



Fig. 1. Rudolf Blind's first illustration for "The Real Thing." From *Black and White*.

prose, which appeared together on the pages of the April 16, 1892, edition of *Black and White*. James probably did not see these paintings until after he had finished revising the story for its first publication.⁹ Looking at each of these pictures in turn, this section attempts to recreate this original audience's experience with the visual and verbal dimensions of "The Real Thing."

In the initial picture as it appeared upon publication, the Monarchs and the narrator meet for the first time in the narrator's art studio (see Figure 1).¹⁰ Though most viewers would probably agree that the painting is just the sort of "bad illustration" to which the story refers, Blind's painting does show him trying to use his artistic medium to his own advantage. Blind clutters the scene with an interesting array of objects, and he adeptly creates many visual rhymes. A two-handled vase repeats the curves of Mrs. Monarch's torso, and a statuary bust echoes the angle at which Mr. Monarch holds his head. The variety of furniture and level of detail show Blind's attempts to envision an appropriate and particular setting.¹¹ But Blind's painting relies on an obvious, even



Fig. 2. Blind's second illustration for James's tale. From *Black and White*.

istics. When he has her don a costume and look over a head, she replies, "I'd rather look over a stove." James has the illustrator narrate, "She fell into position, settled herself into a tall attitude, gave a certain backward inclination to her head and a certain forward droop to her fan, and looked, at least to my prejudiced sense, distinguished and charming, foreign and dangerous" (RT, 323). Again, some of the incidentals in Blind's illustration seem awry. Miss Churm stands near a stove but does not look over it, and the stove, which lacks an exhaust pipe for the smoke, shows no sign that it radiates heat. Miss Churm's fan even reverses the direction of the "droop" the narrator describes. Admittedly this kind of exacting scrutiny risks sounding captious, and the narrator even instructs the Monarchs to look beyond petty details: "Oh, you think she's shabby, but you must allow for the alchemy of art" (RT, 323). But the readers of *Black and White* in 1892 had just such a piece of "alchemy" before them, and



Fig. 3. Blind's final illustration for "The Real Thing." From *Black and White*.

therefore could judge the narrator's success, and could appreciate Miss Churm's exotic allure, for themselves. They could read the narrator's words, and look at Blind's images, and decide if they saw a street urchin who looked "a trifle blowsy" (RT, 321), or a charming princess fit to illustrate a royal romance. The story's audience read about one artist in black-and-white and witnessed the work of an actual artist in the same medium. They could look at Blind's paintings in *Black and White* and decide if the "alchemy of art" in fact did the trick.

The third and final illustration to grace James's story contained both Oronte, who the narrator describes as an illustrator's dream, and Mrs. Monarch, whose aristocratic appearance the narrator finds disappointing (see Figure 3). Blind's illustration does little, however, to distinguish one of them as more picturesque than the other. Mrs. Monarch's face,



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Henry James's "The Real Thing" in the Pot-Boiler Press

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