whole. Through Miss Churm, James is suggesting that the lower class's economic success is found in their ability to adopt a variety of roles. They are not cemented into any specific position, in a similar way that Miss Churm's clever artifice as a model allows her to be used to represent so many different ideas.

> "Oh, you think she's shabby, but you must allow for the alchemy of art."

However, they went off with an evident increase of comfort, founded on their demonstrable advantage in being the real thing.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Major Monarch, Mrs. Monarch

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Before the Monarchs depart from the studio, they watch Miss Churm pose. The artist had hoped that they would get an idea of what models were expected to do, but the Monarchs don't see Miss Churm's value. To them, she is simply a lower-class woman who is very different than the Russian princess she is modeling. The artist counters them, warning them that they are ignoring "the alchemy of art." The artist isn't intending to document Miss Churm exactly as she is, but rather to interpret her positions and gestures to create a drawing that generates the feeling of a Russian princess.

The Monarchs, in missing this subtlety, leave the studio with the assumption that they will make better models for upper-class types because they *are* what the artist is trying to represent. This attitude betrays their ignorance of the purpose of art, as well as their naïve confidence that they are valuable simply because they are aristocrats. Without any prior experience or skills, this ill-founded conviction reveals that they are unaware of the changing socioeconomic landscape of England in which aristocrats are becoming increasingly irrelevant.

The artist has only just begun to use Mrs. Monarch as a model and he is already running into issues. She models as though she is sitting for a photographer, which is to say she is very still. This story was written during a time in history when photography subjects had to remain motionless or the image would be blurred. So while Mrs. Monarch's stiffness would have been useful for a photographer who is trying to capture her image exactly, this rigidity is a disadvantage in the artist's studio.

James uses the symbolism of photography to show that documenting reality is not creating art, and this point is made very clearly in this passage. The artist needs models who can suggest a variety of characters and feelings, but Mrs. Monarch can only be herself. As the artist puts it, "She was the real thing, but was always the same thing." By being "the real thing," Mrs. Monarch limits the artist in what he can represent. He can't use her to suggest any other type besides what she is. Instead of creating art that inspires feeling, his drawings look like photographs—like mere duplicates.

Mrs. Monarch's inflexibility also shows that she is unable to take on different identities. She cannot adapt to fulfill the roles asked of her and instead stiffly remains herself. This makes her a terrible model and thus unemployable for the artist, and further implies that this trait is one of the Monarchs' characteristics that makes them unable to make a living in the changing world. By extension, the aristocratic class (who the Monarchs represent) are also plagued by this rigidity that makes them unemployable.

Part 3 Quotes

❝ But after a few times I began to find her too insurmountably stiff; do what I would with it my drawing looked like a photograph or a copy of a photograph. Her figure had no variety of expression—she herself had no sense of variety (…) I placed her in every conceivable position, but she managed to obliterate their differences. She was always a lady certainly, and into the bargain was always the same lady. She was the real thing, but was always the same thing.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Mrs. Monarch

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 44-45

Explanation and Analysis

❝ I adored variety and range, I cherished human accidents, the illustrative note; I wanted to characterise closely, and the thing in the world I most hated was the danger of being ridden by a type. I had quarrelled with some of my friends about it (…) I might only be a presumptuous young modern searcher, but I held that everything was to be sacrificed sooner than character. When they averred that the haunting type in question could easily *be* character, I retorted, perhaps superficially: "Whose?" It couldn't be everybody's—it might end in being nobody's.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

The artist has been trying to the draw the Monarchs and realizes that he is only ever able to duplicate them, to depict them exactly as they are. This fact frustrates him, because it doesn't align with his artistic goals. The artist is interested in depicting the many various human characters, with their quirks and peculiarities that make each one unique. In contrast, the worst thing for the artist is to be "ridden by a type," that is, to have his art dominated by one single kind of person, which is what happens if an artist stops trying to illustrate unique characters and instead relies on one generalized type to stand for everyone. According to the artist, to fall into such a trap is an abomination, because one character cannot do justice in representing everyone's character, so it follows that any such character is "nobody's" in the sense that it can't be taken as representing any actual person at all.

The artist feels so strongly about this idea that he has argued with his friends about it. So it is unsurprising that the artist is exasperated when drawing the Monarchs; they are the types that are overriding his work. He is unable to illustrate any other personalities or characters—he can only ever draw *them*. He is stuck drawing "the real thing," which turns out to be a stiff documentation of the Monarchs themselves. In this way, reality is a trap when it comes to creating art.

> After I had drawn Mrs. Monarch a dozen times I perceived more clearly than before that the value of such a model as Miss Churm resided precisely in the fact that she had no positive stamp, combined of course with the other fact that what she did have was a curious and inexplicable talent for imitation. Her usual appearance was like a curtain which she could draw up at request for a capital performance.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Miss Churm

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

The more that he works with the Monarchs, the more the artist finds himself considering the value of Miss Churm. While the Monarchs are unable to be anything but themselves, Miss Churm can represent anything. She has "no positive stamp," which is to say that she is not boxed into any one type, like the Monarchs, who are only able to represent themselves. Miss Churm is not a lady or princess, or any of the other aristocratic characters that she represents, but she can imitate all these things, which makes her an extremely useful model for the artist.

Miss Churm is the opposite of "the real thing"—she is an artificial substitute for the royal people that the artist tries to represent. But, as is demonstrated through Miss Churm, artifice is malleable and can be changed to suggest a variety of characters. Additionally, the artist will not merely document artifice, as he is tempted to do with reality, because the artificial thing is not what he is trying to illustrate. The artist never finds himself accidentally duplicating Miss Churm on the paper, because he's never trying to draw *her*. He is instead free to be inspired by the idea or feeling her modeling is communicating.

Part 4 Quotes

> I thought Mrs. Monarch's face slightly convulsed when, on her coming back with her husband, she found Oronte installed. It was strange to have to recognize in a scrap of a lazzarone a competitor to her magnificent Major.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Oronte, Major Monarch, Mrs. Monarch

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

The artist has just hired Oronte to be both a servant and a model. Mrs. Monarch, who already dislikes that the artist uses Miss Churm to model for types that are so different from who she is, is unpleasantly surprised to find Oronte in the studio as well. She immediately recognizes him to be her husband's rival. Of course, as Oronte is not just lower class, but an immigrant who can't speak English too, the fact that he is a rival to the aristocratic couple shows how much the Monarchs' situation has changed. Had the Monarchs not been forced to come to the artist's studio out of financial need, it is unlikely that they would have met Oronte at all. And, if they had, he would have been their inferior. But their financial situation has changed and, now penniless, their peers are people from lower social classes.

And yet, unlike Oronte, the Monarchs are unsuccessful at the work they attempt. While Oronte is taking on two different roles (servant and model), the Monarchs fail at the one that they are attempting. They are unable to adapt as easily as Oronte is. With his practical skills and his flexibility, Oronte is better equipped for success in the changing economy of late 19th century England. Meanwhile, the

Monarchs, who have lost their money, have neither of these qualities and cannot keep up.

"Now the drawings you make from *us*, they look exactly like us," [Mrs. Monarch] reminded me, smiling in triumph; and I recognized that this was indeed just their defect.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Major Monarch, Mrs. Monarch

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Monarch has just seen the artist's drawings of Oronte and insinuates that she wouldn't have guessed that Oronte had been the model. She then remarks that, in contrast, all the artist's drawings of the Monarchs always look exactly like them. She believes that this fact is in their favor. The artist, however, realizes that it is exactly the problem. He isn't trying to document his models exactly as they are; his goal is to interpret them to create art that communicates a feeling. Because the Monarchs can only be themselves, he is thwarted in his goals whenever he tries to use them as models for his illustrations.

On the other hand, Oronte is valuable because he *can't* be found in the artist's drawings. He is successful in his imitations and suggestions of other types, which means that the artist's resulting drawings look like what Oronte was meaning to inspire, and not Oronte himself. Therefore, to create good art, the artist doesn't need "the real thing" at all. What the artist needs is artifice.

[The Monarchs] bored me a good deal; but the very fact that they bored me admonished me not to sacrifice them—if there was anything to be done with them—simply to irritation. As I look back at this phase they seem to me to have pervaded my life not a little. I have a vision of them as most of the time in my studio, seated, against the wall, on an old velvet bench to be out of the way, and looking like a pair of patient courtiers in a royal ante-chamber. I am convinced that during the coldest weeks of the winter they held their ground because it saved them fire. Their newness was losing its gloss, and it was impossible not to feel that they were objects of charity.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Major Monarch, Mrs. Monarch

Related Themes:

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

The artist, even after Jack Hawley's warning that the Monarchs will ruin his career, still can't bring himself to fire the Monarchs. In this passage, the artist's boredom and frustration with the Monarchs, as well as his guilt at these feelings, reveals several changes happening at the time when the story was written.

At this point in history, the English aristocracy is weakening because of the economic shift away from agriculture and the land from which they get their wealth. As the aristocracy's power diminishes, the middle and lower classes become more relevant. The Monarchs are used in the story to more broadly represent the English aristocracy of the late 19th century, symbolism that is suggested by comparing the Monarchs to "a pair of patient courtiers in a royal ante-chamber." The artist, who symbolizes the professional middle class, muses about how the Monarchs, and by extension, the aristocracy, have penetrated his life and seem constantly present, without adding anything of value. Poor, talentless, and stuffy, the artist views them as "objects of charity," which suggests that the other classes have started to consider the aristocrats as pitiable relics of their former greatness.

But even though the Monarchs are useless employees and are a drain on his resources (they economize by sitting by his fire), he, feeling guilty at his irritation with them, is unwilling to throw them out. This may be because of the aristocracy's long-standing cultural importance in England history. Through the artist's unwillingness to reject the aristocratic class, James is suggesting that, because the aristocracy is so closely associated with English culture, the English may believe that discarding them feels as though one were throwing out a museum artifact.

They had accepted their failure, but they couldn't accept their fate. They had bowed their heads in bewilderment to the perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal; but they didn't want to starve.

Related Characters: The Artist (speaker), Major Monarch, Mrs. Monarch

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

At this point, the Monarchs have begun cleaning the artist's studio in the hopes that the artist will keep them on as servants. This desperate action to remain employed moves the artist to tears. The Monarchs' failure is layered. On an artistic level, they were terrible models because they were only ever able to represent themselves. On an economic level, they are unable to retain a job, which both keeps them penniless and demonstrates how they cannot adapt with the changing economy.

In the studio, the Monarchs learned the difficult lesson that reality is less valuable to art than artifice. Because they could only ever be themselves, the artist couldn't use them to draw various types and scenes that communicated meaning. As they were failing, the Monarchs watched as Oronte and Miss Churm were used in their place, because these two could suggest the types that the artist needed. By having the artist reject the Monarchs for Oronte and Miss Churm, James makes it clear that artifice is what is needed to make art, not reality. In this way, "the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal."

This passage also reveals that the Monarchs' status as aristocrats is a dooming one. While none of the other characters have a fate, the Monarchs do. Theirs is that they cannot escape the class into which they were born. They may be penniless, but aristocrats' class is marked more by its cultural heritage and traditions than by its money. In this way, the Monarchs cannot shift into any other class, no matter how badly they need to work alongside the lower classes. And while they remain aristocrats, even if they attempt to be adaptable, the other English classes will remain unwilling to let them behave as anything else.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1

A servant announces the arrival of a gentleman and a lady into an artist's home and studio. As soon as the artist sees this aristocratic couple, he assumes that they are going to ask him to paint their portraits, as they look very elegant and are wearing fine tailored **clothing**. The couple look so distinguished, in fact, that the artist reflects that he would have thought they were famous, if not for the paradoxical truth that the most illustrious-looking people are the least likely to be people worth knowing.

Both the servant and the artist immediately identify the man and woman who arrive as a gentleman and a lady based on their manners and the clothes that they wear. The superficiality of these identifiers make clear the distinctions of class in England at the time the story is set. The artist's assumption of the couple's purpose in coming to see him show two things: one, that the artist sees himself as a portraitist; and two, that there is a basic understanding of how the classes are likely to interact, with the aristocrats at the top. However, the fact that "the most illustrious-looking people are the least likely to be people worth knowing" suggests that the social ideas around value in this time are shifting, and not to the aristocrats benefit.

The gentleman and the lady are very awkward and do not say anything for a few moments. The artist takes this time to look them over, noticing that, while they are very **well-dressed**, they have an "air of prosperous thrift." At last, the woman speaks, explaining that Mr. Rivet sent them, and had said that the artist would be "the right one." The artist responds that he does his best for people who come to him to sit. They begin to discuss payment, and quickly realize that there is a misunderstanding. The lady clarifies that they are not hoping to get portraits done—which is what the artist had assumed—but to be used for the artist's illustrations.

The couple's polite shyness isn't just embarrassing; it's impractical, which suggests that their well-mannered behavior hurts them more than it helps. While they are silent, the artist analyzes the lady's clothing, which shows a few more hints of who they are. He notes their "air of prosperous thrift," which means that they are stretching their money—they are keeping up appearances, but the strain of doing so is beginning to show. This description could be applied to the aristocracy of the late Victorian period more generally.

The artist now realizes the lady and gentleman's purpose in coming to his studio: they wish to be models for the commercial illustrations that he creates for story books and periodicals. Although he dreams of becoming a famous portrait painter, he relies on these illustrations to support himself. He is disappointed to hear that they intend to be hired *by* him, as opposed hiring him. He also regrets that he won't have the opportunity to do their portrait, as he had already decided exactly how he would portray them, even though they probably wouldn't have enjoyed his representation of them. Overall, he is surprised—his guests look too wealthy and elegant to be working as models.

Suddenly, the artist's expectations are flipped. His guests are expecting the artist, a middle-class professional, to employ and pay them, *aristocrats, for* their *services, which is a complete reversal of the traditional social norm. Aristocrats are the class that traditionally holds most of the wealth, so it is highly unusual that they would seek employment from one of the lower classes, who, in turn, usually rely on aristocrats for money. This employment role-swapping has disappointed the artist, who relies on wealthier people to commission him to do the work that he really enjoys, which is painting portraits. Unfortunately, the artist's financial situation limits his chance to achieve his dreams of being a famous portrait painter. But he is versatile in his skills and is able to support himself with a side-job of making illustrations for various books and periodicals. Aside from money, he also regrets not having the chance to paint the couple's portrait because he has already "seen" them in an artistic sense. In other words, he has already decided how he would have portrayed them in such a piece of art. He clarifies that the couple probably wouldn't have liked his depiction of them, which implies that he wouldn't have simply depicted their physical appearance, but instead would have tried to capture a feeling that they inspired in him.*

The lady and gentleman admit that they haven't had any prior experience as models, but they think that they would be great for illustrations. The gentleman repeatedly references the couple's urgent need to do *something*, despite the awkwardness of the situation. The artist decides that he may as well get to know them better, so they introduce themselves as Major Monarch and Mrs. Monarch and inform him that they have lost their fortune and have very little money to live on.

That the couple's last name is "Monarch" further establishes that they can be seen as symbols for the entire aristocratic class. Meanwhile, the artist now finally understands why the Monarchs are looking to work as models: they've lost their wealth and need to work in order to support themselves. The gentleman's repeated remark regarding their need to do something shows that they not only need to work, but that they need to find purpose, too. Here, James is suggesting that the aristocracy, who are represented by the Monarchs, have lost of their purpose in modern society, although the reasons why aren't clear yet.

The Monarchs acknowledge that they are "not so *very* young," but stress that they have excellent figures and could be used to represent the upper-class characters that the artist often has to depict. The artist analyzes their figures but finds that he is embarrassed to do, feeling uncomfortable that he is evaluating their physique as though they are "animals on hire or useful blacks." Mrs. Monarch walks about the room, and the artist concedes that she looks "conspicuously and irreproachably 'good,'" but he still is a bit confused as to why they came to him; he figures that they could have done much better in advertising. Still skeptical, the artist asks if they have had any practice as models, to which the Monarchs explain that they have been **photographed** extensively.

The Monarchs' older age is another hint that aristocrats, as a class, are past their prime point of social relevancy. But their figures, and not their faces, are what the Monarchs believe will be useful to the artist, an assumption that suggests again that the aristocracy's value is in form (manners, behavior, and customs). As Mrs. Monarch shows off her figure to the artist, he agrees that it really is perfect. As an aristocrat, her poise is exactly what people imitate when being "proper." But the artist can't bear to analyze them physically, the way he normally would with models, or, as he puts it "animals on hire or useful blacks," two groups that the artist sees as lowly and utilitarian. The profound racism of his thinking, in which he groups Black people with animals and defines them by their utility, also shows that the artist is a prejudiced man who believes in a social hierarchy with Black people at the bottom and aristocrats on top. It makes him too uncomfortable to assess whether the Monarchs are fit for a job because they come from a class that is never judged on its economic usefulness. In addition, despite the Monarch's fine appearance, the artist isn't convinced that they would make good models. He can more easily imagine them in advertising, because in advertising everything is about how things appear. The implication of the artist's thought is the belief that good art is not solely about how things look, but rather about capturing something beyond just looks: it is about interpreting reality, not just presenting it. The fact that the Monarchs equate photography experience with modelling further betrays their naivety of what models—and art—need to accomplish. They are accustomed to people wanting to document what they look like, but they have never needed to inspire feeling or suggest beyond appearance.

PART 2

The artist considers them. He notices with surprise that he is very sure of the Monarchs' past, even though they haven't told him their story. He pictures them in country estates, surrounded by lush furnishings and **clothing**. He assumes that they were generally liked, but no one wanted to support them, so they are now looking for work. He likes them—they strike him as simple people—but he is still hesitant. Not only does the artist not like amateurs, but he cares far more about the illustrations he creates than about the real people who serve as models for those illustrations. He also already employs several models with whom he is perfectly satisfied.

The fact that the artist can imagine the Monarchs' lives so easily suggests the uniformity and deeply rooted tradition of the aristocratic experience. The symbol of clothing further solidifies and simplifies the Monarch's identity as gentility. Because of their class, the artist can deduce how they would be dressed—as aristocrats. Their affable simplicity further suggests that the Monarchs are one-dimensional. While polite and likeable, they are not particularly intelligent or interesting people. By extrapolation, the English aristocracy is similarly shallow. But the artist's hesitation to hire the Monarchs goes deeper than this. Not only would it be unnecessary to hire them (he already has enough models who work well), the artist's thoughts make clear that art isn't about recreating in paint or ink the real subjects who are his models. So when the artist is depicting upper-class characters in his drawings, it doesn't matter if the model is an aristocrat or not. All that matters is if the model can suggest the feeling or idea *of gentility. In this way, "the real thing" is not necessary for the artist to create art.*

Major and Mrs. Monarch do not, however, get discouraged. They tell the artist that Claude Rivet (a landscape painter who is an acquaintance of the artist's) had informed them of the artist's upcoming project for which they think that they would be perfect. The project is an opportunity to create illustrations for a special edition of several novels by Philip Vincent, an aging novelist who is at last receiving recognition for his works and of whom the artist is envious. The publishers employed the artist to create illustrations for the first book in this series, with the potential of being hired for the following works depending on whether the artist's work is satisfactory.

The Monarchs have their sights set on a very particular project: the Philip Vincent books. If the artist succeeds in impressing the publishers and is granted the full set of books, the project would guarantee plenty of work—for both the artist and his models. The artist's connection to this project goes a bit deeper; he is envious of Philip Vincent's artistic success. As an artist who wishes to be recognized for his portraits (and not his bill-paying side-job of illustrator), he dreams of having the same good fortune of Philip Vincent; that is, of being eventually widely accepted as a great artist. Instead of being able to paint portraits, however, the artist's financial situation has him illustrating instead.

Major and Mrs. Monarch are concerned when the artist informs them that they would have to wear "special **clothes**," or costumes, that he has all of his models use. They respond that, instead, they could bring their own clothing and be used for contemporary scenes, specifically with aristocratic characters. Again the artist hesitates, as he already has enough suitable models. Major Monarch, very awkwardly and with hesitation, asks if it wouldn't be helpful for the artist to have as models "The *real* thing; a gentleman, you know, or a lady," which the artist concedes. At this, Mrs. Monarch begins to cry and confesses that she has applied to countless positions, for posts from secretary to postman, but she is invariably turned away. The artist, embarrassed, does his best to comfort her and they begin to set up a day and time for the Monarchs to model for him.

The Monarchs' refusal to wear costumes has a twofold significance. On one hand, it indicates a snooty desire to remain separate from all of the artist's other lower-class models. It also signifies the Monarchs' inability to take on different roles or identities. By limiting themselves to wearing only their own clothes, they are restricting their range as models—they can only be used to display aristocratic "types," or characters. This self-imposed constraint reveals that aristocrats may be stuck in their old ways and their class not just because they do not have the flexibility required to switch between different roles, but also because they are unwilling *to be flexible. They don't want to change as dramatically as they need to in order to adapt to the changing world. Major Monarch's comment (that they would be the best models for these upper-class characters because they are "the real thing") reveals that this self-imposed limitation is in part due to their belief that they have inherent value by being aristocrats. The Monarchs are relieved that the artist agrees that they may indeed have some innate use as "the real thing." It becomes clear that no other potential employers have found this to be the case. Mrs. Monarch confesses that she has been trying to find work in a variety of roles, but no one wants to hire them, which indicates that no one else is interested in hiring penniless aristocrats, probably because aristocrats have no practical skills in this new and changing world. Additionally, the other classes may share the same discomfort that the artist has implied—that seeing an aristocrat work is just too unnerving. This passage is also important because the artist's concession that Major Monarch has a good point, that it really may be useful to have "the real thing" to inspire art, begins the artist's pursuit to capture reality in his art.*

They are interrupted by Miss Churm, who arrives in the studio looking splashed and dirty from the rain. Miss Churm is one of the artist's favorite models. Although unattractive, uneducated, lower-class, and not particularly respectable, she is very clever in her ability to pose and has a knack for being able to "represent everything." After the artist sends her to a separate room to get **dressed** as a Russian princess, the Monarchs reveal their incredulity and ask the artist if he thinks that Miss Churm looks like a princess. He responds that she does when he draws her, which comforts his wealthy guests. The become only more confident as they watch Miss Churm pose. The artist, however, is enchanted at how she successfully inspires the feeling of a Russian princess. After they leave, Miss Churm mocks their plan to model, even stressing that Mrs. Monarch's lady-like manners will be detrimental.

Miss Churm, who represents the English working class, is the opposite of Mrs. Monarch. She is neither attractive nor refined. But this doesn't matter to the artist, to whom she is a favorite model because she can "represent"—i.e. model—anything. Miss Churm's ability to change roles and become a Russian princess as easily as simply changing clothes suggests the adaptability of the working class. The importance of her adaptability to the artist also demonstrates the importance of artifice—as opposed to reality—when making art. Miss Churm is able through her posing to communicate the feeling *and* idea *of a Russian princess, even if she doesn't precisely look like a Russian princess. It is this feeling or idea that the artist needs to create an illustration that* feels *real. Her actual looks and background have no bearing on art because the artist isn't trying to depict her as she is. This subtlety is lost on the Monarchs, who are shocked that the artist would choose to have a model who is so different than the character that she is supposed to represent. This again betrays their naivety of the purpose of art. Meanwhile, just as the aristocrats are doubtful of Miss Churm's value, so is she skeptical of them. This is yet another example of a member of a lower class expressing their disbelief regarding the usefulness of the aristocracy, a doubt that is rooted simply in the fact that they are aristocrats.*

PART 3

Major Monarch and Mrs. Monarch begin to model for the artist. Mrs. Monarch is the primary model, but the Major comes regardless, which the artist deduces is because he has "nothing else to do." Major Monarch is very friendly and enjoys chatting with the artist while the artist works. The two of them don't have much to talk about—the artist doesn't share the Major's social circle and the Major doesn't discuss anything theoretical—so they stick to topics like good leather, good wine, and trains. Mrs. Monarch, while also courteous, is much more reticent when she is in the artist's studio. She keeps their conversations professional, clearly making the effort to not "slide into sociability."

Major Monarch tags along with his wife to the studio because he has "nothing else to do," another indicator that these aristocrats don't have much purpose. At this point, however, the artist enjoys chatting with Major Monarch, even if their conversations are shallow. The Major, who, as an aristocrat, only knows the social goings-on of the fashionable world, of which the artist is ignorant. The artist, who likes discussing theoretical topics, can't do so with the Major because the latter is a very simple man. Once again, this reveals the vapidity and hollowness of the aristocracy—they aren't intelligent enough to dive into conversation on significant topics. Their breeding has made them good conversationalists, but that is the limit to their training. Meanwhile, Mrs. Monarch doesn't want to confuse her visits with social calls; she is trying to step into the working world and wants to be perceived as a serious employee. The contrast between the two Monarchs' approaches shows their uncertainty of how to behave as employees. They've never been hired before and have different ideas of how they should act.

The artist quickly runs into issues while drawing Mrs. Monarch. He notes that she sits as though she is posing for **photographs**, which is to say, very stiffly. While this may do for photography, it's a problematic practice when modeling in an attempt to suggest something other than yourself. Mrs. Monarch has "no variety of expression [. . .] no sense of variety" and each of the artist's depictions of her look like "a photograph or a copy of a photograph," with the additional issue that all of her illustrations of her result in her being too tall. He tries to position her in various ways, but she always looks the same—she always looks like herself. The artist begins to catch himself trying to create "types" that look like her, instead of having her model the "types." The Major is just as bad; all his images also turn out way too tall. All the while, they behave as though the artist is the one who is lucky by having them model.

Photography, which in the story symbolizes the documentation of reality and how such documentation of reality is not *the same as art, makes another appearance in this passage. Mrs. Monarch has been photographed before, and she is under the impression that the artist is trying to do the same thing—that is, to depict her exactly as she is. It is also important to note that, at the point in history when this story was written, photography subjects had to remain still in order to avoid blurriness. In this way, Mrs. Monarch's stiffness is useful for photography. But art is not photography. The artist is not trying to depict her exactly as she is. Instead, he needs a model who can suggest feelings to inspire his creations of different characters. But Mrs. Monarch doesn't grasp this concept, so the artist is continually thwarted in his attempts to draw her. All of his drawings look like photographs, which is to say that they don't look like artwork. This is the issue with trying to work with reality instead of artifice in art: the artist tries to depict "the real thing" instead of allowing something unreal to inspire the feelings that give art it's real-life appearance. But the Monarchs can't suggest anything else; they can only be themselves, which shows the severe limitations of reality in art. The fact that both the Monarchs look too tall speaks to the unwieldiness of trying to use reality to create art. In the effort to depict "the real thing," the artist loses sight of the feelings, ideas, and their relationships between them that he is hoping to inspire with his art.*

The artist is especially irritated when drawing the Monarchs because the resulting art is very far from his goals. He loves the "variety and range" of human characters and despises "being ridden by a type." He recalls how he used to argue that, when creating art, everything else should be sacrificed before sacrificing character. There is no one type, he maintains, that can represent everyone. While working with the Monarchs, he comes to appreciate Miss Churm, with her ability to imitate so many different "types," even more.

The artist's goals for his art are very far from what he is making while using the Monarchs as models. He wants to depict the variety of human characters and personalities and is appalled by the idea of "being ridden by a type," which means getting suck on portraying a single kind of character. To illustrate the same type over and over is the opposite of capturing a variety of real-life characters. One type cannot represent all the various personalities and characters that exist in the world. By trying to capture "the real thing," the artist has fallen into the trap of depicting just one type time after time. What he needs is artifice, which comes in the form of Miss Churm, who can inspire so many different characters for him to capture on canvas.

Miss Churm's opinion of the Monarchs, "her invidious rivals," only continues to sour. They only occasionally cross paths at the studio, but when they do, she treats them with skepticism and veiled derision. The Monarchs, however, don't notice her much at all. The artist believes that this is not from snobbery, but rather because they don't know how to converse with her; they have nothing in common. One day, when both the Monarchs and Miss Churm are in the studio, they have tea together. The artist, who frequently looks to his models to perform the tea service, asks Miss Churm to serve it. She does so, subtly mocking the Monarchs by over-emphasizing her inflections, but they don't seem to notice. Afterwards, Miss Churm is furious with the artist, believing that he was trying to humiliate her.

Miss Churm remains skeptical of the Monarchs' usefulness as models. Not only does she scorn the upper-class couple's attempt at working, but now she sees them as her rivals. It is likely that, had the Monarchs not been driven to work by financial need, Miss Churm would never encounter the Monarchs, let alone see them as competitors. But their mutual need for employment has brought them all to the artist's studio. Identities have shifted to the extent that the Monarchs find themselves having tea with two other classes: the professional and working classes, as represented by the artist and Miss Churm respectively. This suggests that, in the changing economy and social structures of late 19th century England, the aristocracy is now suddenly finding themselves at the same metaphorical table as the other classes. But the Monarchs cannot adapt to various situations as well as the other two characters, which reveals the limitations of their ability to step into different roles. While Miss Churm can model and perform tea service with ease and the artist can easily converse with people from classes both above and below him, the Monarchs can't "fraternise" with Miss Churm, and aren't even aware of when they are being mocked.

The Monarchs' patience, though, is remarkable to the artist. They stop by his studio on the chance that he could use them and sit for hours to wait their turn. The artist tries to find other artists to hire them, but no one is interested. The Monarchs take this as a sign that the artist is the only one who understands their value so, consequently, they rely on him more heavily than before. On top of this, they have their sights set on being selected as the models for the illustrations for Philip Vincent's novels. The Monarchs are sure that they would be especially valuable for these illustrations, in which the artist would be depicting upper-class characters.

It continues to be clear that the Monarchs have nothing else to do during their days than visit the artist in the hopes of "being used"—a phrase that captures their need for work, but also their need for purpose. Now that they are penniless, it appears that the typical social activities that the Monarchs used to engage in are no longer available. They haven't been able to secure other work (which once again suggests how people from other classes are uninterested in hiring two poor aristocrats), so they fill their empty schedule with waiting in the artist's studio. This again shows that the Monarchs are confusing the relationship between employees and employers with social relationships. The artist also realizes just how much the Monarchs wish to be used as the models for the Philip Vincent novels. They are certain that, as "the real thing," they are the obvious choice to model for aristocratic characters.

One day, while Mrs. Monarch is modeling, a knock at the door interrupts their session. The visitor is an Italian man in search of modeling work. He doesn't speak English, so he communicates with the artist solely through mimicry. Although the artist is initially uninterested, he is quickly impressed by the man's range of expression and ability to communicate without speaking. The young man's eagerness to help also catches the artist's eye, so he offers him a position as both a servant and a model, which the man readily accepts. The artist discovers that the man's name is Oronte, and that he is an Italian immigrant who had moved to England to make money, only to be abandoned by his business partner with whom he sold ice cream.

Oronte represents the immigrant and working classes and, with his range of expression and utility, he also symbolizes the adaptability of these classes, and the necessity of that adaptability for survival. Oronte's ability to communicate merely through expressions and gestures makes him an instant favorite for the artist, who knows that this prized quality is what makes an excellent model. The artist perceives that Oronte is able to suggest a variety of ideas and meanings, which is exactly what the artist needs for his art. Oronte's real identity doesn't matter to the artist, but his ability to communicate meaning does. But Oronte's value doesn't stop there—the artist also hires him on as a servant, which speaks to his capability to take on multiple roles. As he represents the immigrant and working classes, Oronte's adaptability can be extended to these classes too. Oronte is also yet another character brought to the artist's studio because of his financial situation, which introduces him to Mrs. Monarch not as an inferior, but as a peer.

PART 4

Mrs. Monarch is displeased when she sees that the artist has hired Oronte. When she sees the drawings that the artist has done with Oronte, she insinuates that she wouldn't have been able to guess he was the subject. She adds, with satisfaction, that the artist's drawings of the Monarchs always look exactly like them. The artist agrees with Mrs. Monarch, but sees this fact as being precisely the issue. Although he views it as occasionally useful and amusing to work with the Monarchs when depicting upper-class types, he finds it to be overall a frustrating affair. All the same, he proceeds with the determined Monarchs as his protagonists for the Philip Vincent books, and sends several of his illustrations to the publishers.

Once again, Mrs. Monarch demonstrates her ignorance of the purpose of art, which is to interpret reality, not document it. She doesn't understand that the artist isn't trying to capture his models' appearances exactly as they are. He doesn't want the models' real selves to be apparent in his work. While he is frustrated, the artist does still find it sometimes amusing to work with Monarchs (that is, "the real thing"), which shows that, even though he sees that trying to capture reality is having a negative effect on his art, he is nonetheless still distracted by the opportunity.

The artist is excited to get input from his long-time friend Jack Hawley, who has recently returned to London from a trip abroad designed to help him "get a fresh eye." Although Jack is a bad painter, he is an art critic whose opinion the artist trusts. When the artist shows his friend the illustrations of the Monarchs, Jack instantly rejects them and sharply asks the artist what's wrong with him. He finds these images "execrable" given the artist's greater goals for his art. Although the artist presses Hawley for specific reasons why he despises the Monarchs so much, he is unable to give an answer. But he tells the artist that he must fire the Monarchs immediately.

Jack Hawley's disgust with the artist's Monarch-inspired artwork shows that an outside, critical audience also feels that "the real thing" is a poor inspiration for art. Jack knows that the artist seeks to illustrate human character in its variety, so he confronts the artist when he sees that his friend's work is dominated by one type, the very same issue that the artist had denounced earlier in the story. Jack's inability to articulate exactly what is wrong with the art suggests that perhaps the line between copying reality and interpreting reality is a thin one, or that one simply instinctively feels that such art is wrong, without need for an explanation.

The artist ignores Jack Hawley's warning. Yet even though he continues to work with the Monarchs, he is losing his patience with them and he begins to view them as "objects of charity." They, meanwhile, still feel a superiority to Miss Churm and Oronte, whom they assume are being used to depict the "low life" of the Philip Vincent book. However, the artist is actually using Oronte and Miss Churm to model for the aristocratic types too.

The artist is getting fed up with the Monarchs but can't bring himself to fire these pitiful "objects of charity." This suggests that the other classes of 19th century England may see the aristocrats as part of the traditional social hierarchy, but they are being increasingly viewed as pathetic relics from an older time that need more help than they offer. The Monarchs, however, appear to be unaware of the artist's feelings. They still believe that they possess an inherent value as "the real thing," which reveals their ignorance regarding the changing times and the way that their aristocratic background has become a detriment rather than a blessing in the current economy driven by the middle and working classes.

One day, the Monarchs interrupt a sitting with Oronte. They intend to stay for tea, so the artist, wanting to deliver a lesson, asks them to prepare and serve the tea, which embarrasses Mrs. Monarch greatly. She is embarrassed, but does as requested, although she needs prompting from the artist to also serve Oronte a cup. The artist is moved by the effort and humility with which Mrs. Monarch completes this task, and he considers how he is doing the wrong thing by stringing them along in this work that they are unsuitable for.

Mrs. Monarch's serving of the tea is very different than Miss Churm's from earlier in the story. While Miss Churm effortlessly stepped into the role, Mrs. Monarch is embarrassed at having to perform such a menial task. Her pride, which is rooted in being an aristocrat, holds her back from immediately performing this domestic duty. She does not possess the same flexibility of Miss Churm. Furthermore, she is particularly resistant to serving Oronte, whom she sees as far beneath her because of his class. Even though he has more talent than she does and is a far more valuable employee of the artist, Mrs. Monarch is still affected by the old customs of her class, which would never have her, an upper-class woman, serve a poor immigrant. She is trapped in her class. The whole awkward situation makes the artist realize anew just how ill-equipped the Monarchs are for work.

Soon after, the artist receives a response from the artistic advisor for the Philip Vincent books. The advisor informs him that they were disappointed in the work and that the artist risks losing the rest of the books if he doesn't improve his work. Feeling desperate, the artist turns to Oronte and Miss Churm and adopts them as the protagonists for the illustrations. When the Major stops in the middle of a sitting for Oronte, he asks whether the latter is the artist's idea of a gentleman, to which the artist snaps, "I can't be ruined for *you*!" The Major silently exits the studio, relieving the artist, who hopes he won't have to see him again.

While Jack Hawley's artistic criticism demanded that the artist fire the Monarchs, the artist doesn't actually do so until his income is threatened. As seen with the artist's sidelined dreams of being a well-known portrait painter, the artist acts depending on his financial situation. Facing ruin, he finally fires the Monarchs in favor of Oronte and Miss Churm. This rejection of the aristocracy in favor of the lower classes suggests that this is what is happening in late 19th-century England. The aristocracy is unskilled and thus unprepared for a society that evaluates them based on their utility.

The Monarchs do, however, return. Their visit strikes the artist as tragic proof that they really have nothing else to do. But the artist is in the middle of a sitting with Oronte and Miss Churm (who are posing for a scene from the Philip Vincent books) and is too wrapped up in his art to pay the Monarchs much attention. The Monarchs stand back to watch, and this hovering makes the artist uncomfortable. Suddenly, Mrs. Monarch asks for permission to touch up Miss Churm's hair. The artist leaps up, nervous that Mrs. Monarch will hurt his model, but she stills him with a look that he realizes he would like to draw. Mrs. Monarch then adjusts Miss Churm's hair and significantly improves it.

Again, the Monarchs have nothing better to do than visit the artist, even though they are now no longer employed by him. Meanwhile, Miss Churm and Oronte demonstrate that what the artist needs is artifice, not "the real thing", when creating art. The two of them—although far from the aristocrats they are representing for the Philip Vincent books—are able to perfectly suggest the feeling that the artist needs. Mrs. Monarch, however, is still fixated on the fact that the artist's models do not actually resemble aristocrats, which is shown by her adjusting Miss Churm's hair to make it look more elegant. The artist acknowledges that this does improve Miss Churm's appearance, but whether this action improves the artist's work is less certain. Will he get distracted from the feeling he intends to capture by trying to duplicate Miss Churm's hair? Or will it help the artist illustrate a more convincingly elegant hairstyle, suggesting that perhaps a limited amount of reality is useful when creating art? James doesn't provide an answer. But, at last, the artist does see something in Mrs. Monarch that he would like to paint: the expression she uses to halt him from interfering with her hair-styling efforts. Mrs. Monarch finally shows an expression that communicates a feeling strong enough to affect the artist's actions. It is a sad twist of fate that this should happen now, but it is also apparent that this is spontaneous, and not something she can do on command, which is what he needs from his models.

Meanwhile, the Major is looking around the studio to find something to do and begins to clean the artist's kitchen. Mrs. Monarch joins him. The artist is so stunned at this display of humility and desperation that his eyes tear up. The spectacle chills his creative fervor and dumbfounds his two models, whom he dismisses. The Monarchs make one final plea to stay on as servants, to which the artist agrees, knowing full well that he won't be able to stand it. Sure enough, about a week later he gives them some money to go away. He never sees them again. He does secure the rest of the Philip Vincent books, but Jack Hawley avows that the Monarchs did the artist "a permanent harm" and changed his art for the worst. Although this may be true, the artist admits that it was worth it just to have the memory.

The Monarchs are desperately searching for something to prove their usefulness, so they try to convince the artist to keep them on as servants. But even though they exercise the humility required to perform these menial tasks, they make the artist and his models uncomfortable. This suggests that even when aristocrats do the work of the lower classes, they still cannot be anything but aristocrats. Their customs and traditions mark them as aristocrats, no matter their financial situation. The artist's distress at the Monarchs' transformation shows that, to the other classes, aristocrats will never belong to any other class than their own. They are stuck being "the real thing." Even after the artist gets rid of the Monarchs for good, their effect lingers. His art has been permanently damaged by their influence, which suggests that he is still tripped up by the allure of documenting the real thing, instead of using artifice to interpret real life to create art. In this way, the story serves as a warning to all artists of the dangers of abandoning artifice for "the real thing."

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