"THE FINENESS OF THE MEASURES TAKEN": CLOSE READING AS A METHOD FOR APPRECIATING THE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

By

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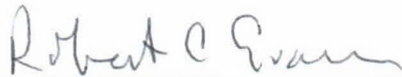

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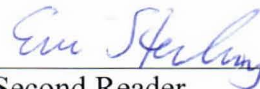

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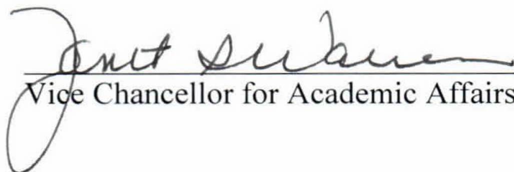

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. Introduction 1

II. *The Ambassadors* 16

III. *The Wings of the Dove* 41

IV. *The Golden Bowl* 56

Works Cited and Consulted 80

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"[T]he fineness of the measures taken—a real extension, if successful, of the very terms and possibilities of representation and figuration—such things alone were, after this fashion, inspiring, such things alone were a gage of the probable success of that dissimulated calculation with which the whole effort was to square." –Preface to *The Ambassadors* (xi)

Although the term "close reading" seems inextricably tied to Formalism or the so-called "New Criticism," the actual process itself—the "careful, intricate study of a text" (Mikics 61)—neither began with the New Critics nor ended with the recent widespread rejection of New Criticism's tenets. In his article "Ethics, Critics, and Close Reading," Andrew Dubois cites a recent history which credited ancient Greek scholars as being the first to formulate a style "capable of reading 'through' a text and permitting attentive consideration, examination and probing of what was being read" (931). Elizabeth Kantor, who devotes an entire chapter of her *Politically Incorrect Guide* to the subject of close reading, takes the same stance: "close reading is simply what the most interested, intelligent, and disciplined readers have been doing since there was any literature to read" (216). She convincingly describes the Romantics Thomas de Quincey and Samuel Coleridge as close readers, offering as evidence de Quincey's admiration of Shakespeare's style—"'the farther we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen

nothing but accident'" (217)—and Coleridge's recognition that in poetry there is "'a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word'" (217). Garrick Davis also makes the same point in the introduction to his recent anthology *Praising It New: The Best of the New Criticism*, in which he lists Aristotle and Longinus as early precursors of "a criticism of permanence rendered so because [according to T. S. Eliot] it 'looked solely and steadfastly at the object'" (xxvi). Of course, it was not until the 1920s, after Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* launched what became known as the "New Criticism,"[1] that the term "close reading" grew to represent a discipline in its own right. By the 1930s and 40s, thanks to the work of scholars such as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, I. A. Richards, William Empson, F. R. Leavis, Yvor Winters, R. P. Backmur, Kenneth Burke, and William K. Wimsatt, the practice of close reading had transformed not just the world of literary criticism but the world of education as well. These "new critics" sought to demonstrate the artistry of literature, particularly poetry, through a careful, sustained examination of the text. For them, close reading became "not the point but the tool developed to prove the point" (Logan xiv).

Although the idea of close reading itself may not have begun with the New Critics, it was the New Critics who refined the process of textual explication into a highly sophisticated and highly trainable technique that was nothing less than revolutionary. Prior to the 1920s, most of what was considered literary criticism tended to be "arcane Indo-European philology on the one hand, and on the other . . . historical scholarship that seemed more deeply interested in sociology and biography than in

literature" (Dubois "Introduction" 4). The New Critics, many of whom were poets themselves and therefore deeply cognizant of literary form, devised their system of close reading in reaction to what they viewed as a serious deficiency in the ways scholars approached texts. In his discussion of the New Critics' "revolution," Garrick Davis quotes Allen Tate's famous complaints in "Miss Emily and the Bibliographer": "If [a student] . . . goes to a graduate school he comes out incapacitated for criticism. . . . He cannot discuss the literary object in terms of its specific form; all that he can do is to give you its history or tell you how he feels about it" (xxiv). Tate and his fellow New Critics corrected this lopsided treatment of literature by focusing almost exclusively on the "form" and "technique" of a literary work. Although at first opposed by the historical scholars and amateur "impressionists" then in power, who generally ignored the stylistic complexities of genre and tone in favor of studying the "content or the history of [a] . . . particular work" (Davis xxiv), the practice of close reading soon became standard fare in American universities for both the scholar and the student. According to Jane Gallop, "when New Criticism took over English studies, it injected methodological rigor into what had been a gentlemanly practice of amateur history. We became a discipline, so the story goes, when we stopped being armchair historians and became instead painstaking close readers" (183).

Indeed, despite the fact that New Criticism has since been overtaken by a number of new theories, including Deconstruction, Post-Modernism, New Historicism, and Cultural Studies, and despite the growing fear that such theoretical approaches have discouraged the teaching of literary form,[2] close reading still "remains a dominant mode

for critical writing in both . . . public schools and . . . colleges" (Bennett 679). Heather Murray claims the practice to be "[s]o pervasive and persistent . . . at the university level that it is tempting to consider it as a synecdoche for the English essay" (195), and Lois Tyson predicts that it will "remain [a real presence among us] . . . for some time to come" (135). In fact, a cursory search of recent college-level teaching aids published between 1995 and 2008 demonstrates the continuing emphasis on close reading in the classroom. Beth Neman's *Teaching Students to Write* (1995) not only provides valuable sample exercises in close reading but also unapologetically describes the practice as one "that should be at the heart of a combined language-arts program" (378). Dennis J. Sumara's *Why Reading Literature in School Still Matters* (2002) provides an engaging demonstration of the effectiveness and value of learning and teaching close reading, while Elaine Showalter's *Teaching Literature* (2003) endorses close reading as a method of teaching "the verbal, formal, and structural elements of . . . words themselves" (56). Although a major feminist critic, Showalter further explains that the "close reading process, or *explication de texte*, that we use in analyzing literary texts does not have to come with the ponderous baggage of the New Criticism, or with political labels" (56). Richard Lanham's *Analyzing Prose* (2003, second edition) provides not just essential terminology for evaluating prose style but also provides invaluable examples of Lanham's own close readings of various prose works. David Nettelbeck's *Computers, Thinking, and Learning* (2005), a manual designed to help college instructors use computers and digital media to "enrich" their teaching (ix), devotes an entire chapter to close reading tactics (v), while Rita Charon's *Narrative Medicine* (2006), a compelling

study of how the reading and understanding of literature can infuse the medical profession with "more humane, more ethical, and perhaps more effective care" (vii), also includes a full chapter on close reading strategies. Finally, Richard Paul and Linda Elder's *The Thinker's Guide to How to Read A Paragraph and Beyond: The Act of Close Reading* (2006) advocates close reading as the key to improving critical thinking skills. Although by no means exhaustive, the above list of textbooks and teaching aids does suggest that close reading, at least as a teaching method in universities, remains highly resilient and fundamentally valuable.

How, then, and why did close reading fall out of favor—at least among "advanced" thinkers—as a scholarly method? Why was "close reading" resisted when it was first advocated by the New Critics, and how and why did it fall into decline among influential theorists after it had eventually risen to such prominence? Although the Poststructuralists and Deconstructionists were among the first to break away from the New Critics' emphasis on aesthetics and textual unity, preferring instead to focus on linguistic contradictions and inconsistencies, it has been argued that they nevertheless practiced a "form of close reading of literary texts not in fact so radically different from New Criticism" (Gallop 182)[3]. It was not until the rise of New Historicism in the 1980s that the popularity of close reading as an essential tool of scholarly work really began to suffer. Touted as the "fading slogan" (Litz 219) of an obsolete and deficient form of criticism, the term, as Jane Gallop remarks, "has been . . . tarred with the elitist brush applied in our rejection of the New Critics' canon and . . . is being thrown out with the dirty bathwater of timeless universals" (182). This tendency to equate close reading with

New Criticism is unfortunate but understandable. If, as Douglas Mao points out, "the most popular form of attack upon the New Criticism has proven to be the assertion that . . . treating the literary text as an autonomous aesthetic object . . . severs it irretrievably from both psychology and history" (227), then any detailed study of textual form or style can easily appear suspect. Marshall Brown identifies Renaissance New Historicists in particular as having a "fear of style and of stylistics" (804), a fear that he points out is "[o]ften . . . coded as a rejection of 'close reading'" (804).[4] Indeed, according to Michael Wood in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, close reading has been identified with a "radical refusal of history . . . [and] a vision of the literary text as a perfected and unalterable verbal structure, a paradise of poised irony and ambiguity, invulnerable to time or politics" (219-220). Such exaggerations have led a number of critics like Mao to protest. In "The New Critics and the Text-Object," Mao argues that the accusations of "ontological naiveté," "hypostatization of the text," and "antihistoricism" leveled against the New Critics are "misreadings" and even "myths" (237). Although he acknowledges the New Critics' "downplaying of the poem-object's history" (245), he also returns to a number of their most controversial works (including Brooks' *The Well Wrought Urn*, Ransom's *The World's Body*, and Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon*) to argue that the "sensitive rhetorical reader, like the sensitive historical reader . . . will recognize that New Critical hypostatization implies not the banishing of context but its problematization, not a prohibition of all moves to situate the text-object but an insistence that they be made with exquisite care" (244). Helen Vendler also gives a sound defense of the New Critics' work in her article "Reading a Poem," which opens with the following clarification:

> I want to begin by scotching an old notion—that there was ever a school that said one should refer, in reading a poem, "only to the words on the page." The critics who asked that attention be paid to the words on the page . . . all assumed that a reader studying poetry would have had an excellent education in Latin, modern languages, philosophy, history, theology, and canonical works of literature. What they objected to were essays in literary history, literary theory, and the history of ideas that displayed only the skimpiest knowledge, if that, of what a poem was up to, what its author was up to. The New Critics asked not for a "close" reading, as it is nowadays referred to, but what I would call "a writer's reading"—the study that another writer would give to what had been attempted, and accomplished, on the page. (129)

Indeed, the idea that close reading must be limited either to one agenda or, as Vendler puts it, "only to the words on the page," is both reductive and ironic, particularly since the method (as envisioned by the New Critics themselves, as A. Walton Litz points out) "was meant to complement historical knowledge, indeed . . . to offer historical knowledge, since the behaviour of words is an aspect of social life" (219).

Fortunately, the past decade has seen a steady return of interest in the practice of close reading, which in turn has led to the appearance of more accurate (and favorable) definitions. For example, the entry for close reading in the 2007 edition of David Mikics' *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* describes the "discipline" (61) as both a vital aspect

of scholarship and a way to prevent one's reading from being restricted by any single theory:

> To read closely is to investigate the specific strength of a literary work in as many of its details as possible. It also means understanding how a text works, how it creates its effects on the most minute level. As such, close reading is the necessary form of serious literary study. Any reader who wishes to avoid turning a poem or a novel into a mere piece of evidence concerning society, history, or intellectual tradition, and instead wants to grasp the work's argument in its own terms, must read closely." (61)

Defined thus, close reading can be used in various contexts and can provide access to a multitude of meanings. As Russ McDonald demonstrates in *Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (2004), "critics of different generations" practice the art of close reading in "different ways" and for different purposes (845). Rather than attempt a conclusive definition of a term so elastic, McDonald asks a series of questions to highlight its "uncertain status at the end of the twentieth century": "Is it an approach, like new historicism? Does it have a political valence, like postcolonial criticism? Is it associated with particular themes and concerns, like psychoanalytic criticism? Is it ideologically neutral? Is it a method? Is it a practice? Are there rules or guidelines for performing it?" (845). Such questions suggest both the fundamental versatility of close reading and its continued value to a number of critics and theorists who, as Dubois notes, "would never be described first as formalists" ("Ethics" 928).

Indeed, a growing number of critics are commenting on the return of close reading as a scholarly practice. Geoffrey Hartman, in "The Fate of Reading Once More" (1996), not only recognizes the continuing presence of "the formal study of texts—canonical and noncanonical" (387), but also declares that to "abandon" the "kind of evidentiality" inherent in close reading "in order to acknowledge the enormous pressures of the present is misguided, mistaken, and useless" (384). Similarly, Douglas Mao maintains that "criticism has much to lose if it neglects either the 'readability' of things or the 'thingliness' of texts" (229) and in "The New Critics and the Text-Object" (1996) sets as his goal the task of proving that the "thingly aspect" of a text "continues to be essential to literary study" (229). Marshall Brown also advocates a return to close reading or "the study of style as the vehicle of literary criticism" (803); in "Le Style Est L'Homme Meme: The Action of Literature" (1997) he points out that "[d]oing literary criticism does not mean studying a particular body of texts, but studying texts in a particular way" (802-3), and he further argues that "style is the most minute, the least ideal, the most concrete universal with which our writing confronts us" (807). Three years later, Heather Dubrow picks up the same line of reasoning in her article "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Reinterpreting Formalism and the Country House Poem" (2000). Dubrow points out that ever since the 1980s, "repeated efforts to find new, or apparently new, ways of justifying the discussion of literary form" (66) have "coexisted" with clearly anti-formalist view points." In fact, Dubrow's own article adds to the rising popularity of such "efforts" by offering evidence that the "potential fissures created by

misreadings and misrepresentations can be prevented by approaching . . . texts . . . more judiciously and by adopting . . . strategies for recuperating formalism" (67).

Even more recently, Andrew Dubois in "Ethics, Critics, Close Reading" (2007) admits that the practice of close reading itself is surprisingly flexible (931) and has, in the past several years, shown up in the most unlikely sources.[5] His argument follows a similar statement in Caroline Levine's "Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies" (2006) claiming that "a range of critics in recent years—including Heather Dubrow, Dorothy Hale, Ellen Rooney, Herbert Tucker, and Susan Wolfson—have urged a new attention to form as part of a politically aware historicism." Levine's argument is particularly intriguing in its proposition that "formalism is precisely what gives value—and political power—to literary and cultural studies." The kind of close reading Levine advocates is "neither apolitical nor ahistorical"; in fact, she suggests a new name for it—"strategic formalism"—in order to clarify its potential value to modern scholarship:

> In any given reading . . . a formalist reader might account for relations among multiple—and often apparently unrelated—formal elements. She might connect punctuation to narrative structure, or meter to metonymy. Thus formalism emerges as an ideal set of methods for thinking about competing modes or order, and it is particularly well suited to the apprehension of subtle interactions among different ordering tactics. The point is not that societies are just like poems, but that literary critics, long practiced at articulating the subtle shaping patterns that both reinforce and

> destabilize one another in a given textual object, are ideally suited to extend those reading practices to the analysis of cultural life . . . . (634)

Levine's proposition that close reading be reintroduced to New Historicism and Cultural Studies finds an echo in Paul Armstrong's recent article entitled "Form and History: Reading as an Aesthetic Experience and Historical Act" (2008), which opens by objecting to the notion that one should have to choose "between form and history" (195). "The otherness of a literary work," he claims, "its challenge as well as its appeal—is inextricably both formal and historical" (195). Like Levine, Armstrong seeks to "recover the interaction of form and history" (198); he reasons that scholars "diminish literature as much by denying its social, cultural, and political meanings as by ignoring how they are mediated by formal acts of signification" (196). Perhaps, as more and more scholars like Levine and Armstrong reacquaint themselves with the value of textual form, the concepts of "formalism" and "close reading" will regain the respect they once held. However, whether formalism itself regains such respect seems less important than keeping close reading alive and healthy as a crucial critical method. Formalism, like all critical theories, has its inevitable limitations, but the technique of close reading seems invaluable no matter which theory or theories a reader adopts.

Of course, alongside the growing number of articles justifying the need for a renewed interest in close reading[6] have appeared a growing number of books and anthologies offering inventive and engaging samples of the very kinds of close reading being promoted here. Some recent collections of such readings include Michael P. Clark's *Revenge of the Aesthetic* (2000), Mark Rasmussen's *Renaissance Literature and*

Its Formal Engagements (2002), Frank Lentricchia and Andrew Dubois' *Close Reading: The Reader* (2003), Garrick Davis' *Praising It New* (2008), and Stephen Cohen's *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism* (2007)—all of which make a compelling case for the continued need for close reading even as part of the most "advanced" theoretical ventures.[7] Other books offering new insights into the formal and artistic qualities of literature include Valentine Cunningham's *Reading After Theory* (2002), which "pay[s] tribute to all those . . . whose exemplary practices in various sorts of close reading . . . kept the flag of the . . . text-respecting, text-loving and . . . text-forgiving hermeneutic touch [sic] . . . flying through the Dark Days of Theory" (167); Terry Eagleton's *How to Read a Poem* (2007), which insists on "a politics of form as well as a politics of content" (8); and Jonathan Culler's *The Literary in Theory* (2007), which calls for a return to the "centrality of the literary" (5). Although the articles and books listed above represent only a portion of the various and variously favorable commentary on the return of close reading, they nevertheless offer compelling evidence of a rising interest in the usefulness of, and need for, the detailed analysis of the specific artistry and craftsmanship and the precise denotations and connotations of literary texts.

Indeed, the fact that many of the critics mentioned above differ greatly in their theoretical leanings indicates the fundamental pervasiveness and longevity of close reading. No longer dismissed as the outmoded tool of a partial form of criticism that privileges aesthetics and disregards cultural content, the practice of close reading seems highly adaptable. Thus, while a close reading of a short story might still involve close attention to word choice, punctuation, sentence structure, style, and genre, it might also

consider more abstract details as well, such as precisely how authors present their ideas, the exact patterns they use to do so, and how those patterns not only affect the story itself but also reflect the culture in which the story was written. Such close reading demands a sensitivity to the subtlest connotations and nuances of words and grammatical functions as well as an ability to connect those observations to larger philosophical and cultural issues. Defined in this way, close reading holds the potential to reinvigorate and enrich any form of criticism, whether it be formal, historical, or cultural in nature.

Some of the most intriguing and therefore rewarding close readings involve texts whose authors have deliberately attempted to create a "fusion of style and substance and of form and content" (Schwarz 18). Henry James, for instance, is one writer well known for his passionate "attention to [such] aesthetic matters" (18) as "craft, unity, [and] technique" (18). Indeed, in his essay "The Art of Fiction" and in the prefaces to each of the New York Editions of his major novels, he stresses the potential artistry of fiction and offers quite detailed critiques of his own experimentations not just with the overall structure of his novels but with the style of his prose itself. His last three novels in particular (*The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*), often categorized as the crowning achievements of his major phase, represent the height of this (near obsessive) experimentation with style and have proven to be rich sites for numerous perceptive close readings. In the three chapters which follow, I hope to contribute to the already vast array of commentary devoted to the artistry of James' prose and, in the process, demonstrate how versatile and rewarding close reading can be. Each chapter offers detailed analyses of various selections from the three novels just mentioned. The

first and third chapters, devoted to *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* respectively, offer five detailed analyses, while the second chapter, devoted to *The Wings of the Dove*, offers three. In choosing the prose selections, I have carefully considered both their relation to each novel's plot and their potential value as illustrations of James' technical skill. Ultimately, I hope these analyses may clarify some of the "fineness of the measures taken" by James himself and thus enhance the experiences of future readers while at the same time proving of James what Richard Blackmur proved of Wallace Stevens: "what still remains will be the essential impenetrability of words, the bottomlessness of knowledge. To these the reader, like the poet, must submit" (qtd. in Lentricchia 21).

Notes

[1] See Garrick Davis' outline of the rise of New Criticism in the introduction to *Praising It New: The Best of the New Criticism.*

[2] In "The Fate of Reading Once More," Hartman claims that the "idea of composition has weakened: the building (and taking down) of metaphors, the patience of prosody, the extension or transformation of genre—which used to be taught as poetics—are no longer second nature even to youngsters who write verse enthusiastically" (388). Jane Gallop also expresses a deep concern about "the fate of close reading" and the fate of literary studies in general without close reading: "If we stop teaching close reading to our students, they will not be able to apply it to other cultural texts. Cultural studies will then become a weaker sort of cultural history, with neither the serious historical methodology in which historians are trained nor the close-reading method in which literary critics used to be trained" (184). Likewise, William Logan, in a forward to *Praising It New*, writes a scathing criticism of professors who seek to remove the study of style from their classrooms: in the hands of such professors, he claims, a poem is "analyzed . . . as a 'text' that mirrors the world of its making, as if it had been written not by a poet but by Sir History or Dame Sociology. The professor will employ the cryptic jargon of methods that to their promoters reveal hidden tensions in language, but to their detractors tar and feather poems for the sins of another day and force very different poets to sing the same tune. To the Marxists, the sins remain those of class; to the feminists, gender; to the scholars of ethnic literature, race—they wave over poems, mere poems, a Geiger counter that detects the decaying radioactivity of racism, sexism, and class hatred" (ix). Although he later acknowledges that "[t]here have been sophisticated and revealing studies on these subjects" (xi), he also reiterates the inappropriateness of handling literature "with the dispatch of a meat grinder" (xi): "long before the poem has been dragged in by the tail you can predict whether the butcher will sell you the sausages of [Jacques] Derrida, or [Michel] Foucault, or [Jacques] Lacan. It's disheartening to see a poem raided for evidence of sins long defunct or treated with a forensics kit, as if it were a crime scene" (xi).

[3] See also Wolfrey's *Readings: Acts of Close Reading in Literary Theory*, esp. xi.

[4] In an appendage to his article, however, Brown clarifies that he "by no means intend[s] to impeach historicists generally" (806), adding that "[m]any noted Romantic historicists . . . have subtle ears for style which they use to make revealing critical distinctions between epochs and among authors and within texts" (806).

[5] The three main sources Dubois discusses are Spivak's "Close Reading," Quayson's *Calibrations: Reading for the Social*, and Salih's Introduction to *The Judith Butler Reader.*

[6] See, for example, Benardete, Chu, Helfer, Nolan, Walters, Matar, Gibbons, Jones, Lopez, O'Keefe, Holland, Keitner, Llewelyn, Elena, Joseph, Germany, Holmes, and Trethewey.

[7] See also Rosteck, Bal and Gonzales, esp. 137-228; Isobel Armstrong, Gallagher and Greenblatt, esp. 8-9 and 31-39; Warhol, esp. 23-28; Berger; Said, esp. 57-84.

CHAPTER II

THE AMBASSADORS

This novel marks the beginning of Henry James' major phase and the first part of what many critics consider his defining trilogy: *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). Although the novels of the trilogy are often listed in order of publication, *The Ambassadors*, the novel that James himself considered his best work, was composed first. All three, however, develop and refine a theme James himself made famous, that of the American innocent awakening to the subtleties of European culture and to the consciousness of moral ambiguity. Much of what makes *The Ambassadors* so structurally remarkable is that although James uses third person, he limits his point of view to admit nothing but the observations of a single character, his protagonist, Lewis Lambert Strether. Because all actions, all conversations, all scenes (even those described by other characters) are sifted through Strether's limited perceptions and rationalizations, the reader may often feel confined in Strether's consciousness even though Strether himself feels his mental and physical horizons expanding. In fact, an important key to appreciating the book is to realize that what happens is far less important than how Strether interprets and responds to what happens. The entire book could thus be viewed as an illustration of James' philosophy that those most engaged in the life of the mind, those most active in the unending struggle of

intellectual growth through honest interpretation, are the most fully alive. This of course may be one of the reasons that James uses such elaborate sentence structures and forces his readers to read so carefully and to reread so often. To James, even the act of reading is not as important as the act of thinking about what is being read.

Sent and sponsored by his wealthy fiancée, Mrs. Newsome, Strether arrives in Europe intent on persuading Mrs. Newsome's son Chad to mend his dissolute ways and return to America to manage the family business in Woollett, Massachusetts. Although Mrs. Newsome never makes an appearance in the novel, she remains a dominant and sometimes daunting presence for Strether, who soon feels torn between his loyalty to her and his obligations to his new friends in Paris. One of his friends, Maria Gostrey, establishes herself early on as his guide and confidante. She encourages him to view Paris and Madame de Vionnet, Chad's supposed paramour, with an open mind—an attitude far removed from the rigid disapproval that emanates from Mrs. Newsome. When Strether hears others describe Chad's attachment to Mme. de Vionnet as "virtuous," he interprets the description to mean Platonic and gains a heightened respect for the couple, a respect which ultimately convinces him that Chad belongs in Paris next to the woman who has transformed him from a boorish American boy to a sophisticated man. Mrs. Newsome responds to Strether's change of mind by sending reinforcements: Chad's sister and brother-in-law (Mr. and Mrs. Pocock) and Chad's childhood friend, Mamie (Mr. Pocock's sister). Despite the mounting pressure, however, Strether steadily professes his admiration for Mme. de Vionnet and Chad. Even when he realizes that Mme. de Vionnet's relationship with Chad is not as pure as he once supposed, he reacts with great

sensitivity, realizing that now more than ever, Chad's rightful place is next to the exquisite and vulnerable Mme. de Vionnet. In the last chapter, as Strether prepares to return to America, he makes a final visit to Maria Gostrey, who invites him to live with her. Strether declines, although he obviously finds the prospect appealing, and chooses instead to return, honorably unattached, to end an irreparable relationship with Mrs. Newsome.

THE SPEECH IN THE GARDEN

Context: Reportedly spoken by William Dean Howells and conveyed to Henry James by Jonathan Sturges (a family friend), this speech became the seed from which the entire novel grew. Placed near the middle of the novel, it represents not just a turning point in Strether's perception of his situation, but also a moment of personal crises as he becomes acutely aware of lost time and lost opportunities. The scene takes place at a party hosted by Gloriani, a famous sculptor (who also appears in James' earlier novel *Roderick Hudson*). Strether has just met Gloriani and Mme. de Vionnet for the first time and is both overwhelmed by the beauty of the place and its people and mystified by the fact that Mme. de Vionnet is completely different from what he (and Mrs. Newsome) had been expecting. While sitting in Gloriani's beautiful old garden full of "tall bird-haunted trees" (199), Strether delivers this speech to "little Bilham," a young American artist, who shares his admiration for Chad.

Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what *have* you had? This place and these impressions--mild as you may find them to wind a man up so;

all my impressions of Chad and of people I've seen at *his* place—well, have had their abundant message for me, have just dropped *that* into my mind. I see it now. I haven't done so enough before—and now I'm old; too old at any rate for what I see. Oh I *do* see, at least; and more than you'd believe or I can express. It's too late. And it's as if the train had fairly waited at the station for me without my having had the gumption to know it was there. Now I hear its faint receding whistle miles and miles down the line. What one loses one loses; make no mistake about that. The affair—I mean the affair of life—couldn't, no doubt, have been different for me; for it's at the best a tin mould, either fluted and embossed, with ornamental excrescences, or else smooth and dreadfully plain, into which, a helpless jelly, one's consciousness is poured—so that one 'takes' the form, as the great cook says, and is more or less compactly held by it: one lives in fine as one can. Still, one has the illusion of freedom; therefore don't be, like me, without the memory of that illusion. I was either, at the right time, too stupid or too intelligent to have it; I don't quite know which. Of course at present I'm a case of reaction against the mistake; and the voice of reaction should, no doubt, always be taken with an allowance. But that doesn't affect the point that the right time is now yours. The right time is *any* time that one is still so lucky as to have. You've plenty; that's the great thing; you're, as I say, damn you, so happily and hatefully young. Don't at any rate miss things out of stupidity. Of course I don't take you for a fool, or I shouldn't be addressing you thus awfully. Do what you like so long as you don't make *my* mistake. For it was a mistake. Live! (215)

ANALYSIS: Like the rest of the novel, this passage reveals a host of ironies and seeming contradictions. "Live," for example, the first and last word of the passage, may seem ironic, coming as it does from a quiet thinker and observer, one whose contemplations habitually delay action and judgment. Yet, while most people measure a full life according to its level of activity, enterprise, and accomplishment, Strether measures a full life according to how deeply and thoughtfully one has been able to appreciate living. To "live," to "have" a life, for Strether involves the art of understanding and enjoying beauty. He regrets the long dreary years he wasted in "drudgeries and delusions" (115), and as he "sees" for the first time the extent of Chad's charmed life, surrounded by original art, fascinating people, and ancient architecture, his growing desire for its preservation is tinged with envy. As the novel progresses, however, it becomes increasingly clear that Strether is the one who is fully "living," fully absorbing and appreciating the surrounding beauty and its implications, not Chad, who will eventually leave Mme. de Vionnet at the prospect of raw monetary gain. Strether looks at his mistakes and cries "It's too late[,]" but the very passion of his cry suggests that the best part of his life, the part in which he will gain the most, is yet to come. Thus, the moment Strether pictures as his end is the moment he begins living again—a paradox distinctive to religious conversion and one that adds a grave urgency to his message. The "faint receding whistle miles and miles down the line" could easily be an advancing whistle. In fact, the image of the train station itself—a place of endless possibility, offering one both the ability to travel to delightful destinations and to return to the same destination

countless times—introduces a surprising element of hope. The very act of acknowledging his wasted years brings back all Strether thinks he has lost.

Even though Strether speaks to Bilham from a position of wisdom, his words are modest and his tone humble: "Of course I don't take you for a fool, or I shouldn't be addressing you thus awfully." Perhaps it is this characteristic humility that allows him to accept the validity of opposing perspectives, as he does in his analogy of the tin mould. To be bound by one's circumstances in life, to be molded by fate, as a pudding or jelly is molded by the shape of a pan, suggests a grim view of determinism. Yet, even as Strether acknowledges the inevitability of fate, he avoids the resignation that one would expect from such a view. Even as he claims that freedom is an illusion, the very depth of his regret over a lost opportunity implies that he believes he could have made a different choice. Faced with these two mutually exclusive concepts—fatalism and free will—Strether reaches for a compromise: the illusion of freedom is still a form of freedom. His outburst itself, a reaction to the beauty he sees in Chad's life, suggests a desire to make use of this newly-identified sense of freedom and change his priorities. After all, "[t]he right time is *any* time that one is still so lucky as to have." In the course of the novel, Strether will face many such irreconcilable views: loyalty to one person will involve betraying another, virtue will include sexuality, and right will assume the face of wrong. Finally, Strether's visually descriptive word choice in this culinary analogy—"fluted," "embossed," "ornamental excrescences," "smooth" and "dreadfully plain"—reflect his fundamental interest in aesthetic detail as well his philosophical tendency to give abstract significance to concrete objects.

Also ironic is the fact that the only way for Strether to take advantage of the opportunity ahead of him is to linger in seeming inactivity. It takes the kind of "gumption" he wished he had as a young man for him to shrug off Mrs. Newsome's restrictive influence and allow himself time to wander the streets of Paris, attend parties, and develop a friendship with Chad and Mme. de Vionnet. Yet, his indulgences never eclipse his sense of responsibility; he is, above all, a man of moderation, of restraint, of temperance. In fact, this speech, or "outburst" as James calls it, is quite atypical of his usual sparse and reserved conversational voice. Here, he reveals an unexpected passion and abandonment, demonstrated by short abrupt sentences, a vigorous imperative mood, an expressive "oh," and even an emphatic expletive. James intensifies this breathless tone by adding dramatic italics, assertive dashes, and a final enthusiastic exclamation point. Yet, even when Strether is at his most uninhibited (at least verbally), his sentences, like his thoughts, still retain a sense of balance: "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to"; "What one loses one loses"; "I was either . . . too stupid or too intelligent to have it." Such parallelism reflects the open-mindedness and aversion to rigidity by which Strether will learn to view the world.

MARIE DE VIONNET'S BEAUTY

Context: Strether has at this point met Marie de Vionnet twice—once at Gloriani's party where he made his famous speech to Bilham and once alone in her apartment where the two of them enjoyed a long tête-à-tête. He has also learned, through Miss Gostrey, something of her past—that she was consigned to an arranged marriage at an early age (a marriage which quickly turned bad) and now enjoys a "judicial separation" (224) from

her husband. Strether makes the following observations during a social gathering at Chad's apartment.

Her bare shoulders and arms were white and beautiful; the materials of her dress, a mixture, as he supposed, of silk and crape, were of a silvery grey so artfully composed as to give an impression of warm splendour; and round her neck she wore a collar of large old emeralds, the green note of which was more dimly repeated, at other points of her apparel, in embroidery, in enamel, in satin, in substances and textures vaguely rich. Her head, extremely fair and exquisitely festal, was like a happy fancy, a notion of the antique, on an old precious medal, some silver coin of the Renaissance; while her slim lightness and brightness, her gaiety, her expression, her decision, contributed to an effect that might have been felt by a poet as half mythological and half conventional. He could have compared her to a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud, or to a sea-nymph waist-high in the summer surge. Above all she suggested to him the reflexion that the *femme du monde*—in these finest developments of the type—was, like Cleopatra in the play, indeed various and multifold. She had aspects, characters, days, nights—or had them at least, showed them by a mysterious law of her own, when in addition to everything she happened also to be a woman of genius. She was an obscure person, a muffled person one day, and a showy person, an uncovered person the next. He thought of Madame de Vionnet to-night as showy and uncovered, though he felt the formula rough, because, thanks to one of the short-cuts of genius, she had taken all his categories by surprise. (256)

ANALYSIS: James reveals the significance of this description by placing it at the very beginning of the third and final chapter of Book Sixth—a position perfect for both introductions and conclusions and one which James cleverly uses to pose a new answer to old curiosities about Marie de Vionnet. In the previous two chapters, Strether glimpses Marie's stately apartment where he recognizes her as an aristocrat, the "mistress" (236) of "possessions . . . hereditary cherished charming"(235), and he hears Miss Barrace vaguely describe her as "wonderful," "magnificent," "brilliant," "various," and having "beautiful shoulders" (251). James offers no significant visual detail, however, and the reader's curiosity slowly builds, piqued as much by a lack of information as by Strether's obvious admiration, until at last it finds satisfaction in the turning of a page, that singular moment of both ending and beginning. James' love of contrast can also be seen in his juxtaposition of subject matter; chapter two, for example, ends with a brief reference to Maria Gostrey, Strether's first impression of a "femme du monde," while chapter three begins with this long, flattering description of her rival, Marie, the far more alluring "woman of the world."

This passage also reflects some of James' most common motifs: sight, art, description, and interpretation. Strether's love of visual beauty, for example, leads him not just to admire every detail of Marie's costume and demeanor but also to provide a well phrased, if not poetic, review of what he sees, employing common elements of art theory (color, shape, line, texture, form and value) as well as conventional literary techniques (a dense use of adjectives and adverbs, parallel sentences structures, allusions, similes, and lists of modifiers). In fact, an isolated reading of this passage will more

likely evoke the image of Strether in a museum, admiring a fixed, impassive statue or portrait than at a party approaching a moving, responsive woman of flesh and blood. That he compares her head to a token of monetary value, an "old precious medal, some silver coin of the Renaissance" suggests the sexual objectification or appraisal of her body, yet his admiration of "her gaiety, her expression, her decision" as well as her "obscurity" and "genius" indicates a genuine interest in her character and personality. This view of Strether as a passionately active spectator and interpreter provides a fascinating correlation to James' own role of observer (art lover) and creator (artist). Indeed, the passage itself, like so many of Strether's other descriptions, resembles the impressionist portraits of his time in the way it spotlights an immediately perceived aura or mood. Yet, with characteristic humility, Strether deliberately avoids assuming the role of poet; his most extravagant comparisons are either rendered hypothetical ("He could have compared her to a goddess") or dissociated completely as something "that might have been felt by a poet."

Marie herself, in Strether's view, becomes nothing less than iconic. She symbolizes all his abstract conceptions of beauty, from his "notion of the antique" to his image of the Renaissance profile to his perception of the modern "femme du monde." Ironically, her beauty—the aspect of her being that Strether finds most permanent—is possible only through "various and multifold" transformations. In fact, in order to satisfy Strether's ideal of the perfect woman, she must embrace and embody contradiction itself; she must be chaste yet seductive, modest yet exquisitely costumed, resilient yet vulnerable, "half mythological" yet "half conventional." Such antilogy naturally leaves

Strether wavering on the brink of several emotions at once. Although the first thing he notices—her "bare shoulders and arms"—indicates an instinctive pleasure in her body, he avoids any acknowledgement of sexual desire, shifting quickly from her skin to what covers it—her "collar of large old emeralds" and her "artfully composed" dress, shimmering with "embroidery," "enamel," and "satin." However, these tangible details morph quickly into abstractions: she is "a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud," "a sea-nymph waist-high in the summer surge," a "woman of genius," living by a "mysterious law of her own." This shifting of Strether's focus from Marie's physical beauty (over which she has little control) to her influence over his imagination (over which she has even less control), serves as a subtle reminder of his position as judge and critic. Yet, even though Strether's assessment verges on worship, it does little or nothing to empower Marie. She stands before him in passive silence, unable to challenge or endorse his thoughts, while he watches her in perplexed admiration, "all his categories taken by surprise." The shifting colors of her dress, imparting a cold "silvery gray" one moment and a "warm splendour" the next, baffle him as surely as the changing aspects of her personality, "showy and uncovered" one day and "muffled" and "obscure" the next. Should he accept her as a friend or continue to hold her at arms length as a "type," a symbol of female immorality? In the end, Strether confesses his "formula rough"; both his language and his judgment fail him in the presence of Marie's complexity.

MRS. NEWSOME'S SILENCE

Context: This passage occurs immediately after the novel's first crisis. Strether has just received an "ultimatum" (291) from Mrs. Newsome, stating that if he will not return to

Woollett immediately, she will send the Pococks over to handle the situation. Meanwhile, when Chad expresses a willingness to return to Woollett, Strether does exactly the opposite of what he was sent to do: he persuades him to remain in Paris.

The increase of his darkness, however, and the quickening, as I have called it, of his tune, resided in the fact that he was hearing almost nothing. He had for some time been aware that he was hearing less than before, and he was now clearly following a process by which Mrs. Newsome's letters could but logically stop. He hadn't had a line for many days, and he needed no proof—though he was, in time, to have plenty—that she wouldn't have put pen to paper after receiving the hint that had determined her telegram. She wouldn't write till Sarah should have seen him and reported on him. It was strange, though it might well be less so than his own behaviour appeared at Woollett. It was at any rate significant, and what *was* remarkable was the way his friend's nature and manner put on for him, through this very drop of demonstration, a greater intensity. It struck him really that he had never so lived with her as during this period of her silence; the silence was a sacred hush, a finer clearer medium, in which her idiosyncrasies showed. He walked about with her, sat with her, drove with her and dined face-to-face with her—a rare treat "in his life," as he could perhaps have scarce escaped phrasing it; and if he had never seen her so soundless he had never, on the other hand, felt her so highly, so almost austerely, herself: pure and by the vulgar estimate "cold," but deep devoted delicate sensitive noble. Her vividness in these respects became for him, in the special conditions, almost an obsession; and though the obsession sharpened his

pulses, adding really to the excitement of life, there were hours at which, to be less on the stretch, he directly sought forgetfulness. He knew it for the queerest of adventures—a circumstance capable of playing such a part only for Lambert Strether—that in Paris itself, of all places, he should find this ghost of the lady of Woollett more importunate than any other presence. (302)

ANALYSIS: Many of the sentences in this passage hinge upon the balancing of opposites, perhaps as a way of drawing attention to the complete reversal of Strether's goal as ambassador. James' word choice, in particular, creates striking paradoxes, as when he uses the word "tune" to mean his "lines" or letters to Mrs. Newsome: the "quickening . . . of his tune resided in the fact that he was hearing almost nothing." By using auditory terms, James gives the clause both a literal meaning (the absence of sound resulted in an escalation of sound) as well as a figurative meaning (the fewer letters he received, the more letters he wrote), both of which reveal perfectly paired opposites. Furthermore, the word "tune," with its connotations of light-hearted cheer, could either contradict Strether's own rather melancholy disposition or indicate that his emotions are at odds with Mrs. Newsome's "intensity." As the passage gains momentum, this theme of balanced contradiction grows increasingly more evident. Several lines down, for instance, James arranges two parallel sets of contrary elements to describe (and imitate) Mrs. Newsome's fluctuating influence over Strether: "if he had never seen her so soundless he had never, on the other hand, felt her so highly, so almost austerely, herself: pure and by the vulgar estimate 'cold,' but deep devoted delicate sensitive noble." Each statement begins by exposing a possible negative in Mrs. Newsome's character but ends by

modifying that same negative into a positive, thus revealing Strether's growing discernment while also mirroring one of the singularities of James' oeuvre—a lack of clear-cut villains and heroes. While a lesser man in Strether's situation might be tempted to vilify Mrs. Newsome, whose opinions he can no longer endorse, and glorify Mme. de Vionnet, whose "virtuous attachment" he now wants to protect, Strether remains admirably open-minded, if not impartial. James further lowers the chance of Strether appearing critical by introducing the first negative as a hypothetical or conditional statement ("if he had never seen her so soundless he had never . . . felt her so highly . . . herself"). Furthermore, by using a colon to separate the two statements, he forces the reader to pause at a unique moment of equilibrium and symmetry. This pause not only attracts attention to the message of the second (far more complimentary) clause but also gives the reader a chance to anticipate the forthcoming explanation or vindication of the first clause. Thus, as the structure of the second half unfolds under the same hypothetical arrangement as the first, the growing correlation of detail neatly parallels the reader's growing sense of gratification. Mrs. Newsome's "soundlessness" or lack of communication finds clarification in the adjective "cold," while Strether's vague declaration that he "had never . . . felt her so highly . . . herself" finds a similar clarification in the emphatic string of unpunctuated adjectives "deep devoted delicate sensitive noble." All this parallelism and balance calls attention to Strether's constant attempts to impose order and meaning on a situation rife with ambiguity.

Yet another example of paradox lies in the way Strether synesthetically employs three of the five senses—sight, sound, and touch—to describe the presence of a woman

an ocean away, one whom "he had never seen so soundless." The "sacred hush" of her silence grows visible as both a "darkness," representing her absence, and a "finer clearer medium," representing her presence. Likewise, although her silence feels "cold," his "obsession" over it "sharpens his pulses." Despite the frequent use of such sensory detail, however, Mrs. Newsome remains lost in the shadows, a bodiless presence, a mere "ghost" of a character—chilling, haunting, and voiceless. In fact, Strether's talent for creating vivid portraits of his friends and relatives falls strangely short when it comes to Mrs. Newsome. In the course of the entire novel, the only physical details he offers of her appearance serve as points of comparison in descriptions of other characters, as when he compares her to Maria Gostrey in Book Seventh or Sarah Pocock in Book Eighth. Thus, Mrs. Newsome's present silence toward Strether emerges as a direct counterpart to his ongoing silence about her. Indeed, Strether's sudden "obsession" with her after such reserve could be an indication of guilt or regret at having moved beyond her—beyond her "idiosyncrasies," her rigid codes of conduct, and her realm of influence. His own inner journey has created a distance far greater than any physical expanse could provide. Thus, while Mrs. Newsome seems to grow increasingly less tolerant, it is only because Strether continues to grow more adept at viewing himself and others from multiple angles; Mrs. Newsome's behavior, he admits, is "strange" but perhaps "less so than his own behavior appeared at Woollett." The final paradox of the passage, then, involves Strether's changing relationship with Mrs. Newsome: the very intensity of her presence proves the diminishing of her power.

A REVELATION AT THE CHEVAL BLANC

Context: This scene, which begins the third chapter of Book Eleventh, marks the climax of the novel. Strether is sitting in a garden behind an inn called the Cheval Blanc after having spent a "rambling day"(457) alone in the French countryside. While waiting for his dinner in a little pavilion overlooking the nearby river, he witnesses the approach of a young couple by boat.

What he saw was exactly the right thing—a boat advancing round the bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol. It was suddenly as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted more or less all day, and had now drifted into sight, with the slow current, on purpose to fill up the measure. They came slowly, floating down, evidently directed to the landing-place near their spectator and presenting themselves to him not less clearly as the two persons for whom his hostess was already preparing a meal. For two very happy persons he found himself straightway taking them--a young man in shirt-sleeves, a young woman easy and fair, who had pulled pleasantly up from some other place and, being acquainted with the neighbourhood, had known what this particular retreat could offer them. The air quite thickened, at their approach, with further intimations; the intimation that they were expert, familiar, frequent--that this wouldn't at all events be the first time. They knew how to do it, he vaguely felt--and it made them but the more idyllic, though at the very moment of the impression, as happened, their boat seemed to have begun to drift wide, the oarsman letting it go. It had by this time none the less

come much nearer--near enough for Strether to dream the lady in the stern had for some reason taken account of his being there to watch them. She had remarked on it sharply, yet her companion hadn't turned round; it was in fact almost as if our friend had felt her bid him keep still. She had taken in something as a result of which their course had wavered, and it continued to waver while they just stood off. This little effect was sudden and rapid, so rapid that Strether's sense of it was separate only for an instant from a sharp start of his own. He too had within the minute taken in something, taken in that he knew the lady whose parasol, shifting as if to hide her face, made so fine a pink point in the shining scene. It was too prodigious, a chance in a million, but, if he knew the lady, the gentleman, who still presented his back and kept off, the gentleman, the coatless hero of the idyll, who had responded to her start, was, to match the marvel, none other than Chad. (461)

ANALYSIS: Like so much of James' writing, this passage gains its full significance and intensity from an accumulation of previous detail. Strether's day in the French countryside, described in the preceding chapter, has given Strether some of the happiest moments of his trip (perhaps even of his life); he left Paris in the hope "of seeing something somewhere that would remind him of a certain small Lambinet" (452), a "special-green vision" (453) he once saw in an art gallery but could never afford to buy. Soon he finds his hopes magnificently granted: he wanders into the very landscape he long dreamed of owning—"[t]he oblong gilt frame disposed its enclosing lines" (453)—and he spends the rest of the afternoon "freely walking" (453) in a work of art all the more glorious for being real. Nowhere else in the novel does Strether experience such

pure gratification; nowhere else does he seem so susceptible to beauty or so hopeful about the future. It is next to this dreamlike chapter, marking the apex of Strether's happiness, that James places the novel's climax and the moment of Strether's gravest disappointment. Thus, the description of the approaching boat as "exactly the right thing" gathers a multitude of meanings. To James, the scene may be "right" because of its strategic position in the novel; it places Strether's most dramatic shift of emotion at the beginning of a new chapter, a place of distinction, of prominence, but one not entirely free from the warm glow of the previous pages. The "right thing" to James could also mean the best thing for Strether's character development; without this painful moment of recognition, there would be no real test of Strether's maturing, broadening moral consciousness. To Strether himself, however, who has "not once overstepped the oblong gilt frame" (457) of the Lambinet, the vision is "right" in that it perfects and completes his "idyllic" landscape; the introduction of human activity adds a sense of vitality and spatial depth while the bright pink parasol introduces a touch of warmth and focus. Also, given Strether's affectionate thoughts of Marie de Vionnet in the previous chapter, the romantic nature of the scene becomes "exactly the right thing" to match his sentimental mood. Most compellingly, however, the scene is "right" in its fulfillment of desire: "these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted more or less all day long." For much of the novel, Strether has viewed Chad as the embodiment of youthful perfection; in fact, he often seems to be reliving his own youth vicariously through Chad. Thus, it seems "right" that his image of the ideal youth together with the woman of his dreams should appear in his ideal landscape. All these mingled suggestions

of desire and perfection, then, only serve to deepen Strether's shock when the intimate strangers resolve into focus as Marie de Vionnet and Chad.

Yet, with characteristic finesse James delays the moment of shock until the last word of the paragraph, gradually altering each sentence to reflect Strether's progress from detached observation to mild curiosity to startled discovery. The first five sentences of the passage, for example, move at a leisurely pace, prolonged with appositives, interrupting modifiers, and participial phrases. Still the detached observer gazing through an imaginary frame, Strether notes in candid admiration how the couple "drifted into sight, with the slow current," how they "came slowly, floating down," how the "air quite thickened, at their approach, with further intimations; the intimation that they were expert, familiar, frequent." Both his mental framing of the scene and his ample, languid repetitions add a touch of the surreal, as though his own reality is separated somehow from the scene unfolding before him. The reader, then, lingers in a double sense of detached pleasure, viewing both the reality/unreality of the couple in the boat and the reality/unreality of Strether watching them. By the middle of the paragraph, however, as Strether begins to notice the strange wavering of the boat and the furtive signals between its occupants, the sentences grow shorter and more emphatic and the tense shifts from simple past to past perfect, thus allowing him to detail separately the sudden rush of observations and speculations flooding his consciousness. The drifting of the boat, the nearing of the boat, the lady's detection of Strether, her unheard comments to her companion, the way her companion remains turned from Strether, as though heeding her instructions—all these simultaneously occurring details, recorded with deliberate

precision, force the reader to follow the growing intensity of Strether's focus. In fact, the expansion of this one brief moment into an entire paragraph creates a sensation of slow motion, which in turn magnifies the final moment of recognition. By the last few sentences of the passage, however, James abruptly restores the immediacy of the moment with a succession of time-related words—"sudden," "rapid," "instant," "sharp start"—thus redirecting the reader's attention to the swiftness of Strether's plunge from passive observer to active performer.

STRETHER'S FAREWELL TO MARIA GOSTREY

Context: The following scene, taken from the very end of the novel, records Strether's final conversation with Maria Gostrey, his guide, confidante, and devoted friend. The two are standing in Maria's "little Dutch-looking dining-room" (507) overlooking a small garden, and Strether has just offered her his hand in farewell.

"To what do you go home?"

"I don't know. There will always be something."

"To a great difference," she said as she kept his hand.

"A great difference--no doubt. Yet I shall see what I can make of it."

"Shall you make anything so good--?" But, as if remembering what Mrs. Newsome had done, it was as far as she went.

He had sufficiently understood. "So good as this place at this moment? So good as what *you* make of everything you touch?" He took a moment to say, for, really and truly, what stood about him there in her offer--which was as the offer of exquisite service, of lightened care, for the rest of his days--might well have tempted. It built

him softly round, it roofed him warmly over, it rested, all so firm, on selection. And what ruled selection was beauty and knowledge. It was awkward, it was almost stupid, not to seem to prize such things; yet, none the less, so far as they made his opportunity they made it only for a moment. She'd moreover understand--she always understood.

That indeed might be, but meanwhile she was going on. "There's nothing, you know, I wouldn't do for you."

"Oh yes—I know."

"There's nothing," she repeated, "in all the world."

"I know. I know. But all the same I must go." He had got it at last. "To be right."

"To be right?"

She had echoed it in vague deprecation, but he felt it already clear for her. "That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself."

She thought. "But with your wonderful impressions you'll have got a great deal."

"A great deal"—he agreed. "But nothing like *you*. It's you who would make me wrong!"

Honest and fine, she couldn't greatly pretend she didn't see it. Still she could pretend just a little. "But why should you be so dreadfully right?"

"That's the way that—if I must go—you yourself would be the first to want me. And I can't do anything else."

So then she had to take it, though still with her defeated protest. "It isn't so much your *being* 'right'—it's your horrible sharp eye for what makes you so."

"Oh but you're just as bad yourself. You can't resist me when I point that out."

She sighed it at last all comically, all tragically, away. "I can't indeed resist you."

"Then there we are!" said Strether.

ANALYSIS: In his preface to *The Ambassadors*, James created Maria as a "ficelle" (literally translated, a piece of string), to help "tie up" the plot and shed light on Strether's often obscure thoughts and comments. It seems natural, then, that the novel's first and last conversations should occur between Maria and Strether. The circular nature of such an arrangement emphasizes the transformation of Strether's personality and outlook since his arrival in Europe, thus adding a gratifying sense of completion to an otherwise ambiguous ending. For example, while the first conversation introduces Strether as the shy, impressionable, compliant representative of Woollett, often baffled by the complexities of social interaction, this last conversation reveals him as an autonomous, discerning individual, sensitive to the implicit desires in Maria's guarded language but wise enough to decline them in order to follow his self-defined moral values. Maria herself, despite her function as a clever (and rather convenient) narrative ploy, develops quickly into a sympathetic and credible character, mostly due to James' skill at creating realistic, telling dialogue. A careful look at this short final conversation, for example, reveals some of Maria's most engaging qualities. The fact that she interrupts Strether's moment of farewell with a penetrating question ("'To what do you go home?'") suggests a genuine solicitude for his wellbeing as well as an unwillingness to end the conversation,

say goodbye, or see him leave. Of course, her questions also suggest a fundamental curiosity, the kind of curiosity that, without good manners, could easily border on the intrusive. Yet, Maria's obvious affection for Strether keeps her unfailingly tactful and generous, as when she leaves her second question unfinished out of a sense of delicacy for the regret he may be feeling over his recent estrangement with Mrs. Newsome.

Like any convincing character, however, Maria weakens in the face of disappointment; when Strether tells her he "'must go,'" she not only questions his reason ("'to be right?'") but lets a note of "vague deprecation" enter her voice. Even Strether, who never wavers in his perception of her as "honest and fine," eventually notices the faint petulance of her final question—"'But why should you be so dreadfully right?'"—instinctively attributing it to friendly, teasing pretense. The cheerfulness of Maria's banter, however, carries a note of desperation; in fact, her attitude of "defeated protest" (which Strether again interprets as a playful ruse) and her final ironic echo, "'I can't indeed resist you,'" would seem too raw without the accompanying half-"comic," half-"tragic" sigh. Such a combination of honesty and wit becomes all the more endearing given the poignancy of her situation. Readers can easily identify with her constant struggle to "read between the lines" of Strether's ambiguous remarks, her brave efforts to hide her disappointment, and her ongoing attempt to piece together a convincing reason for his rejection. Indeed, through her persistent questions, tentative summaries, and shrewd observations, Maria becomes just as helpful, just as much of a friend, to the reader as she has been to Strether. Playful, practical, and witty, her lively voice offers

relief not just from the ambiguity of Strether's confining perspective and moral quandaries but from the intensity of Mme. de Vionnet's romantic melancholy as well.

Strether, for his part, obviously anticipates Maria's feelings before she even voices them; he completes her unfinished question with surprising accuracy and then responds to her confession of love with a quick succession of almost dismissive assents: "'Oh yes—I know . . . I know. I know.'" Even the dialogue tags indicate Strether's desire to move on; the phrase "he took a moment to say," for example, suggests that his acknowledgment of her love is interrupting something more important, namely their farewell. This single-mindedness, however, shows no trace of narrow-mindedness; Strether understands the full import of Maria's proposal and allows himself to imagine the "exquisite service," the "lightened care," that life with her would bring. In fact, as he views the situation from Maria's perspective, he admits that "'[i]t was awkward, it was almost stupid, not to seem to prize such things.'" Nonetheless, Strether's moral obligations prevent him from gratifying his own desire for comfort at the cost of another's distress. After all, it is Mrs. Newsome's money that has allowed him to enjoy Maria's company, even as it is her offended silence that has suspended his relationships. "To be right," then, for Strether, means returning to Woollett and resolving his engagement with Mrs. Newsome frankly and honorably, without having "got anything" at her expense. Ironically, the way Strether leads the reluctant Maria to see the value of his decision mirrors the way she once led him to appreciate the value of Chad's relationship with Mme. de Vionnet; Maria must now admit how "dreadfully right" he is just as he so often acknowledged the accuracy of her judgments. Ultimately, however,

this conversation, like so many others in the novel, remains profoundly ambiguous. James leaves his readers, like his characters, sifting through unanswered questions and polite generalities, all the while dimly aware of a deep undercurrent of unnamed emotion.

CHAPTER III

THE WINGS OF THE DOVE

In *The Wings of the Dove*, the second of his final three masterpieces, James not only employs the same elaborate, obscure style which characterizes *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl*, but he also explores many of the same conflicting themes, such as self-sacrifice versus exploitation, adultery versus fidelity, American simplicity versus European duplicity, and inward thought versus external action. Yet, *The Wings of the Dove* is neither limited to the consciousness of a single character (as is *The Ambassadors*) nor divided neatly into parallel halves (as is *The Golden Bowl*). Its looser structure and additional centers of consciousness allow for more frequent shifts of perspective, all of which serve to create an atmosphere of pretense ideally suited for a drama of social intrigue.

The novel opens with Kate Croy, a beautiful but penniless young women, waiting in the living room of her father's dingy residence in Chirk Street, London. Kate has come to tell her father that she would rather live with him than with her wealthy aunt, Maud Lowder, whose benevolence carries weighty conditions. Mrs. Lowder is willing to support Kate financially but only if Kate agrees to an arranged marriage and the severing of all ties with her father. Kate's father, Lionel Croy, who appears to be as mercenary as Mrs. Lowder, advises his daughter to accept her aunt's conditions. Kate's sister, Marian,

an impoverished widow with four energetic boys, also pressures Kate to return to Mrs. Lowder. The only person not counting on Kate to seek an advantageous match is the man she loves, Merton Densher, an intelligent but poor young journalist. Although Densher asks Kate to ignore her aunt's wishes and marry him immediately, Kate likes her "charming quarters" at Lancaster Gate more than she would like to admit and persuades him to wait for something to happen to change her aunt's mind.

Into this tangle of concealed avarice enters Milly Theale, the beautiful but ailing young American heiress, and her companion, Susan Stringham, who as it turns out, knows Mrs. Lowder from boarding school. The two American women become regular visitors at Lancaster Gate where Milly soon attracts the admiration of London society, including a certain Lord Mark, whom Mrs. Lowder intends for Kate. When it becomes obvious, however, that Milly prefers Densher, the three women in Milly's life (Kate, Mrs. Stringham, and Mrs. Lowder) contrive to bring the two together. Mrs. Stringham simply wants to fill Milly's last days with as much life and happiness as possible, but Kate and Mrs. Lowder nurse the hope that Milly will leave Densher her money, thus making him an eligible match for Kate. Meanwhile, Sir Luke Strett, one of London's prominent doctors, advises Milly to travel to the Continent for a change of air and scenery. Unfortunately, although Milly and her retinue move to the beautiful Palazzo Leporelli in Venice, Milly's condition rapidly worsens.

After some time, Lord Mark visits Milly privately and proposes to her, but Milly turns down his offer, choosing instead an uncertain relationship with Densher. When Mrs. Lowder and Kate see how weak Milly is getting, they return to London in order to

give Milly and Densher more time together. Lord Mark, however, returns to Venice once more to inform Milly that Kate and Densher have been engaged the whole time she has known them; his vindictive message seems to snuff out Milly's desire to live. She "turns her face to the wall" and refuses to see anyone but Mrs. Stringham. Densher eventually returns to London, where, little more than a fortnight later, he receives news of Milly's death. Milly has indeed left the young journalist a fortune, but Densher, who is now in love with her memory, cannot in good conscience accept it. He tells Kate that he will marry her only "as they were," without the money; Kate's response to his ultimatum ends the novel in ambiguity—"We shall never be again as we were!"

KATE WAITS FOR HER FATHER

CONTEXT: The following passage, taken from the very beginning of the first chapter, describes Kate and her assessment of her father's dismal rooms in Chirk Street.

She waited, Kate Croy, for her father to come in, but he kept her unconscionably, and there were moments at which she showed herself, in the glass over the mantel, a face positively pale with the irritation that had brought her to the point of going away without sight of him. It was at this point, however, that she remained; changing her place, moving from the shabby sofa to the armchair upholstered in a glazed cloth that gave at once—she had tried it—the sense of the slippery and of the sticky. She had looked at the sallow prints on the walls and at the lonely magazine, a year old, that combined, with a small lamp in coloured glass and a knitted white centre-piece wanting in freshness, to enhance the effect of the purplish cloth on the principal table; she had above all from time to time taken a brief stand on the small

balcony to which the pair of long windows gave access. The vulgar little street, in this view, offered scant relief from the vulgar little room; its main office was to suggest to her that the narrow black house-fronts, adjusted to a standard that would have been low even for backs, constituted quite the publicity implied by such privacies. One felt them in the room exactly as one felt the room—the hundred like it or worse—in the street. Each time she turned in again, each time, in her impatience, she gave him up, it was to sound to a deeper depth, while she tasted the faint flat emanation of things, the failure of fortune and of honour. If she continued to wait it was really in a manner that she mightn't add the shame of fear, of individual, of personal collapse, to all the other shames.

ANALYSIS: With the first two words of this novel, James introduces the ambiguity for which he has become so famous. Although he begins with an action verb couched in the active voice—"she waited"—the very meaning of the phrase and the state of inactivity it implies depletes it of the energy and force typically associated with the active voice. This disparity between style and meaning parallels Kate's struggle between action and stasis as she tries to suppress her restless energy within the confines of the "vulgar little room." Yet, these two words also introduce one of the novel's most prevalent themes: waiting. Kate's father makes her wait "unconscionably" now, but during the course of the novel, Kate will ask her family and her lover to wait for her just as inexcusably. Like her father, she reveals a great capacity for patience when waiting on her own terms but seems to show little sympathy for those she pushes to frustration. In these opening lines, she waits for her father's appearance out of pride (to avoid the "shame of fear, of individual, of

personal collapse"); by the end of the novel, however, she will wait for Milly's death out of greed, thus becoming tainted with a "shame" far greater than any she imagines here. The strained mood of this passage, induced by Kate's feelings of shame, irritation, and mistrust, makes a fitting introduction for a plotline replete with hidden motives and delayed gratification.

Yet, James is as much a master of structure as he is of foreshadowing. The reversed order of the first few words, for example, causes a momentary period of delay for the reader, who must wait for the name to which the pronoun refers while the repetition of the subject foreshadows the elaborate expansiveness of James' style and the unhurried pace of his plot. Meanwhile, the formality of the arrangement, its poetic tone and lyrical cadence, not only provides a sense of ceremony well in keeping with the love of finery which Kate later displays but also accentuates how out of place she feels in her father's cramped and tasteless rooms. In fact, as the paragraph develops, a thinly veiled sense of superiority emerges in her appraisal of the shabbiness of the sofa, the sallowness of the prints on the wall, the age and sparsity of reading material, the griminess of the knitted centerpiece, and the vulgarity of the room and the street outside. This initial disgust, of course, helps the reader understand the full magnitude of what she has come to tell her father: that she wants to stay with him, even in such a miserable place. Of course, by withholding the details of her decision for several paragraphs, James complicates this first impression of Kate, which although reminiscent of Dickens in its realistic evocation of poverty, gives the reader no clear way of determining whether or not Kate will be a sympathetic character. "[P]ale with . . . irritation," restless with impatience, and provoked

by pride, Kate seems on the one hand primed for villainous conduct; yet, on the other hand, she epitomizes one of the classic images of the heroine—the beautiful young woman threatened by the ugliness of poverty but still idealistic enough to choose love over money. The ambivalence of this characterization, so distinctive of James' style as a whole, sets the stage for later ambiguities while also introducing an element of suspense.

James also builds suspense by prolonging the moments of Kate's impatience and imitating through expanded sentence patterns her inflated sense of time. His use of dashes, for instance, whether lengthening the delay between verb and object (". . . that gave at once—she had tried it—the sense of the slippery and of the sticky") or deferring the conclusion of a chiasmus ("One felt them in the room exactly as one felt the room—the hundred like it or worse—in the street") create a visual as well as a mental suspension of thought. In addition to extending both moment and meaning, however, the interrupters, qualifiers, and embedded phrases also imitate Kate's impatient turns about the room. In the second and third sentences of the passage, for example, James breaks the flow of his sentences repeatedly, causing the reader to stop and start with an abruptness that parallels Kate's fitful movements back and forth from sofa to armchair and from room to balcony. Such erratic rhythms, accompanied by the sharpness of Kate's perceptions, draw attention to the closeness of the room; in fact, as Kate's mental aversion to her surroundings translates into a physical reaction—she feels the "slippery and sticky" armchair and tastes the "faint flat emanation of things"—the sense of confinement becomes almost stifling. She seems caged in by her senses just as she later becomes trapped by her family's expectations and her designs on Milly's wealth.

MILLY CONTEMPLATES HER FATE

CONTEXT: This scene takes place in the fourth paragraph of chapter eleven while Milly and her entourage (Mrs. Stringham, Mrs. Lowder, and Kate) are at Matcham, Lord Mark's country estate. Lord Mark has just led Milly to a beautiful portrait in the house, one that he claims bears a striking resemblance to her. As the two approach the painting, Milly senses an appeal from Lord Mark: "Do let a fellow who isn't a fool take care of you a little." This tacit message is "the thing" the narrator refers to in the first sentence below.

The thing somehow, with the aid of the Bronzino, was done; it hadn't seemed to matter to her before if he were a fool or no; but now, just where they were, she liked his not being; and it was all moreover none the worse for coming back to something of the same sound as Mrs. Lowder's so recent reminder. She too wished to take care of her—and wasn't it, a peu pres, what all the people with the kind eyes were wishing? Once more things melted together—the beauty and the history and the facility and the splendid midsummer glow: it was a sort of magnificent maximum, the pink dawn of an apotheosis coming so curiously soon. What in fact befell was that, as she afterwards made out, it was Lord Mark who said nothing in particular—it was she herself who said all. She couldn't help that—it came; and the reason it came was that she found herself, for the first moment, looking at the mysterious portrait through tears. Perhaps it was her tears that made it just then so strange and fair—as wonderful as he had said: the face of a young woman, all

splendidly drawn, down to the hands, and splendidly dressed; a face almost livid in hue, yet handsome in sadness and crowned with a mass of hair, rolled back and high, that must, before fading with time, have had a family resemblance to her own. The lady in question, at all events, with her slightly Michael-angelesque squareness, her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck, her recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds, was a very great personage—only unaccompanied by a joy. And she was dead, dead, dead. Milly recognised her exactly in words that had nothing to do with her. "I shall never be better than this."

ANALYSIS: This scene gives readers a new perspective on Milly's physical and mental state. While the painting itself implies the nature of her outward appearance (the red "mass of hair, rolled back and high"; the "Michael-angelesque squareness"; the "full lips"; and the "long neck"), her visceral reaction to the painting and her assessment of what it symbolizes provide a more complicated view of her inner self. Until this point, James has portrayed a composed, almost stoic, woman, who, even in her weakest moments, expresses nothing but a philosophical desire for human companionship; the inclusion of such an emotional scene, then, brings to light a far more complicated, vulnerable, and self-indulgent woman, one who actually seems to enjoy the recognition of her physical beauty and who also seems to fear its decay. Unlike Kate, who is placed before a mirror that reflects an exact replica of her living form, Milly is placed before a painting that displays a romanticized but lifeless imitation of her features. This contrast visually foreshadows how Densher will eventually idealize his memory of Milly but view Kate and her flaws with surprising acuity. Milly's viewing of the Bronzino also

represents a recurring motif in James' fiction, that of an intelligent, appreciative consciousness stirred by a vision of beauty. The Bronzino, however, draws more than just admiration from Milly; it deeply and profoundly alters her perception of herself. From this moment on, she grows increasingly more aware of her function as an asset and a source of diversion. Like the portrait, she is admired as much for her monetary worth as for her beauty.

Of course, the lifelessness of the Bronzino also reflects (in a very literal way) Milly's mortality and the iconic status she will gain in death. Perhaps it is the shock of seeing this lifelessness in a woman so similar to herself—a woman once warm and responsive but now fixed into a single expression, a single hairstyle, a single posture—that moves Milly to tears. Perhaps it is the realization that death, like art, brings an irrevocable fixity to the body, allowing no room for the changing faces of love or age. Perhaps it is the dread of being typecast by her youth, beauty, and wealth, of being reduced to a single image devoid of thought or feeling. Perhaps it is the portrait's inscrutability, the enigmatic gaze of the Bronzino woman, which demonstrates the ultimate futility of being understood by another human being and which forces Milly to consider the remoteness of death, the ultimate isolation. Perhaps it is the combination of all of these that makes her weep; the text, as is so often the case with James, offers tantalizing clues but no definitive answers. Yet, just as the portrait becomes a reminder of death to Milly, so Milly with her mysterious illness becomes a reminder of death to the other characters and the reader. The moment itself, at the very height of its beauty ("the pink dawn of an apotheosis"), falls into darkness ("she was dead, dead, dead,"), thus

echoing the way Milly at the very height of her youth will succumb to death. In one image, then, James captures both similarity and contrast: a dying but living face looks at its dead but lifelike reflection.

Yet, James' prose style also invites us to share in the role of the observer. His use of expletives and "be" verbs, for example, imitates Milly's assessment of the state of things: "the thing . . . was done," "it was a sort of magnificent maximum," "what in fact befell was that . . . it was Lord Mark who said nothing," "it was she herself who said all," "it was her tears," "The lady in question . . . was a very great personage." Rather than clarify the situation, however, the accumulation of expletives, together with the repetition of the unclear pronoun "it" ("it came; and the reason it came . . ."), only serves to emphasize Milly's groping attempts to express something inexplicable. It is clear that she senses a particular beauty gathering in the air, but her catalogue of vague, collective nouns ("the beauty," "the history," "the facility," "the splendid midsummer glow") and her expressions of uncertainty ("somehow," "something of the same sound," "sort of") make her vision seem all the more elusive. Amid all this vagueness, however, amid the diffused "glow" and the blur of tears, James manages to bring the Bronzino portrait into focus with a startling clarity. He achieves this effect simply enough by shifting from a succession of weak state-of-being verbs to a combination of strong action verbs ("drawn," "dressed," "crowned," "rolled") and vigorous participles ("recorded," "brocaded," "wasted"). Quite suddenly the text assumes an air of warmth and intensity, well in keeping with Milly's unexpected expression of emotion. This climactic rise of passion is further accentuated by the progressive shortening of sentence rhythms and the

solid swelling of "d" sounds in phrases like "splendidly drawn, down to the hands, and splendidly dressed"; "handsome in sadness"; and "recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds"—all of which culminate in the throbbing force of repetition: "dead, dead, dead."

KATE AND DENSHER ADMIRE MILLY

CONTEXT: In the following excerpt, taken from chapter three of book eight, Kate and Densher are at a dinner party at the Palazzo Leporelli, Milly's recently acquired Venetian residence. To mark the importance of the occasion, Milly has laid aside her habitual black attire for a "wonderful white dress" (304), a symbolic transformation which leads Densher and Kate to re-evaluate her beauty and innocence as well as the growing severity of her illness.

"But she's *too* nice," Kate returned with appreciation. "Everything suits her so—especially her pearls. They go so with her old lace. I'll trouble you really to look at them." Densher, though aware he had seen them before, had perhaps not "really" looked at them, and had thus not done justice to the embodied poetry—his mind, for Milly's aspects, kept coming back to that—which owed them part of its style. Kate's face, as she considered them, struck him: the long, priceless chain, wound twice round the neck, hung, heavy and pure, down the front of the wearer's breast—so far down that Milly's trick, evidently unconscious, of holding and vaguely fingering and entwining a part of it, conduced presumably to convenience. "She's a dove," Kate went on, "and one somehow doesn't think of doves as bejewelled. Yet they suit her down to the ground."

"Yes—down to the ground is the word." Densher saw now how they suited her, but was perhaps still more aware of something intense in his companion's feeling about them. Milly was indeed a dove; this was the figure, though it most applied to her spirit. Yet he knew in a moment that Kate was just now, for reasons hidden from him, exceptionally under the impression of that element of wealth in her which was a power, which was a great power, and which was dove-like only so far as one remembered that doves have wings and wondrous flights, have them as well as tender tints and soft sounds. It even came to him dimly that such wings could in a given case—*had*, truly, in the case with which he was concerned—spread themselves for protection. Hadn't they, for that matter, lately taken an inordinate reach, and weren't Kate and Mrs. Lowder, weren't Susan Shepherd and he, wasn't *he* in particular, nestling under them to a great increase of immediate ease?

ANALYSIS: In this scene, as in the earlier scene at Matcham, James uses a richly symbolic image to objectify Milly and give his readers new insight into her character. Of course, while the viewing of the painting at Matcham reveals Milly's ability to objectify herself, the extended dove metaphor in this scene serves a reminder of how she is constantly being objectified by those around her. Both scenes, although quite different in their use of imagery, place Milly as the focal point of great attention and devotion, thus creating a sense of balance and counterpoint within the narrative framework. Furthermore, by using the dove—an image steeped in Biblical tradition—to emphasize Milly's iconic role, James charges her presence with a saintly, otherworldly quality. Thus, Densher's perception of Milly as "embodied poetry" not only foreshadows his later

devotion to her memory but also accentuates the aura of spirituality her presence brings—a spirituality which calls to mind the apostle's account of the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove (Luke 3:22). As one girded with wealth and "bejeweled" with a "priceless chain" of pearls, she embodies the Psalmist's dove of prosperity, whose wings are "covered with silver" and "yellow gold" (Psalm 68:13). As one burdened with premature grief for her own death, she calls to mind Isaiah's doves of mourning (38:14) and the Psalmist's cry "Oh that I had wings like a dove for then would I fly away and be at rest" (55:6). As one willing to give of herself without hope of remuneration, she represents the sacrificial doves of the Pentateuch as well as Christ, the ultimate sacrificial dove. Even the few religious allusions that do not completely fit Milly's role still hold some significance. For example, at this point in the narrative it may seem likely that Milly and her wealth will become, like Noah's dove of peace, a harbinger of amity and "immediate ease"; in the end, however, she becomes just the opposite: a source of pain and conflict which divides the couple now so in love. Ironically, although Kate is the one who now prompts Densher to notice Milly's dovelike qualities, by the end of the novel, she will not be able to keep him from worshiping Milly in memory as the dove which in the Song of Solomon represents the "beloved" (2:14; 5:12), the "fair one" (1:15; 4:1), and the "undefiled" (5:2; 6:9)—designations which will eventually make Kate seem villainous by comparison.

Yet, Milly's character also reflects many dove-like qualities not clearly related to the scriptures, qualities such as innocence, purity, gentleness, and passivity—all of which set her apart from Kate, who often appears corrupted, ruthless, and manipulative. In fact,

by having Kate be the one to draw Densher's attention to Milly, James places Densher (and therefore the reader) in the perfect position to compare the two women. Next to Kate, who shrewdly evaluates and manipulates those around her, Milly seems especially soft and remote; however, Milly's "trick" of "fingering and entwining" her long pearl necklace through her fingers suggests that her mind, like Kate's, is preoccupied by some consuming thought. Of course, as the reader is by now aware, while Milly's mental distractions involve an intense desire for intangible things such as life and love, Kate's clearly involve an equally intense desire for material things, particularly Milly's wealth. Indeed, Densher is "struck" by the look on Kate's face as she watches Milly finger her pearls. James never fully defines what is so striking about the look, but the way he deflects attention to the object of her gaze—the pearls—suggests that the expression is one Densher wishes to avoid, perhaps one of covetousness or jealousy. A few lines down, the implication of jealousy returns as Densher notes Kate's acute awareness of "that element of wealth in [Milly] . . . which was a great power." Yet, although the thought of wielding such power obviously appeals to Kate, she tries to keep her "reasons hidden" from Densher. Perhaps she senses that Densher admires the way Milly has used her power to protect those around her and thus knows that her own more selfish uses would therefore disappoint him. Still, the fact that Densher notices both her reservations and her desire for power suggests that he is beginning to recognize a less-than-altruistic motive in her drawing his attention to Milly's beauty. Thus, even when describing the politest of exchanges and most innocuous of gestures, James manages to suggest deep-seated and often dark human emotions. In the end, of course, all the allusions and implications

buried in James' text leave his readers in a state of uncertainty. What are Kate's true motives? Is Milly as pure as Densher portrays her? How reliable is Densher as a witness? Like the characters themselves who must read meaning into the slightest of expressions and the vaguest of remarks, readers find themselves obliged to piece together an opinion about the characters, not from a clear first hand account, but from a series of often biased perceptions and assumptions.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLDEN BOWL

The third novel in James' crowning trilogy and the last (and longest) of his works to be completed, *The Golden Bowl* marks for many readers and critics the apex of James' writing career. Despite a short list of characters and a relatively simple plot, James creates a rich and intense "drama of consciousness," a kind of mental and emotional labyrinth, through which readers must wend their way as cautiously and patiently as his characters themselves. The difficulty as well as the enjoyment of such a journey through the rich prose of James' later work lies in the reader's interpretation, for James even at his most precise, revels in ambiguity. The most thoughtful of readers will, more often than not, come away from a reading of *The Golden Bowl* with more questions than answers. Yet, there is an anomalous tidiness to the work as well; for example, its neat division into two parallel volumes ("The Prince" and "The Princess," respectively) foreshadows not just the neatly arranged ending but also the remarkable sense of balance maintained in the relationships of the four main characters.

The novel begins with Amerigo, a poor Italian prince of ancient lineage, wandering around London mulling over his imminent wedding to Maggie Verver, a young American heiress. After much thought, he decides to pay a visit to Fanny Assingham, the woman who first introduced him to his fiancée. At the Assingham's,

however, Amerigo learns that Fanny is expecting Charlotte Stant, a woman he knew long before he met Maggie. Fanny informs the prince that Charlotte has just arrived from the United States to attend his wedding. In fact, Charlotte arrives before the prince's visit is over, much to the chagrin of Fanny, who knows that they once loved each other and that a mutual lack of money had been their only reason for separating. Before the prince leaves, he agrees to meet Charlotte alone sometime before the wedding to help her find Maggie a wedding gift. While on their last date together, which both agree to hide from Maggie, they find the beautiful golden bowl that will play such a crucial role in their lives. The prince immediately detects a crack in the bowl, but Charlotte sees only its beauty. In the end, they leave the bowl in the obscure Bloomsbury antique shop where they found it and return home empty-handed.

Sometime after the wedding Maggie begins to worry about her father, Adam Verver; she imagines him lonely without her constant company and weary of avoiding the unwanted attentions of a certain Mrs. Rance. In an attempt to ease the situation, Maggie suggests inviting Charlotte for a prolonged visit, little suspecting how this one invitation will change their lives forever. Scarcely two months after Charlotte's arrival, prompted by Maggie's concern for him, Mr. Verver proposes to Charlotte, who after some hesitation accepts his offer. However, the union which he hoped would "put . . . his child at peace" eventually causes Maggie more turmoil than she has ever known. At first, both couples seem content, but as Maggie spends increasingly more time with her father and her small son, thus leaving Charlotte and the prince increasingly alone together, the "happy balance" of their arrangement threatens to break. Maggie begins to suspect a

secret connection of some kind between Charlotte and her husband; yet, when she confronts Fanny about it, the older woman, with a forced calm, tries to quell her nagging fears. The climax of the novel occurs when Maggie again confronts Fanny, this time with the golden bowl itself to validate her worst suspicions. Fanny, in an attempt to negate the problem, throws the bowl on the floor, breaking it into three pieces. It is at this crucial moment that the prince enters the room. Maggie then tells him what she knows (or suspects) but decides they must keep her knowledge a secret from Charlotte in order to protect her father from pain. Mr. Verver, however, despite their best efforts, seems aware of the awful secret; he decides to leave with Charlotte for the United States, where he plans to fill a museum with the masses of rare artwork he has been avidly collecting over the years. By the end of the novel, Maggie and the Prince are alone in each other's arms, but the moment is bittersweet; both have had to sacrifice something beloved in order to give their marriage a second chance.

THE PRINCE ADMIRES CHARLOTTE

CONTEXT: In the following passage, taken from chapter three of the first book of Volume One, Charlotte has just entered the room in which Fanny and the Prince have been talking over tea. As the two women greet each other, the prince finds time to reacquaint himself with Charlotte's physical charms.

He saw again that her thick hair was, vulgarly speaking, brown, but that there was a shade of tawny autumn leaf in it for "appreciation"—a colour indescribable and of which he had known no other case, something that gave her at moments the sylvan head of a huntress. He saw the sleeves of her jacket drawn to her wrists, but

he again made out the free arms within them to be of the completely rounded, the polished slimness that Florentine sculptors in the great time had loved and of which the apparent firmness is expressed in their old silver and old bronze. He knew her narrow hands, he knew her long fingers and the shape and colour of her finger-nails, he knew her special beauty of movement and line when she turned her back, and the perfect working of all her main attachments, that of some wonderful finished instrument, something intently made for exhibition, for a prize. He knew above all the extraordinary fineness of her flexible waist, the stem of an expanded flower, which gave her a likeness also to some long loose silk purse, well filled with gold-pieces, but having been passed empty through a finger-ring that held it together. It was as if, before she turned to him, he had weighed the whole thing in his open palm and even heard a little the chink of the metal. When she did turn to him it was to recognise with her eyes what he might have been doing. She made no circumstance of thus coming upon him, save so far as the intelligence in her face could at any moment make a circumstance of almost anything. If when she moved off she looked like a huntress, she looked when she came nearer like his notion, perhaps not wholly correct, of a muse. (72-73)

ANALYSIS: This passage displays two of James' favorite themes—beauty and the discriminating appreciation of beauty. By joining these two themes, however, James adds a new dimension—the intellectual beauty of the observer who through the skillful use of language has exalted the visual beauty of the object. Thus, the prince's admiration of Charlotte, couched in language that matches (or even enhances) her beauty, earns the

admiration of the reader, who then becomes the new discriminating critic. In fact, this ability to appreciate and evaluate beauty, a hallmark of James' most sympathetic protagonists, marks the Prince as one of the leading characters in the narrative. His sensitivity to word choice alone suggests an artistic attention to detail and a desire to be both precise and eloquent. When describing the color of her hair, for example, he notes that to use a word as common as "brown" is to speak "vulgarly." Yet, even poetic devices fail to capture his reality; the moment he finds an appropriate image for her particular shade of hair—a "tawny autumn leaf"—he dismisses it by declaring such a shade "indescribable" and without equal. The inadequacy of language, however, does not keep him from further flights of imagery; her hair reminds him of "the sylvan head of a huntress," her body a "wonderful finished instrument," and her waist the "stem of an expanded flower." Beauty thus becomes his "muse."

In the end, however, such exquisite grace only makes the hint of vulgarity all the more conspicuous, particularly given James' penchant for irony and foreshadowing. On the one hand, "vulgar" can mean "common" or "undistinguished," thus creating a striking contrast to Charlotte's extraordinary attractions. The unremarkable "brown" of her hair is made remarkable by the indescribable "tawny" color of its highlights in the same way that the common poverty and dependence of her situation is made uncommon by her grace and intelligence. On the other hand, the word "vulgar" can mean indecent or lacking in good taste, thus foreshadowing her later adultery with the Prince. Although impeccable in matters of wardrobe and etiquette, Charlotte reveals a shocking lack of refinement in matters of integrity and virtue. Moreover, this departure from propriety

matches the primitive images of nature she evokes in the Prince: a "huntress," a "leaf," a "flower." Like a huntress, Charlotte seeks to satisfy her hunger through cunning and stealth. In fact, the Prince's use of such earth-related imagery may reflect his own primal, animalistic desires. His acute awareness of her body—the "rounded . . . polished slimness" of her arms, the "narrow hands," the "long fingers," the "shape and colour of her finger-nails," the "movement and line" of her back, the "extraordinary fineness of her flexible waist"—marks them both as sexual creatures in whom instinct will overcome culture. Charlotte's ability to speak to him sensually anticipates her surprising fluency in his native language, Italian. In this way, James builds a sense of foreboding in his readers, for as yet the Prince has only praised his wife's innocence. How will Maggie, whose father later compares her to a nun, sustain the Prince's interest? How will their marriage survive if the Prince has already found his muse in Charlotte?

Yet, although Charlotte symbolizes the natural beauty of the New World, she also embodies the artistic splendor of the Old World. As the Prince gazes upon her, he savors every remembered beauty as though he were an avid art collector meeting again a beloved masterpiece. Ironically, Charlotte eventually does become part of an art collection—although not of the Prince's acquisition. She becomes part of Adam Verver's collection, which already holds the Prince himself. Even as the Ververs admire the Prince as "a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price," so the Prince now gazes upon Charlotte as "something intently made for exhibition, for a prize." Furthermore, by comparing her to Florentine sculptures of "the great time," he not only connects her with his own country and his own aristocratic past, thus emphasizing their mutual

compatibility, but also suggests that her beauty is classic, universally admired, and enduring. She fairly glitters in London's high society, despite a lack of money and rank, and the Prince finds her beauty in no way diminished by the intervening years or by his new relationship with Maggie. His present assessment of her aesthetic value seems especially fitting since a large part of the novel's overall plot involves the pursuit and acquisition of art: Charlotte and the Prince's search for a wedding gift ends in the discovery of the golden bowl, Adam Verver's search for a rare set of "oriental tiles" ends in his marriage proposal to Charlotte, while Maggie's search for a birthday gift ends in the re-emergence of the golden bowl. This large-scale pattern of repetition finds smaller echoes throughout the novel; in the last sentence of the above passage, for example, James sums up all previous allusions to nature and instinct with the word "huntress" and all previous allusions to art and culture with the word "muse." Such reiteration only serves to emphasize Charlotte's power over the Prince's mind.

THE GOLDEN BOWL'S FIRST APPEARANCE

CONTEXT: In the following passage, taken from chapter six of the first book, Charlotte and the Prince have just discovered that the owner of the little Bloomsbury antique shop in which they have been browsing, can speak Italian and therefore knows what they have been saying to each other. When the Prince asks if he is Italian, the old man responds in English, "Oh dear no." When asked if he is English, however, he responds in Italian, "Che!" (Not at all!). It is this last question that he "waives" so dramatically by turning away.

The dealer waived the question—he practically disposed of it by turning straightway toward a receptacle to which he hadn't yet resorted and from which, after unlocking it, he extracted a square box, of some twenty inches in height, covered with worn-looking leather. He placed the box on the counter, pushed back a pair of small hooks, lifted the lid and removed from its nest a drinking-vessel larger than a common cup, yet not of exorbitant size, and formed, to appearance, either of old fine gold or of some material once richly gilt. He handled it with tenderness, with ceremony, making a place for it on a small satin mat. "My Golden Bowl," he observed—and it sounded on his lips as if it said everything. He left the important object—for as "important" it did somehow present itself—to produce its certain effect. Simple but singularly elegant, it stood on a circular foot, a short pedestal with a slightly spreading base, and, though not of signal depth, justified its title by the charm of its shape as well as by the tone of its surface. It might have been a large goblet diminished, to the enhancement of its happy curve, by half its original height. As formed of solid gold it was impressive; it seemed indeed to warn off the prudent admirer. Charlotte, with care, immediately took it up, while the Prince, who had after a minute shifted his position again, regarded it from a distance.

It was heavier than Charlotte had thought. "Gold, really gold?" she asked of their companion.

He waited. "Look a little, and perhaps you'll make out."

She looked, holding it up in both her fine hands, turning it to the light. "It may be cheap for what it is, but it will be dear, I'm afraid, for me." (118-119)

Analysis: In this first appearance of the golden bowl, James creates an elaborate scene of suspense, thus drawing attention to the bowl's highly symbolic role in the narrative. A mysterious and cryptic dealer turns without warning and without explanation to a featureless, unnamed "receptacle." From this he "extracts" a "square box . . . covered with worn-looking leather." His next few actions, listed in spare yet precise detail, gain a ritualistic quality, as though the object being brought forth were indeed worthy of worship: "[h]e placed the box on the counter, pushed back a pair of small hooks, lifted the lid and removed from its nest a drinking-vessel." These three levels of enclosure—first the square box secured with hooks, then the protective leather covering, and finally the unidentified repository secured with locks—not only echo the novel's larger themes of secrecy and concealment but also anticipate the masks of polite deception that will later encase the characters' true feelings. The way the dealer treats the bowl, once unveiled, augments it's significance almost to the point of excess: he displays it "with tenderness, with ceremony, making a place for it on a small satin mat"; he intones the phrase "My Golden Bowl . . . as if it said everything"; and then he stands back theatrically to let the object "produce its certain effect." Indeed, James manipulates the very structure and appearance of his sentences to ensure that the bowl's "effect" strikes his readers with as much "certainty" as it does Charlotte and the Prince; he capitalizes the words "My Golden Bowl," sets off descriptive phrases with conspicuous dashes, repeats the word "important," and uses quotation marks to emphasize the repetition. Placed thus in the spotlight to act out its own small drama, the bowl seems to take on a personality of its own, while the details of its appearance—its "singularly elegant" form, its "happy

curve," and its "impressive" guise of "solid gold"— both develop its identity and foreshadow its integral role in the story's plot.

All the suspense and "ceremony" of this debut, however, only serve to heighten the bowl's symbolic potential. Traditionally related to rituals of consecration, such as marriage and christening, the image of a jeweled or gilded drinking vessel seems the natural choice for a story of romance and marital relationships. Ironically, it is Charlotte, the one most taken by the beauty of the vessel, who proves to be the one least concerned with the sanctity of her marriage vows. In fact, she later compares the scandalous prospect of a day alone with the Prince to "a great gold cup" they will "drain together." The image of the golden bowl can also be traced to at least three familiar literary texts: Ecclesiastes, which equates its breakage to death; the Grail legends, which link its discovery to self-denial, and Blake's Book of Thel, which questions its ability to hold love. Thus, Fanny's act of breaking the golden bowl symbolizes the death of Maggie's innocence, while the two "quests" (Charlotte's charade of a search to find Maggie a wedding gift and Maggie's genuine hunt to find her father a birthday gift) serve to contrast Charlotte's deliberate self-indulgence and Maggie's filial devotion. Of course, James complicates the metaphors continually, for Maggie is not entirely selfless and her quest ends not in the possession of a "Holy Grail" of gifts, but of a damaged and damaging fraud. Finally, Thel's troubling motto "Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod, / or Love in a Golden Bowl?" finds answering echoes in Maggie's rueful desire for "the golden bowl . . . as it *was* to have been . . . [t]he bowl with all our happiness in it . . . [t]he bowl without the crack." Just as the unseen crack has all along been threatening the

structure of the beautiful golden bowl, so this clandestine moment in the dealer's shop will, even before their vows are spoken, threaten the very foundation of the Prince's marriage to Maggie.

As the novel progresses and James continues to extend and complicate the bowl's range of influence, those who find themselves weighing its significance as Charlotte weighs its substance, will no doubt join her in declaring it "heavier" than expected. As a drinking vessel that never gets put to use, the bowl becomes a mere symbol of what it was intended to be just as the two marriages, planned for convenience not love, become mere showpieces for what they were intended. The adjective "golden" brings to mind the Verver's wealth, the wealth that Charlotte will later enjoy though now she stoops to haggle; it also implies serendipity (Matcham affords a "golden opportunity" for lovers), happiness (Maggie spends many "golden hours" in her father's company), and prosperity (Adam Verver's magnificent art collection creates a brief "golden age" at Fawns). Above all, however, the bowl evokes a sense of dread; it "warn[s] off the prudent admirer" and gives Charlotte's innocent comment—"it will be dear, I'm afraid, for me"—the ominous ring of prophecy.

THE BROKEN BOWL

Context: In this passage, taken from chapter ten of the fourth book, Maggie finds herself alone with Prince Amerigo, who several moments earlier had opened the door on Fanny breaking the golden bowl.

She went in silence to where her friend—never in intention visibly so much her friend as at that moment—had braced herself to so amazing an energy, and there

under Amerigo's eyes she picked up the shining pieces. Bedizened and jewelled, in her rustling finery, she paid, with humility of attitude, this prompt tribute to order—only to find however that she could carry but two of the fragments at once. She brought them over to the chimney-piece, to the conspicuous place occupied by the cup before Fanny's appropriation of it, and after laying them carefully down went back for what remained, the solid detached foot. With this she returned to the mantel-shelf, placing it with deliberation in the centre and then for a minute occupying herself as with the attempt to fit the other morsels together. The split determined by the latent crack was so sharp and so neat that if there had been anything to hold them the bowl might still quite beautifully, a few steps away, have passed for uninjured. As there was however nothing to hold them but Maggie's hands during the few moments the latter were so employed, she could only lay the almost equal parts of the vessel carefully beside their pedestal and leave them thus before her husband's eyes. She had proceeded without words, but quite as if with a sought effect—in spite of which it had all seemed to her to take a far longer time than anything she had ever so quickly accomplished. Amerigo said nothing either—though it was true his silence had the gloss of the warning she doubtless appeared to admonish him to take: it was as if her manner hushed him to the proper observation of what she was doing. He should have no doubt of it whatever: she *knew*, and her broken bowl was proof that she knew—yet the least part of her desire was to make him waste words. (451)

ANALYSIS: Since James spends far more time detailing his characters' thoughts than he does recounting their actions, scenes like this, which deliberately spotlight a series of simple movements, naturally acquire a heightened sense of symbolic importance. In fact, by methodically listing each movement without the clamor of thought or dialogue, James is able to create a moment of sudden silence and slow motion; as Maggie clears the floor "without words," she imagines the job "take[ing] a far longer time than anything she had ever so quickly accomplished." Held thus under the scrutiny of author, reader, and character alike, the moment becomes inflated with awkwardness, the kind of moment in which imagined sounds, like the clink of the crystal fragments or the heavy beating of Maggie's heart, grow almost audible. Even the text shares in this sense of self-consciousness; as Maggie's movements, already stilted by her "rustling finery," become conspicuously redundant (she retraces her steps across the room to pick up the third fragment of the bowl and then busies herself with a futile attempt to fit the pieces together), so the text also grows noticeably repetitive ("under Amerigo's eyes" finds an echo in the preposition "before her husband's eyes," "laying them carefully down" in the participial "placing it with deliberation," "chimney-piece" in the modifier "the conspicuous place occupied by the cup," "what remained" in the appositive "the solid detached foot," and "she knew" in the clause "her broken bowl was proof that she knew"). As a result, the reader, like Amerigo, feels "hushed . . . to the proper observation" of Maggie's actions. Even James' description of Maggie's clothes contributes to this sense of spectacle; the word "bedizened," for example, indicates a gaudiness or a lack of taste in Maggie's finery that contrasts not just with her gentle,

retiring personality but with Charlotte's impeccably elegant style as well. Although Maggie's overdressing could be an appeal for her husband's attention, it could also indicate a desire for concealment or disguise; perhaps she hopes the layers of expensive jewels and rich fabrics will provide a façade of confidence and poise, diverting attention from her nervous trembling and chaotic emotions. Yet, the vision of Maggie, shyly displaying her extravagant costume, also brings to mind her unassuming father and his exquisite hoards of rare art; perhaps father and daughter, both of whom appear somehow nondescript next to the romance of the Prince's royalty and the charm of Charlotte's panache, surround themselves with costly ornaments in order to validate their worth. In the end, of course, it is their strength of character which proves their worth, not their wealth.

Symbolically, this scene makes a fitting climax for the novel's second volume as it exemplifies Maggie's new leading role in the plot. In the first volume, James gives Amerigo the dominant and informed point of view, thus relegating Maggie to a role of passivity and innocence. In the second volume, however, James reverses this dynamic, giving Maggie center stage as the informed initiator of events while moving Amerigo to the position of quiescent spectator. Her moment of power, however, Maggie turns into a moment of meekness; she bends low before the erect figure of Amerigo to pick up the fragmented bowl and seems desirous of sparing him not just needless words but the embarrassment of exposure as well. This "humility of attitude" adds depth and complexity to her character just as the knowledge of Amerigo's infidelity adds layers of significance to each of her actions. For instance, the way she hides the cracks of the

golden bowl by fitting together its three broken pieces mirrors the way she attempts to hide the flaws in her marriage by holding together the three split relationships—Maggie and Amerigo's / Maggie and Charlotte's / Charlotte and Adam's. Of course, fitting the three fragments together seamlessly requires a steady amount of balanced pressure, the slightest lapse of which, she finds, immediately causes the cracks to reappear. Alternatively, the only way to hide the flaws in the three broken relationships requires the "firmest abstention from pressure" and a mutual conspiratorial silence, a silence which Maggie has already "appeared to admonish . . . [Amerigo] to take." Despite her obvious control of the situation, however, Maggie's inability to carry more than two fragments of the bowl at a time suggests a measure of frailty, of helplessness; she cannot effect the restoration of three relationships on her own. She needs Amerigo's obliging silence, Charlotte's proud restraint, and her father's discreet observations in order to achieve her final triumph of marital preservation. Ultimately, the rich symbolism of James' prose creates a sense of ambiguity rather than clarity. If Maggie's restoration of the golden bowl symbolizes the restoration of her marriage, the fact that her hold is only momentary suggests that her solution for the two marriages may also be temporary. Likewise, the impression of wholeness which she seeks to give both the bowl and her marriage suggests a desire to restore her life to an appearance of perfection—a perfection undermined, however, by its own superficiality.

MAGGIE ENVISIONS CHARLOTTE AS A CAGED BIRD

CONTEXT: Prior to this paragraph, which ends the first chapter of Book Fifth, the reader learns that Amerigo and Maggie have kept a strict silence about the broken bowl

and Maggie's discovery of the affair between her husband and Charlotte. As Maggie ponders Charlotte's position, she somewhat apprehensively imagines her friend watching for an opportunity to question her alone. This nervousness, however, gives way to "hours of exaltation" as she considers Amerigo's "tacit vow . . . to abide without question by whatever she should be able to achieve or think fit to prescribe."

The point at which these exaltations dropped however was the point at which it was apt to come over her that if her complications had been greater the question of paying would have been limited still less to the liabilities of her own pocket. The complications were verily great enough, whether for ingenuities or sublimities, so long as she had to come back to it so often that Charlotte could all the while only be struggling with secrets beyond any guessing. It was odd how that certainty again and again determined and coloured her wonderments of detail; the question for instance of *how* Amerigo, in snatched opportunities of conference, put the haunted creature off with false explanations, met her particular challenges and evaded—if that was what he did do!—her particular demands. Even the conviction that Charlotte was but awaiting some chance really to test her trouble upon her lover's wife left Maggie's sense meanwhile open as to the sight of gilt wires and bruised wings, the spacious but suspended cage, the home of eternal unrest, of pacings, beatings, shakings all so vain, into which the baffled consciousness helplessly resolved itself. The cage was the deluded condition, and Maggie, as having known delusion—rather!—understood the nature of cages. She walked round Charlotte's—cautiously and in a very wide circle; and when inevitably they had to communicate

she felt herself comparatively outside and on the breast of nature: she saw her companion's face as that of a prisoner looking through bars. So it was that through bars, bars richly gilt but firmly though discreetly planted, Charlotte finally struck her as making a grim attempt; from which at first the Princess drew back as instinctively as if the door of the cage had suddenly been opened from within. (483-484)

ANALYSIS: This passage focuses on one of the most powerful and disturbing themes in the novel: that of captivity or confinement. In fact, the cage image offered here is only one of many such images of bondage—some of which include Amerigo as a "lamb tied up with pink robbon," Charlotte with the "end of a long silken halter looped round her beautiful neck," Maggie flapping her wings in a "gilded cage," Charlotte "frantically tapping" from behind a glass partition, and Amerigo pacing in a "locked cage" or "monastic cell." Part of what makes these images of captivity so arresting lies in their depiction of humans being treated as animals. The elegantly dressed, highly sophisticated Charlotte confined to a cage adds a primitive, almost grotesque, element to the passage. Is she on display? Does she pose a danger? Maggie's behavior toward Charlotte certainly suggests both; she moves around her friend as though to gain a better angle but does so "cautiously and in a very wide circle." Yet, the image of a caged human also suggests insanity or some grave crime against civilization. Maggie's wary approach suggests a deep distrust of Charlotte—not entirely unwarranted, of course, given Charlotte's affair with Amerigo. Perhaps Maggie fears Charlotte's unpredictable, instinctual nature; perhaps she distrusts Charlotte's ability to act civilized or follow the same ethical

guidelines that dictate her own actions. Ironically, Maggie herself cannot control the impulses of her body; one slight movement from Charlotte and she recoils "instinctively." In fact, the very subjectiveness of the text brings Maggie's own sanity into question. It seems quite possible that Charlotte's desire for confrontation is all a figment of Maggie's imagination. What is the "grim attempt" that Maggie thinks she sees? Is it an attempt at escape, an attack on Maggie, or simply an innocent gesture misinterpreted? By focusing so exclusively on Maggie's limited perceptions, James forces his readers through an experience of silent conjecture very similar to the suffocating atmosphere of Maggie's own speculating mind.

Yet, Maggie's vision of the encaged Charlotte could also indicate a deep sense of compassion; after all, Maggie knows the "nature of cages" all too well, and in her bewilderment, can empathize only by projecting her own emotions and fears onto Charlotte. While most women would feel angry or vengeful in the presence of their husband's mistress, Maggie feels pity—condescending pity, some would argue—but pity nonetheless. Paradoxically, the cages imprisoning James' characters are often of their own making; if Maggie and Charlotte suffer in a "deluded condition," it is because they refuse to voice the questions that will bring them the answers they so desire. Their cages of polite silence may prevent the infliction of pain or embarrassment, but they also create a stifling sense of loneliness, a loneliness which James cleverly mirrors in the text by limiting dialogue to a bare minimum. In this passage, for example, the only communication between the two women takes the form of mute, animal-like movements and reflexes; Maggie circles her mother-in-law "cautiously" but "[draws] back

instinctively" at the first sign of contact. Even in sentence structure and word choice James continues to build upon this sense of enclosure and isolation. Using passive voice, vague pronouns, relative pronoun clauses, and abstract subjects and subject complements, he builds a barrier around the reader, a barrier against comprehension, against simplicity, against certainty. Imprisoned thus in the prose, the reader can perhaps better identify with the "baffled consciousness" of James' characters.

Even in the arrangement of his ideas, James seems fascinated with contradiction. The first sentence of the passage, which begins with Maggie's sense of "exaltation" (an exaltation which the reader knows is based on Amerigo's desire to protect her from distress) ends with a description of the "drop" of this same exaltation, not from thoughts of how much deeper her suffering would have been if the complications had been greater, but rather from the paradoxical notion that she would have suffered "even less" had there been *more* complications. In essence, this first sentence seems to imply that she feels disappointed in how little she has suffered. This thought, however, is contradicted in the very next sentence when she realizes that her complications are "verily great enough" as long as Charlotte holds "secrets beyond guessing." Such structural inconsistencies bring to mind broader paradoxes about Maggie's situation: her sense of freedom requires Charlotte's restriction, her desired unification with her husband necessitates undesired separation from her father, and her role as the victor depends on her performance as the defeated. Furthermore, the idea that Maggie and Charlotte have switched places, that Charlotte is now in the same cage of "delusion" that once imprisoned Maggie, recalls the various shifting patterns of arrangement that take place among the two couples,

particularly those that involve the reversal of power. For example, the holder of secrets (and thereby control) changes from Charlotte in volume one to Maggie in volume two, the seduction of Amerigo which Charlotte achieves in volume one becomes Maggie's triumph in volume two, and Amerigo's initial infidelity to Maggie is followed by his betrayal of Charlotte. Through such reversals, contrasts, and shifts of status, James creates a text fairly bristling with tension, a text which continually leaves its readers suspicious of deeper meanings hovering just beyond their grasp.

MAGGIE AND THE PRINCE ARE ALONE TOGETHER AT LAST

CONTEXT: This passage, taken from the very end of the novel, describes Maggie and Amerigo's first private moments together since bidding farewell to Charlotte and Adam. While Amerigo has been leading their son upstairs to the nursery, Maggie has been fearfully anticipating her husband's reaction to "this end," this final result of her scheme. She wonders whether he will reward her with love and approval, and if so, with how much? The "number" mentioned below thus refers to the "amount" of affection she gathers from his expression.

He opened the door however at last—he hadn't been away ten minutes; and then with her sight of him renewed to intensity she seemed to have a view of the number. His presence alone, as he paused to look at her, somehow made it the highest, and even before he had spoken she had begun to be paid in full. With that consciousness in fact an extraordinary thing occurred; the assurance of her safety so making her terror drop that already within the minute it had been changed to concern for his own anxiety, for everything that was deep in his being and everything that was fair

in his face. So far as seeing that she was "paid" went he might have been holding out the money-bag for her to come and take it. But what instantly rose for her between the act and her acceptance was the sense that she must strike him as waiting for a confession. This in turn charged her with a new horror: if *that* was her proper payment she would go without money. His acknowledgement hung there, too monstrously, at the expense of Charlotte, before whose mastery of the greater style she had just been standing dazzled. All she now knew accordingly was that she should be ashamed to listen to the uttered word; all, that is, but that she might dispose of it on the spot for ever.

"Isn't she too splendid?" she simply said, offering it to explain and to finish.

"Oh splendid!" With which he came over to her.

"That's our help, you see," she added—to point further her moral.

It kept him before her therefore, taking in—or trying to—what she so wonderfully gave. He tried, too clearly, to please her—to meet her in her own way; but with the result only that, close to her, her face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders, his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: "'See'? I see nothing but *you*." And the truth of it had with this force after a moment so strangely lighted his eyes that as for pity and dread of them she buried her own in his breast. (579-580)

ANALYSIS: On the surface, this passage gives the novel a sense of closure quite unexpected in James' later prose. While the reassuring dialogue between Maggie and Amerigo adds an emotional resolution almost trite in its cheerfulness, their affectionate embrace, itself a physical act of closure, brings to mind the stereotypical happy ending

one might expect of a romantic comedy. Furthermore, the image of the "money-bag" not only suggests the finality of a business transaction but also provides a fitting culmination to the novel's repeated references to sums of expense and payment. Thus, when Maggie observes that Amerigo's company has "paid" her "in full," her words suggest a neat balancing of accounts. She can now collect the reward for her longsuffering silence, and Amerigo can begin to repay the Ververs for their generosity. Yet, despite this initial sense of harmony, the text fails to elicit the satisfaction expected from a happy ending. Charlotte may be gone, but memories of her "greater style" still haunt Maggie, whose attempts at communication leave Amerigo "trying" in vain to understand her. In fact, Amerigo tries "too clearly"; his strained efforts "to meet her in her own way" indicate feelings of obligation, not love. Even his intimate gestures are an "act," thus transforming his last words—"'I see nothing but *you* '"—from a confession of innocent adoration to an admission of self-imposed imprisonment. The "pity and dread" that his words evoke in Maggie only serve to confirm this disturbing "truth." Thus, their final embrace becomes an act of enclosure, perhaps symbolizing another cage of pretense and delusion, behind the bars of which Amerigo will hide his memories of Charlotte and Maggie will hide her eyes from his charade. Ironically, then, the very act meant to symbolize intimacy turns for this couple into a symbol of their isolation.

Indeed, the closer one examines the text, the more ambiguous it becomes. The narrator's frequent references to numerical and monetary values, for example, add a chilling pragmatism to what might otherwise be construed as a tender love scene. Maggie not only counts the number of minutes Amerigo has been away, but she also tries to

estimate the exact amount of his affection. Such calculations bring to mind her earlier efforts to sustain an appearance of perfection and order in her relationships. Unfortunately, love cannot be reduced to a precise number or even a fixed amount, and Maggie's overwhelming desire to orchestrate a clear-cut resolution to the affair between Amerigo and Charlotte only seems to produce more uncertainty. She averts the "uttered word" of Amerigo's potential confession with bright but inane observations, as though to keep him from cluttering her moment of triumph with messy expressions of apology or remorse. She also imagines his affection as a bag of money, perhaps to bring their relationship to a more manageable or more comprehensible level. After all, as a currency of affection, money has served her father well; with it he seems to have effectively fulfilled her every desire, even that of a grand prince to love. Perhaps Maggie's comparison of affection to money reflects a desire for something both measurable and hoardable; perhaps she wants to be as certain of the depth and sincerity of Amerigo's love as she is of the quantity and solidity of her father's wealth. Ultimately, of course, Amerigo's love (like James' text) remains elusive, and in order to achieve a sense of emotional closure, Maggie (like James' readers) must work through a process of interpretation and analysis.

James also uses contrast to add to the overall ambiguity of the passage. Maggie's drastic shifts of emotion, for example, not only lead the reader to doubt her ability to read her husband's body language but also create a mounting sense of disorientation. The thrill of "assurance" she feels when Amerigo first enters is quickly followed by a deep and sudden concern for his potential "anxiety," a concern which in turn gives way to the "new

horror" that he may think she expects a "confession." Against this complicated and detailed account of emotional fluctuation James then places a short exchange of dialogue almost unnerving in its simplicity. Yet, the apparent clarity of the dialogue provides no more resolution than the vagaries of Maggie's emotion. In fact, the concept of a question being used "to explain and to finish" is itself something of a paradox, since questions typically demand (rather than provide) explanation and prolong (rather than end) a given issue. Furthermore, while both Maggie and Amerigo use sight-related language (Maggie's expression "'you see'" is echoed in Amerigo's response "'See? I see nothing but *you*'"), neither shows an interest in "seeing" at all. Amerigo restricts his vision to one object, his wife, while Maggie hides her eyes in Amerigo's breast for fear of glimpsing the "truth" in his expression. Thus, James leaves his readers with a denouement that multiplies rather than resolves the intricacies of the plot.

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