

**THE IMPRESSION  
IN THE ESSAYS AND LATE NOVELS OF  
HENRY JAMES**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the meanings and uses of the impression in the essays and late novels of Henry James. While James found fault with impressionism in French painting and literature, he repeatedly called the novel ‘a direct impression of life’, and used the term to figure important moments of perception and action for his protagonists. The thesis offers the first full-length study of the impression on its own terms, rather than through the lens of a wider artistic or philosophical movement, the most obvious example being impressionism. It locates James’s impression within an intertextual history comprising British empiricist philosophy (Locke and Hume), empiricist psychology (William James), British aestheticism (Pater and Wilde), and, looking forwards, twentieth-century theories of the performative (Austin, Derrida, de Man, Butler). It offers a series of close readings of James’s non-fictional and fictional treatments of the impression in his early criticism and travel writing (1872-88), his prefaces to the New York edition (1907-09), and the three novels of his major phase, *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). This exploration does not produce any unified definition of the impression in the work of James. It finds, rather, that the impression crystallizes one of James’s main themes, the struggle between art and life, a consequence of the competing empiricist and aesthetic tendencies that the thesis distinguishes within accounts of the impression available to James. The thesis goes on to show that impressions in James may be made as well as received, and so introduces a further distinction, between ‘performative’ and ‘cognitive’ impressions. It argues that what James does with these competing impressions – empiricist and aesthetic, cognitive and performative – is to make them the narrative focus of his late novels and their drama of consciousness.

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## Note on Texts

I refer to all texts by the author-date system. Of the authors I quote, Henry James and Walter Pater, in particular, were meticulous revisers, Oscar Wilde less so. As I am making a historical argument about the meanings and uses of the impression, I quote James's and Pater's texts in their first published form, noting substantial revisions in footnotes.

I quote passages in James's prefaces to the New York Edition from Blackmur's collected edition (James 1962). As for James's art criticism, I quote from the anthology, *The Painter's Eye*, which reproduces James's reviews as they originally appeared in periodicals (James 1956b). When discussing James's travel writing, I quote from the first US edition of *A Little Tour in France* (1885), which appeared a year after the first appearance in the *Atlantic Monthly* of the articles it collects, and I discuss articles in *English Hours* (1905) as they first appeared in the 1870s in *The Nation*, noting any revisions James made to them in his 1905 collection (James 1885b; James 1905a). I quote James's literary essays of the 1880s as they first appeared in periodicals, noting any significant revisions made to them when James collected them in *Partial Portraits* (1888) (James 1888b). I quote *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904) in their first British editions (James 1902; James 1903; James 1905b). *The Golden Bowl* was first published in the US in 1904, and then in Britain in 1905. *The Ambassadors*, though published after *The Wings of the Dove*, was written before it; I treat them in chronological order of composition. These novels, along with most of James's fiction, were collected and revised by James in the twenty-four-volume *The Novels and Tales of Henry James* (1907-1909), published by Scribner's, commonly known as 'The

New York Edition'. Of the passages I quote from the three novels, a handful were revised substantially in the New York Edition: I quote these (in footnotes) as they appeared in the English issue of the New York Edition, published by Macmillan in 1908-09, which comprised the sheets of the ordinary issue of the American edition (James 1909b; James 1909a; James 1909e; James 1909f; James 1909d; James 1909c).

Among Pater's work, I discuss *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) – which, after the first edition, Pater renamed *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* – and *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Pater revised *The Renaissance* significantly for its second (1877), third (1888), and fourth (1893) editions. I primarily look at the first edition, which James was most likely to have read (Pater 1873). When I refer to revisions Pater made to this text, I quote the final, 1893 text, in Hill's scholarly edition (Pater 1980). Pater revised *Marius* slightly in 1885, then very extensively in 1892. I quote the first edition of *Marius*, noting any significant revisions by referring to the posthumous ten-volume 'Library Edition', published by Macmillan in 1910, which reproduced the 1892 text (Pater 1885a; Pater 1885b; Pater 1921b; Pater 1921a).

Pater's disciple, Wilde, did not revise his texts to the same extent. I quote from the text of the first British edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) (rather than from the shorter, earlier version which appeared in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1890), using the relevant volume of the recent Oxford *Complete Works* (Wilde 2005). As for 'The Decay of Lying' (1889) and 'The Critic as Artist' (1891), I quote from the text of the first edition of Wilde's collection of critical essays, *Intentions* (1891), in which they were included, rather than from their first appearances in *Nineteenth Century* in 1889 and 1890, respectively, using the relevant volume of the Oxford edition (Wilde

2007b; Wilde 2007a). I prefer the text of *Intentions* to that of the two periodical articles, as the two essays had greater impact in this form.

I use the following abbreviations to refer to some of the texts above: *EH* (*English Hours*), *LE* (The ‘Library Edition’ of Pater’s Work), *NYE* (The ‘New York Edition’ of James’s work), and *PP* (*Partial Portraits*).

## Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine the meanings and uses of the impression in the essays and late novels of Henry James. While James rejected impressionism in French painting and found fault with it in French literature, he placed the impression at the heart of his own aesthetic project, as well as his conception of consciousness and experience. In ‘The Art of Fiction’ (1884), he defended the novel on the basis of its being ‘a direct impression of life’, while also claiming that ‘experience consists of impressions’ (James 1884: 507). He went on to use the impression in his late fiction to figure important moments of perception and action for his protagonists. The variety of uses sketched above raises a series of questions that lie at the heart of this thesis. What, for James, is an impression? How does his use of the word compare with that of his contemporaries, particularly the so-called ‘impressionists’? Does James’s notion of the impression change over time and, if so, how?

I have chosen to examine these questions with reference to James’s early essays (1872-88), his prefaces to the New York edition of his collected works (1907-09), and the three completed novels of his ‘major phase’, *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904).<sup>1</sup> It is within these novels that James most fully explores and puts into fictional practice the impression that he had earlier refined in his literary theory and criticism. Among his early essays, I address his reviews of painterly and literary impressionism, his art criticism more generally, his travel writing about England (collected in 1905 as *English Hours*) and France (collected in 1885 as *A Little Tour in France*), and his manifesto for fiction, ‘The Art of Fiction’ (1884). In these critical texts, James criticizes contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The Major Phase’ is the subtitle of Matthiessen’s influential study of James (Matthiessen 1946).

notions of the impression, from painting and literature, in the light of his own conception of it. In the prefaces to the New York edition, James, looking back on his literary practice, not only calls the novel an impression of life, as he had already done in 'The Art of Fiction', but also, more importantly, foregrounds the impressions of his characters and shows how he uses these to structure his late novels. These novels are the focus of the second half of the thesis. Of the authors I quote, Henry James and Walter Pater, in particular, were meticulous revisers, Oscar Wilde less so. As I am making a historical argument about the meanings and uses of the impression, I quote James's and Pater's texts in their first published form, noting substantial revisions in footnotes. A detailed account of my textual decisions can be found in the 'Note on Texts'.

This exploration does not produce any unified definition of the impression. Rather, as this thesis argues, the term crystallizes James's main theme of the struggle between art and life, between the moral and the aesthetic: the impression is 'an impression of life' but it is also the novel; it is traditionally the means for the empiricist philosopher to discover the truth about life, but also, by the 1870s, for the aesthetic critic to discover the secret of art. It is a word that combines perception and artistic representation, whose intersection James implicitly celebrated in his privileging of point of view, and in his insistence that art represent life.

What this suggests is that James's impression is best understood with reference, not to any movement of impressionism, but to a complex intertextual history in which it marks but one chapter. Its specificities have roots in a tradition that starts with the British empiricist philosophers of the eighteenth century and continues, in modified form, in the work of the empiricist psychologists and the aesthetic critics of the nineteenth. But James's impression looks forwards as well as backwards,

anticipating the twentieth-century discourse of performativity in its power to do things with words, and so upsetting the idea that its meanings might be wholly determined by the pre-existing empiricist tradition.

### **1. An overview of the thesis**

The thesis falls into two halves. The first half looks at theories of the impression as they emerge in James's non-fiction and in the intertexts with which his work is in dialogue; the second examines how his practice of the impression adopts and adapts these theories in the major phase of James's fiction.

Chapter one starts by observing the apparent anomaly that, while James was critical of French impressionist painting and literature in the 1870s and 1880s, he nevertheless made the impression the centrepiece of his representation of the novelist at work in 'The Art of Fiction': in that literary manifesto, James wrote that 'a novel is [...] a personal impression of life', and he described how a female novelist, 'a woman of genius', created a fiction from a passing, but revelatory impression (James 1884: 507, 509). How might this anomaly be addressed? The chapter does so by reading James's early art criticism, literary criticism and travel writing as a remaking of existing models of the impression, and argues that James's impression combines the best of the French novel's attention to sensation with the English novel's attention to reflection. It also observes that, in the same manifesto, James attributes as much importance to the making of impressions as to the receiving of them. It introduces, for this reason, a distinction, fundamental to the argument of later chapters, between 'performative' impressions and 'cognitive' impressions.

Chapters two and three offer a selection of intertexts for James's emerging impression. These come from the two areas, broadly defined, of empiricism and

aestheticism, and include empiricist philosophy (Locke and Hume), nineteenth-century empiricist psychology (especially that of his brother, William James), British aestheticism (Pater and Wilde), and theories of performativity (Austin, Derrida, de Man, Butler).<sup>2</sup> From this selection of intertexts an account is derived of James's position within the longer history of the impression. This suggests that James followed Pater in resurrecting an old empiricist word, 'impression', that recent psychologists had avoided because of its subjective associations in Hume. But Pater, who valorized the subjective, found in Hume's impression a role for the imagination at the heart of perception and consciousness. This extra imaginative agency, which the aesthetes built into the empiricist impression, was further emphasized by two psychologists: Franz Brentano and William James. William James's emphasis throughout his work on 'apperception', the notion that perception immediately combines sensation (from outside) and ideation (from within) and that subject and object are thus combined in perception, accounts for several important aspects of James's late impressions, especially their tendency to be immediately aesthetically composed, and the fact that deceptive impressions are often the result of collaborations between deceivers (the objects of perception) and dupes (the subjects of perception).

The interpretive excesses of James's protagonists' cognitive impressions, chapter three goes on to suggest, may be accounted for by the flamboyant aestheticism of Wilde's 'critic as artist'. But the most active of James's impressions are performative: they are impressions made, not received; so the chapter turns to theories of performativity in the search for an account of the impression that

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<sup>2</sup> In my choice of intertexts I have benefited, especially, from reading Matz (2001), Ryan (1991), Griffin (1991) and Miller (2005).

encompasses both criticism and creation, and that captures the insidious capacity of the performative impression to make an alternative world which seems already to exist.

The theoretical uses to which James puts the impression in the prefaces to the New York Edition of his work are the subject of chapter four, which itself serves as a kind of preface to the final two chapters of the thesis, and its coda, in which James's fictional treatment of the impression in the three novels of the major phase is considered. In the prefaces and the novels of that phase, the impression is less likely to figure as an empiricist counterweight to ideas and is more likely to be forced uneasily to accommodate within itself both empiricism and aestheticism, which were identified (in chapters two and three) as the impression's constitutive schools of thought. What James does with these uneasy accommodations is to make them the narrative focus of his late novels and, in the prefaces, to theorize their interest in these terms. The novel is still an impression, then, but of a different kind: thanks to James's use of point of view, it is now, first and foremost, the impression of a character which is at the heart of the novelist's drama of consciousness.

Chapter five examines the first of the three novels, namely *The Ambassadors*. If the prefaces suggest that the novel is a character's impression, then *The Ambassadors* is Lambert Strether's impression, since the novel is entirely focalized through him. But what kind of impression is this? The chapter argues that the impression is at different times empiricist (a means for Strether to discover the truth) or aesthetic (a means for him to appreciate beauty for its own sake). In its empiricist guise, Strether's impression helps him to see what is going on behind the deceptive surfaces of Paris, behind the performative impressions engineered by Chad Newsome and Madame de Vionnet to disguise their sexual relationship, and helps him to

discover facts and make moral judgments. By contrast, aesthetic impressions, including those confected for him, help him to 'live', to make the most of life by imaginatively augmenting it, offering a fuller appreciation of the moment or a beautiful memento of it. The impression is the intersection, and site of potential conflict, of the aesthetic freedom of the imagination and the empiricist exigencies of experience.

Chapter six looks at James's next novel, *The Wings of the Dove*. It argues that in this novel Milly Theale is a dupe, like Strether, deceived by friends, Kate Croy and Merton Densher, who deploy performative impressions to conceal their secret love affair; but that, unlike Strether, Milly realises that impressions involve the collaboration of impressor and impessee and that these roles may be reversed. So she learns to make impressions, which scupper the plot against her, by making Densher fall in love with her, hence making real what had previously been feigned. Milly begins as a critic of the lovers' artful deception, but in the end she becomes an artist in her own right. Her most performative impressions refute the truth and the depth offered by recognition, when she is told of the plot, and adhere so tenaciously to the aesthetic surfaces she has created that they create a new reality.

The Coda acts as a conclusion to the thesis and suggests new directions for the impression by showing how *The Golden Bowl* both codifies the impressions of the previous two novels, making them an entrenched feature of James's narratives, and extends them. Maggie Verver uses cognitive impressions to discover that her husband, Prince Amerigo, is unfaithful. She then uses performative impressions to arouse passion in her husband and save her marriage. She thus, like Milly, uses impressions as both critic and artist. Again, like Milly, her performative impressions refute empiricist recognition by adhering so tenaciously to deceptive, aesthetic

surfaces that they become a reality. But, unlike Milly, Maggie is always aware of the depth she glimpses through recognition, and so does not become seduced by the surfaces of her own impressions: she uses them in a pragmatist manner, not to create a brittle artefact, like Densher's love for Milly's memory, but to solve problems and influence events. Unlike in the previous two novels, the moral and the aesthetic are aligned in the concept of form, since Maggie's performative impressions impose a composition both moral and aesthetic.

## 2. Existing scholarship

Many critics have addressed James's impression. But most have done so in pursuit of other quarries: for example, his literary impressionism,<sup>3</sup> his links to painterly impressionism,<sup>4</sup> his inheritance of both literary and painterly impressionism;<sup>5</sup> his

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<sup>3</sup> In Ford's view, James's impressionism lies in his portrayal of characters' consciousness as containing both impressions of the surface and graver preoccupations, which he links to James's economy (Hueffer 1918); for Watt, impressionism was the abandonment of authorial omniscience, meaning Conrad was the truer impressionist (Watt 1980); for Hay, James's impressionism represents impressions as only the beginning of reflective processes (Hay 1988); Bell sees James's impressionism as 'privileg[ing] the faithful representation of immediate states of mind over traditional conceptions of linear story or unitary meaning', suspending his characters' and his readers' desire for conclusions (Bell 1991: 6); Hoople sees it in James's representation of 'how the mind takes in fragments of the world and must develop the pictures of reality from the fragments', and describes impressions as sensual tricks, as well as primary data (Hoople 2000: 43, 45); Jameson sees James's use of point of view as impressionist, a modernist strategy which both reacts against, but is complicit with, capitalist reification (Jameson 2002).

<sup>4</sup> For Winner, James was not an impressionist stylistically but because of his interest in fluid subjectivity (Winner 1970); Anderson makes analogies between impressionist paintings and scenes in *The Ambassadors* (Anderson 1977); Torgovnick claims James's characters read their experiences as though looking at a painting (Torgovnick 1985); Brooks argues that James's work is more representational, and more concerned with the (expressionist) relationship between surface and depth than the impressionists' (Brooks 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Anderson and Kirschke look at both literary and painterly sources for James's impressionism (Anderson 1977; Kirschke 1981).

place within the empiricist and pragmatist,<sup>6</sup> or phenomenological traditions;<sup>7</sup> his links to the aesthetic movement.<sup>8</sup> This comes at the expense of addressing James's impression on its own terms.

Studies of James's impressions fall, in essence, into two kinds: one focuses on a shorter view of their historical moment and sees this as largely artistic in its terms of reference; the other offers a longer view and one that is predominantly philosophical in character.<sup>9</sup> In this respect, studies of James's impressions obey the distinction that Saunders (2006) offers when surveying critical approaches to the broader phenomenon of literary impressionism. Studies of this phenomenon are dominated by two books, Armstrong's *The Challenge of Bewilderment: Understanding and Representation in James, Conrad and Ford*, and Matz's *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Armstrong 1987; Matz 2001). These two represent, according to Saunders, two critical approaches to understanding literary impressionism: for Armstrong (1987) and others, it is 'contemporary with Impressionism in paint:

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<sup>6</sup> Raleigh claims James's characters are passive Lockean *tabulae rasae* (Raleigh 1968); Hocks uses William James's psychology to look at the interplay between experience and ideas in *The Ambassadors* (Hocks 1974); Griffin uses William James's empiricist psychology to show that James's characters' perception is not passive but concrete and embodied (Griffin 1991); Ryan links Jamesian point of view to modernist anxieties about the dissolution of the self threatened by empiricist psychology (Ryan 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Stowell sees James's impressionism as characterized by 'subjective objectivity', and hence formative of modernism, and stresses the importance of apperception in understanding Jamesian consciousness (Stowell 1980); Rowe characterizes James as a proto-deconstructionist whose innocents mistakenly believe in unmediated impressions (Rowe 1984: 189-217). See the Coda for an account of Butte (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Sherman argues that James was influenced by Pater, including in his relish for impressions (Sherman 1947); Ellmann claims that James mocked Pater, and his impressions, for thirty years, before relenting in time for the major phase (Ellmann 1983); Freedman argues that the impression of 'The Art of Fiction' was much influenced by Pater, and that James critiqued and remade aestheticism, especially in the major phase (Freedman 1990); Mendelssohn claims that both James and Wilde adhered to a fictional interpretation of Pater's impressionism (Mendelssohn 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Studies which take the short view of literary impressionism, including James's, tend to discuss French painterly and literary impressionism, English literary impressionism, the *fin-de-siècle*, and contemporary historical events (Hueffer 1918; Winner 1970; Hay 1976; Anderson 1977; Watt 1980; Kirschke 1981; Armstrong 1983a; Torgovnick 1985; Hay 1988; Katz 2000; Jameson 2002; Brooks 2007; Parkes 2011). Studies taking the longer view tend to take a more philosophical approach (Stowell 1980; Rowe 1984; Ryan 1991).

something occupying the space between Realism and modernism, coinciding with the origin of phenomenology', whereas Matz (2001) and others are 'more concerned to trace the notion of the "Impression" further back: philosophically, to its origins in British empiricism' (Saunders 2006: 206).

Armstrong's shorter view of James's impressionism leads him to see James as both 'the last realist' and 'the first modernist' (Armstrong 1987: 5). What is common to James, Conrad, and Ford, whom he calls 'literary impressionists', is that they 'explore how we construct reality by interpreting it', by making 'the act of understanding a drama in its own right', their self-conscious formalism bringing to the foreground the interpretive constructs that we often take for granted (Armstrong 1987: 1, 1, ix, 5). But he pays very little attention to the 'impression' itself in James's texts in order to justify his description of James as an 'impressionist'.<sup>10</sup>

By contrast, Matz (2001) has the laudable aim of redefining literary impressionism in terms of a theory of the impression itself. His literary impressionism encompasses a wider range of authors, Pater, Hardy, James, Conrad, Proust, Ford and Woolf. He argues that impressionism 'destroy[s] standard perceptual distinctions between thinking and sensing' in search of a 'perceptual totality', figured in the artistic manifestoes of James, Ford and Conrad as a collaboration between the intellect of the writer and the senses of a social inferior, a collaboration which might also bring about a greater political unity for the community. In Matz's view, James's impression, like Pater's before him, tries to combine art and life, perception and reflection, realism and romance, imagination and reality, making 'the impression the

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<sup>10</sup> In his earlier study, Armstrong theorizes the impression in James's 'The Art of Fiction' as an act of 'phenomenal knowing', using Kant, Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty: 'the impression, like the intentionality of consciousness, mediates between subject and object' (Armstrong 1983b: 44-5, 52). It is an 'imaginative act of seeing' with 'almost miraculous revelatory power', but it also has inherent weaknesses, since it is only her own 'foreshortened image' of the young men that the female novelist sees (Armstrong 1983b: 44-5, 49).

basis of an aesthetic vision that discovers truest realism in the most fertile imagination' (Matz 2001: 100-105, 45-6). The impression's sources include, for Matz, Pater, William James, and James's friend, the French literary impressionist, Alphonse Daudet (Matz 2001: 87-9). At the heart of the Jamesian impression is a combination of 'vitality and connoisseurship', life and art, which, if successfully combined, might comprise a 'single Impressionist faculty', but which, in reality, become an anxious 'Impressionist compromise' for both character and novelist (Matz 2001: 106, 86).

Matz's work has rejuvenated the field of literary impressionism and I agree with him about the importance of Pater and William James as intertexts for James's impressions. But it could be argued that his focus on the impression as figuring the author's point of view tends to overlook a more important role for the impression as James uses it, namely, as an expression of the distinct points of view of his characters. Matz claims, for example, that, by *The Ambassadors*, James has transcended his 'impressionist compromise' between art and life since, in the unifying figure of Strether, he can locate both vitality and connoisseurship (Matz 2001: 117). This strikes me as a fair assessment of James's treatment of the impression as authorial point of view in the prefaces to the New York edition of his collected works, but as a misreading of *The Ambassadors*, which seems to me in fact to stage the conflict between different impressions within the mind of Strether. It is Matz's focus on 'impressionism', rather than 'impressions', that is perhaps at the root of this misreading.

### 3. The contribution of this thesis

Viewing James's impression through the lens of impressionism has, in my view, distorted it. Those who see impressionism as formative of modernism (such as Armstrong 1987) tend to reach for anachronistic phenomenological contexts for James's impression. Like Griffin (1991) and Stowell (1980), I argue that a more apposite context for James's merging of the subject and object is the theory of apperception, celebrated by William James as the notion that we shape, and are shaped by, experience. This is clearly proto-phenomenological, and probably influenced later phenomenologists (Bell 1991: 356). I agree with phenomenological and post-structuralist assertions (such as Rowe 1984) that there is no such thing as an unmediated, pure impression in James's texts, but I think this can be accounted for both by James's own conception of the composing consciousness, and by empiricist accounts of the association of ideas, and apperception.

Associating James's impressions with impressionism also leads to too dominant an analogy with painterly impressionism, which James vocally criticized. I agree that James was influenced by painterly and literary impressionism, but, as will be clear, this only accounts for certain aspects of his impression, for example the first appearance of an impression at the start of a recognition scene. Some critics, in my view, overstate the usefulness of impressionist painting as an interpretive model for his literary representation of consciousness. I emphasize, instead, James's pre-impressionist, but nevertheless painterly, notion of the impression. Unlike, for example, Matz (2001) and Stowell (1981), but like Anderson (1977), Torgovnick (1985) and Winner (1970), I do not believe that it is wrong to make analogies between styles of painting and styles of literature, where appropriate. That the two are

sister arts is a consistent theme of James's throughout his career. Indeed, 'impression' is a term that James brings into literary criticism from art criticism.

A preoccupation with impressionism also leads to false characterizations of James, Hume, and Pater, and of the connections between them. Since painterly impressionism is about perception, its use as a term to encompass Hume's sceptical philosophy, Pater's aesthetic criticism, and James's psychological fiction, tends not only to elide the differences between these thinkers, but also to exaggerate their interest in perception. Locke and Hume divided perception (which they defined more widely than we do) into sensation and reflection, but they were more interested in reflection. Similarly, as Freedman (1990) and Mendelssohn (2007) have shown in different ways, Pater's notion of perception could be, at different points, sensationalist or more reflective. But some (for example, Hay 1988) have focused too much on the vivid impressions in both the opening of Hume's *Treatise* and the conclusion of Pater's *Renaissance*, and so have wrongly argued that both Hume and Pater were as interested in the vivacity of raw impressions as the impressionist painters were. This concept of impressionism is then too often visited upon James's texts, even by those who explicitly hold back from painterly analogies (such as Bell 1991), either to criticize them for not presenting perception vividly enough (Watt 1980) or to characterize misleadingly certain passages as representing exclusively immediate states of mind (Bell 1991). My view, by contrast, is that James's impressions feature most significantly in his representation of memory. As a result, his accounts of fleeting moments are often recorded within the context of several later temporal moments, reaches of time opened up by his use of analeptic prolepsis, in which a character anticipates looking back on a moment. Like the empiricists before him,

James is more interested in the internal perception involved in reflection than the external perception that is sensation.

My notion that an impression is made by a painter, in the form of a preliminary study, not just as the receiving and recording of a first impression, corresponds to my wider emphasis on performative impressions, which I argue James brings to the foreground as early as 'The Art of Fiction'. Studies that conceive of impressions only as cognitive, even those which conceive of perception as actively phenomenological, rather than purely empiricist, tend to exaggerate the passivity of the impression; the impression is not only the preserve of the bewildered protagonist, as the title of Armstrong's study of impressionism might suggest, *The Challenge of Bewilderment*; it is also used by villains and deceivers, and their dupes, when they fight back. The only work which gestures towards this active, sometimes deceitful, use of the impression is that of Hoople, who memorably describes impressions as 'confected', a word I often borrow (Hoople 2000: 40).

The novelist will never offer us a stable taxonomy of the impression as philosophers, psychologists or critics might, and James was not in the business of offering any such thing. My approach therefore stresses the heterogeneity of James's impressions. In this I have benefited from Matz's conception of the impression as an unstable collaboration between life and art, perception and thought, realism and romance. But I would go further than Matz in this respect, pointing out that James's impressions are individual to each character, and to James at different stages of his career. It may, indeed, be one of James's contributions to the theory of the impression, if such a thing exists, that fiction can best represent in its varieties of author, and character, the manifold impressions of humanity.

Focusing on these impressions has allowed me to revisit some major topics in James criticism. My distinction between cognitive and performative impressions, for example, recasts the Jamesian recognition as a process in which a dupe has a cognitive impression that suddenly sees beneath the performative impressions of someone trying to deceive them. It offers a new characterization of recognition as fundamentally empiricist: a sensation changes a character's thought, an act of Lockean or Humean outer perception is followed by an act of Lockean or Humean inner perception. Cave (1990) describes Jamesian narratives as a succession of recognitions. I would qualify this by describing them as a series of misrecognitions – in which the impression's aesthetic aspect distorts its empiricist one – crowned by a corrective, final recognition. Like Bersani (1976), I agree that recognition increasingly becomes, in James's late texts, the unwelcome intrusion of reality into imaginative consciousness, the 'violence of fact', which I identify as an incoming Humean impression of sensation which attacks an existing, more reflective aesthetic impression (Bersani 1976: 134).<sup>11</sup> But I also argue that the aesthetic aspects of the impression can sometimes enhance their role in the recognition of empiricist reality. Bersani conceives of Jamesian imaginative consciousness as subjectively imperious and all-consuming. But my understanding of the impression as a connection between two people leads me to characterize some of the most imaginative moments of consciousness as the result of a collaboration, often between deceiver and deceived, as in Milly's apparent complicity in her own deception.

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<sup>11</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition 1b) of 'impression' is 'a charge, onset, attack, assault', which was the earlier meaning of the Latin *impressio*. ("impression, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2014. Web.)

#### 4. Questions of method

As we have seen, then, many critics address James's impression in pursuit of other quarries. I am indebted to these studies for having created the conditions for my own work, but I would argue that many of them offer an incomplete account of James's impression, by identifying it as one element in a broader context for his work. My intention is to read James's impression on its own terms, not, for example, as an expression of his impressionism.

What precisely do I mean by James's impression? Is my object of study the word 'impression', or the impression as a *concept*?<sup>12</sup> I argue, in what follows, that James developed his own concept of the impression, distinct from earlier and contemporary concepts, which he usually referred to with the word 'impression'. But James also used the word 'impression' in more orthodox ways, and in idiomatic formulations, which are unremarkable. So while my practice is to concentrate my analysis on occurrences of the word in James's writing, and thereby to trace the word's shifting meanings in use, I am not offering an exhaustive analysis of instances of the word 'impression' in James's corpus. This, I believe, would be of little interest. Since my quarry is ultimately the impression as a concept, and not purely as a word, I do not place it in inverted commas in the title of this thesis, or, sometimes, in the body of the thesis.

At the end of this thesis, in the first section of the Coda, having examined many instances of the word in a variety of contexts, I offer a definition of the concept of the Jamesian impression. I do so not in order to fix the term to one stable and unchanging meaning. My definition is, instead, an example of what Max Weber called an 'ideal type': it is a heuristic device designed to group together and describe a

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<sup>12</sup> The studies that Neil Kenny has devoted to early modern 'curiosity' set out with great clarity the methodological options available (Kenny 1998; Kenny 2004).

series of specific occurrences (Weber 1949). ‘Impression’ is a word with a wide semantic range in the writing of James, with several clusters of meaning, which shift in time and between texts, but which nonetheless share a set of family resemblances. It is these that I have tried to delineate. In general, of course, a word and its ideal-typical meaning do not always coincide. The impression is no exception. Therefore, as will become clear in what follows, I allow myself on occasions the latitude to suggest that James’s concept of the impression is present in a passage, even though the word itself is some distance away.<sup>13</sup> This is a methodological consequence of my decision to accord priority to James’s conceptualization of the impression. In general, however, the word remains at the centre of my attention and helps to limit my sample.

Why bother with James’s use of the word ‘impression’? Isn’t it just an example of what Ellmann has called ‘Pater patter’ (Ellmann 1983: 5)? Why not concentrate on another abstract noun often used by James, such as ‘reflexion’, ‘note’, ‘appreciation’, ‘suggestion’, ‘sense’ or even ‘idea’? I choose to study the impression because not only did James himself emphasize it both in his theory and his practice of fiction, but because critics, painters and novelists of the time also privileged it. ‘Impression’ was a word in vogue in Britain and France in the 1870s and 1880s as a result of impressionism and aestheticism. But, one might counter, does this not suggest that the word had been ‘degrade[d] into a species of cliché’ by the time James wrote the novels of his major phase, its use too often an empty gesture towards ‘cultural sophistication’ (Freedman 1990: 206, 207)?<sup>14</sup> And why bother at all to discriminate between the words which James uses to represent consciousness, if

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<sup>13</sup> I am, throughout, explicit about this procedure. The most significant example of this occurs when I describe, in chapter 1.4, James’s metaphor of the spider-web of experience in ‘The Art of Fiction’ as a representation of the impression, since, in my view, it sits in apposition to James’s description of how the novelist receives and makes impressions. There are other occasions, with justifications, as follows: pages 55-56, 191-192, 250-251, 297, and 298.

<sup>14</sup> Freedman is describing what he sees as the hollow aesthetic chit-chat of the drawing rooms of *The Wings of the Dove*.

Chatman is right that James's lexical choices are driven not by distinctions in meaning, but by stylistic considerations:

What can we say about words like 'idea' and 'impression' [...]? [...] For it doesn't seem that these terms are used in any technically 'philosophical' way [...] His characters are constantly engaged in (or in the grips of) heavy ratiocination [...] What has been aptly called James' 'cognitive apparatus' is very elaborate indeed. But though the vocabulary is rich, the actual amount of psychological distinction is small, and most of the variety is, like much else in James, elegant variation. (Chatman 1972: 9-10)

I hope on the contrary to demonstrate that James, and indeed Pater before him, use the term 'impression' with precision, in a range of contexts, to represent distinct elements and characteristics of consciousness. Although, as an ideal type, James's impression has a wide semantic range, this is focused by the context of its individual occurrences, as I show in a series of close readings of the novels of the major phase.

My underlying assumption has been that James chose the word deliberately when he used it, and so I have tried to understand these uses without visiting on them preconceptions that might distort my reading of them. This desire not to bring preconceptions to a writer's work is echoed throughout James's first important treatment of the impression, 'The Art of Fiction', which itself reflects an empiricist privileging of experience over inherited ideas. My method acknowledges this, but it also looks to a variety of intertexts to help make sense of the experience of reading James's impressions, for two connected reasons: James's understanding of the impression, and the reader's, do not exist in a vacuum; and, as Pater wrote in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, 'Theories, religious or philosophical ideas, as points of view, instruments of criticism, may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us' (Pater 1873: 211).

## 1. James's Criticism of the Impression, 1872-1888

'A novel is in its broadest definition a personal impression of life', James wrote in 1884 in 'The Art of Fiction' (James 1884: 507). This chapter explores the anomaly that, while he expressed strong reservations about impressionism in the work of contemporary French painters and novelists in essays of the 1870s and 80s, James made the 'impression' his overarching metaphor for the novel. My claim will be that this anomaly is explained if we read his criticism as a critique, and a remaking, of existing models of the impression.

What then, for James, is an impression? How does his notion of the impression compare with that of his contemporaries, particularly the so-called 'impressionists'? This chapter finds that James, from the start, conceives of the impression as an imaginative form of perception, rather than a raw sensation, which, as such, may figure anything from a moment of consciousness to an entire work of art, such as a novel or a painting. His use of it suggests that he conceives of consciousness as inherently aesthetic. James's impression tries to mediate between art and life and, in doing this, reveals his sense that the conflict between the two, especially between creating art and living life to the full, needs to be overcome. The impression is, above all perhaps for James, an attempt to reconcile his commitment to representing life with his belief in the transformative power of the artistic imagination.

This chapter looks both at James's early notions of the impression and at his views of the impressionisms of others in his critical writings on painting and literature and in his early travel writing, culminating in 'The Art of Fiction' (1884). James published art reviews between 1868 and 1882, and then briefly in 1897. He reviewed

contemporary fiction more consistently, from 1861 to his death in 1915. In the first and third sections of this chapter, respectively, I focus on his reviews of painterly and literary impressionism. James was of the generation of the French impressionists. In 1876, at the age of 34, he saw for the first time paintings by Monet, Renoir and Pissarro. In the 1880s and 1890s, he wrote articles about the contemporary French novelists Maupassant, Daudet and Loti, whom he saw as ‘impressionists’. Between the sections on painterly and literary impressionism, I examine (in section 1.2) James’s uses of the word in his art criticism and travel-writing about England (collected in 1905 as *English Hours*) and France (collected in 1885 as *A Little Tour in France*), of the 1870s and 1880s. In the fourth section, I return to examine in more detail the role that the impression plays in his early critical writings on literature, in particular, ‘The Art of Fiction’.

Why begin my study of James’s impression by looking at his criticism? I do so on the grounds that James himself offered, in the preface to *What Maisie Knew* (1908), when describing his own role as a ‘student of great cities’:

To criticise is to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a relation with the criticised thing and make it one’s own. The large intellectual appetite projects itself thus on many things, while the small – not better advised, but unconscious of need for advice – projects itself on few. (James 1962: 155)

For James, criticism is an act of perceptual and imaginative appropriation in which the subject assimilates a new object or experience. In another preface he describes himself as a ‘critic of life’ (James 1962: 202).<sup>1</sup> The impression is one of the most important and prevalent metaphors for this imaginative appropriation of the stuff of life. As we will see, like criticism, the impression has both passive and active elements: it quietly ‘appreciate[s]’, receives something, but it also ‘projects’ itself

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<sup>1</sup> James is perhaps alluding to Matthew Arnold’s definition of poetry as ‘a criticism of life’ in his 1880 essay ‘The Study of Poetry’ (Arnold 1921: 48).

onto things, in the process of taking possession of them. Elsewhere in the prefaces, indeed, James calls himself a ‘projector’ and an ‘imaginative and projective person’ (James 1962: 249, 151). James, in his essays, makes many perceptual and imaginative appropriations, sometimes using his impressions to do so; but he also undertakes a criticism of contemporary notions of the impression itself, one that is receptive to them but also transforms them. He reclaims the impression by remaking it, and insists that its ultimate home is the novel, that, indeed, the novel is an impression. This is a claim he continues to make from ‘The Art of Fiction’ (1884) to the prefaces (1907-09), preparing the way for the very particular, and unusual, impressions of his late fiction (the subjects of chapters five, six and the coda, below). But it is in James’s criticism that the process of appreciating and appropriating the impression is most apparent.

### **1.1 Painterly Impressionism**

In 1876 James attended the second exhibition of impressionist paintings at Durand-Ruel’s gallery, seeing works by Renoir, Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, and Morisot, among others. His reaction was conservative. Like most other critics of the time, James criticised the painterly impressionists for presenting their sense impressions as finished works of art. He thought their impressions were unimaginative and unworthy of record, and needed to be finished through the formal activity of the imagination; they were too receptive, and insufficiently projective. This first response is a useful guide as to how – and why – James conceived differently of the impression. It can be better understood by recalling an observation he made two years later of the American painter James McNeil Whistler: ‘His manner is very much that of the French “Impressionists”, and, like them, he suggests the rejoinder that a picture is not an

impression but an expression – just as a poem or a piece of music is’ (James 1956b: 165).<sup>2</sup> In other words, the impressionists’ attempts to record immediate perception through hasty, broad brushstrokes had not, in James’s opinion, produced art. Art must be more than just perception: the artist must convert his impression into an expression.

How might an artist do just this? James wrote of the 1876 show in Paris:

The young contributors to the exhibition of which I speak are partisans of unadorned reality and absolute foes to arrangement, embellishment, selection, to the artist’s allowing himself, as he has hitherto, since art began, found his best account in doing, to be preoccupied with the idea of the beautiful. (James 1956b: 114)

James presents the painterly impressionists here as recording a sensation so raw that it requires the finishing processes of artistic form to produce beauty. His quarrel with the impressionists was that they omitted these processes and presented their mere sense impressions as art. His conception of so raw an impression as theirs was of something passive, insufficiently interventionist, too ready to receive the outside world rather than project something imaginatively onto it:

The beautiful, to them, is what the supernatural is to the Positivists – a metaphysical notion, which can only get one into a muddle and is to be severely let alone. Let it alone, they say, and it will come at its own pleasure; the painter’s proper field is simply the actual, and to give a vivid impression of how a thing happens to look, at a particular moment, is the essence of his mission. (James 1956b: 114)

Impressionists tried to render their individual impressions of objects rather than the objects themselves. Many of the formal and thematic characteristics of impressionism may be motivated by its privileging of ‘sensation’. Painterly impressionism captures an instant of time, before sensation becomes perception; like other sensations, an impressionist painting elicits perceptual activity on the part of the

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<sup>2</sup> Critics have largely excluded Whistler from the school of impressionism, perhaps because his ‘main concern was not with effects of light and colour but rather with the composition of delicate patterns’ (Gombrich 1978: 422).

viewer, to whom the burden of visual intelligibility is transferred by the painter; the effects of light and colour are more important than the object or motif – which is rendered with minimal narrative implications – as sensation tends not to engage the associative processes which make objects identifiable and parts of larger stories; like a spontaneous sensation, the impressionist painting apparently lacks formal, academic composition and focus.

It is the absence of form in their impressions which leads James, in 1876, to compare the impressionists' 'realism' unfavourably with that of the English Pre-Raphaelites (James 1956b: 114-5).<sup>3</sup> Both groups, in his view, tended to produce pictures with 'a subject which has been crudely chosen' (James 1956b: 115). He goes on to suggest, using consistently religious language, that the Pre-Raphaelites instinctively knew that such realism in choice of subject had to be redeemed by form. For James, such formal work is 'above all things laborious' – hard, as well as pious, work, which sets apart the industrious Protestant English from the Catholic French.

Eleven years later, in 1887, James's admiration for his friend, the painter John Singer Sargent, prompted him to present at least one form of impressionism in a slightly less unfavourable light. His residual hostility to most impressionist works, however, may be inferred from his reluctance to allow Sargent to be tainted by association with them:

From the time of his first successes at the Salon he was hailed, I believe, as a recruit of high value to the camp of the Impressionists, and to-day he is for many people most conveniently pigeon-holed under that head. It is not necessary to protest against the classification if this addition always be made to it, that Mr. Sargent's impressions happen to be worthy of record. This is by no means inveterately the case with those of the ingenuous artists who most rejoice in the title in question. To render the impression of an object may be a very fruitful effort, but it is not necessarily so; that will depend upon what, I won't say the object, but the impression, may have been. (James 1956b: 217)

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<sup>3</sup> James records in his memoir *A Small Boy and Others* (1913) that his first encounter with the Pre-Raphaelites took place in 1856 (James 1956a: 178).

Good impressionism is possible but it requires good impressions. The impression's quality is not determined by its object, implying that aesthetic treatment, rather than choice of subject, is what counts. To be 'worthy of record' implies that the impression must in some sense be already worked up, be more than mere sensation. This becomes clearer in the light of a comment on Sargent's perception in the previous paragraph of the review:

Perception with him is already by itself a kind of execution. It is likewise so, of course, with many another genuine painter; but in Sargent's case the process by which the object seen resolves itself into the object pictured is extraordinarily immediate. It is as if painting were pure tact of vision, a simple manner of feeling. (James 1956b: 217)

In a sensibility such as Sargent's, it becomes impossible to differentiate 'impression' from 'expression', as James did so readily in the case of Whistler. For Sargent, seeing is a form of painting, painting a form of seeing. As we will see is true of James too, in his travel writing, Sargent perceives in part through the medium of artistic form: the outside world apparently composes itself pictorially to his vision. The effect of such an impression is to establish a continuous spectrum between perception and artistic creation. The first-rate impressionist painter is one whose impressions are sufficiently imaginative to engage – to impress – the viewer.

The only explicit grounds offered by James for a comparison of Sargent with the impressionists is that the impressions of both the former and the latter 'simplify'. Yet where the impressionists' simplification produces an insubstantial impression, thinner than the perceptive viewer's, Sargent's is stylish and energetic. Like a reduction in cooking, Sargent's simplification produces a richer sauce:

The talents engaged in this [impressionist] school lie, not unjustly, as it seems to me, under the suspicion of seeking the solution of their problem exclusively in simplification. If a painter works for other eyes as well as his own he courts a certain danger in this direction – that of being arrested by the cry of the spectator: 'Ah! but excuse me; I myself take more impressions than that.' We feel a synthesis not to be an injustice only when it is rich. Mr. Sargent

simplifies, I think, but he simplifies with style, and his impression is the finest form of his energy. (James 1956b: 217-8)

Sargent's 'simplification' is associated with 'style', an aspect of form; it is an expression of 'energy', which we might associate with action, perhaps with the 'arrangement, embellishment, selection' which James thought the impressionists had omitted. In the 1876 review, the impressionists' simplification, or 'general expression', was associated with an absence of activity, 'let it alone, they say', a lack of embellishment or adornment, in contrast with the Pre-Raphaelites' labour. Here simplification becomes the interventionist activity of 'synthesis'.

When, in 1887, James referred to 'the Impressionists', as we have just seen, he was borrowing a term that had first emerged in the French language of art criticism. *Impressioniste* and *impressionisme* were coined as terms of abuse in a hostile review of the first exhibition in 1874 of the 'Société anonyme des peintres, sculpteurs et graveurs', a group including Cézanne, Degas, Monet, Morisot, Pissarro, Renoir, and Sisley, among others (Nochlin 1966: 10-13). The satirical critic Louis Leroy, entitling his article 'L'Exposition des impressionistes', made criticisms similar to those James would make two years later. Leroy staged an imaginary dialogue between himself and an indignantly conservative fictional painter, M. Joseph Vincent: as he pauses before each new painting, Vincent – like James – complains of its sloppiness, lack of finish, imprecision, lack of observation, and simplification, and Leroy tries to mollify him with the refrain 'perhaps... but the impression is there', going on to describe their school as 'impressionism' and their manner as 'impressionist' (Nochlin 1966: 10-13). Taking his cue from one of Monet's contributions, a painting of Le Havre called 'Impression: soleil levant' ('Impression: sunrise') (1872), Leroy noticed that the painters were united in their attempts to render the painter's momentary impression of a scene, and in their willingness, in pursuit of this, to sacrifice orthodox principles of

composition, finish and detail. Leroy did not feel, however, that the impressions were accurate; like most of his contemporaries, he struggled to make visual sense of the paintings, not persuaded that isolated instants of human perception are quite so incomplete. Leroy's addition of the suffix '-ist' to Monet's 'impression' mocked the notion that a unified, artistic philosophy could be based around so rough a thing as an impression. But the painters soon adopted the abusive term in earnest, and turned it against their critics: they named their third exhibition 'L'Exposition des impressionistes' in 1877.<sup>4</sup>

Leroy's review identified important antecedents to impressionism when 'M. Vincent' laments the malign influence of Corot and Manet. Corot – who taught Pissarro – was a member of the Barbizon school (c.1830-70), along with painters such as Courbet, Daubigny, and Lambinet. The Barbizon school was perhaps the most important influence on impressionism.<sup>5</sup> Inspired by the example of Constable, these French painters introduced a realist strain to contemporary, largely romantic, painting, making nature the subject of their paintings rather than a background to scenes of myth or history, and painting ordinary, rather than dignified, people. 'The Barbizon artists provided the Impressionists with a model of observed, specific, non-historical landscape with attention to times of day and seasons, often painted out of doors' (Seiberling 2003). *The Ambassadors* makes much of one such Barbizon painting – by Lambinet – as we will see in chapter five.

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<sup>4</sup> The name was further publicized by *Les Peintres Impressionistes* (1878), a book by a sympathetic journalist, Duret, and by a new journal, published to coincide with the third exhibition, called *L'Impressioniste* (Thomson 2000: 136). However, there was always some unease at the name within the group: at the sixth exhibition, in 1881, 'impressioniste' in the exhibition's title was replaced by 'indépendant', at Degas's request; and, at the eighth and final exhibition of 1886, the term 'impressionisme' was renounced by the painters of the original exhibition of 1874 (van Gunsteren 1990: 29; Thomson 2000: 144).

<sup>5</sup> Other possible influences include: Claude Lorraine, eighteenth-century Japanese artists (such as Hokusai), Turner, Constable, Delacroix, Baudelaire, Ruskin. Some have argued that painterly impressionism was also influenced by positivism, or the atomist structure of many modern scientific models.

More famous than Corot was Courbet, who influenced the work of Manet, the father of the impressionists, in the 1860s. Courbet helped to persuade some of his peers, including Manet, that ‘the artist’s own time and experience were the appropriate subject-matter for art’, discarding convention in shocking ways (Seiberling 2003). Manet’s subsequent anti-academic innovations led to his exclusion from the official state-sponsored Salon de Paris in 1863, whose jury was the arbiter of success for contemporary painters. Opposition to this exclusion led to the establishment of a ‘Salon des Refusés’, an official home for some of those excluded from the main Salon. But the painters who would later be termed the impressionists took the further initiative, several years later, of showing and selling their own paintings independently outside the two Salons. The 1874 exhibition was the first of eight such ventures.

The earliest recorded use of ‘impression’ in a painterly context in France, in 1636, describes a physical event, ‘première couche de peinture à l’huile’ [‘first layer of oil paint’]: the ‘priming’ or ‘ground’, the first coat of paint or other substance, often tinted, which is laid on the painter’s canvas in order to reduce its absorption of subsequent layers of paint.<sup>6</sup> It could also mean a copy taken from a type or from an engraving; the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites an example of this use in 1869.<sup>7</sup> Despite this physical sense, French painterly uses of ‘impression’ in the nineteenth century more often alluded to its meaning as a psychological event, the painter’s first conception of the motif. Monet, already gaining notoriety through his exhibits in the Salon in the 1860s, used the word ‘impression’ frequently to describe what he painted from as early as the late 1850s (Smith 1995: 19). A famous passage of 1856 in one of

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<sup>6</sup> “impression”, *Le Petit Robert*. Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2nd ed. 1977. Print.

<sup>7</sup> “impression, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2014. Web.

Corot's notebooks uses the word in its psychological sense, advising the student above all to trust his first impression:

N'abandonnons jamais cela et, en cherchant la vérité et l'exactitude, n'oublions jamais de lui donner cette enveloppe qui nous a frappés. N'importe quelle site, quel objet; soumettons-nous à l'impression première. Si nous avons été réellement touchés, la sincérité de notre émotion passera chez les autres. (Corot quoted in Clark 1966: 95)

[Let us never abandon that [the artist's first sensation] and, while seeking truth and accuracy, let us never forget to give it that envelope that struck us. Whatever the site, whatever the object, let us submit to our first impression. If we have really been touched by it, the sincerity of our emotion will communicate itself to others.]

Here the impression is the first effect on the artist of nature, an effect which is both aesthetic (it transforms truth into beauty) and emotional (we are touched by it), but which is also part of the truth of the experience. The artist's first impression has an imperiousness which the impressionists, too, would later also obey. But Corot does not argue, as the impressionists would, that the painter's job is finished once he has rendered the first impression. He is simply suggesting that recollection of the first impression is an essential part of painting.

The kind of impression Corot describes may be seen as a raw ingredient of those highly finished nineteenth-century French paintings in the grand manner of David, Delacroix and Ingres. This raw psychological ingredient was embodied in various physical manifestations, in preliminary studies and sketches, inspired by the painter's initial mental impression as he stood in front of the motif. Individual details of the motif would be perfected in a number of *études*, small paintings of certain elements of the finished whole. The overall composition would be rehearsed in two kinds of sketch: the *esquisse*, a small-scale trial sketch of the whole, quickly drawn or sometimes painted, and the *ébauche*, the first application of paint after the physical impression (as in the priming or ground). Especially the *esquisse* and the *étude*, but also the *ébauche*, were often executed *en plein air*, if the motif was a landscape. The

overall composition of these, the *paysage composé*, would typically then take shape in the artist's studio. These *études* and *esquisses* were seen as the rough work of the painter and given no space in the Salon. But the celebrated sketches of Constable, who inspired the painters of the Barbizon school, encouraged many artists to exhibit their own sketches and, by the 1860s, the sketches of painters such as Corot began to be prized and traded in their own right.

What the two meanings of 'impression' – physical and psychological – have in common is that they describe preliminaries to a finished painting, which, through metonymy, become the whole painting itself. Sometimes an ambiguous use evokes both meanings: Monet suggested, in 1901, that, as the light changes so quickly in England, 'I should have done nothing but sketches, real impressions', the sensation and its rendering becoming synonymous (Smith 1995: 27).

After the label 'impressionism' had been so mockingly attached to them in 1874, the impressionists made early verbal efforts to make the term their own and thus to define their emerging school. A year later, a formal definition of 'impressionism' emerged 'from among their midst – and doubtless with their consent', when a friend of Renoir's, Georges Rivière, wrote that 'treating a subject in terms of the tone and not of the subject itself, this is what distinguishes the impressionists from other painters' (Rewald 1973: 338). They painted objects as they found them outside in the open air – helped by technological changes which made painting equipment more portable – rather than as they appeared in the controlled light of the studio: carefully graded shades diminishing into shadow were replaced by harsh contrasts and bold colours. In 1875 Castagnary offered a fuller and more useful definition than Rivière. The painters have in common, he said,

the determination not to search for a smooth execution, but to be satisfied with a certain general aspect. Once the impression is captured, they declare their

role terminated [...] If one wants to characterize them with a single word that explains their efforts, one would have to create the new term *Impressionists*. They are impressionists in the sense that they render not a landscape but the sensation produced by a landscape. (Rewald 1973: 330)

Paintings were 'general', were not 'smooth', as quick, broad brushstrokes replaced the slower, more finished techniques of traditional painting. Nor were these paintings preparatory sketches for a greater work: the painter's role was 'terminated' once the impression had been fixed.

The painterly impressionists tried to fix the naïve impressions of their eyes before they became influenced by established ways of perceiving and by the association of inherited ideas. This was another reason for speed of execution.

Pissarro equates true sight with fleeting impressions; as time elapses, these give way to the deadening hand of convention:

Precise drawing is dry and hampers the impression of the whole; it destroys all sensations [...] Don't proceed according to rules and principles, but paint what you observe and feel. Paint generously and unhesitatingly, for it is best not to lose the first impression. (Nochlin 1966: 60)

Renoir wrote that 'the artist who uses the least of what is called imagination will be the greatest': 'It is the eye of the sensualist that I wish to open' (Nochlin 1966: 49, 50). Bypassing traditional associations would mean that young painters could see for themselves, rather than seeing through the template of inherited wisdom. Renoir is equating imagination here with culture more generally and suggesting that true sensualism derives from true sensations. Seeing afresh means resisting all associations: it means 'judg[ing] pictures' by 'what we *see*' rather than 'by what we *know*' (Gombrich 1978: 406). The critic Jules Laforgue wrote in the 1880s that the impressionists had succeeded in eliminating the influence of culture on perception entirely: by forgetting tradition and art school training, 'the Impressionist [...] has succeeded in remaking for himself a natural eye, and in seeing naturally and painting as simply as he sees', unlike the public and the critics whose eyes are 'trained to see

reality in the harmonies fixed and established for it by a host of mediocre painters' (Nochlin 1966: 15, 19; Peters 2001: 16-17).

Paintings were also occasionally conceived of as impressions made on the viewer, not just received by the painter. Of Monet, the reviewer Théodore Duret, who became the principal defender of Manet and other impressionists during the 1870s, wrote that he had 'succeeded in setting down the fleeting impressions which his predecessors neglected or considered impossible to render with the brush'; and he 'transmits a singularly lively and striking sensation of the observed scene. His canvases really do communicate impressions' (Nochlin 1966: 29, 30). In Duret's description, painting for Monet is a 'transmission' of the painter's impression to the viewer.

The reaction of most contemporary French critics to impressionism followed Leroy's early lead. The impressionists were widely derided. One of the best-known reviewers of the Salon in 1876 criticized the impressionists for attacking beauty by lazily exhibiting mere impressions: 'M. Manet is among those who maintain that in painting one can and ought to be satisfied with the *impression*. [...] M. Monet – a more uncompromising Manet – Pissarro, Mlle Morisot. etc., appear to have declared war on beauty' (Rewald 1973: 326). Jules Clarétie, reviewing the 1874 exhibition, dismissed 'ces impressions fugitives, ces esquisses' ['these fleeting impressions, these sketches'], equating the fleeting impression with a preparatory sketch that, in his view, did not merit exhibiting.

## **1.2 James's Art Criticism and Travel Writing**

The hostile reaction of most contemporary French critics to the new impressionism doubtless influenced James's views in 1876. But he may have had a further reason for

his marked hostility to the so-called impressionists: they had decisively attached to themselves a term that James had often used in his own criticism of paintings and places well before 1874, and so he may well have felt that their version circumscribed the true potential of the impression, which he himself was beginning to discover. I hope to show in what follows that James's impression, on the evidence of his early art criticism and travel writing, may be distinguished from its namesake – as he found it in the paintings of the French impressionists – by its artfulness, its transitional nature, and its moral qualities.

James's impressions are instantly artful. Their speed in becoming art sometimes appears to disguise the writer's agency. The conceit here is that the English landscape is inherently pictorial:

Everything, in England, in old-time corners, has the connecting touch and quality of illustration, and in a particularly golden August, with an impression in every bush, the immediate vision, wherever one meets it, easily attaches and suffices. (James 1905a: 303)<sup>8</sup>

In fact it is James's imagination, conditioned by his knowledge of English art, which construes the external world pictorially.

James's impression is an essential, but preliminary, stage in both the appreciation of the viewer and the expression of the painter. James, as viewer, whether of a scene or a painting, is 'a votary, always, in the first instance, of a general impression' (James 1885b: 144). Of Bourges he remarks, in *A Little Tour of France*, that 'however late in the evening I may arrive at a place, I cannot go to bed without an impression' (James 1885b: 75). Standing before one of Sargent's portraits, he wonders how it is that it 'makes so ineffaceable an impression' (James 1956b: 221).

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<sup>8</sup> I have not been able to find the relevant volume of the periodical in which this article first appeared (*Harper's Weekly* XLI 25 September, 1897), so the text quoted above is from the revised version which appeared in *EH*.

In case any of the impressions of his travel writing are a little rough, he heads off the kind of criticism he himself made of the impressionists for exhibiting impressions rather than finished pictures, while suggesting, too, that it is in his novels that worked-up impressions may be found: he presents his own travel writings as a series of sketches, and is candid about their provisional nature, describing *A Little Tour* in a new preface of 1900 as ‘impressions, immediate, easy and consciously limited; if the written word may ever play the part of brush or pencil, they are sketches on “drawing-paper” and nothing more’ (James 1956b: 23). Within *A Little Tour*, he writes of his ‘attempt to sketch without a palette or brushes’ (James 1885b: 122).

The provisional nature of most impressions means they can be revised at any time. This, in James, takes two forms. The original scene or painting is revisited, so that one is ‘playing at first impressions for the second time’, or impressions are ‘renewed’ (James 1872a: 7; James 1956b: 188). A more profound nurturing of the impression leads to impressions which are fuller and deeper than sketches, resembling rather the first layer of paint as it persists on the canvas and is enriched by new layers: ‘I remained there an hour and got a complete impression’ James writes of the Pont du Gard, built by the Romans in the south of France (James 1885b: 170).

The impression’s capacity for revision means that it may be anything from a first impression to a deep impression to ‘one’s ultimate impression’ (James 1956b: 167). So James often qualifies it with an adjective. At one end of the scale is ‘that great general impression which, first and foremost, it is the duty of an excellent picture to give you’ (James 1956b: 111). At the other end is the ‘total impression’ of a critic, in reaction to, for example, a painting of Delacroix’s: ‘we find it hard even to fix our impression of it [...] Delacroix, more than any painter we know, must be

judged by the total impression. This, at least as a final one, is often very slow to come' (James 1956b: 111).

By using the word to describe his own response to paintings but in ways that evoke its earlier painterly meaning as a preliminary to a finished work, James implies that perception and criticism, and consciousness itself, are inherently artistic acts. As we have seen, the discourse of impressionism, both for and against, stressed the psychological meaning of impression, rather than the physical meaning as an object, an early attempt at a painting. James stresses this latter sense. His use of the term draws an implicit analogy between having an impression of something and possessing a painting of it. Like the sketch, or first layer of paint, it is intrinsically aesthetic, already comprising the formal foundations of the finished work, and is thus the product of imaginative effort and will on the part of the artist. We are told, in *A Little Tour*, of how an impression is 'a picture that hangs itself to one of the lateral hooks of the memory', and of how 'the place [near Blois] makes a little vignette, leaves an impression' (James 1885b: 233, 32). Describing a visit to Exeter in 1872, James equates viewing his impressions of English cathedrals with looking at paintings in a gallery.

You are making a collection of great impressions, and I think the process is in no case so delightful as applied to cathedrals. Going from one fine picture to another is certainly good, but the fine pictures of the world are terribly numerous, and they have a troublesome way of crowding and jostling each other in the memory. The number of cathedrals is small [...] They form, indeed, but a gallery of vaster pictures; [...] All this is especially true, perhaps, of one's memory of English cathedrals, which are almost alone in possessing, as pictures, the setting of a spacious and harmonious Close. The Cathedral stands supreme, but the Close makes the *scene*. (James 1872b: 86)<sup>9</sup>

The gatherer of impressions is a collector of pictures. Each of James's impressions is here so formal as to be a piece of art in itself. In this way the impression aestheticizes instantly.

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<sup>9</sup> *EH* replaces 'memory' with 'sense', and 'cathedrals' with 'sacred piles' (James 1905a: 89).

As a critic, James used the impression to seek, infer and sometimes bring out the 'moral' in paintings, which, as in its French usage, may also include the sentimental, literary, and historical, as well as the ethical. James's impression makes human sense of a place or painting by tracing its literary, artistic, historical, or psychological associations, in ways that frame it within a wider human narrative. And James himself is drawn to paintings which seek to make these connections beyond their own frames, as his appreciation of the painters Fortuny, Gautier, Corot, Gerome, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, and Leighton shows, all of whom he calls 'literary' (James 1956b: 90). James stressed the importance of a painter's 'moral tone' or 'sentimental intention': 'I think there is no question that, on the whole, the artist we value most is the artist who tells us most about human life'; 'it seems a great pity that a painter should ever reproduce a thing without suggesting its associations, its human uses, its general sentimental value' (James 1956b: 185, 12). As Marianna Torgovnick has argued, James's art criticism 'always reflects his taste for the representational, the dramatic, the art of content and moral'; he thought that art critics should approach paintings like literary critics (Torgovnick 1985: 43).

For James, painting was moral when it was related to life, not just to its own form, as he reveals in a response to Whistler. The impressionists used technical innovations to render perception more realistically: thick brush strokes, unexpected colour combinations, the foregrounding of obstacles to perception, such as fog and smoke. Some critics interpreted such innovation as exhibiting a preoccupation with the painters' own techniques. In the following passage, of 1877, James uses the term 'Impressions' to suggest that Whistler's paintings, though perhaps not strictly impressionist, shared the impressionists' self-reflexivity, at the expense of engaging with life.

I will not speak of Mr. Whistler's 'Nocturnes in Black and Gold' and in 'Blue and Silver', of his 'Arrangements', 'Harmonies', and 'Impressions', because I frankly confess they do not amuse me [...] It may be a narrow point of view, but to be interesting it seems to me that a picture should have some relation to life as well as to painting. Mr. Whistler's experiments have no relation whatever to life; they have only a relation to painting. (James 1956b: 143)

Here James satirically draws attention to Whistler's habit of giving his paintings names which stress their form and obfuscate any narrative, any 'relation [...] to life'.<sup>10</sup>

Whistler would later, in his 'Ten O'Clock Lecture' (1885), dismiss the efforts of literary people to produce art criticism. Perhaps anticipating objections similar to these, James adopts a rather apologetic note concerning his own critical methods in the following passage of 1875, a note which diminishes as he turns to the precedent set by literary painters themselves:

It will not be amiss to excuse us for sometimes attempting to motive [justify] our impressions, as the French say, upon considerations not exclusively pictorial. Some of the most brilliant painters of our day, indeed, are themselves more literary than their most erratic critics; we have invented, side by side, the arts of picturesque writing and of erudite painting. (James 1956b: 89-90)

### 1.3 Literary Impressionism

James had a much higher esteem for the literary impressionists of his age than for the painterly. The works of the former were also largely confined to the world of sensation, in James's view, but their impressions were more expressive and artful, imaginative in and of themselves: they were not only receptive, but projective, too, and capable of rendering a world, not just of sensations, but of ideas, beliefs and emotions. James must have wanted his declaration, in 'The Art of Fiction', that the novel is an impression, to be seen alongside his reactions to the impressionism of his

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<sup>10</sup> Whistler famously named an affecting painting of his elderly mother, 'Arrangement in Grey and Black' (1871); despite this, James admired its 'power to render life' in 1882 (James 1956b: 209).

French literary peers. ‘The Art of Fiction’ of 1884 was, after all, reproduced in *Partial Portraits* (1888) alongside three essays that – explicitly or implicitly – analyse French literary impressionism: ‘Alphonse Daudet’ (1883), ‘The Life of George Eliot’ (1885), and ‘Guy de Maupassant’ (1888). James also tackles literary impressionism in a further two essays, both entitled ‘Pierre Loti’ (1888, 1898), the latter serving as an introduction to a translation of some of Loti’s work called *Impressions*. James implies, too, that Flaubert, the Goncourts and Zola may be impressionists, or have affinities with them (James 1888c: 649). Which elements of their impressionism did James develop, and which did he reject?

In the Loti essay of 1888, he wrote that French contemporary novelists offered ‘the most complete affirmation that the novel at present offers us’ (James 1888c: 663). What the French brought to the novel that it so desperately needed – in his eyes – was a new perceptiveness. Writing of himself and his fellow English and American writers, James lamented in the Maupassant essay that

We have doubtless often enough the courage of our opinions (when it befall that we have opinions), but we have not so constantly that of our perceptions. There is a whole side of our perceptive apparatus that we in fact neglect, and there are probably many among us who would erect this tendency into a duty. (James 1888a: 367)

This neglect becomes strikingly apparent for James when it is set alongside the perceptual acuity of contemporary French novelists. In the light of this, the assertion of ‘The Art of Fiction’ that the novel is an impression may suggest that James, wanting the English novel to be more French, hoped to steer it towards a greater sensory awareness. Throughout these essays, James celebrates the French novelists for their ‘tactile sensibility’, which he says is ‘immense’ and ‘may be said, in truth, to have produced a literature’ (James 1888c: 648). He presents their work as a form of documentary in its extraordinary ability to recreate sensory experience ‘which gives the reader exactly the sense of blinking, wondering, perspiring participation in the

presence of endless queerness – the sense of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling’; it is ‘journalism, but journalism exquisite’ (James 1898a: 17).

For all his enthusiasm about these novelists, and frequent reference to their ‘impressions’, James makes only two explicit references to ‘impressionism’ in these essays: in ‘The Life of George Eliot’, where he contrasts Daudet’s literary impressionism with Eliot’s more reflective novels; and in ‘Pierre Loti’ (1888), where he wonders how much longer such impressionism may last (James 1885a: 677; James 1888c: 664). Even these two instances of ‘impressionism’ – which occur, almost parenthetically, in the penultimate and last paragraphs of the essay – suggest a reticence on James’s part to use this language.

James’s reticence contrasts with the wide currency of the term ‘literary impressionism’. The first recorded use of the term occurs in Ferdinand Brunetière’s article ‘L’Impressionisme dans le roman’ (1879). Other critics followed suit: for example, Louis Desprez wrote in 1884 that Daudet’s talent lay in ‘la vivacité de l’impression première’ (Kirschke 1981: 60). It is likely that James read Brunetière’s article, since he was both a keen reader of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, where it appeared, and a friend of Daudet’s, having met him during his year in Paris in 1876-7 (Kirschke 1981: 60). During that year, James also met other literary impressionists, Zola, the Goncourts and Maupassant, when his friend Turgenev took him to Flaubert’s gatherings, all of whom were deemed literary impressionists by contemporary critics (van Gunsteren 1990: 38; Brooks 2007: 5). James admired and met at least one such critic in 1884 in London, Paul Bourget, who drew analogies between the Goncourts’ style and painterly impressionism (Kirschke 1981: 53).

Brunetière, while mostly praising Daudet, suggests that he cannot be a master of his pen as he only presents surfaces and appearances, a criticism that James would

make of the literary impressionists in general, as we will see (Matz 2001: 14). Brunetière describes literary impressionism as a stylistic development of naturalism that incorporates the main principles of impressionism in painting. His essay ‘both laments and systematizes the literary techniques corresponding to those of contemporary painting’, citing synecdoche, grammatical dislocation, absence of stable point of view, visual immediacy, absence of conjunctions, and a stress on the language of the senses (Lethbridge 2011: 535). A similar argument was made by Desprez in 1884 who argued that the Goncourts were literary impressionists who had transposed painterly techniques into language in the form of broken sentences, and many adjectives and synonyms (van Gunsteren 1990: 38).

One reason perhaps for the readiness with which analogies were drawn between painters and novelists was the friendships between them. The pivotal figure here is Zola, who came into contact with Manet, Monet and Pissarro through his childhood friend, Cézanne. Although he later tired of them, Zola was an early journalistic champion of the painterly impressionists in the 1860s, above all of Manet, whom he was the first to defend. Renoir painted Daudet’s wife in 1876. Maupassant accompanied Monet on a painting trip in the mid-1880s and wrote about his attempts to capture ‘l’instant fugitif’.

James’s use of the term ‘impressionist’ to characterise certain French writers also presumes that an analogy between painting and literature may usefully be made. Of Daudet, for example, he writes: ‘if he paints with a pen he writes with a brush’ (James 1883: 503); the Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones, too, ‘paints [...] with a pen’ (James 1956b: 90). In the first essay on Loti, James describes him as though he were an impressionist painter working *en plein air*: ‘he arrives with his bundle of impressions, but they have been independently gathered, in the world, not

in the school' (James 1888c: 664). His description of Maupassant's representational economy calls to mind his praise of Sargent's 'synthesis', examined earlier:

His eye *selects* unerringly, unscrupulously, almost impudently – catches the particular thing in which the character of the object or the scene resides, and, by expressing it with the artful brevity of a master, leaves a convincing, original picture. If he is inveterately synthetic he is never more so than in the way he brings this hard, short, intelligent, gaze to bear. (James 1888a: 368)

But the same article also revisits his criticism of the painterly impressionists for their habit of 'simplification'. Describing Maupassant's rather cursory approach to his fellow man, he identifies 'in his easy power to generalise a certain absence of love, a sort of bird's-eye-view contempt [...] the whole thing is an impression, as painters say nowadays, in which the figures are cheap' (James 1888a: 368-369).

This ambivalence in James's attitude towards the literary impressionists is reflected elsewhere. In these five essays his high enthusiasm and esteem for them are always won in spite of their obvious limitations. On the one hand they are perceptive and eloquent; on the other, they are superficial and brittle. He suspects they are always in danger of not quite getting away with some kind of inadequacy or sleight of hand. He writes of Loti in the earlier of the two essays:

He has settled the question of his own *superficies* [surfaces] [...] but he has not settled the other, the general question of how long and how far accomplished and exclusive – practically exclusive – impressionism will yet go, with its vulture on its back and feeding on it. (James 1888c: 664)

Nevertheless, in contrast with the painterly impressionists, these novelists – in James's opinion – are highly imaginative. To return to the paired terms of the introduction of this chapter, their impressions are both receptive and projective, meaning that they both register passively and actively take possession through linguistic representation. James suggests this in a eulogy of Daudet:

a light, quick, joyous, yet ironical, imagination, a faculty of *seeing* images, *making* images, at every turn, of conceiving everything in the visible form, in the plastic spirit; an extraordinary sensibility to all the impressions of life, and

*a faculty of language* which is in perfect harmony with his wonderful fineness of *perception*. (James 1883: 500, italics added)<sup>11</sup>

As we will see, this description anticipates the account in ‘The Art of Fiction’ of novelistic genius. However, as the two balanced pairs suggest (seeing then making, perceiving then speaking), the receptive and the projective aspects of the novelist’s art are – for now – firmly separated by James: ‘Half the faculty I speak of, in the French, is the expressive part of it. The perception and the expression together have been worked to-day [...] with immense vigour’ (James 1888c: 649).

Such perceptual powers mean that literary impressionists, like Daudet, are ‘much less concerned with the moral, the metaphysical world than with the sensible. We [the English] proceed usually from the former to the latter, while the French reverse the process’ (James 1883: 501). James believed good fiction included both worlds: ‘every good story is of course both a picture and an idea, and the more they are interfused the better the problem is solved’ (James 1888a: 377). At their best, in his opinion, the literary impressionists fuse the two worlds of the sensible and the moral: James writes of one of Daudet’s novels, ‘the beauty of *Numa Roumestan* is that it has no hollow places; the idea and the picture melt everywhere into one’ (James 1888b: 199).<sup>12</sup> The problem with the literary impressionists is that most of the time they fail to reach the moral: they have too much ‘picture’, too little ‘idea’. They are ‘students [...] of the visible and palpable’, with only a ‘visual curiosity’ (James 1888c: 649).<sup>13</sup> Their impressions are both more receptive and more projective than

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<sup>11</sup> *PP* replaces ‘ironical’ with ‘reflective’ (James 1888b: 205).

<sup>12</sup> Here I quote *PP*. The original text reads ‘the logic and the image melt everywhere into one’ (James 1883: 599). In James’s revisions of 1888 in this and the preceding instance, he may be moving towards a clearer distinction between perception and reflection, a distinction already apparent, as we will soon see, in his 1885 essay on George Eliot. This is an empiricist distinction, as we will see in the next chapter, and perhaps reflects the influence of his brother’s evolving thoughts.

<sup>13</sup> James, in a revised version for *Essays in London and Elsewhere* (1893), replaces ‘students [...] of the visible and palpable’ with ‘students [...] of the mere palpable’ (James 1893: 163).

those of their painterly counterparts: they are truer to sensation, but they also make sensation yield, or support, thought and language. Yet, as with the painterly impressionists, they are somehow, by their impressionism, confined to the world of sensation and surfaces, trapped within what, as we have seen, James calls ‘the question of [...] [their] *superficies*’.

In James’s view, Daudet was the literary impressionist most able to reach ideas through pictures, but even his efforts were flawed. Three passages, in particular, all of which refer to Daudet, address the question of the relation between picture and idea, surface and depth, the sensible and the moral (or the ‘metaphysical’, as James also calls it). The first two passages – which will be examined in detail in the next section as a source for, and contrast to, ‘The Art of Fiction’ – occur in the Daudet essay of 1883. In the third passage, from the George Eliot essay of 1885, James contrasts Daudet’s ‘perception’ with Eliot’s ‘reflection’ (James 1885a: 674). He uses his praise of French literary impressionism to diagnose the ills of English fiction. This essay contrasts the ‘source[s] of information’ used by the two novelists: for Daudet it is direct perception of life, in other words, pictures; for Eliot it is her ‘moral consciousness’ and the books she reads, in other words, ideas (James 1885a: 677, 673). Tellingly, even when James sets before himself the two options of French impressionism and, for want of a better term, English rationalism, he cannot pin his colours to the French mast. He implies that some kind of intermediate position is best.<sup>14</sup>

Like the essay on Maupassant, ‘The Life of George Eliot’ uses the example of French literary impressionism to diagnose English fiction’s loss of contact with vivid, spontaneous experience. During her early years Eliot ‘was inhaling those impressions

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<sup>14</sup> Though see footnote 15 for a suggestion that James increasingly inclined towards French literary impressionism during the 1880s.

which were to make her first books so full of the delightful midland quality [i.e of the rural Midlands], the air of old-fashioned provincialism'; her 'early novels are full of natural as distinguished from systematic observation' (James 1885a: 670, 674).

However, her irregular life, living with a married man, George Henry Lewes, meant that she sequestered herself away, spending too much time absorbing 'the contagion of his studies', 'limit[ing] her experience too much to itself' (James 1885a: 674, 676).

The novel for her was 'not primarily a picture of life, [...] but a moralised fable' (James 1885a: 673).

We feel in her, always, that she proceeds from the abstract to the concrete; that her figures and situations are evolved, as the phrase is, from her moral consciousness, and are only indirectly the products of observations. They are deeply studied and elaborately justified, but they are not *seen* in the irresponsible plastic way. (James 1885a: 673)

James contrasts Daudet's very different response, when confronted with 'literatures and sciences':

'Ah, les livres, ils nous débordent, ils nous étouffent – nous périssons par les livres!' [Ah, books, they fill us to bursting, they stifle us – they destroy us!] That cry of a distinguished French novelist (there is no harm in mentioning M. Alphonse Daudet), which fell upon the ear of the present writer some time ago, represents as little as possible the emotion of George Eliot, confronted with literatures and sciences. M. Alphonse Daudet went on to say that, to his mind, the personal impression, the effort of direct observation, was the most precious source of information for the novelist; that nothing could take its place; that the effect of books was constantly to check and pervert this effort; that a second-hand, third-hand, tenth-hand, impression was constantly tending to substitute itself for a fresh perception; that we were ending by seeing everything through literature instead of through our own senses; and that, in short, literature was rapidly killing literature. (James 1885a: 677)

While James is sympathetic to Daudet's view, however, he resists its prescriptiveness, and refuses to endorse either approach to literature at the expense of the other.

This view has immense truth on its side, but the case would be too simple if, on one side or the other, there were only one way of finding out. The effort of the novelist is to find out, to know, or at least to see and no one, in the nature of things, can afford to be less indifferent to side-lights. Books are themselves, unfortunately, an expression of human passions. George Eliot had no doubts, at any rate; if impressionism, before she had laid down her pen, had already begun to be talked about, it would have made no difference with her – she would have had no desire to pass for an impressionist. (James 1885a: 677)

Presumably Daudet and Eliot struggle ‘to see’ by the light of different sources: Eliot by her ‘reflection’, itself sustained by her wide reading; Daudet by his ‘personal impression’. But neither should neglect the unexpected insights provided by sidelights auxiliary to the spotlight of their preoccupation, by impressions in Eliot’s case, and books in Daudet’s. James implicitly positions himself somewhere between Daudet and Eliot, though he seems a little more inclined towards impressionism. But, as he writes here, perception is not the highest goal of the novelist, knowledge is, and there is more than one route to this.

#### **1.4 ‘The Art of Fiction’ (1884)**

James’s responses to the literary impressionists influenced the theory of the impression that he advanced in ‘The Art of Fiction’ where he sought to codify – and to extend – the conception of the impression that had been implicit in his earlier art criticism and travel writing. In this new setting, the impression becomes a metaphor for artistic creation, not just artistic appreciation: the novel is an ‘impression of life’. James also now argues that everyday experience and perception comprise impressions, too, and thus assigns a key role to the imagination in ordinary consciousness: the impression records experience, but it also shapes it aesthetically. Such a model establishes a continuous spectrum between perception and artistic creation, sometimes muddying the difference between the two.

James wrote ‘The Art of Fiction’ as a response to the novelist Walter Besant’s lecture of the same title in which Besant had insisted that fiction ‘is governed and directed by general laws; and that these laws may be laid down and taught with as much precision and exactness as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion’ (Besant 1885: 3). Chief among Besant’s laws was that the novelist should confine

himself to representing what he has personally experienced. Opposing such prescriptiveness, James's article was, in his own words, 'simply a plea for liberty' (James and Stevenson 1948: 102). On what grounds is this liberty sought?

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say. The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out, is a limitation of that freedom and a suppression of the very thing that we are most curious about. The form, it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact[.] (James 1884: 507)<sup>15</sup>

To call the novel an 'impression of life' is in part to stress its mimetic commitment, something both Besant and James insist on. Besant argues that 'the highest praise they [readers] can bestow upon him [the novelist] is that he has drawn the story to the life' (Besant 1885: 18). In James's view, too, 'the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it *does* compete with life' (James 1884: 503).<sup>16</sup> Yet James's mimetic stricture on the novel is loosened both by the adjective qualifying 'impression', and by the model of the impression which James goes on to develop. First, as a 'personal' impression, it is unique, spontaneous and natural, and varies across individuals, and hence cannot be prescribed in advance. Second, as we will see, the Jamesian impression implicitly argues that experience for each one of us is constantly

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<sup>15</sup> *PP* makes the novel a 'direct' as well as a 'personal' impression: 'a novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life' (James 1888b: 384). In another revision to a later part of the essay, as we will see, James again combines these epithets, so that his exemplary novelist had not simply 'got her impression' of life but 'got her direct personal impression' (James 1888b: 389). These extra qualifications perhaps show that James was increasingly inclining, during the course of the 1880s, towards French literary impressionism, by absorbing further Daudet's warning (which he reproduced, as we have just seen, in his 1885 article on George Eliot) that books in general had become second-hand impressions on which novelists relied to perceive the world, a poor substitute for their 'personal impression, the effort of direct observation' (James 1885a: 677). In the 1888 text, then, James emphasizes that novelists ought to write novels that are 'direct' impressions of life, not impressions of life viewed through other books. He would further emphasize this in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* (1908), as we will see in chapter four, in which he insists that the 'subject' of a novel be 'the result of some direct impression or perception of life' (James 1962: 45).

<sup>16</sup> *PP* removes the antagonism between art and life: 'The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life' (James 1888b: 378).

augmented by the imagination. The injunction to confine oneself to experience becomes much less constrictive once experience is widened by James to include fleeting perception, and perception itself is shown to be shaped by the imagination. Experience thus comes to be constituted by impressions.

At the kernel of Besant's lecture was the notion that:

First, and before everything else, there is the Rule that everything in Fiction which is invented and is not the result of personal experience and observation is worthless [...] To take an extreme case: a young lady brought up in a quiet country village should avoid descriptions of garrison life. (Besant 1885: 17)

James responded to this in a famous passage, rich in implications for the present thesis, which celebrates the power of the impression to augment experience, in which he describes the practice of an exemplary novelist, his acquaintance, and later friend, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, daughter of Thackeray, although he does not name her.

What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative – much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius – it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. The young lady living in a village has only to be a damsel upon whom nothing is lost to make it quite unfair (as it seems to me) to declare to her that she shall have nothing to say about the military. Greater miracles have been seen than that, imagination assisting, she should speak the truth about some of these gentlemen. I remember an English novelist, a woman of genius, telling me that she was much commended for the impression she had managed to give in one of her tales of the nature and way of life of the French Protestant youth. She had been asked where she learned so much about this recondite being, she had been congratulated on her peculiar opportunities. These opportunities consisted in her having once, in Paris, as she ascended a staircase, passed an open door where, in the household of a *pasteur*, some of the young Protestants were seated at table round a finished meal. The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience. She had got her impression, and she evolved her type. She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she also had the advantage of having seen what it was to be French; so that she converted these ideas into a concrete image and produced a reality. Above all, however, she was blessed with the faculty which when you give it an inch takes an ell, and which for the artist is a much greater source of strength than any accident of residence or of place in the

social scale. The power to guess the unseen from the seen[.] (James 1884: 509-510)<sup>17</sup>

In this passage James renegotiates Besant's treaty between art and life and redefines 'experience' as something nearer to 'imaginative perception'. He reveals here that he shared the impressionists' belief that art begins in perception. For him, however, perception alone is barely adequate. As we have seen, James wrote in the Eliot essay that perception is the bare minimum that the novelist might be expected to undertake, 'the effort of the novelist is to find out, to know, or at least to see'. In 'The Art of Fiction', perception needs a helping hand, and it is with her 'imagination assisting' her perception that the young female novelist may be able to 'speak the truth'. The impressions that emerge from 'The Art of Fiction' are not simply metaphors for an author's perception, then, but more widely figure the meaning or understanding that he or she discerns within life.

There are two representations of the impression to consider here. The first is the metaphor of the spider-web within the consciousness of the novelist, which catches the smallest particles. This represents generically the process in which impressions are constantly received and construed by a genius. True, there is no explicit mention of the impression here, and the spider-web is called simply 'experience', but it stands in apposition to a specific instance of the receiving of an impression by Ritchie. Furthermore, as we will see, James soon afterwards writes that 'if experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions *are* experience', which implies that what the spider-web catches 'within the chamber of

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<sup>17</sup> *PP* again emphasizes that the impression be 'direct', replacing 'She had got her impression, and she evolved her type' with 'She had got her direct personal impression, and she turned out her type' (James 1888b: 389).

consciousness' are indeed impressions (James 1884: 510).<sup>18</sup> Through her possession of a particularly advanced version of this sensibility, the English novelist, a 'woman of genius', is able to give a highly convincing impression of young French Protestants to her readers, despite only having once glimpsed a group of them as she climbed a staircase.

My earlier model of the receptive versus the projective impression, which was inspired by James's definition of 'criticism' in the prefaces and further refined by a comparison of James's responses to painterly and literary impressionisms, now needs to be adjusted in order to account for James's own theory of the impression as it emerges in 'The Art of Fiction'. There are, I think, not two, but three kinds of impression to be observed in this passage, according to whether the impression is received, formed or made. Ritchie *receives* a 'glimpse' ('she had got her impression'). Her mind then goes to work on this glimpse and begins to *form* an impression, using her existing ideas of youth, Protestantism, and France. Once she has written her short story, she then *makes* an impression on her reader ('the impression she had managed to give in one of her tales of the nature and way of life of the French Protestant youth'). Ritchie's tale is an impression in all these three senses. These impressions involve incrementally more 'imagination assisting'. The first two, receiving and forming an impression, are receptive and projective impressions respectively. The receptive impression is quite passive, a sensation striking the surface of the mind. The projective impression is more active, the mind already using the imagination to enrich the impression with other ideas. I call both these kinds of impression 'cognitive', as

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<sup>18</sup> Matz and Stowell also argue that the spider-web represents the process by which impressions are received and construed: the impression has 'metaphorical power to be an "air-borne particle," ' the spider-web representing 'impressionistic experience', or the 'consciousness of impressions' (Stowell 1980: 170; Matz 2001: 91).

they are stages of thought.<sup>19</sup> That Ritchie then makes an impression on her readers reminds us that every impression is double-ended, a collaboration between an impressor and an impessee. The cognitive impression, receptive or projective, views the impression from the perspective of the mind of the impessee. I call the impression that is made on another person a ‘performative’ impression, adopting the point of view of the impressor.<sup>20</sup>

Ritchie’s revelation seems to combine all three impressions instantly: the cognitive impression, both receptive and projective (receiving and forming an impression), and the performative impression (making an impression). ‘The freedom to feel and say’ encapsulates the cognitive and performative sides of the impression. For Ritchie their coincidence is such that perception and artistic creation become indistinguishable. It is as though Ritchie has composed her tale on the staircase, in the same way that, with Sargent, ‘perception [...] is already by itself a kind of execution’ (James 1956b: 217). Such a coincidence suggests the limitations of constructing models, such as my own, which hope to differentiate clearly between impressions. The boundary between sensation and thought, between the cognitively receptive and the cognitively projective, is unclear in this passage, as we will see: Ritchie combines sensation and thought instantly. Similarly unclear is the boundary between the cognitive and the performative. It is hard to distinguish the impression formed in her mind from the impression made in her tale: when does the former become the latter?

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<sup>19</sup> Given the recent flourishing of cognitivist approaches to literature, my choice of wording here might suggest that I, too, draw methods and concepts from the cognitive sciences as I read Henry James. While I do share with the cognitivists an understanding of ‘cognitive’ as denoting not just rational processes (inference, deduction, and so on) but the broader mental architecture that incorporates thought, sense perceptions and emotions, strictly cognitivist literary analysis falls beyond the remit of my thesis (See eg. Zunshine 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Some time after deciding on the names ‘cognitive’ and ‘performative’ for the kinds of impressions I was trying to describe, I discovered that Paul de Man sometimes renames what J. L. Austin called the ‘constative’ aspect of language ‘cognitive’, and so writes about the opposition between the ‘cognitive’ and ‘performative’ functions of language (Austin 1962; de Man 1979). De Man’s theory is discussed in the third chapter (3.2.4).

This mirrors a similar ambiguity, already observed in French painterly discourse, as to whether instances of ‘impression’ refer to psychological impressions or paintings.

This is unclear since thought is in itself performative, an act of representation, like fiction-making: the ‘glimpse made a picture’, Ritchie ‘evolved her type’, she ‘converted these ideas into a concrete image’, but we cannot know, in the case of each of these, whether the image refers to the cognitive impression within Ritchie’s mind or to the resulting short story, a performative impression.<sup>21</sup>

The cognitive reception of the impression on the surface of the mind is figured by the spider-web’s catching of the ‘air-borne particle’. This metaphor illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing the receptive from the projective impression. Men and women of genius have spider-webs of the ‘finest silken threads’ within their consciousness, such that nothing is lost on them, and they receive and register the world about them acutely. Ritchie has what Matz has called ‘impressionability’, a ‘receptivity to impressions’ (Matz 2001: 54, 86). In his view, James uses the figure of Ritchie as a compromise between ‘different styles of receptivity’, both ‘natural openness’, associated with youth and femininity, and ‘cultured discretion’, associated with age and masculinity (Matz 2001: 86). The denser the spider-web, the more impressible the surface of the mind, the greater and more projective will be the mind’s reaction to stimulation – ever greater ‘revelations’ are possible from ever smaller ‘pulses’ of air. This is what we find in the person ‘on whom nothing is lost’ (James 1884: 510). But at the very moment the particle is received, something projective and performative happens: a projective tremor runs through the spider-web which converts ‘the faintest hints of life, [...] the very pulses of the air[,] into revelations’,

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<sup>21</sup> In ‘evolved her type’ James puns on ‘type’ as meaning both ‘representative character’ and the metal plate which printers use to make an impression on the page (as in the process of ‘typesetting’). ‘Character’ derives from the Greek word for ‘stamp’.

revelations which might comprise not just thoughts (projective) but spoken or written words (performative). There is an equation between sensitivity and creativity: the violent trembling of the web's gossamer, as a particle lodges, figures the way in which a receptive mind is creative at the very moment in which it apprehends or construes something. In contrast to the impressions of the literary impressionists, sensation, thought and expression coincide, as do the receptive, the projective and the performative. And, again, unlike theirs, the performative aspect of James's impression dwarfs the cognitive in scale. We are told that Ritchie was 'blessed with the faculty which when you give it an inch takes an ell'. The cognitive activity inherent in the impression registers one inch, which it then performatively converts into a further forty four inches.

What is the exact mechanism by which the impression does this cognitive and performative work? How is it that the Jamesian impression finds out more than that of the literary impressionists? James's description of the impressions of the painters may be said to correspond to the receptive cognitive impression whereas his description of the literary impressions seems nearer to the projective cognitive impression. Perhaps it is the coincidence of the receptive and projective aspects of her impression that allows Ritchie, unlike the painterly or literary impressionists, to reach the moral beyond the sensible and to convert a glimpse of a few young men into a sustained characterization. There seem to be two main stages in this process, both of which are perhaps performative extensions of the original impression – though they may be one and the same.

In the first stage, the 'glimpse made a picture', implying that the glimpse undergoes some kind of immediate aesthetic treatment within Ritchie's mind to compose itself into a picture. This reminds us of Sargent's aestheticizing vision, as

well as James's impressions in his early travel writing. At this point perception becomes experience: 'The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience'. The cognitive glimpse is somehow artfully shaped to become a picture.

The next stage is rather unclear, but it seems as though, to use James's distinction, the impression is formed when this 'picture' is combined with Ritchie's existing 'ideas' about the constituent characteristics of the young men: 'She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she also had the advantage of having seen what it was to be French'. These ideas come from Ritchie's past experience. They are then recalled, or conjured up, by the picture of the young men – perhaps at a later date.

Next, and finally, 'she converted these ideas into a concrete image and produced a reality'. Again, perception becomes 'reality' (as it earlier became 'experience') at a projective or performative moment: ideas are 'converted' and an image is born. The effect is an imaginative projection that goes beyond anything within the original picture or ideas, a collaboration between sensation and thought, perception and imagination.

Yet such clumsy attempts to decompose this process are constantly undermined by the fluidity of the term 'impression': we are told early on in the passage of the impression given 'in one of her tales', but then later the impression is something she 'had got' from her glimpse: it is both a raw, cognitive ingredient that goes into the finished work, and something produced, performed by the finished work.

It is time to reprise the last sentence of, and to continue, the long passage quoted above:

The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life, in general, so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it – this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions *are* experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe. Therefore, if I should certainly say to a novice, ‘Write from experience, and experience only,’ I should feel that this was a rather tantalising monition if I were not careful immediately to add, ‘Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!’ (James 1884: 510)

This passage has a startlingly similar analogue in the Daudet essay, written two years before ‘The Art of Fiction’, from which I have already quoted. At this point I will look at this passage, and another in the same essay, as sources for the impression in ‘The Art of Fiction’. This comparison will suggest that the Jamesian impression is partly shaped by his appreciation of what he felt was the best work of the French literary impressionists, but also that his impression exceeded theirs in various ways.

Early on in the essay on Daudet, James writes of how modernity has produced ‘a new sense, a sense not easily named or classified’ in contemporary art,

partly physical, partly moral, and the shortest way to describe it is to say that it is a more analytic consideration of the appearance of things. It is known by its tendency to resolve its discoveries into pictorial form. It sees the connection between feelings and external conditions, and it expresses such relations as they have not been expressed hitherto. It deserves to win victories, because it has opened its eyes well to the fact that the magic of the arts of representation lies in their appeal to the associations awakened by things. It traces these associations into the most unlighted corners of our being, into the most devious paths of experience. The appearance of things is constantly more complicated, as the world grows older, and it needs a more and more patient art to divide it into its parts. (James 1883: 500-501)<sup>22</sup>

This passage, like the long one quoted from ‘The Art of Fiction’, address a literary art that is built around acts of imaginative perception that move between the sensible and the moral. Sometimes the moral is expressed sensibly: in the Daudet essay, the ‘tendency to resolve its discoveries into pictorial form’ anticipates how Ritchie ‘converted these ideas into a concrete image’. Sometimes the moral is inferred from

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<sup>22</sup> *PP* adds ‘a closer notation’ here, in apposition to ‘a more and more patient art’ (James 1888b: 206).

the sensible: in the earlier essay, the new sense in art ‘sees the connection between feelings and external conditions’, while in the later Ritchie has ‘the power to guess the unseen from the seen’. In both passages, it is the relations between the sensible and the moral that are insisted on: the French novel ‘traces these associations’, while Ritchie ‘trace[s] the implication of things’. In both, the artistic sense moves freely, in both directions, between the local and the universal, in acts of both induction and deduction: Daudet breaks ‘the appearance of things [...] into its parts’, while Ritchie ‘judge[s] the whole piece by the pattern’. Both passages suggest that the visual may be revelatory and that the unearthing of ‘associations’ is an experience in itself.

Although it makes no explicit reference to impressions or impressionism, the passage in the Daudet essay looks forward to the emphasis in ‘The Art of Fiction’ on the cognitive and performative aspects of the impression. It identifies two visual powers of the novel: the performative work of representing pictorially knowledge which has hitherto not been seen; and the cognitive work of a greater scrutiny of the world’s existing appearances, which are becoming ‘constantly more complicated’. However, by contrast with Ritchie’s impression, the French novel’s cognitive and performative work happens separately: it ‘*sees* the connection between feelings and external conditions, and it *expresses* such relations as they have not been expressed hitherto’ (italics added). So the cognitive is found in references to the visual, the performative in references to expression: the former is the ‘consideration of appearances’, ‘it has opened its eyes well’, ‘it sees’, noting the ‘appearance of things’, as opposed to the latter’s ‘resolve’, ‘express’, ‘appeal’, and its ‘closer notation’. Only one verb, which will recur in ‘The Art of Fiction’, combines the cognitive and the performative: ‘it *traces* these associations’ (italics added).

Although the ‘new sense’ that Daudet exhibits tries to reach the moral beyond the sensible, the language of the passage belies this: it is ‘a more analytic consideration of *appearances*’, a ‘closer notation’ of ‘the *appearance* of things’ (italics added). Indeed James concedes that ‘what he mainly sees is the great surface of life and the parts that lie near the surface. But life is, immensely, a matter of surface, and if our emotions, in general, are interesting, the *form* of those emotions has the merit of being more definite’ (James 1883: 501). Emotions are not visible, but they may be inferred from their symptoms: the moral may thus be reached through the sensible. Again, the moral is associated with ‘emotions’, as earlier with ‘feelings’. Here James seems partly to unpick the surface-depth binary that underlies so many of the reservations he expresses about literary impressionism elsewhere in these essays.

The tone of the two passages is different. Daudet and friends are ascribed a ‘new sense’, whereas Ritchie and friends are ‘blessed’ with an almost mystical potency by James, ‘the power to guess the unseen from the seen’, which is ‘a much greater source of strength than any accident of residence’. James says rather tentatively of the Daudet school that ‘it deserves to win victories’: its ‘analytic consideration of appearances’ is ‘patient’, offering a ‘closer notation’ of life, tracing the ‘associations’ that it discerns there; it is, as it were, an analytical amanuensis, dividing life into parts. By contrast, ‘The Art of Fiction’ describes a ‘faculty’ that does not merely consider what is already there, but extends it from an inch to an ell, strengthening and empowering those who possess it. The perceptual powers it offers are more performative than those of the Daudet essay and include guessing and

judging. This ‘faculty’ sounds very much like the ‘imagination’, though James uses the word only once in the whole essay, when he speaks of ‘imagination assisting’.<sup>23</sup>

The second passage in the Daudet essay is even more strikingly prescient of ‘The Art of Fiction’. Here James describes Daudet attempting exactly the same imaginative feat as he would describe Ritchie undertaking two years later: the attempt to depict a French Protestant, without being oneself a French Protestant, and hence relying solely on one’s fleeting perceptions or, in the case of Ritchie, on one’s impression. Specifically, Daudet portrays an austere Protestant zealot, Madame Autheman, in his novel *L’Évangéliste* (1883). In this task Daudet’s impressionism fails where Ritchie’s impression succeeds:

Proposing to himself to describe a particular phase of French Protestantism, he has ‘got up’ certain of his facts with commendable zeal; but he has not felt nor understood the matter, has looked at it solely from the outside, sought to make it above all things grotesque and extravagant. (James 1883: 509)

Perception, ‘look[ing] at it solely from the outside’, falls short of feeling or understanding. Ritchie’s performative transformation of her original perception of the young men created an experience and a reality that she was able to inhabit. By contrast, Daudet can only perceive from the outside. Why? Isn’t his zealous procedure of ‘get[ting] up’ certain perceptions and facts similar to Ritchie’s performative impression?

The fact is that M. Daudet has not, (to my belief) any natural understanding of the religious passion; he has a quick perception of many things, but that province of the human mind cannot be quickly perceived – experience, there, is the only explorer. (James 1883: 509)<sup>24</sup>

Again, ‘perception’, which is ‘quick’, cursory, is not the same as a ‘natural understanding’.

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<sup>23</sup> He also writes, as we have seen, that ‘when the mind is imaginative [...], it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations’ (James 1884: 509).

<sup>24</sup> *PP* replaces ‘quickly perceived’ with ‘*fait de chic*’, which means ‘achieved without preparation’, or ‘apprehended intuitively’ (James 1888b: 238).

The whole tenor of the passage may seem at odds with ‘the analytic consideration of appearances’ which James claimed for Daudet earlier in this same essay and with ‘The Art of Fiction’. Earlier in the essay James argued that through the appearance of things one could intuit feelings, presumably the feelings of others, such as Protestants; in ‘The Art of Fiction’ he repudiates Besant’s notion that ‘everything in Fiction which is invented and is not the result of personal experience and observation is worthless’ by suggesting that fleeting perceptions, as impressions, could themselves be a form of personal experience. Here he seems to unpick the commonplace pairing of ‘experience’ and ‘observation’, as cited, for example, by Besant. He suggests that no perception, no consideration of appearances, may be sufficiently analytic to stand in for direct participative experience, apparently espousing a view he will later implicitly criticize in Besant: that ‘experience [...] is the only explorer’ of religion. Although there is no mention of impressions here, perception is opposed to, and excluded from, experience.

To say that ‘experience [...] is the only explorer’ is nevertheless perfectly consistent with the claims of ‘The Art of Fiction’, since that essay argues that ‘impressions *are* experience’. What Daudet fails to do here, unlike Ritchie, is to turn his perception into an experience. As we have seen, in Ritchie’s case the impression allows the imagination to augment experience in such a way that perception may almost replace experience: the performative action of the impression creates an experience or reality which she can inhabit. But James asserts that ‘Daudet is much more an observer than an inventor’; he ‘has no high imagination, and, as a consequence, no philosophy’ (James 1883: 503, 509).<sup>25</sup> The imagination generates ideas, presumably those that Ritchie merges with pictures to form an impression.

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<sup>25</sup> *PP* replaces ‘philosophy’ with ‘ideas’, again invoking implicitly perhaps a more empiricist distinction between impressions and ideas, perception and reflection (James 1888b: 238).

Perhaps it is Daudet's lack of imagination that prevents him turning his perception into experience as well as being truly insightful about the moral: his 'insight fails him when he approaches the question of spiritual things [...] There are certain things he does not conceive – certain forms that never appear to him' (James 1883: 509).<sup>26</sup> 'Conceive' here is a particularly performative verb of perception, suggesting again that Daudet's lack of imagination hampers his perception – especially of the moral. The impression's leap, from perception to experience, involves the work of the imagination.

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<sup>26</sup> *PP* replaces 'when he approaches the question of spiritual things' with 'when he begins to take the soul into account' (James 1888b: 238).

## 2. Intertexts (I): Empiricism and Psychology

The following two chapters offer a selection of intertexts for James's emerging impression: in this chapter, empiricist philosophy (Locke and Hume), and nineteenth-century psychology (especially that of his brother, William James); in the following chapter, British aestheticism (Pater and Wilde), and theories of performativity (Derrida, de Man, Butler), which have their origins in the speech act theory of J.L. Austin. The chapters find that James's championing of the impression followed Pater's. Pater led the way in resurrecting an old empiricist word of Locke's and Hume's that recent philosophers and psychologists had avoided because of its subjective, even solipsistic, associations – Hume had argued that the reality we perceive is a fiction which our imagination constructs using its impressions. This subjectivism was what perhaps motivated Pater's return to the impression, for it offered the subject a greater role in perception and consciousness, whereas recent empiricism, especially in the form of Mach's sensationism, but also in the prevailing philosophy of mind in England, had amplified the passivity of the subject. Instead of discouragement and uncertainty, Pater found, in Hume's scepticism, a role for the imagination. The resurrected Humean impression allowed Pater, and then James, in his wake, to install the imagination at the heart of perception and consciousness, as a means of reaching the truth, appreciating the genius of beauty, and finding life-affirming pleasure which mitigates transience and mortality. The very inconsistency of these conflicting ends became the subject of James's fiction, which he tended to express as a confusion between the aesthetic and the moral: the impression is sometimes the site of this conflict.

The added imaginative agency which the aesthetes built into the empiricist impression was further emphasized by two psychologists, Franz Brentano and William James, who sowed the seeds of phenomenology. Brentano argued that we exist in an intentional relationship with what we perceive. William James expressed this in another way, saying that we both sculpt, and are sculpted by, perception and experience, which he captured in the notion of ‘apperception’, a form of perception which immediately combines sensation (from outside) and ideation (from within).<sup>1</sup> He formalized this into a method of philosophical enquiry, pragmatism, a form of empiricism which nevertheless respects the usefulness of rationalist theories. William James urges us to test our ideas (which he calls concepts) by seeing how useful they are in negotiating the world of impressions (which he calls percepts). James’s late protagonists, likewise, often test their impressions against ideas, and their ideas against impressions. Although neither Brentano nor William James focus on impressions, their mingling of the subject and the object accounts for several important aspects of James’s late impressions, especially their ability to aestheticize immediately, and the fact that deceptive impressions are often the result of collaborations between deceivers and dupes. William James’s description of thought as fluid, inchoate, touched by both sensation and ideation, is a good characterization of how James’s characters’ impressions evolve over time.

Yet the interpretive excesses of the impressions of James’s late dupes and deceivers, as well as the diminishing empiricism of his theory of the novel, take us beyond William James’s theory of apperception, or the impressions of Pater’s aesthetic critic, to the more flamboyant impressions of Wilde’s ‘critic as artist’. Brentano’s intentionality can also be expressed in the idea that it takes two to make an

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<sup>1</sup> William James extended this idea still further in his philosophy of ‘radical empiricism’ in which subject and object meet in ‘pure experience’ (James 1976).

impression, and hence that impressions can travel in both directions. In James's major phase, dupes not only use their imaginations to deceive themselves but use them to make counter-impressions on those deceiving them. Wilde's sense of how the critic could become as creative and powerful as the artist matches James's depiction of dupes who stop being an audience to deceptive impressions, and actively appropriate them themselves.

Wilde, celebrating the repudiation of fact in his attacks on realism, advocated an art that was creative rather than imitative. But his impressions, however creative, are still imitative in the sense that they appear in criticism, albeit aesthetic criticism. Late Jamesian performative impressions, when characters make impressions on others, are expressions better examined in the context of a theory which may account for both impressions and expression. One such is the theory of performativity. This offers a theory not only of how artistic impressions are made, but situates these within a spectrum of wider impressions made, including artistic, non-artistic, verbal, gestural, deceitful, and creative, which is helpful when analysing James's extended analogies of deception and fiction-making. But, as we will see, they also offer a way of conceptualizing how impressions are received: how the world is acknowledged or described, rather than intervened in; but also how, in acts of creative reading, registering the world may itself be creative, which is useful for understanding how the gullibility of dupes can actively contribute to collaborative fictions. Above all, they capture the insidiously creative capacity of the performative impressions of James's late fiction to create an alternative world which pretends to be one which already exists; and they explain why repeated surface actions can create an apparently originary depth below the surface, how doing can become being.

It may already appear, from the foregoing summary, that I will spend much of the next two chapters identifying in the work of these theorists of the impression sources of influence for James's thinking about the impression. That is not the case. Evidence of his knowledge of these theorists is limited and ambiguous. Edel's and Tintner's record of James's library at his death, in Lamb House, Rye, contains little philosophy (no Locke or Hume, for example), no psychology, and none of his brother's major texts (Edel and Tintner 1987).<sup>2</sup> However, 'the two brothers, while often in disagreement, conversed, corresponded, recommended and exchanged articles and books, and read one another's works throughout their lives' (Griffin 1991: 6). William James was a great popularizer of psychology, giving many public lectures: much of his *Principles of Psychology* was published not only in specialist but also in popular journals, several of which were certainly read by Henry (Griffin 1991: 8). We know that Henry read his brother's *Pragmatism*, after which he wrote to William that, all his life, he had 'unconsciously pragmatized' (James quoted in Hocks 1974: 15). Yet those critics who have examined the James brothers together have rarely advanced an argument of influence.<sup>3</sup> Pater's influence on James has been asserted more often, as has Wilde's.<sup>4</sup> We know that James read Pater's *The Renaissance* soon after it was published, since he referred to its chapter on Botticelli in an 1874 essay, 'Florentine Notes', published while he was writing *Roderick Hudson* (Ellmann 1983: 210; Freedman 1990: 133). Although most of James's

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<sup>2</sup> Philosophical texts include some by Henry James senior (his father), J. S. Mill, Plato, Arthur Schopenhauer, Leslie Stephen. Literary texts with connections to my argument include many by Matthew Arnold, Alphonse Daudet, George Eliot, Gustave Flaubert, and Walter Pater, J. M. Whistler's *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890), and Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* (1893). Of course, James would have read a lot that didn't survive in his library, and would doubtless have been given many books that he didn't read.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Hocks, Griffin and Ryan explicitly hold back from an argument of influence (Hocks 1974: 3-6; Griffin 1991: 8; Ryan 1991: 3).

<sup>4</sup> Freedman argues that James's fiction is, in part, a sustained dialogue with Pater and Wilde (Freedman 1990). Mendelssohn describes a 'long-term intellectual flirtation' between James and Wilde (Mendelssohn 2007: 13).

references to Wilde are vitriolic or dismissive, it seems likely that James would have read the work of one of his main rivals, at least in drama, to which James turned his hand without success in the 1890s.<sup>5</sup>

Gaps in our knowledge of James's reading do not, however, entirely account for why the evidence of his knowledge of these theorists remains limited and ambiguous: James's self-fashioning as an imaginative writer also has its part to play. James found fault with Daudet for having 'not a great number of ideas', since, as he put it, 'imaginative writers of the first order always give us an impression that they have a kind of ideal', reflecting, perhaps, as Bellringer has suggested, Arnold's example (James 1883: 509).<sup>6</sup> James here sounds equivocal: writers need only give an 'impression' of a 'kind of philosophy'. There is, accordingly, little acknowledgement in James's texts of the ideas that have influenced him. Perhaps this is because James, as his comment suggests, believed that writers communicate with their readers (and that readers absorb writers' philosophies) through impressions, not through ideas. We saw in chapter one that impressions were central to James's criticism as a tool with which 'to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession', to receive and then to 'project', as Ritchie did (James 1962: 155). We ought not, then, expect always to recognize the ideas in James's texts, as they have been extended and imaginatively appropriated by his impressions. A remark of James's secretary Theodora Bosanquet confirms this view: 'He [James] could let Huxley and Gladstone, the combatant champions of Darwinian and orthodox theology, enrich the pages of a single letter without any reference to their respective beliefs.... the personal impression [was] the

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<sup>5</sup> Freedman speculates that the mutual hostility between James and Wilde may have derived from a common interest in 'the cultural fate of Pater', or the 'sibling rivalry' of two immigrant outsiders (Freedman 1990: 169).

<sup>6</sup> *PP* replaces 'a kind of ideal' with 'a kind of philosophy' (James 1888b: 238). Arnold argued that first-rate literature requires first-rate ideas which it synthesizes; criticism's 'business is [...] simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas' for literature (Arnold 1921: 18-19).

thing sought' (quoted in Hocks 1974: 68). That James presents his own impressions of the writers he reads, not their ideas, chimes in with T. S. Eliot's famous comment on what he saw as James's resistance to ideas: 'James's critical genius [as a critic of 'living beings'] comes out most tellingly in his mastery over, his baffling escape from, Ideas; a mastery and escape which are perhaps the last test of a superior intelligence. He had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it' (Eliot 1947: 125-6). James's persona was, in other words, deliberately *belletrist*. That he was not an intellectual has sometimes been adduced by his supporters, in Hocks's words, 'as still greater evidence of his monastic dedication to art', partly inspired, perhaps, by his own cultivated self-image as the ascetic, aesthetic Master (Hocks 1974: 68).

If I were asked to frame an argument of influence, I would limit myself to the claim that James had mediated access to all of the philosophers and theorists in these two chapters (apart, of course, from later theorists of the performative) via the texts of Pater and William James, which we know he read. Pater and William James are notable synthesizers of large amounts of philosophical, psychological and scientific material. As we will see, both tried in different ways to reconcile rationalism and empiricism.<sup>7</sup> The dominant influence they share is Hume, the first theorist of the impression, so Hume must also count as an important precursor to Henry James.

But, as I have just suggested, seeking influences is the wrong way to set about understanding the various means by which James's account of the impression may be

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<sup>7</sup> Pater tried to construct a 'Weltanschauung', a 'synthesis of empiricism and idealism', that would fuse ideas culled from his wide reading of British empiricists, such as Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Mill and Darwin, and of German idealists, such as Goethe, Lessing, Kant and Hegel (McGrath 1986: 8). McGrath believes, unlike most critics, he claims, that idealism is more influential on Pater than empiricism. William James's theory of perception reacted against both Kant and British empiricism (Myers 1981: xxiv-xxvi). He makes frequent reference in *The Principles of Psychology* to a range of thinkers, including British empiricists (philosophers and psychologists), Kant and German-speaking psychologists. As we will see, his later philosophy of pragmatism sought to combine the best of empiricism and rationalism.

said to relate to other accounts. I have preferred to call the subjects of these two chapters ‘intertexts’, a term drawn from the theory of ‘intertextuality’ first proposed by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, in order to allow for the full range of relationships between James’s texts and those with which they are in dialogue. Intertextuality can be used as an umbrella term for a range of relationships between two texts, from designating a text as a source, to a mere analogue, and it is able to describe not only how James drew upon pre-existing accounts of the impression, for example, but also how readers of James have subsequently interpreted his impressions in the light of other texts they have read – including ones written since James’s death (Worton and Still 1990).

## **2.1 The British Empiricists**

Locke and Hume argued ‘that all our knowledge is founded’ in ‘*experience*’ (Locke 1961: 77). ‘Experience’ comprises two kinds of perception: sensation, perceiving the outside world, and reflection, perceiving ideas within our minds. For them, every simple idea derives from a simple sensation, which Hume, but not Locke, called an ‘impression’. More complex ideas are then built by perceiving these original ideas within the mind during reflection. Impressions are important to both, as they figure the manner in which the mind receives the impress of information, either from outside or from its own ideas within the mind. Locke usually makes no distinction between sensations and ideas: our perception stocks our mind with ideas. For Hume, perception gives us transient impressions, less vivid copies of which then become fixed as our ideas.

### 2.1.1 John Locke

Although Samuel Johnson cites Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) in the very first definition of 'impression' in his *Dictionary* (1755), an impression is not a distinct entity for Locke, as it would be for Hume, but a metaphor that figures how people receive external information which marks and shapes them.<sup>8</sup> This is perhaps the central metaphor of empiricism, as it is what Locke and his heirs substituted, as we will see, in place of the earlier model of innate ideas, information as latent within the mind. Locke uses the impression to represent, for example, the influence of a sensation on the body, or of an idea on the mind, namely one which is striking, immediate and both passively and unavoidably received. Impression is a common and important word for Locke because he figures the mind as a 'white paper void of all characters' – often summarised by later commentators as a *tabula rasa*, though Locke (and Hume) never used this phrase – which receives ideas as paper is imprinted with letters.

Locke's conception of the mind was revolutionary as he sought to convince his readers to discard their belief in 'innate ideas', 'the notion that there are in the *understanding* certain *innate principles*, [...] characters, as it were, stamped upon the mind of man, which the soul receives in its very first being' (Locke 1961: 9). By opposing innate ideas, Locke was fighting against the established orthodoxy of European philosophy, set out in the rationalist philosophy of Descartes and Leibniz. Locke goes on: 'It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced readers of the falseness of this supposition, if I should only show [...] how men, barely by the use of their natural faculties, may attain to all the knowledge they have' (Locke 1961: 9). The supposedly innate ideas whose questioning provoked the most heated debate

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<sup>8</sup> "impression." *A Dictionary of the English Language*. W Strahan, 1755. Print.

were those of Christian belief and morality. Locke was accused by some of being godless.

James's insistence that the novelist not be held to supposedly innate rules of fiction – in response to Besant – has the same spirit as Locke's resistance to inherited orthodoxy in the name of personal experience: James writes that, Besant 'seems to me to mistake in attempting to say so definitely beforehand what sort of an affair the good novel will be' since, in James's view, 'certain traditions on the subject, applied *a priori*, have already had much to answer for' (James 1884: 507). The most serious of these traditions is no doubt the moral one, as we saw in chapter one. Resisting inherited forms in the name of personal experience was also an important motivation of the impressionist painters, though James does not seem to have perceived this common ground.

How, then, are our ideas acquired? Through all our 'experience' subsequent to our birth:

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any *ideas*. How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from *experience*; in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation, employed either about *external sensible objects*, or about the *internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves* is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the *ideas* we have, or can naturally have, do spring. (Locke 1961: 77)

Our ideas are first acquired through external 'observation', sensory perception, 'having *ideas* and perception being the same thing' (Locke 1961: 80). Before such perception has taken place, the mind is empty, but, over time, perception stocks it with ideas. Locke figures the mind not only as an empty piece of paper, a blank canvas, waiting to be 'painted', but also as an empty room or house needing to be 'furnished', or become a 'store' of 'materials': 'the senses at first let in particular

*ideas* and furnish the yet empty cabinet [of the mind]; and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names got to them' (Locke 1961: 15). It is a 'closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left, to let in external visible resemblances, or *ideas* of things without' (Locke 1961: 129). Locke's imagery of the mind as a passive recipient of furniture or light would be repeated by later empiricists, as we will see. James's description of 'experience' as a 'spider-web' within the 'chamber of consciousness' catching particles can be understood in the context of this tradition, as can his image of Ritchie receiving an impression through an open door.

So Locke describes perceptions as objects which furnish a room, 'the senses at first let in particular *ideas* and furnish the yet empty cabinet', or which are put away for safekeeping in the memory, 'the storehouse of our *ideas*' (Locke 1961: 117). These objects sometimes seem to be paintings: he asks of the mind's 'white paper', 'Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety?' (Locke 1961: 77). Viewing again these ideas lodged in the memory is a kind of 'secondary perception' (Locke 1961: 120). Perception, or thought, always have an idea (or an impression) as their object: 'there is no thinking or perceiving that does not have an idea for its object' (Locke 1961: 112). According to some commentators, both Locke and Hume have an 'imagistic theory of perception' in which perceptions (both internal and external) are reified into images, independent objects to which the mind stands in relation (eg. Noonan 1999: 10).<sup>9</sup> This would mean, for example, that to see a tree one would need first to have an

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<sup>9</sup> For some commentators this commits Locke and Hume to a belief in indirect, rather than direct realism: in other words, external objects really exist in the world, but we only perceive them indirectly through our impressions or ideas of them (Lowe 1995: 36-42; Noonan 1999: 55-57).

idea of a tree. As we will see when we turn to William James, ‘apperception’ was the notion that, in perception, existing ideas come to the aid of sensations.

We are reminded of how, in *A Little Tour of France*, an impression of James’s becomes ‘a picture that hangs itself to one of the lateral hooks of the memory’, and of his description of his visits to English cathedrals as ‘making a collection of great impressions’ (James 1872b: 86; James 1885b: 233). I will go on to argue that James refines this reification of perception when I turn to his major phase in later chapters: characters capture an impression which becomes the ‘ground’ of a painting in their minds to which, during reflection, they add further layers of paint.<sup>10</sup>

The mind has two kinds of perception, ‘sensation’ and ‘reflection’: ‘external material things as the objects of SENSATION, and the operations of our own minds within as the objects of REFLECTION, are to me the only originals from whence all our ideas take their beginnings’ (Locke 1961: 78). As we have seen, ideas enter the mind through sensation. (Though Locke sometimes calls reflection ‘internal sensation’ (Locke 1961: 78)). They may then become more sophisticated ideas through operations of the mind such as ‘*perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing*’ (Locke 1961: 78). In other words, our simple ideas of reflection, such as the notion of remembering or believing, arise in the mind when it is considering simple ideas of sensation. But such internal perception, or self-reflexivity, is included within the category of ‘experience’ by Locke. So we derive the idea of remembering or believing from our experience. This is one way in which the mind increases the number of ideas with which the senses furnish it. The other is through various ‘operations of the mind’ which transform simple ideas into complex ones, actions such as comparing ideas, putting together ideas (‘composition’), or making

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<sup>10</sup> Some critics have criticized James for having a reifying perception which they diagnose as a response both to, and from within, capitalism (Porter 1981; Rowe 1984; Jameson 2002).

one idea a general representative of its kind ('abstraction') (Locke 1961: 88, 124, 125, 126).

Henry James's distinction between Daudet's 'perception' and Eliot's 'reflection', discussed in chapter one, is clearly an empiricist one, deriving ultimately from Locke. Jamesian recognition, in which a chance impression slowly develops into a deep insight, has its roots in Locke's ideas. His recognition scenes typically involve, for a character, a process of sensation – a chance glimpse of something they were not meant to see – followed by a process of reflection, typically alone and after the event. This reflection tends to be figured as a form of internal perception. There are two stages, then: seeing, followed by *seeing*.

'The mind is wholly passive in the reception of all its simple *ideas*', but 'it exerts several acts of its own whereby out of its simple *ideas*, as the materials and foundations of the rest, the others [complex ideas] are framed' (Locke 1961: 130). However, Locke also notes that an important element of perception is the immediate and imperceptible action of our judgment on ideas received from sensation – for example, when we see a globe, we may actually see a flat circle, but, from experience, we infer that it is globular (Locke 1961: 130). James probably experiences a similar, albeit more advanced, action within his own mind when a scene seems to compose itself before him.

'Ideas' comprise all kinds of perceptions, both internal and external, for Locke: 'whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call *idea*' (Locke 1961: 104). However, despite this, Locke does distinguish sometimes between sensations and ideas and, since he uses 'impression' to figure a particular manner of influence, it can often become a rather mobile synonym for either sensation or idea. Impressions are made

on the senses, and the senses then make an impression on the understanding. As a result, although never formalized as such, the impression can often seem like an intermediate stage between sensation and thought, mediating between the body and the understanding in a way which neither the sensation nor the idea could manage. James's consistent use of 'impression' for both sensation and reflection does the same: an impression is received, and persists as an impression during its evolution in the mind, implying sensation and reflection are continuous mental experiences. As we will see, it was Hume, who fifty years later, tamed the impression by dividing all perceptions into 'impressions', aligned with sensation, and 'ideas', aligned with thought. We can see the seeds of this in Locke. For example, when 'impression' is used in place of 'idea', it is often qualified by adjectives such as 'constant', 'lasting', or 'deep', which try to mitigate the immediate and evanescent aspects of the impression (Locke 1961: 10, 118, 80). This anticipates Hume's notion that an idea is simply a more lasting form of an impression. Writing of the passive reception of simple ideas, Locke declares that 'the mind is forced to receive the impressions; and cannot avoid the perception of those *ideas* that are annexed to them', in a sentence which Hume could have written (Locke 1961: 90).

Although Locke argues that there is a 'constant decay of all our *ideas*', the '*memory*' is 'the storehouse of our *ideas*', and has 'the power to revive again in our minds those *ideas* which, after imprinting, have disappeared' (Locke 1961: 119). He calls 'viewing again the *ideas* that are lodged *in the memory*' 'secondary perception', noting that this may often be a voluntary, rather than involuntary activity, in which the mind is not passive but active (Locke 1961: 120).

Retention, reason and perception, are all 'facult[ies] of the mind whereby it makes a further progress towards knowledge' (Locke 1961: 117). The existence of

these faculties is one proof that ideas are not innate – ‘*God having fitted men with faculties and means to discover, receive, and retain truths, accordingly as they are employed*’ – but it also compels us to discover truth ourselves, rather than relying on second-hand information (Locke 1961: 57). Taking things on trust is imperfect and lazy knowledge since ‘*our knowledge depends upon the right use of those powers nature hath bestowed upon us*’ (Locke 1961: 58). We must make ‘use rather of our own thoughts than other men’s to find it [...] So much as we ourselves consider and comprehend of truth and reason, so much we possess of real and true knowledge’ (Locke 1961: 58). What in others ‘was science is in us but opiniatrey’ (Locke 1961: 58-9). This doctrine of first-hand, independent observation is reflected in both James’s themes and his narrative method. Characters, such as Strether and Maggie, are involved in empiricist quests in which one of their challenges is to see for themselves, using their own impressions. James’s increasingly figural, rather than authorial narratives, places readers in the position of Strether and Maggie, leaving them the job of making sense of the story, rather than helping them with authorial asides.

This principle informs both Locke’s own method of enquiry and his method of persuasion of his readers. He investigates by observing his own mind – what William James calls the ‘introspective method’, used by psychologists into the twentieth century – and, rather than taking them on trust, invites us to test his arguments, ‘appeal[ing] to everyone’s own observation and experience’, ‘the best way to come to truth being to examine things as really they are, and not to conclude they are as we fancy ourselves or have been taught by others to imagine’ (James 1981a: 219; Locke 1961: 77, 128-129). In both ‘The Art of Fiction’ and, as we will see, the prefaces,

James practises the introspective method, investigating and then presenting to us the behaviour of his creative mind.

### 2.1.2 David Hume

Johnson's definition of 'impression' makes no mention of Hume, or his *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), which is odd given that Hume borrowed Locke's metaphor and used it to name a distinct and primary kind of perception, a name that would stick for a long time. But the impression's long association with Hume is reflected in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: it dates the first instance of 'impressionism' (in its entry on that term) in England to 1839 and to the quotation, 'All hail to Berkeley who would have no matter, and to Hume who would have no mind; to the Idealism of the former, and to the *Impressionism* of the latter!'<sup>11</sup> This mocks Hume's scepticism about the existence of personal identity which, as we will see, derived from the foundational importance to Hume of the fleeting impression: all Hume could find when he looked deeply within himself was a series of impressions.

Hume built on many of Locke's ideas. His experimental philosophy was motivated by the belief, shared with Locke, that 'principles taken upon trust [...] seem to have drawn disgrace upon philosophy itself'; the only solid foundation for the 'science of man', the subject of his treatise, 'must be laid on experience and observation', the paired principles that, as we have seen, Locke periodically reminds us underpin his essay (Hume 1960: xx; Locke 1961: 77). Hume's underlying conviction throughout his investigations is that 'we cannot go beyond experience' (Hume 1960: xxi). He inherits much of Locke's thought. He has an 'imagist theory of thought', which conceives of thinking as a kind of perception (Noonan 1999: 61). He

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<sup>11</sup> "impression, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2014. Web.

asserts that ideas derive from the sensation of external objects or from reflexion on internal experiences, thus, to some extent, distinguishing between feeling and thinking (Hume 1960: 1-2). He uses his own experience, and appeals to the reader's, to develop his theories. He argues that the 'operations of the mind', which he calls the 'association of ideas' (and impressions), are governed by a handful of rules through which we pass from one idea to the next, and through which complex ideas are built from simple ones (Hume 1960: 10-13). Finally, he believes that the memory is where our ideas are stored (Hume 1960: 8-10).

Yet Hume departs from Locke in the terminology and detail of his model. As he tells us, he no longer requires 'idea' to cover all perceptions, those associated with both 'feeling and thinking', as Locke had (Hume 1960: 2). He sees himself as 'restor[ing] the word, idea, to its original sense' as a perception associated with *thinking*, 'from which Mr. *Locke* had perverted it, in making it stand in for all our perceptions' (Hume 1960: 2). He then introduces a second category of perception, the 'impression', by which he 'would not be understood to express the manner, in which our lively perceptions are produced in the soul', as we have seen Locke did, 'but merely [to express] [those] perceptions themselves' (Hume 1960: 2). Impressions are not associated with thinking, but with perceiving and feeling.

Feeling precedes thinking, in Hume's model, since every simple idea is copied from a simple impression. 'Our impressions are the causes of our ideas, not our ideas of our impressions', and we cannot form ideas of things of which we have not had impressions (Hume 1960: 5). Commentators have called this Hume's 'Copy Principle': *'that all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent'* (Hume 1960: 4; Noonan 1999: 6). Impressions and ideas differ

in the degrees of force and liveliness with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name *impressions*; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By *ideas* I mean the faint images of these [impressions] in thinking and reasoning. (Hume 1960: 1)

Impressions include ‘passions and emotions’, as well as ‘sensations’. Hume is at pains to stress throughout the *Treatise* that ‘degrees of force and liveliness’ is all that differentiates ideas from impressions. Perhaps as a result of this, impressions are transient, ‘perishing existences’, whereas ideas, though less vivid than impressions, seem to be capable of enduring (Hume 1960: 193).

As Locke argued of ideas, ‘Impressions may be divided into two kinds, those of SENSATION and those of REFLEXION’ (Hume 1960: 7). Impressions of reflexion appear to be mainly ‘passions and emotions’, ‘derived in a great measure from our ideas’ when the mind views them (Hume 1960: 7). For example, the impressions of reflexion, ‘desire’ or ‘aversion’, are produced when the mind perceives an ‘idea of pleasure or pain’; they ‘may properly be called impressions of reflexion, because derived from it’ (Hume 1960: 8). Since Hume says that impressions and ideas are identical but for degree of liveliness, ideas also fall into the two categories of sensation and reflexion.

Hume goes on to describe the way in which impressions and ideas combine to form a train of thought (Hume 1960: 7-8). An impression naturally conducts the mind to an idea related to it, and also communicates to the idea ‘*a share of its force and vivacity*’ (Hume 1960: 8). When an impression of sensation ‘strikes upon the senses’, for example heat, we feel heat (Hume 1960: 8). ‘Of this impression there is a copy taken by the mind, which remains after the impression ceases; and this we call an idea’ (Hume 1960: 8). An example would be the ideas associated with an original impression of a flame. When we *think* about heat (instead of feeling it), we are

perceiving an idea of sensation (the thought of heat) which is derived from an impression of sensation (the original feeling of heat). On another occasion, the idea of heat might provoke an impression of reflexion, a passion or emotion (rather than a sensation), for example an impression of fear. It is called an impression of reflexion because the mind receives an impression from the activity of reflecting on itself, here the idea of heat. This impression of reflexion is 'again [...] copied by the memory and imagination, and become[s] [an] idea', the idea of fear (rather than the feeling of fear) (Hume 1960: 8). Hume calls impressions of sensation 'original' impressions, and those of reflexion 'secondary' impressions, as they 'proceed from some of these original ones, either immediately or by the interposition of its idea', as we saw, in the example above of heat, the impression of fear proceeding from either the idea or the impression of heat (Hume 1960: 275).

Hume explains belief purely in terms of vivacity. An idea to which we give credence is simply more vivid than one to which we do not (Hume 1960: 86). In degree of vividness, beliefs lie between ideas and impressions. Sudden belief in an idea may make it as vivid as an impression of sensation (Hume 1960: 119). Ideas from the memory are more vivid than those from the imagination: the memory respects the order of the original impressions whereas the imagination does not (Hume 1960: 8-9). A 'perfect idea', one put together by the imagination, has least vivacity. Since impressions lend a degree of their vivacity to ideas, the more recent the idea in the memory, the more vivid, as its original impression is not yet so distant.

For James, the reader's belief in the impressions offered by a novelist was important. In 'The Art of Fiction' he criticized authors' asides which conceded the fictionality of their narratives as a 'betrayal of a sacred office' since 'the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it *does* compete with life' (James 1884: 504, 503).

Like Hume, James believed that the nearer an impression was to experience, the more vivid it was, and the more it would command belief, but James applied this to the impressions offered by the novelist. Given that the novel is a ‘personal impression of life’, its ‘value [...] is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression’ (James 1884: 507). This returns in the prefaces where the proximity of the novel to an impression of life not only gives it more vividness, but more moral authority: a novel’s morality depends on the amount of ‘felt life concerned in producing it’ and its capacity to grow ‘with due freshness and straightness any vision of life’, both of which depend on a ‘close connexion of the subject with some mark made on the intelligence’ (James 1962: 45). George Eliot’s ‘figures and situations’ are not ‘*seen* in the irresponsible plastic way’, as they evolved from her ‘moral consciousness’ – in Humean terms, they are less vivid as they are products of her imagination, and not her memory (James 1885a: 673).

For Hume, the mind moves from idea to idea, or impression to idea, or combines simple ideas into complex ones, through three ‘associating principles of thought’ (Hume 1960: 283, 107). These principles of association are : ‘RESEMBLANCE, CONTIGUITY in time or place, and CAUSE and EFFECT’ (Hume 1960: 11). As Locke did, Hume contrasts, against the active exertions of ‘reasoning’ — in which the mind ‘go[es] beyond what is immediately present to the senses, either to discover the real existence or the relations of objects’ — the ‘mere passive admission of the impressions thro’ the organs of sensation’ (Hume 1960: 73).

‘Of these three relations [...] this of causation is the most extensive’; so Hume examines it at length (Hume 1960: 12, 73-94). When we have an impression of something, our mind often moves on to another impression or idea that we have tended to associate with that impression, through an inference of cause and effect,

based on our past experience. For example, we have become used to feeling heat when we see a flame, and we infer that the heat is caused by the flame. So when we think of a flame we also think of heat, but Hume says that the heat-giving power we attribute to the flame is an inferential leap driven by probability, and not by reasoning. ‘Reason can never satisfy us that the existence of any one object does ever imply that of another; so that when we pass from the impression of one to the idea or belief of another, we are not determin’d by reason, but by custom or a principle of association’ already existing between ideas in our mind (Hume 1960: 97).

Such a frequent reliance on probability, rather than reason, when we think, is one of the ‘numberless infirmities [...] common to human nature’ (Hume 1960: 265). Hume’s attention to these means he is often classed as a sceptic. His greatest scepticism concerns ‘personal identity’, and the impression is central to this scepticism. Those philosophers are mistaken, he argues, who believe in an ‘idea of *self*’, of ‘perfect identity and simplicity’, which endures through time (Hume 1960: 251). Hume proves this by asking where we might find a single, lasting *impression* of self from which an idea of self might derive. ‘I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception’ and these impressions – for example, ‘pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations’ – are multiple and transient (Hume 1960: 251-252). Since ‘it must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea [...] there is no such idea [of self]’ (Hume 1960: 251-252). This test of the validity of ideas is, for Hume, a useful corollary of his copy principle, ‘the principle [...] *that all our ideas are copy’d from our impressions*’ (Hume 1960: 72): ‘’tis impossible perfectly to understand any idea, without tracing it up to its origin, and examining that primary impression, from which it arises. The examination of the impression bestows a

clearness on the idea' (Hume 1960: 74-5). By tracing the idea of self back to its possible origin, Hume shows that the idea itself is chimerical.

So what is the self, then, if anything? The nearest Hume comes to defining the idea of self is 'that succession of related ideas and impressions, of which we have an intimate memory and consciousness' (Hume 1960: 277). He figures the mind, famously, as a theatre within which the self, a 'bundle' of perceptions, exists:

I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. [...] The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. (Hume 1960: 252-253)

James's increasing use of point of view in his fiction, as we will see in chapter four, similarly equates character and identity with impressions.

Hume extends this scepticism into our perception of all objects, not just ourselves. When we 'ascribe an identity' to an object, such as a plant or animal, this is a 'fiction' of our 'imagination' (Hume 1960: 253-254). In fact, all we are aware of is a succession of separate impressions of an object but our minds 'feign the continu'd existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption' so that we 'substitute the notion of identity, instead of that of related objects' (Hume 1960: 254). Identity does not belong to these different perceptions, 'but is merely a quality, which we attribute to them, because of the union of their ideas in the imagination, when we reflect upon them' (Hume 1960: 260). Hume calls this a 'mistake', the mistake which leads us to talk not only of a '*self*', but also of a '*soul*' and '*substance*' (Hume 1960: 254). This 'fiction', going beyond what is immediately present to the senses, seems to be inconsistent with Hume's insistence that we avoid going beyond experience (Hume 1960: 254). It also has analogies with Ritchie's use of her imaginative impressions to go beyond what is present to her senses, her glimpse of the young men, both by

perceiving the unseen from the seen, and by inferring their continued existence after she has passed the doorway.

## 2.2 Nineteenth-Century Empiricist Psychology

As we have seen, sensation was the first home of the impression, and, along with its twin, reflection, the two bedrocks of empiricism. In the nineteenth century sensation and reflection became topics in a new discipline, psychology. Those philosophers drawn to this new discipline, especially in England and Austria, were empiricists who owed much to Hume's model of thought, especially his notion that ideas are copies of impressions (the copy principle), and that our thinking comprises a chain of impressions and ideas, linked associatively (which became known as associationism). Despite this, the word 'impression' drops out of the technical vocabulary for mind in the nineteenth century, in favour of 'sensation' and 'perception'.

In this section we will look briefly at two English inheritors of Humeism, James Mill and his *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1829), and his son John Stuart Mill, and his *A System of Logic* (1843). The Mills' adherence to Hume's associationism and copy principle shows how entrenched his model of mental activity had become in the English philosophy of mind. But the Mills' conception of the mind is more passive than Locke's or Hume's. Nevertheless, they represent a kind of orthodox Humeism continuing into the nineteenth century in this regard. Then we will examine two Austrian works of empiricist psychology: Ernst Mach's *The Analysis of Sensations* (published in German in 1886), and Franz Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (published in German in 1874). Mach and Brentano offer two contrasting reactions to this Humean inheritance. Mach adopted an extreme form of associationism, in which everything is made up of moving

‘elements’ – hence his work was often called ‘the philosophy of impressionism’, as Hume’s had earlier been, though Mach rarely uses ‘impression’ himself. He emphasises the determinism implicit in earlier associationism, and represents the mind as relatively powerless in a fluid and unstable world. Mach is useful as he offers an extreme representation of the passivity and vulnerability of the empiricist subject, one which is of a piece with those moments in James’s late fiction when characters are muddled or bewildered, or when, during the shock of recognition, their old aesthetic or idealist worlds are destroyed by a sudden Humean impression of sensation. By contrast, Brentano rejects associationism and the passivity inherent in it, arguing that the mind and what it observes are mutually interdependent: they exist in an intentional relationship. For him mental activity is not built out of base units obeying primary laws, but is to be conceived of as a whole, directed to some purposive end.

We will finally focus on William James’s *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), which synthesized much of this work and made it available to a much wider audience in both America and Europe, as well as on his major philosophical contribution, *Pragmatism: a New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907). William James, a psychologist, and then a philosopher, though an empiricist, rejected the theory of the impression, as well as associationism, arguing that sensation and reflection are intermingled, and that the mind is a continuous whole, a ‘stream of consciousness’, rather than a collection of discrete impressions and ideas. In both his psychology and philosophy he tried to reconcile empiricism with rationalism. In his view, a model which describes us as receiving impressions of experience does not do justice to the fact that we are active in consciousness, both shaped by and shaping experience. He reflects aspects of both Mach’s and Brentano’s thinking: like Mach,

he believes that perception involves an imposition of contingent outlines on otherwise teeming particles; like Brentano, he thinks that perception is a relationship between subject and object, to which both contribute.

### 2.2.1 James Mill and J.S. Mill

James Mill's *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1829) is the most detailed statement of the 'associationist', 'elementarist' or 'atomist' (often used interchangeably) philosophy of mind that had been prevalent in England since Hume and David Hartley. Among other things, James Mill extended the principle of association to the analysis of emotional states, declaring that 'the order in which the more complex mental phenomena follow or accompany one another, [is] reducible, by an analysis similar in kind to the Newtonian, to a comparatively small number of laws of succession' (Mill 1869: viii). His son, John Stuart Mill agreed: 'the subject, then, of Psychology, is the uniformities of succession, the laws, whether ultimate or derivative, according to which one mental state succeeds another' (Mill 1974: 852). One of these laws is 'in the language of Hume, that every mental *impression* has its *idea*' (Mill 1974: 852) or, as his father, James Mill, puts it: 'We have two classes of feelings; one, that which exists when the object of sense is present; another, that which exists after the object of sense has ceased to be present. The one class of feelings I call SENSATIONS; the other class of feelings I call IDEAS' (Mill 1869: 52).

Why has Hume's 'impression' become 'sensation'? To call a sensation an 'impression' would undermine the notion that there are 'two classes of feelings', since for Hume impressions differ from ideas only in intensity. Furthermore, the preface to James Mill's text mentions 'the reaction against the Experience psychology, provoked

by the hardy scepticism of Hume', which suggests that Hume's doubt as to the stability of personal identity, and to the truth value of sensation, was viewed as threatening to the new science of psychology (Mill 1869: xii). Both Mills make a clear distinction between subject and object, a distinction which collapses with Mach, and is muddled by Brentano.

So the Mills follow Locke and Hume in arguing that thought originates in experience, and often in sensation. But theirs is a more passive conception of the human mind than that of Locke and Hume. The Mills' focus on the impersonal Newtonian laws by which mental phenomena proceed suggests that the mind is just a locus for formations of particles rather than an agency in command of its thoughts. By contrast, as we have seen, Locke and Hume discuss the more active 'operations' of the mind.

### **2.2.2 Ernst Mach**

The challenge to the integrity of the self posed by associationism is shown particularly vividly by Ernst Mach, a physicist as well as philosopher, and his 'Philosophie des Impressionismus', as one contemporary called it ['the philosophy of impressions'] (van Gunsteren 1990: 39). Mach's work has been regarded as a 'limiting case of pure empiricism', an extreme form of associationism, which posited not just that our thoughts comprise elements or atoms which cluster together according to laws of association, but that the world consists only of our sensations, also known as 'sensationalism', or 'neutral monism' (Hamilton 1998; Mach 1959:

235, 12).<sup>12</sup> For Mach the elements that comprise the world belong neither to the mind nor to the world ('neutral'), neither to the perceiving subject nor to the perceived object ('monism'). As we will see, Pater's conclusion to *The Renaissance* offers a similarly sensationalist vision of the world, though he moves from a world of elements to a world of subjective impressions, which, as we will see, Mach would regard as supporting the tyranny of the ego.

Mach's associationism challenges the integrity of both subjects and objects. Both the ego and objects are merely clusters of elements. Mach argues that out of the flux of sensations we discern certain 'bodies' as though they were fixed and enduring; in fact this is a result of a 'conscious economy of mental presentation', and of mental habit, as such apparently solid bodies are merely combinations of elements, or 'nuclei': 'bodies are but thought-symbols for complexes of elements (complexes of sensations)' (Mach 1959: 3, 12, 29). In particular, as Hume first argued, the '“I” or “Ego”' is a 'complex of memories, moods, and feelings, joined to a particular body (the human body)', 'the primary fact is not the ego, but the elements (sensations) [...] the elements constitute the I' (Mach 1959: 3, 23). For Mach this means that 'the ego must be given up' (Mach 1959: 25). He conceives of the self as virtually dissolved into its own environment, its sensations merely shared with any location: 'when I speak of my own sensations, these sensations do not exist spatially in my head, but rather my “head” shares with them the same spatial field' (Mach 1959: 27). The self or ego simply becomes a field of view, which Mach illustrates with a picture of his study seen through his right eye, a view which includes his nose and legs. There are obvious analogies with a novel such as *The Ambassadors*, which offers us one man's

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<sup>12</sup> William James's posthumous *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912) also offered a philosophy of monism, of continuity between subject and object, thought and thing. He claimed that we live in a world of 'pure experience' (rather than 'elements', 'impressions' or 'sensations') in which 'there is no selfsplitting [...] into consciousness and what the consciousness is "of"', until we formally abstract them (James 1976: 16, 13).

point of view. With this giving up of the ego, the determinism implicit in the association of thought of earlier philosophers becomes more apparent, the self a site for the progression of mental states: if ‘two contents of consciousness, *A* and *B*, have once appeared simultaneously, one of them, when it arises, will evoke the other’ (Mach 1959: 239).<sup>13</sup>

### 2.2.3 Franz Brentano

Franz Brentano, another Austrian, a philosopher and psychologist, taught both Freud and Husserl in Vienna. He was influenced by the early British empiricists, as well as by James Mill, but he represents the mind not as a space within which particles cluster, as the Mills and Mach did, but as a single whole which is always involved in an encounter with an object: today he is best known for arguing that the subject and object are suspended in an ‘intentional’ relationship, for which he has, with William James, been seen as a father of phenomenology.

His empiricism is clear. He cites J.S. Mill’s reference to the Humean Copy Principle approvingly, though he distances himself from Hume’s terminology: ‘every impression, [...] using the language of Hume, has its idea’ (Brentano 1973: 12, 77-8). Sensations, as Hume had argued of impressions, are the ‘primary mental elements’ (Brentano 1973: 46). But, departing from Hume, mental phenomena are to be distinguished from physical in that they are ‘intentional’. Together they comprise ‘the data of our consciousness’, but only mental phenomena have intentionality, the mind’s ability to direct itself on things (Brentano 1973: 77). Physical phenomena are sense-objects. Mental phenomena include sensations, ideas, judgments and interests.

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<sup>13</sup> Mach, of the five philosopher-psychologists examined here, is the most influenced by Hume so it seems odd that he never mentions impressions. The reason may be the reason he gives for preferring ‘element’ to ‘sensation’, which we have touched on already: ‘vestiges of a one-sided theory inhere in that term [sensation]’, presumably a theory which suggests that sensations are mental rather than physical phenomena (Mach 1959: 22).

Unlike physical phenomena, mental ones refer to objects beyond themselves and hence, in a sense, contain these objects within them – which Brentano calls having ‘the intentional [...] inexistence of an object’ (Brentano 1973: 88-89). The result is that subjects mean nothing without the objects they are directed towards: ‘where you cannot speak of an object, you cannot speak of a subject either’ (Brentano 1973: 90-91). As we will see, Brentano’s intentionality is evident in William James’s apperception, and in Pater’s insistence that we know the object by knowing our impression of it.

Instead of reconciling the division between the subject and the object by making them indistinguishable, as Mach had done, Brentano’s intentionality does this by making them interdependent. Although to claim that every mental phenomenon is ‘intentional’ does not mean that each one itself has an intention, it does suggest that mental phenomena exist towards some end, and that each represents an encounter between a subject and an object, a subject with intentions, desires and designs on that object, perhaps. The self is no longer a site for mental activity, as in the associationist model, but a relationship with the world. This arguably offers a more autonomous and robust subject than associationism. The distinction between physical and mental phenomena, clear in the Mills, has been muddied by the intentional inexistence of the physical phenomenon within the mental one.

Brentano helps us understand the Jamesian impression as, if perception is a relationship, then the impression is sustained by both impressor and impessee. So we can understand deceptive performative impressions as cognitive impressions, too, in which the dupe bears some responsibility for their own deception. Equally, the relationship within any perception can reverse, the direction of the impression can

reverse, so dupes can make impressions on their deceivers, too, something which happens in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*.

#### 2.2.4 William James

Now we turn to William James's philosophy and psychology. William was an empiricist, much influenced by Locke and Hume, but he recognised that rationalism or idealism address important human needs and desires – for optimism, free will and the spiritual, for example. Despite this empiricist bent, William did not make the impression a central feature of any of his theories (although his speculative and interdisciplinary method have led both his contemporaries and later commentators to call his philosophy 'impressionistic', and to call him an '*impressionist* in psychology' (G. Stanley Hall quoted in Myers 1981: xxxvi; Ryan 1991: 80)).

Why bother with William James if the impression is not important to his work? He represented consciousness in ways which, as we will see, have striking affinities with his brother's impression: above all, in his efforts to overcome the division between empiricism, which states that all knowledge is based on experience, and rationalism, which stresses the role of unaided reason in knowledge over the role of sensory experience. Time and again, in the psychological theories of *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), and in *Pragmatism* (1907), which he classed as a form of empiricism, he described the mind in ways which frustrated traditional distinctions between the subject and the object, a distinction inherent in most empiricist and rationalist thought. For his conception of the mind as both shaping and shaped by experience, and for his notion that subject and object may be united in 'pure experience', he has been seen as a major influence on phenomenology.

However, as a psychologist, William accepted a ‘*thoroughgoing dualism* [...] of Object and Subject’ (James 1981a: 214). Psychology was just beginning to differentiate itself from philosophy, and William hoped that *The Principles* would become the definitive work in this new field. But, as we will see, he was explicitly uncomfortable about the dualist assumptions that scientific methodology demanded, and many of the aspects of the mind that he described seem to him to muddy the distinction between subject and object. In *The Principles* there are allusions now and then to an ‘ulterior monistic philosophy’ that, ‘as an individual who has the right also to be a metaphysician, [he might] have in reserve’ (James 1981a: 216). When he moved into metaphysics, no longer bound by this methodology, he expressed more freely his instinctive monism, as we will see.

In *The Principles of Psychology*, to which we now turn, William declared that ‘the “simple impression” of Hume, the “simple idea” of Locke, are both abstractions, never realized in experience’ (James 1981a: 461). By this he meant that perception and thought are not composed of discrete and unchanging entities, like impressions and ideas, and that sensations, perceptions and thoughts cannot be easily discriminated. The persistent refrain of *The Principles* is that our instinctive sense of ‘the continuous flow of the mental stream’ has been wrongly cast aside, thanks to traditional empiricism, in favour of ‘an atomism, a brickbat plan of construction’ of the mind (James 1981a: 195).

The impression is an abstraction, for William, since he opposes the three main elements of ‘the associationist Philosophy’, which was founded once Hume ‘chopped

up our “stream” into a ‘chain of distinct existences’ (James 1981a: 334).<sup>14</sup> First, he objects to Hume’s copy principle, which asserted that ideas are ‘completely adequate copies’ of ‘original impressions’, and that impressions are copies of physical phenomena; second, he disagrees with the ‘atomistic theory’ that impressions and ideas are ‘all so separate from each other as to possess no manner of connection’; and, third, he rejects the notion that ‘“Association” [is] the one all-absorbing power of the mind’ (James 1981b: 691; James 1981a: 458).

The Copy Principle arose, in William’s view, due to ‘the dependence of psychology on common speech’ (James 1981a: 194). We name our thought with the name of its object, drawn from ‘the vocabulary of outward things’ (James 1981a: 193). As a result, the thought is wrongly presumed to have a ‘precisely similar independence, self-identity, and mobility’ as its object. In fact, *‘however complex the object may be, the thought of it is one undivided state of consciousness’* (James 1981a: 266-7).

This rejection of Hume’s Copy Principle naturally leads to a rejection of atomism, an assumption held by both dominant traditions in psychology: ‘These words are meant to impeach the entire English psychology derived from Locke and Hume, and the entire German psychology derived from Herbart, so far as they both treat “ideas” as separate subjective entities that come and go’ (James 1981a: 195). These two traditions’ atomistic models of our ideas do no justice to what he had called in 1884 ‘the “fact” of felt relations’ (quoted in McDermott 1976: xviii).

Yet William did not jettison associationism, just as he did not reject rationalism. Instead, he tried to reconcile it with its opposite, dissociation, arguing

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<sup>14</sup> William characterized English psychologists as ‘associationists’, naming, as ‘Locke’s descendants’, Hume, Hartley, James Mill, J.S. Mill and Bain (James 1981a: 458-460). Elsewhere he describes the ‘English empiricist school’ as comprising Locke, Hume, Hartley, the Mills, and Spencer, for example (James 1981a: 380).

that the two are like the two legs on which we walk (James 1981a: 519). Dissociation is so prominent in *The Principles* because William begins from the premise that ‘the only thing which psychology has a right to postulate at the outset is the fact of thinking itself’ (James 1981a: 219). And thinking, which includes sensation and perception, is symbolized for William by the metaphor of a stream, an undiscriminated whole. As for sense impressions, William writes that ‘the law is that all things fuse that *can* fuse, and nothing separates except what must’ (James 1981a: 461). Dissociation thus characterizes much of the activity of the mind as, without such activity, the mind tends to apprehend things as one. In fact, William claims that ‘*the first sensation which an infant gets is for him the Universe*’ (James 1981b: 657).<sup>15</sup> Although, as we will see, Isabel Archer’s consciousness is represented as consisting of discrete impressions and ideas, consistent with Locke and Hume, in the major phase James’s protagonists’ impressions are more fluid, persisting and deepening, during reflection. Dissociation is often their starting point, too: as we will see, Strether’s first experience of Gloriani’s Garden is one large impression, within which he slowly discriminates.

‘The Stream of Thought’ is the chapter with which William begins his detailed account of the mind. This metaphor emphasises the connectedness of mental phenomena, which is prior to such abstractions as the simple impression. Like Locke and Hume, William suggests that perceiving and thinking are on a continuum. Locke used ‘idea’ to cover perceptions and thoughts, and Hume argued that ideas were simply less vivid impressions. William uses ‘the word thinking [...] for every form of consciousness indiscriminately’, having lamented the absence in English of a ‘general

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<sup>15</sup> William’s later descriptions of the ‘pure experience’ at the heart of his ‘radical empiricism’ recall those of the infant’s undiscriminated, pure sensations in *The Principles* (James 1976: 13).

term by which to designate all states of consciousness [...] to cover sensation and thought indifferently' (James 1981a: 219, 185). There are 'five characters of thought', William tells us in his chapter, which encapsulate both William's opposition to pure associationism, and the elements of dissociation which he wished to emphasise:

- 1) Every thought tends to be part of a personal consciousness.
  - 2) Within each personal consciousness thought is always changing.
  - 3) Within each personal consciousness thought is sensibly continuous.
  - 4) It always appears to deal with objects independent of itself.
  - 5) It is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects – *chooses* from among them, in a word – all the while.
- (James 1981a: 220)

The second proposition rejects the notion that the conditions of our mind are the 'effect of variations in the *combination* of certain simple elements of consciousness that always remain the same', whether Locke's simple ideas or the sensations envisaged by later psychologists, such as the Mills (James 1981a: 225). In fact, '*there is no proof that the same bodily sensation is ever got by us twice*' since 'for an identical sensation to recur[,] it would have to occur the second time *in an unmodified brain*' (James 1981a: 225, 227). Furthermore, 'no two "ideas" are ever exactly the same [...] *A permanently existing "idea" or "Vorstellung" which makes its appearance before the footlights of consciousness at periodical intervals, is as mythological an entity as the Jack of Spades*' (James 1981a: 229-230). The recognitions of Henry James's protagonists typically involve an impression returning again and again, but to an evolving consciousness, such that reflection cumulatively extracts different aspects of the impression. As we will see, this is particularly true of Maggie's impressions in *The Golden Bowl*.

The third proposition, that thought is continuous, rejects the theory that 'consciousness [...] appear[s] to itself chopped up in bits', due to what he later called, the 'pulverization of all experience by association[ism]', as it did in the associative chains of ideas or impressions envisaged by Locke, Hume, the Mills and others

(James 1976: 22; James 1981a: 233). James prefers the flowing metaphor of '*the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life*' (James 1981a: 233).

The fourth proposition, that thought deals with objects independent of itself, reminds us that William believes, with Brentano, in the intentionality of consciousness (Brentano 1973: 88-89).

The fifth proposition, that the mind makes choices among the objects of its thought, according to its interest, is evidenced, for example, in the mind's 'selective attention': 'we find it quite impossible to disperse our attention impartially over a number of impressions', as evidenced by our tendency to subdivide into smaller groups a homogenous series of noises or dots (James 1981a: 273). More fundamentally, one of the main messages of *The Principles* is that '*my experience is what I agree to attend to*', that 'each of us literally *chooses*, by his ways of attending to things, what sort of a universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit' (James 1981a: 380, 401).

Yet selective attention has been ignored by the 'psychologists of the English empiricist school' since, for them, 'the higher faculties of the mind are pure products of "experience"; and experience is supposed to be of something simply given' (James 1981a: 380). They conceive of experience as 'pure receptivity', which is not consistent with the 'reactive spontaneity' of selective attention (James 1981a: 380). But William does in fact build on the work of Locke and Hume in this area. As we have seen, Locke and Hume argued that, at times, judgement transforms perception, so that when, for example, we see an apparently oblong table, we infer that it is round. What William James does is to elaborate this into a more evenly divided model of empiricist thought: perception combines messages coming both from without and from within, combines sensation and ideation.

Yet whereas Hume imagined us as a passive audience watching the impressions of experience in the theatre of the mind, William imagines us as a more active audience, choosing among our perceptions, in ‘a theatre of simultaneous possibilities’ (James 1981a: 277). Experience is not simply what is present to our senses, since we never notice millions of such items. We only notice what interests us: ‘without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos’ (James 1981a: 381). ‘The mind, in short, works on the data it receives very much as a sculptor works on his block of stone’ (James 1981a: 297). (This selective attention operates differently across individuals, but it has also evolved over time so that it now differs across species (James 1981a: 277)). But the data of experience also work on us: ‘Experience is remoulding us every moment, and our mental reaction on every given thing is really a resultant of our experience of the whole world up to that date’ (James 1981a: 228). This latter clause matches Henry James’s metaphor of the spider-web, in which its reactive tremors are dictated, in part, by the shape given to it by previous particles it has absorbed. The symbiosis, inherent in experience, of subject and object is summarized in the sentence, ‘*My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind* – without selective interest, experience is an utter chaos’ (James 1981a: 380-1). Henry’s version of William’s sculptor, as we will see, is the artist who carves out his own window in the wall of the house of fiction through which to observe the scene of life.

Like Mach, and, as we will see, like Pater in his famous conclusion, William argues that the solid ‘bodies’ or ‘things’ that we see are simply the result of decisions we have made to group teeming sensations in certain formations, ‘which happen practically or aesthetically to interest us, to which we therefore give substantive names’ (James 1981a: 274-275). Once we have chosen a thing, we also choose which

aspect of it will be its representative aspect: the truest aspect of a table-top is, for us, the one under which we see two right angles, whereas the majority of its aspects involve our witnessing two acute and two obtuse angles, for example (James 1981a: 274).

Attention is also required to dissociate a whole impression into its constituents, but such a choice requires prior knowledge: ‘any total impression made on the mind must be un-analyzable, whose elements are never experienced apart [...] Only such elements as we are acquainted with, and can imagine separately, can be discriminated within a total sense-impression’ (James 1981a: 474-475). Such knowledge is ‘the formation from within of a separate image of that thing, which should, as it were, go out to meet the impression received’:

attention involves inward reproduction [...]. In looking for any object in a room, for a book in a library, for example, we detect it the more readily if, in addition to merely knowing its name, etc., we carry in our mind a distinct image of its appearance. (James 1981a: 474-6)

So it is clear why William criticizes the notion of a discrete impression: our most basic attention to something comprises a mixture of impressions from without and ideas within. William has a wide range of synonyms for selective attention, including, ‘apperception’, ‘ideational preparation’, ‘preperception’, ‘assimilation’, or, simply, ‘the association of ideas’ (James 1981b: 750-751). During apperception, ‘incoming ideas or sensations are said to be “apperceived” by “masses” of ideas already in the mind’ (James 1981b: 750-751).

Every impression that comes in from without, be it a sentence which we hear, an object of vision, or an effluvium which assails our nose, no sooner enters our consciousness than it is drafted off in some determinate direction or other, making connection with the other materials already there, and finally producing what we call our reaction. The particular connections it strikes into are determined by our past experiences and the ‘associations’ of the present sort of impression with them. [...] It is the fate of every impression thus to fall into a mind preoccupied with memories, ideas, and interests, and by these it is taken in. (James 1983: 95)

This ‘fusion of the new with the old’ is often indistinguishable: for example, when we read a page of print, we often overlook misprints as we imagine we are seeing the right letters which are in fact being supplied by our memory (James 1983: 96). Strikingly, ‘when [...] sensorial attention is at its height, it is impossible to tell how much of the percept comes from without and how much from within’ (James 1981a: 415). Neurologically speaking, ‘the attentive process, therefore, at its maximum may be physiologically symbolized by a brain-cell played on in two ways, from without and from within’ (James 1983: 70). ‘*Sensational and reproductive brain-processes combined, then, are what give us the content of our perceptions*’, our ‘percepts’ (James 1981b: 724). Similarly, the success of Densher’s and Kate’s impressions in deceiving Milly in *The Wings of the Dove* is partly a result of Milly’s existing ideas which go out to meet them. When James describes how his impressions compose themselves in his travel writing, he suggests that he is unable to discriminate his own contribution to the scene before him, something particularly marked in Strether’s visit to the countryside, as we will see.

So single, discrete impressions are rare. When they do occur, William describes them as ‘sensations’ and distinguishes them from ‘perceptions’. Perception involves ‘knowledge *about* a thing [...] knowledge of its relations’, through apperception, the association of ideas, whereas sensation itself is mere ‘acquaintance [...] limitation to the bare impression which it makes’ (James 1981a: 250). ‘*Pure sensations can only be realized in the earliest days of life*’ (James 1981b: 657). Sensations are examples of ‘feeling’, perceptions of ‘thought’: ‘through feelings we become acquainted with things, but only by our thoughts do we know them. Feelings are the germ and starting point of cognition, thoughts the developed tree’ (James

1981a: 128). Perception involves more ‘associative processes’ than sensation (James 1981b: 723).

We can, in fact, recuperate sensation from perception by deliberately defamiliarizing our perception, by inhibiting ‘associative irradiations’: for example by listening to a language we do not understand, or repeating a word over and over again (James 1981b: 726). The effect of this is to separate off the word from any associates, in other words from its meaning. In the latter case ‘one may often surprise a change in the very *feel* of the word’ (James 1981b: 726). This sensual change, from perception to ‘naked sensation’, is particularly marked in visual defamiliarization: for example, looking at a painting or a landscape or a face upside down (James 1981b: 727). In chapter one I adopted two of Henry James’s words to name the painterly impressionists’ impressions as more ‘receptive’ and the literary impressionists’ as more ‘projective’. We can now borrow William’s more elegant distinction between sensations and perceptions.

William James’s description of looking at a landscape while standing on one’s head is a good characterization of much impressionist painting:

Perception is to a certain extent baffled by this manoeuvre; gradations of distance and other space-determinations are made uncertain; the reproductive or associative processes, in short, decline; and, simultaneously with their diminution, the colors grow richer and more varied, and the contrasts of light and shade more marked. (James 1981b: 727)

Jamesian recognition typically begins with a raw sensation which is strikingly unfamiliar, for example Isabel’s sight of Osmond sitting, while Madame Merle stands. This is a sensation as it cannot be accommodated to Isabel’s existing ideas about the connection between the two. Just as the impressionist painters believed they had liberated themselves from the conventions of culture through their sensations, so James’s protagonists are liberated from the conventional associations with which their deceivers have tried to disguise their true behaviour.

William uses ‘impression’ more than James Mill, J.S. Mill, Brentano and Mach, despite his reservations about Locke’s and Hume’s models of mind. As well as occasionally using it to mean ‘sensation’, he uses it more vaguely to figure a stimulus to which the brain and then the body react, a usage standard in physiology texts of the time. Anticipating cognitive psychology, William conceived of the human mind in constant dialogue with, and adaptation to, a sensory environment, which itself reflects the influence of Locke and Hume (see Ludwig 2002). ‘Man is an organism for reacting on impressions; his mind is there to help determine his reactions, and the purpose of his education is to make them numerous and perfect’, William wrote (James 1983: 32). As we will see, *The Golden Bowl* presents a world in which characters negotiate their environments using their impressions, receiving impressions, then making them, then receiving them again, in a series of feedback loops. For William, education consists in educating children’s reactions to impressions: ‘*No reception without reaction, no impression without correlative expression* – this is the great maxim which the teacher ought never to forget’ (William James 1983: 30). This recalls Henry’s rejoinder to Whistler that ‘a picture is not an impression but an expression’ (James 1956b: 165).

We have observed several empiricist elements in *The Principles*: association is repeatedly shown to be central to cognition (albeit combined with dissociation and absorbed into the broader notion of apperception); feeling and thought exist on the same spectrum; and William reasons about the human mind through introspection. So is William an empiricist? In *Pragmatism* he argues that the history of philosophy is a ‘clash’ between the ‘“empiricist” and [...] the “rationalist” temper’ in humans, ‘“empiricist” meaning your lover of facts in all their crude variety, “rationalist” meaning your devotee to abstract and eternal principles. No one can live an hour

without both facts and principles, so it is a difference rather of emphasis' (James 1975: 12). With its emphasis on empiricism rather than rationalism, William's thought, 'is essentially a mosaic philosophy, a philosophy of plural facts, like that of Hume and his descendants' (James 1976: 22). If 'facts' are to be sought, and if they are to be explained on their own terms, William's philosophy shares with Locke's an antipathy towards inherited ideas, which are wrongly believed to be innate, and with Hume's philosophy an underlying conviction that 'we cannot go beyond experience' (Hume 1960: xxi).

However, he did not solely emphasise empiricism: principles *are* encountered in experience and so have a place and an existence. In fact, temperamentally, William shares much with the rationalists, especially in their belief that through free will we are responsible for our actions and may improve our world. Empiricists – also called 'materialists', or 'sensationalists' – are 'pessimistic', 'fatalistic', and 'irreligious'; the rationalists, by contrast, are 'optimistic', believe in humanity's free will, and are 'religious' (James 1975: 13). Materialists are fatalistic because they believe that, since everything is material, it is subject to scientific laws such that, given certain conditions, outcomes are predetermined, a tendency evident in our previous discussion of empiricism, especially that of the Mills and Mach. Rationalists are optimistic as their belief in free will means that they feel humans may improve their lot, while they have religious faith in 'an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved', in contrast with the materialist prediction of the demise of man and matter (James 1975: 55). One way to conceive of Henry's protagonists is as rationalists, idealistic and in search of freedom, confined to an empiricist world.

William offers pragmatism as a way of combining the best of empiricism and rationalism. The method of 'pragmatism' is

a system that will combine both things, the scientific loyalty to facts and willingness to take account of them, the spirit of adaptation and accommodation, in short, but also the old confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity, whether of the religious or of the romantic type. (James 1975: 17)

It allows, under certain circumstances, the coexistence of ‘facts’ and ‘principles’ (the latter also designated as ‘beliefs’, ‘notions’, ‘theories’ and ‘concepts’) (James 1975: 31). How? In the following quotation, by ‘notion’, James means principle or theory:

The pragmatic method [...] is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. (James 1975: 28)

Theories are tested by evaluating their practical consequences. William applies this pragmatic method to three interrelated controversies on which rationalists and materialists do not agree: is ‘the world [...] run by matter or by spirit?’; does ‘*design in nature*’ exist?; and ‘*the free-will problem*’ (James 1975: 50, 56, 59). Using these examples, he tries to show how ‘*Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest*’ (James 1975: 31-32). Pragmatism is not hostile to abstractions ‘so long as you get about among particulars with their aid and they actually carry you somewhere’ (James 1975: 40). ‘*Ideas [...] become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience*’ (James 1975: 34). ‘Concepts [...] are things to come back into experience with’, not destinations reached once we have done our experiencing (James 1975: 50).

In the pragmatic method James formalizes a hunch about the relationship between impressions and ideas, or what he calls percepts and concepts, a hunch which echoes Hume’s method that one can test the robustness of an idea by trying to find the impression from which it originated. As early as *The Principles*, William had argued, in a chapter called ‘The Perception of Reality’, that ‘a conception, to prevail, must *terminate* in the world of sensible experience’ (James 1981b: 929). Later, in the

*Essays*, he formalized the pragmatic method still further by claiming that it was inherent to the very act of cognition: in ‘the cognitive relation’ – ‘how “one” thing can know “another”’ – ‘idea[s] [...] terminat[e]’ in ‘percept[s]’, so that, ultimately the ‘percept [...] *verifies* the concept’ with its ‘retroactive validating power’ (James 1975: 34, 50). This is a version of Hume’s belief that the best way to test the robustness of an idea is to find its impression which, as we will see, is James’s way of approaching his earlier novels in the prefaces.

In the process of recognition, James’s characters often unwittingly adopt a pragmatic method. Typically, they have been preoccupied with an idea which is then either confirmed or rejected by a subsequent impression. As we will see, Strether’s idea of the ‘virtuous attachment’ only allows him to negotiate experience until the scene in the country, when an impression invalidates it. Earlier in the novel Strether adopts the pragmatist view that ideas should be evaluated by their usefulness when he declares, in his famous ‘Live!’ speech, that freedom is an illusion that he wished he had once believed in, presumably so that he could have ‘lived’ more. In *The Golden Bowl*, this cognitive relation is reversed: Maggie’s tentative impressions of adultery are retroactively validated by the concepts offered to her by the vendor of the golden bowl.

Yet this cognitive relation seems rare in practice. William James not only argued, as Brentano did, that concepts are as real as percepts, but he sometimes seemed to suggest that concepts often appear to us to be more real than percepts, or at least more common. Concepts seem real to us not only if they remain uncontradicted, or if they are verified by percepts, but also if they appeal to ‘*our aesthetic, emotional, and active needs*’ (James 1981b: 940). This echoes Henry James’s definition of the realistic in ‘The Art of Fiction’, which rebuked Besant’s simplistic notion: ‘The

characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most' (James 1884: 509). Despite the cognitive relation, William acknowledges that 'most thought-paths [...] are substitutes for nothing actual; they end outside the real world altogether, in wayward fancies, utopias, fictions or mistakes' (James 1976: 32). They do not 'come back into experience' and terminate in percepts (James 1975: 50). So there is a distinction to be made 'between knowing as verified and completed' and 'knowledge still *in transitu* and on its way' (James 1976: 36). This distinction encapsulates William's continuing attempts to reconcile the competing demands of empiricism and rationalism.

### **3. Intertexts (II): Aestheticism and The Performative**

If William James rejected the Humean impression as an abstraction which overlooked the role of the subject in consciousness, Pater, instead, aestheticized it, thereby placing the subject's imagination at the heart of consciousness. In this chapter, we turn to Pater, and then to Wilde, who granted the imagination still more license within the aesthetic impression. But aestheticism will not equip us to examine the most creative performative impressions of James's major phase, impressions which are made, rather than received, because even Wilde's most flamboyantly creative impressions are imitative, obeying, if reluctantly, Hume's copy principle. So, in the second half of this chapter we turn to the more contemporary intertexts of theories of the performative. These offer a wider framework which can encompass both the most imitative and the most creative impressions, both impressions received and impressions made on others.

#### **3.1 British Aestheticism**

If the impression had been neglected by English philosophers and psychologists in the nineteenth century, it gained a renewed currency in English letters thanks to British aestheticism. Following Locke and Hume, the aesthetes assumed that we perceive objects, especially works of art, through the impression they make on our mind, a subjective response which they recorded in their 'impressionistic criticism'. Although 'aestheticism was not a programmatic or coherent movement: its exponents shared no clear sense of belonging to a school', the editors of an anthology of 'aesthetic criticism', encompassing, among others, Ruskin, Morris, Gautier, Baudelaire,

Swinburne, Pater, Whistler, Wilde, and Yeats, are able to point to a ‘concentration on one’s own personal *impression* of a work of art as the starting point for all the figures collected here’ (Evangelista 2009: 3; Hough and Warner 1983: 4). Like the texts of Brentano, Mach and William James, the aesthetes’ impressions can be seen as both a legacy of, and a reaction against, the passivity, determinism and pessimism of the Humean impression, or at least against that of its afterlife in the nineteenth century. If we are cast adrift in a world of transient and finite impressions, if in fact we ourselves are no more than temporary clusters of such impressions, these writers variously suggest, then we must try to perfect those impressions as they pass. On the one hand, this is achieved by increasing one’s sensitivity to impressions, on the other by transforming one’s impressions into something new. In Pater’s work, especially, the impression is both the chaos, and a source of meaning and pleasure that we ourselves shape in the face of that very chaos.

This section focuses on several texts by two important figures in the aesthetic movement: Pater’s collection of essays on renaissance art, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), and his Roman historical novel, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), Wilde’s sensational novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), and his two essays, ‘The Decay of Lying’ (1889) and ‘The Critic as Artist’ (1891), both collected in *Intentions* (1891).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pater changed the name of his collection of essays, after its first edition, to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*; as Beaumont explains, this was probably in response to an early review which claimed that its title was ‘misleading’ since ‘the historical element’ was missing (Pater 2010: xxx). I will subsequently refer to it by its later name. Wilde’s two essays originally appeared in the periodical *Nineteenth Century* in 1889 and 1890, the latter called ‘The True Function and Value of Criticism’.

### 3.1.1 Walter Pater

Pater offers two kinds of impression in his work, and they frame *The Renaissance*. In the preface the impression is a means for discovering and discriminating beauty. The conclusion offers the Humean impression of sensation: a transient perception of the external world.<sup>2</sup> It begins by presenting an empiricist, associationist, Humean view of the world, a vision of ‘physical life’ as comprising a vast number of ‘elements’ in ‘perpetual motion’, the ‘clear, perpetual outline[s]’ of objects being merely transient illusions which we superimpose on a teeming mass (Pater 1873: 207-208).<sup>3</sup> This recalls Hume’s insistence that, with only a string of flickering impressions to guide us, it is a ‘mistake’ to talk of ‘*substance*’ (Hume 1960: 260). This is exactly the world which, as we have seen, Mach would conjure fifteen years later in his conception of neutral monism, and which William James referred to as the ‘primordial chaos of sensations’ which is shaped by our perceptions (James 1981a: 277). It is also determinist, like the Mills’ world, because natural processes are the result of elements obeying basic rules of association: ‘the passage of the blood, the waste and repairing of the lenses of the eye’, ‘processes which science reduces to simpler and more elementary forces’.

Yet, before any mention of elements or flux, Pater offers, as his first example of ‘physical life’, a ‘moment’ of sensual pleasure: the ‘delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat’. Although Pater doesn’t identify it as such, this is what Locke or Hume would call an ‘impression on the body’, a sensation. The recoil and the water symbolize the transience and flux of elements. But they also delight Pater.

Throughout the conclusion, Pater offers a joy and a vitality missing from other

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<sup>2</sup> McGrath refers to the conclusion’s ‘strict Humean sensationalism’, arguing that the furore it caused has led to an undue emphasis being placed on empiricism in accounts of Pater’s work (McGrath 1986: 43, 54).

<sup>3</sup> All unreferenced quotations in this and the following eight paragraphs are to Pater’s conclusion (Pater 1873: 207-213).

associationist views of the world, from the bleakness of Hume's scepticism, from the overwhelming confusion of Mach's sensationism, from the grim materialism of William James's atomism, and from the perfunctory mechanisms of the Mills' model of mind. Perhaps Pater is partly inspired by the bright streaks in Hume's *Treatise*, the 'force and liveliness' of impressions, their 'vivacity', their 'distinct colours' (Hume 1960: 1, 8, 9).

As Pater shifts his focus from 'physical life' to the 'inward world of thought and feeling', via what Pater calls 'reflection' and 'analysis' (and William James would call 'introspection' and 'disassociation'), 'each object is loosed into a group of impressions'. What seem to be fleeting atoms are in fact our fleeting perceptions: the conclusion seems momentarily to become an impressionist painting in which fresh sensations have been substituted for our stereotyped view of the world, almost an anticipation of Seurat's *pointillisme*.<sup>4</sup> This second paragraph of the conclusion has the most – seven – instances of the impression, and, with their continual incantation, Humean scepticism seems ever to intensify as all of 'experience dwindles down' to the lowest common denominator, 'a single sharp impression', and a self, 'weaving and unweaving'. Pater, again, following Hume, argues that 'experience' is nothing but the 'impressions of the individual [...] in perpetual flight', 'the passage and dissolution of impressions'. This clearly reflects the influence of Hume who argued that our conviction in the continuing identity of an object is a fiction we have applied to a series of separate impressions of an object.

Substituting 'impressions' for 'elements' leads Pater to the kind of solipsism or subjective idealism which haunted Hume: 'Every one of those impressions is the

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<sup>4</sup> For Evangelista, Pater uses this 'image of a world in continuous evolution' to justify his conviction that 'meaning, like desire, fluctuates, continuously fragmenting and rearranging itself into new configurations' (Evangelista 2009: 47).

impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world'. The self is no longer consistent: 'that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving our ourselves' evokes Hume's most sceptical idea that there is no such thing as self, nothing but a bundle of perceptions. Such an analytic reduction risks the conclusion ending in the impasse of solipsism, as the first book of Hume's *Treatise* had, or in the *reductio ad absurdum* into which some believed Hume's sceptical philosophy had led. Where do you go once experience has become a 'single sharp impression' which is 'gone while we try to apprehend it'?

Pater is forced to get a second wind from 'philosophy' which, he claims, 'startle[s]' us into 'sharp and eager observation'.<sup>5</sup> But Pater's 'observation' is not the same as that in the philosophy of Locke and Hume: impressions of sensation, ideas. He means the aesthetic contemplation of beautiful things. The impression is clearly not a sufficiently reliable vehicle for this new, pressing 'observation', so Pater looks elsewhere to a range of revitalizing synonyms, associated with life, fertility and the senses, including 'observation', as we have seen, 'outline[s]', 'images', 'sensations', 'pulses', a 'stirring of the senses', 'mood', 'tone', 'insight', 'pulse', 'senses', 'passion', the 'attitude' of another's face, 'pulsations', a 'quicken sense of life', the 'fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness', 'one desperate effort to see and touch', and, above all, 'moments'. All of these, loosely speaking, are synonyms for the impression, or what the impression may offer, but they are given an aesthetic turn, 'impression[s] of beauty or pleasure', as the preface calls them (Pater 1873: ix). Like Hume, Pater conceives of impressions as not only sensual, but emotional and reflective, including 'intellectual excitement' and 'passion'. Despite this, the most intense impressions, or, strictly speaking 'moments', seem to be visual: Pater asks

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<sup>5</sup> In the fourth edition of 1893, philosophy not only startles but 'rouses' the human spirit, this time to 'a life of constant and eager observation' (Pater 1980: 188).

how, within our ‘counted number of pulses’, we may ‘*see* in them all that is to be *seen* in them by the finest senses?’ (italics added).

Explicit, nominal ‘impressions’ now suddenly return for one final appearance in the conclusion in a more Lockean manifestation, as an antidote to metaphysics and inherited ideas. ‘Courting new impressions’, seeing and touching, is contrasted with ‘acquiescing’ in some ‘abstract morality’, ‘theory, or idea, or system’, and ‘what is only conventional’, which must be resisted if it ever demands ‘the sacrifice of any part of this experience’.<sup>6</sup> Pater’s ‘end’ is ‘Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself’. Such suspicion of metaphysics is common to many of the empiricist thinkers examined in the previous chapter: Locke, Hume, Mach, William James, as well as the painterly and literary impressionists of chapter one. ‘Failure is to form habits: for habit is relative to a stereotyped world’ which is soon contrasted with ‘discriminat[ing] every moment some passionate attitude in those about us’. True perception registers difference everywhere, unique impressions which theories would homogenize: ‘it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike’. Yet, like William James with his theory of pragmatism, Pater does not suggest that theory be abandoned all together: ‘Theories, religious or philosophical ideas, as points of view, instruments of criticism, may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us’.<sup>7</sup> We must assess theory against impressions, by collecting more data: ‘What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions’.

The peroration of the conclusion, its final paragraph, refers to ‘moments’, with which it began, rather than to impressions. ‘Moment’ is the single most common noun

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<sup>6</sup> The 1893 text replaces ‘abstract morality’ with ‘abstract theory’ (Pater 1980: 189).

<sup>7</sup> The 1893 text replaces ‘Theories, religious or philosophical ideas’ with ‘Philosophical theories or ideas’ (Pater 1980: 189). This, and the previous revision, may be an attempt to steer the conclusion away from explicitly religious ground, in the light of the controversy that greeted the first edition.

in the conclusion (appearing eleven times), about twice as common as ‘experience’ or ‘impression’, neither of which appear in the final paragraph. Perception (impressions) is so directed towards mitigating time, that it becomes itself a unit of time. If our life is purely an ‘interval’ (repeated four times in the final paragraph), comprising ‘moments’, with nothing beyond, ‘our one chance is in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time’. The source of these ‘pulsations’ – in effect, impressions – suddenly shifts from life to art, from the beauty of ‘frost and sun’, ‘the hills or sea’, ‘the face of one’s friend’, to the work of Voltaire, to which the ailing Rousseau turned on what he thought was his deathbed. It is ‘art and song [...] the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art’s sake’ that is the best source of the ‘wisdom’ which Pater is offering.<sup>8</sup> Art is the antidote to Pater’s bleak, Humean scepticism, which, Beaumont, a recent editor of Pater, has suggested was also inspired by the evolutionists, Darwin and Spencer (Pater 2010: 178).

Pater apparently shifts his focus from sensations, albeit aesthetically discriminated, to reflection, ‘the intellectual excitement’ of literature which will ‘make as much as possible of the interval that remained’. He stops referring to ‘experience itself’, calling ‘passion’ the ‘fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness’. Art offers the finest form of intellectual experience, promising ‘the highest quality to your moments as they pass’. Yet this shift from sensation to reflection is hesitant: Pater describes how Voltaire awakened in Rousseau the ‘literary sense’; he mentions ‘passion(s)’ three times, and the ‘ecstasy and sorrow of love’, as well as a ‘quickened sense of life’. Despite this persistence of the sensual, the

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<sup>8</sup> The 1893 text replaces ‘the love of art for art’s sake’ with ‘the love of art for its own sake’ (Pater 1980: 190). Hill implies that Pater’s motive in offering a variant to this famous phrase is stylistic, noting that he had previously used it in an essay of 1878 (Pater 1980: 457).

impression is not invoked in this rallying cry for art, presumably as it has too many reductive and sceptical associations.

Whereas in the conclusion to *The Renaissance* humans were rendered weak in the face of a world of transient elements, elements which, when reflected on, shrank to become simply our impressions of the outside world, its preface invites us to master this situation by prolonging, intensifying and enriching those impressions, and relying with confidence on them as an index to the outside world. Prefacing Pater's critical essays, it offers a methodology of aesthetic criticism, based partly on an empiricist understanding of how the mind works. The impression is again subjective, an aspect of the subject, but it is produced within us by an external object, like a work of art. Its uniqueness as ours, its idiosyncrasy, rather than suggesting a disorienting solipsism, bolsters the self. Rather than being lost as soon as it is apprehended, the impression persists within us, evolving over time. As a result of these characteristics, it is analysis of the impression that offers the most concrete definition of beauty – the goal of the aesthetic critic. Pater again displays an antimetaphysical preference for experience in place of the fruits of experience that a theory of art might offer:

To define beauty not in the most abstract, but in the most concrete terms possible, not to find a universal formula for it, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics.

'To see the object as in itself it really is,' has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly. (Pater 1873: vii-viii)<sup>9</sup>

Pater is quoting Matthew Arnold's essay, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1864). For Arnold the 'critical effort [is] the endeavour, in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it

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<sup>9</sup> All unreferenced quotations in this and the following five paragraphs are to Pater's preface (Pater 1873: vii-xiv). The 1893 text replaces 'not to find a universal formula for it' with 'to find, not its universal formula' (Pater 1980: xix).

really is', '*a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world*' (Arnold 1921: 1, 38). Arnold believed that intellectual effort in England had become too partisan, too lazy, and that this had compromised its rigour, its ability to see and to assess objectively. Arnold's desire 'to see the object as in itself it really is' may echo Locke's similar injunction 250 years earlier, which also contrasts the veracity of personal observation with speculation and hearsay: 'The best way to come to truth being to examine things as really they are, and not to conclude they are as we fancy ourselves or have been taught by others to imagine' (Locke 1961: 128-129). Pater, by contrast, believed that precision in criticism came from isolating and cultivating one's own subjective, partisan response, one's impression. Although Pater apparently accepts Arnold's empiricist precept, he introduces an extra, introspective stage which may indefinitely defer knowing the object itself. To know the object, one must know oneself.

Pater's impression persists within the mind, but is otherwise treated by the mind just as the idea is by Locke and Hume: the mind then reflects on it, an internal image of the object, a kind of Lockean internal sensation. Locke and Hume's two-stage conception of reasoning as sensation followed by reflection is matched by Pater's description of the aesthetic critic 'experienc[ing] these impressions strongly, and driv[ing] directly at the analysis and discrimination of them'.

This interdependence of subject and object recalls our discussion of Brentano's text, published a year after *The Renaissance*, in particular his assertion 'where you cannot speak of an object, you cannot speak of a subject either' (Brentano 1973: 90-91). Pater's version of this is that where you cannot speak of the subject, you cannot speak of the object either; both are protophenomenological, in their conviction that the subject and the object are held in an intentional relationship – but

with different emphases. Pater's method – trying to understand beauty as a mental phenomenon by exploring the mind – owes something to Locke and Hume's use of introspection to analyse perceiving and thinking.

For Pater, one analyses the art object's virtue by analysing the impression produced, asking, 'What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence and under its influence?' Such subjectivism explains Pater's early assertion that 'Beauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative'.

Another way to describe this subjectivism is to state that the impression includes a large contribution from the subject. The aesthetic critic can increase the 'depth and variety' of his impressions, his facts or data, through 'education', though he must already possess 'the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects'. 'To enjoy [...] to discriminate' one's impression, to 'realise', to 'analyse', to 'explain' the 'influence' of one's impression, to 'reduc[e] it to its elements', 'to distinguish' it, all posit an active subject. Pater figures both sensation – 'to see and touch' – and reflection – 'to realise' – as active. By contrast, as we have seen, for Locke and Hume, the mind is quite passive when perceiving, though more active during both Lockean 'reflection' and Humean 'reasoning' (Locke 1961: 130; Hume 1960: 73). The method of the aesthetic critic is also employed by James's protagonists during recognition: Isabel, Strether, Milly, and Maggie all discriminate, realise, and analyse their impressions which deepen during this process of internal perception. For Pater and for James, the impression remains an impression during this process, whereas for empiricists it would become an idea.

Despite all this subjectivism, Pater describes his critic as though he is an associationist scientist who seeks the simplest rules to explain phenomena. The preface recapitulates the scientific language of the conclusion. It is the object's 'virtue' or 'quality' which allows it to produce an 'impression of beauty or pleasure' within us:

And the function of the aesthetic critic is to distinguish, analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced. His end is reached when he has disengaged that virtue, and noted it, as a chemist notes some natural element, for himself and others[.]

Locke argued that the 'secondary qualities' of an object are its powers to produce a sensation within us; unlike 'primary qualities', secondary qualities only exist in objects when they are perceived (Locke 1961:105-106). 'This influence he feels and wishes to explain, analysing it, and reducing it to its elements'. The results of this enquiry have the status of scientific fact: 'The answers to these questions are the original facts with which the aesthetic critic has to do [...] one must realise such primary data for one's self or not at all'. The ultimate goal of the investigation is to find out in whom stirred 'the genius, the sentiment of the period' which will often involve, within an artist's work, 'disengag[ing] this virtue from the commoner elements' by isolating the crystals of genius.

Now we have looked at both the conclusion and the preface, we can see that 'The Art of Fiction' is much influenced by both. All three texts look inwards, in acts of empiricist introspection, celebrating temperaments and modes of perception which are intensely receptive and observant, primarily visual, acknowledging the variety of the world (of 'persons, things, situations' in the conclusion, of art in the preface and James's essay), and they all resist any theories that might inhibit this. The impression is the vehicle for such perception in the preface and James's essay; in the conclusion

its sceptical overtones force Pater to substitute synonyms for it, but they nevertheless clearly name a Humean impression, albeit aestheticized.

Comparing the conclusion with ‘The Art of Fiction’, we can see that experience comprises impressions, and that they both celebrate the aesthetic ‘moment’. Pater’s conviction that impressions of the moment can redeem life is the conclusion’s greatest legacy to James’s texts: to Strether and to Milly, impressions, as they do in Pater, offer concentrated, intense experience to those whose time is running out. Both, at times, live for these moments. But in James’s text this moment is the occasion for something beyond itself, Ritchie’s act of creation. In Pater’s text identification of the impression reduces and unravels experience, whereas in James’s it expands it. Pater’s impression is here associated with isolation, James’s with Ritchie’s imaginative sympathy. James’s spider-web catches impressions, vital but not transient, and holds onto them; Pater’s hand cannot even grasp an impression as it disappears. Ritchie is trying ‘to guess the unseen from the seen’, Pater is confined to the world of sensation. James’s subject Ritchie is active: she *converts* the ‘pulses’ of the air into ‘revelations’. Pater simply sits in the place where he might receive the most ‘pulses’, trying to ‘be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite’: his ‘moments’ involve ‘some form grow[ing] perfect’, ‘courting new impressions’ (as the painterly impressionists did, too), whereas Ritchie receives and creates an impression at the same time.

Looking at the preface alongside ‘The Art of Fiction’, James’s greatest debt is the notion that the impression can offer imaginative liberation from a constrictive referentiality, while remaining within a broadly empiricist framework. The impression, as an imaginative medium, offers both a freedom within the task of ‘see[ing] the object as in itself it really is’, the critic’s job, and within ‘represent[ing]

life', the novelist's job, as James described it in the revised version of 'The Art of Fiction' in *Partial Portraits* (James 1888b: 378).<sup>10</sup> Artistic value, for both, is assessed by the intensity of impression: for James, a novel's value is determined by its 'intensity' as an 'impression of life'; for Pater, the critic's qualification is not having an 'abstract definition of beauty', but 'the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects', which James calls 'the condition of feeling life', and, in the 1888 version of the essay, 'a capacity for receiving straight impressions' (James 1884: 510; James 1888b: 399). But each recognizes that values are relative, too: for Pater, 'beauty [...] is relative', while, for James, 'reality has a myriad forms' (James 1884: 509).

Throughout *The Renaissance*, there is an interplay, and tension, between aesthetic pleasure and knowledge. Sometimes pleasure and knowledge reinforce each other: in the preface, it is analysis that helps us 'to enjoy what has been well done in art', while our 'education' increases our 'susceptibility' to these 'impression[s] of pleasure'; in the conclusion, it is through 'discriminat[ion]' that we experience 'some form grow[ing] perfect in hand and face', a 'choicer' 'tone on the hills or sea', an 'attractive' 'mood of passion', in short, 'ecstasy'. Yet pleasure and knowledge are also in conflict, and here we turn to the essays of *The Renaissance* more generally. Pater's pleasure as a critic clearly derives from his imaginative augmentation of facts: this is why he had to remove the word 'History' from the title of subsequent editions. The objectivity of his impressions is always threatened by his romantic ideation and imaginative extensions, far beyond the extent to which Locke and Hume described perception as influenced by judgement. As we will see, this tension between pleasure

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<sup>10</sup> Iser's description of Pater's impression is reminiscent of James's definition of criticism in his preface to *What Maisie Knew*, discussed at the beginning of chapter one: 'it transforms the object through the act of grasping it' (Iser 1987: 44-5).

and knowledge is particularly pronounced in Strether, for whom ‘knowledge is soon contaminated by desire’ (Cave 1990: 433).

Pater prefers his own impressions to ‘facts’, as he tells us in ‘The School of Giorgione’ (published in a periodical in 1877, and added to the third edition of 1888), in which he gives perhaps the most frank account of his method and its aims. Whereas we might think of facts as the ‘vérité’, Pater sees impressions as the ‘vraie vérité’:

Something like this seems to me to be the *vraie vérité* about Giorgione, if I may adopt a serviceable expression, by which the French recognise those more liberal and durable impressions which, in respect of any really considerable person or subject, anything that has at all intricately occupied men’s attention, lie beyond, and must supplement, the narrower range of the strictly ascertainable facts about it. (Pater 1980: 121-122)

Rather than reaching facts through the impression, as an empiricist might, impressions here lie beyond the narrower range of fact. In *The Ambassadors*, Strether, through his impressions on the spot, reaches a *vraie vérité* which is beyond the strictly ascertainable facts that he can communicate to Mrs Newsome by letter. Pater laments the ‘science’ of modern scholarship, its preoccupation with ‘strictly ascertained facts’, whose zeal has diminished Giorgione’s extant output almost to the scale of ‘Sordello’s one fragment of lovely verse’ (Pater 1980: 112, 121, 112). But Pater is not going to let his impressions of Giorgione be impoverished by the intervention of historical fact: ‘For the aesthetic philosopher, therefore, over and above the real Giorgione and his authentic extant works, there remains the *Giorgionesque* also – an influence, a spirit or type in art’ (Pater 1980: 116). Pater makes the figures of the past more real for us by invoking their ‘spirit’, or mood, here, the ‘*Giorgionesque*’, through his impressions of them. These impressions, insistently spinning narratives around artists of the past and their works, make their own demands of facts and truth: of Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*, Pater observes, ‘but for express historical testimony, we might fancy that this was but his ideal lady’ (Pater 1873: 117). Writing of the style

that Leonardo inherited from his teacher, Pater suggests: ‘Much of it there must have been in that lost picture of “Paradise”’, that ‘must’ indicating how the logic of Pater’s own narratives fills in historical gaps, like lost pictures (Pater 1873: 95). Most disregarding of fact is Pater’s imaginative sympathy, which attributes emotions and motivations to his subjects, to the extent that inferred human interest sometimes comes before cultural or historical interest, as when he brilliantly but scandalously suggests that Botticelli’s Madonnas ‘shrink from the pressure of the divine child, and plead in unmistakable undertones for a warmer, lower humanity’, his narrative impulse transforming the various Madonnas into a single dramatic sequence (Pater 1873: 50). Pater’s own speculations are so interweaved with historical fact as to make distinguishing them very difficult, his tone remaining confidently confiding, even at the greatest pitch of speculation, just as William James pointed to many occasions in which our sensation is inextricable from our ideation. Ritchie’s imaginative speculation about the youths through her impression is repeated by Strether’s and Milly’s, both of whom are inveterate romancers. But, as we will see, the impression’s imaginative capacity can also be used in a much more measured and analytic way, by, for example, Maggie.

Pater directs us to a fictional treatment of the impression, in a footnote to the conclusion of the third edition of 1888 of *The Renaissance*, which explains that he had omitted the conclusion in the second edition ‘as I conceived it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall [...] I have dealt more fully in *Marius the Epicurean* with the thoughts suggested by it’ (Pater 1980: 186). For Denis Donoghue,

the main reason [for writing *Marius*] was to refute the charge, levelled against *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, that [Pater] was a hedonist, an epicurean, and – the implication was clear – that he instructed his undergraduates at Brasenose to live for pleasure alone. (Donoghue 1995: 192)

*Marius* places the conclusion's pursuit of perfected impressions as an end in itself as one of a number of intervening stages in Marius's spiritual journey from follower of Classical religion to Christian.

Marius is half materialist, half spiritualist, or half empiricist, half idealist, as the book's subtitle indicates: *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*. He enjoys the here and now – art, the visible world – while retaining a Platonic or Wordsworthian sense of powers beyond the sensible. By locating him in Rome in the second century AD, Pater allows him to explore a wide range of intellectual and spiritual systems: Greek and Roman philosophy, Classical and Christian religion. *Marius* implicitly categorises the impressions of *The Renaissance* as Epicurean and empiricist, contextualizing them philosophically and historically. In telling the story of a man, it also rationalizes them psychologically.

In his boyhood Marius worships ascetically the traditional household gods of the old Roman religion. He then discovers Plato. The death of his best friend, Flavian, installs a grim materialism in place of his idealism. He then reads those authors chiefly concerned with the soul, Epicurus, Lucretius and especially Heraclitus. From Heraclitus, who provided the epigraph for the conclusion, Marius acquires a Humean 'scepticism' which finds that our 'false impression of permanence or fixity in things' belies 'those fluid impressions' which mean that the visible world is in constant flux (Pater 1885a: 139, 140, 139). He then reads Aristippus, of Cyrene, a follower of Socrates, who restates Heraclitus's belief in '“the subjectivity of knowledge”' – 'our knowledge is limited to what we feel' – in ways which clearly allude to Hume (Pater 1885a: 148, 149). What Marius particularly relishes in Aristippus is his unusually positive reaction to Heraclitus, his 'perpetual, inextinguishable thirst after experience' (Pater 1885a: 147).

Under the influence of various of these philosophers, but especially Aristippus, Marius formulates his own ‘New Cyrenaicism’ which is a philosophy identical to that of Pater’s conclusion: since ‘all that is real in our experience [is] but a series of fleeting impressions’, we must consider ‘how such actual moments as they passed might be made to yield [...] their utmost, by the most dexterous training of [...] capacities’ (Pater 1885a: 157). But, unlike the conclusion, the yielding ‘to the impressions of a direct and concrete experience’ is shown to be a reasoned response to experience, as well as a thoughtful synthesis of centuries of thought: the ethics of the conclusion are shown to derive from a robust epistemology (Pater 1885a: 152).<sup>11</sup> Marius is a new Aristippus, responding positively to the skepticism of Heraclitus and Hume respectively, proving that ‘every age of European thought has had its Cyrenaics or Epicureans [...] *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!*’ (Pater 1885a: 155-156). But *Marius* differs from *The Renaissance* in its relocation of emphasis from ‘experience’ to ‘a wide and various education[,] [...] directed especially to the enlarging and refinement of the receptive powers’, ‘culture’ (art, literature, and music) (Pater 1885a: 158).<sup>12</sup> The sensuality is more specular than bodily: ‘the true “aesthetic culture” would be realisable as a new form of the “contemplative life”, founding its claim on the essential “blessedness” of “vision” – the vision of perfect men and things’ (Pater 1885a: 159).<sup>13</sup> Such a contemplative life offers not simply exquisite sight, but ‘the real business of education – insight, insight through culture, into all that the present moment holds in trust for us, as we stand so briefly in its presence’ (Pater 1885a: 154).

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<sup>11</sup> Library Edition (*LE*) replaces ‘to the impressions of a direct and concrete experience’ with ‘to the impressions of an experience, concrete and direct’ (Pater 1921b: 141).

<sup>12</sup> *LE* replaces ‘a wide and various education[,] [...] directed especially to the enlarging and refinement of the receptive powers’ with ‘a wide, a complete, education [...] directed especially to the expansion and refinement of the power of reception’ (Pater 1921b: 147).

<sup>13</sup> *LE* replaces ‘essential’ with ‘intrinsic’ (Pater 1921b: 148).

*Marius* further contextualizes the thought of the conclusion by showing how Marius's New Cyrenaicism is ultimately dwarfed by the ascetic Roman Stoicism of both the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius and his tutor Cornelius Fronto. Fronto's speech leads Pater's narrator to prepare us for Marius's own disillusionment by pointing out the shortcomings of Cyrenaicism: it is 'the characteristic philosophy of youth – ardent, but narrow in its survey' because it distortingly focuses on only one 'aspect of experience', 'the beauty of the world and the brevity of man's life in it' (Pater 1885b: 16). Above all, the Cyrenaicists, the narrator tells us, sacrificed 'sympathy', 'a thousand possible sympathies, and things only to be enjoyed through sympathy, from which they detached themselves, in the mere intellectual pride of loyalty to a theory that would take nothing for granted, and assent to no approximate or hypothetical truths' (Pater 1885b: 25).<sup>14</sup> Had they allowed themselves 'a little more of such "walking by faith", a little more of such reasonable "assent"', they might have profited from the old Greek religion and morality (Pater 1885b: 28). Recapitaluting Fronto's long speech, the narrator notes that, beyond the 'full stream of refined sensation', one may experience more through an 'an expansion, of sympathy' which joins one to a larger system, to humanity, to things like 'friendship and patriotism' (Pater 1885b: 32, 34, 27).

Marius's burgeoning idealism, shadowing, but short of, the narrator's revelation, is given a new Christian lease of life, as he begins to suspect that his best friend Cornelius is a Christian. Witnessing a Christmas ceremony, Marius feels spiritually satisfied as never before. The two are captured by Romans, but Marius sacrifices himself for his friend, almost becoming a Christian martyr. There is a

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<sup>14</sup> *LE* replaces 'in the mere intellectual pride of loyalty to a theory that would take nothing for granted' with 'in intellectual pride, in loyalty to a mere theory that would take nothing for granted' (Pater 1921a: 22).

suggestion that his powers of reception have been honed throughout his life in order to experience a Christian vision on his deathbed (Pater 1885b: 239-245). His final thought is to remember all the people he has loved: ‘In the bare sense of having loved he seemed to find, even amid this foundering of the ship, “that on which his soul might assuredly rest and depend” ’ (Pater 1885b: 245).

Put bluntly, *Marius* puts the impression of *The Renaissance* in a moral context, in James’s sense of the word: it shows the human conditions in which impressions become important to a character, but also those in which they may be inadequate. As we will see, one way to read the end of *The Wings of the Dove*, and the whole of *The Golden Bowl*, is as James’s *Marius*: impressions have a role but they are subordinated to a wider morality.

### 3.1.2 Oscar Wilde

Wilde was hugely influenced by Pater, referring to *The Renaissance* in 1890 as ‘the book which has had such a strange influence over my life’, ‘the golden book of spirit and sense, the holy writ of beauty’ (Wilde quoted in Chai 1990: 96; Wilde quoted in Danson 1997: 15). The ‘new Hedonism’ prophesied evangelically by Lord Henry Wotton for the benefit of Dorian Gray is entirely indebted to Pater’s conclusion: ‘its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience [...] to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment’ (Wilde 2005: 279).

Like Pater, Wilde finds the finest moments, the finest impressions, in art, and that they may only be fully appreciated by the ‘aesthetic critic’ (Wilde 2007a: 199). But Wilde suggests in ‘The Portrait of Mr W. H.’ that such a view involves a disquieting determinism and passivity: ‘were we at the mercy of such impressions as

Art or Life chose to give us?’ (quoted in Danson 1997: 40). Wilde’s answer to this is ‘no’: first, we should not seek our impressions in life but in art, and, second, we can ourselves, as ‘the critic as artist’, be the author of the impressions we find in art.

Wilde takes Pater’s impressionistic criticism an imaginative step further: the job of the critic, the critic as artist, is to translate his impression of the art work into a new form, even to reveal things in the work which the artist has not put there. Just as Wilde shows how the critic can become as creative as the artist by wresting control of the impression, James, in the major phase, shows how dupes can practise still more creative deceptions than their deceivers, by appropriating and reshaping impressions.

Wilde followed Pater in declaring that ‘the secret of life is art’ (Wilde quoted in Aslin 1969: 99). Yet for Pater art offered us a ‘quickened sense of life’, while for Wilde art could create a new life superior to the old (Pater 1873: 212). For Pater in *The Renaissance*, art offered the same sensory pleasures as life, only more intense, life which could already be aesthetic in itself; until its last paragraph, Pater’s conclusion is more concerned with ‘some tone on the hills or sea’ or ‘the face of one’s friend’ than the ‘work of the artist’s hands’ (Pater 1873: 210, 211). Art guarantees the intensifier ‘always’ in the maxim ‘To burn always with this hard gem-like flame’, distilling the formal beauty inherent in life (Pater 1873: 210). By contrast, for Wilde, art offered what life lacked: ‘Life! Don’t let us go to life for our fulfilment or our experience. It is a thing [...] without that fine correspondence of form and spirit which is the only thing that can satisfy the artistic and critical temperament’ (Wilde 2007a: 173).

To understand Wilde’s extension of Pater’s impressionistic criticism we have to understand first Wilde’s conception of art, for he believed criticism to be an art. Wilde’s advocacy of a criticism which created rather than reflected matches his

advocacy of an art which created new worlds rather than imitating our existing one. ‘The Decay of Lying’ (1889) is a provocative attack on the success of nineteenth-century literary realism: ‘Facts [...] have invaded the kingdom of Romance. Their chilling touch is over everything’ (Wilde 2007b: 87). Instead, ‘what I am pleading for is Lying in art [...] lying and poetry are arts’, for ‘Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art [...]’ (Wilde 2007b: 75, 76, 103). Wilde’s mouthpiece, Vivian, disparages the ‘substitution of an imitative for a creative medium’ which emerged in the time of late Shakespeare when life began to get the upper hand over art (Wilde 2007b: 85). This will be remedied when ‘Art, breaking from the prison-house of realism, will run to greet’ the ‘liar’, and ‘Romance [...] return to the land’ (Wilde 2007b: 88, 101). In his prefaces James is keen to keep art and facts apart by, partly, at times, reducing the impression of life to a raw ingredient. In *The Golden Bowl*, the strategy that guides Maggie’s performative impressions is the repudiation of fact, which she hopes will restore her ailing marriage.

Art should not be imitative of life since ‘Life is terribly deficient in form’ and is, ‘from the artistic point of view’, a ‘failure’, in the words of another of Wilde’s aesthetic manifestoes, ‘The Critic as Artist’ (1891) (Wilde 2007a: 166, 167). Instead, ‘Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself. She is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance. She is a veil, rather than a mirror’ (Wilde 2007b: 89-90). As a result, ‘it is the function of Literature to create, from the rough material of actual existence, a new world that will be more marvellous, more enduring, and more true than the world that common eyes look upon’ (Wilde 2007a: 152). The notion of the critic as artist, which recalls William’s metaphor of the sculptor of experience, extends this principle to criticism.

Yet it is not just new worlds that are sustained by art, but our existing one, too. In ‘The Decay of Lying’, in a mischievous assault on imitative art, Wilde argues that ‘Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life’ (Wilde 2007b: 102). In fact, ‘external Nature also imitates Art’ since Art ‘offers’ Life ‘certain beautiful forms’ (Wilde 2007b: 103, 102). Life’s manner of expression turns out to be the manner in which life affects us, in other words, how we construe our impressions of life: ‘the only effects that she can show us are effects that we have already seen through poetry, or in paintings’ (Wilde 2007b: 103).<sup>15</sup> As an example of how our perception is acculturated in this way, Wilde in each of the two essays cites the impressionist painters, perhaps ironically, since the aim of the impressionists was to restore to us a naïve sensation, free of conditioning by cultural conventions:

Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? [...] The extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to this particular school of Art [...] Nature [...] is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. (Wilde 2007b: 95)

Wilde’s point explains why James’s impressions of the English countryside in chapter one are irredeemably aesthetic: when faced with the real thing, he can’t forget all the paintings he has seen. The deceivers of his major phase remake the worlds of their dupes by similarly conditioning their perception. Such conditioning fails during recognition, and the first shock of recognition is often a raw impression, apparently unconditioned. But some critics, reflecting Wilde’s point about the conditioning conventions of impressionism itself, as we will see, even argue that James’s visual descriptions are at times inflected by impressionism.

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<sup>15</sup> ‘The desire for a world where we freely make and remake the surfaces that constitute our most significant subjective reality’ underlies the positions Wilde takes in ‘The Decay of Lying’ (Danson 1997: 41).

Criticism is able to be more creative than art as it is an even less imitative medium, in other words, it is more of an impression:

I would say that the highest Criticism, being the purest form of personal impression, is in its way more creative than creation, as it has least reference to any standard external to itself, and is, in fact, its own reason for existing, and, as the Greeks would put it, in itself, and to itself, an end. (Wilde 2007a: 154)

Here we have *l'impression pour l'impression*, more autonomous even than *l'art pour l'art*. If James said that the novel is an impression, Wilde says that criticism is an impression of an impression, or a criticism of a criticism, since Arnold was not wrong in calling literature a 'criticism of life' (Wilde 2007a: 142). The critic is at an extra remove from life: 'the critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticises as the artist does to the visible world' (Wilde 2007a: 153). As a result, criticism 'is never trammelled by any shackles of verisimilitude. [...] One may appeal from fiction unto fact. But from the soul there is no appeal' (Wilde 2007a: 154). By contrast Pater argued, in 1877 in 'The School of Giorgione', that one of criticism's jobs is to 'estimate the degree in which a given work of art fulfils its responsibilities to its special material' (Pater 1980: 102).

Wilde's critic does not simply analyse the impression made on him by a work of art, as Pater and Aristotle do: '*The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things*' (Wilde 2005: 167). Whereas Pater tactfully postponed Arnold's objective of 'seeing the object as in itself it really is' until one knew one's impression of the object, Wilde apparently cancels the objective, altogether, his more robust approach to Arnold evident in the original title of the essay, 'The True Function and Value of Criticism'.

[I]t has been said [...] that the proper aim of Criticism is to see the object as in itself it really is. But this is a very serious error, and takes no cognizance of Criticism's most perfect form, which is in its essence purely subjective, and seeks to reveal its own secret and not the secret of another. For the highest

Criticism deals with art not as expressive but as impressive purely. (Wilde 2007a: 155-156)

In chapter four, James's description of Maisie in his preface will cast her in terms similar to these: she invests her own transformative meaning in the tawdry scenes of her home life. Here fully-realized subjectivity is no longer the precondition for objectivity, as it was for Pater, but is an end in itself: the impression is no longer an instrument. Wilde follows Pater in dealing with art as impressive, rather than expressive. But, rather than the self being the measure of art, as Pater advocated, for Wilde art becomes the occasion for self-knowledge and self-expression. Wilde's impression seems hardly to bear the imprint of the world beyond the critic's head: if 'the highest criticism [...] is, the record of one's own soul', and the critic's 'sole aim is to chronicle his own impressions', then one's impressions simply reflect oneself (Wilde 2007a: 154, 155).

Perhaps one's impressions also become oneself. For Wilde, when 'the critical and cultured spirits [...] *seek to gain their impressions almost entirely from what Art has touched*', they are living a 'contemplative life, the life that has for its aim not *doing* but *being*, and not *being* merely, but *becoming* – that is what the critical spirit can give us', echoing Pater on this last point (Wilde 2007a: 166, 178). The acquisition of an impression involves a change of state for the subject, rather than an action, as James's spider-web becomes more dense with particles. Lord Henry Wotton tells Dorian that 'the aim of life is self-development', 'to realize one's nature perfectly', while Gilbert declares in 'The Critic as Artist' that the critic's aim is the 'perfecting of himself', 'to him the culture of the century will see itself realized' (Wilde 2005: 183; Wilde 2007a: 196). To realise the critic's personality is criticism's aim, but '*to reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim*' (Wilde 2005: 167). Criticism is 'the only civilized form of autobiography' (Wilde 2007a: 154). Milly's spectatorship and

criticism of the performative impressions put on for her by Kate and Densher soon become an act of self-dramatization, as she takes their impressions and lives them as her own, fully realizing the aesthetic potential within herself and their view of her.

There is, surely, a degree of activity when a critic translates his impression of beautiful things into a new material. The impression may become equally beautiful, or more so, in the hands of critics such as Ruskin and Pater who translate their visual impressions into words through ekphrasis. ‘Who cares whether Mr. Ruskin’s views on Turner are sound or not’ if his prose is ‘as great a work of art’ as Turner’s sunsets (Wilde 2007a: 156)? ‘Who, again, cares whether Mr. Pater has put into the portrait of Monna Lisa something that Lionardo never dreamed of’, if Pater’s prose makes the picture ‘more wonderful to us than it really is’ (Wilde 2007a: 156, 157)? In this way, the best criticism

treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation. It does not confine itself [...] to discovering the real intention of the artist and accepting that as final. And in this it is right, for the meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as much in the soul of him who looks at it, as it was in his soul who wrought it. (Wilde 2007a: 157)

As explicit communication becomes more fraught in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, impressions begin to replace language. At these points, Milly and Maggie are forced into ekphrasis themselves, decoding gestures into speech in their heads. Such moments are also opportunities for their creative expression, for them to take control of the meaning of events, if only within their own consciousnesses.

### **3.2 The Performative**

The contexts analysed so far offer neither an explanation nor sufficient tools for trying to explain the performative impressions of the major phase, when characters make impressions on others. Empiricist and aesthetic impressions are fundamentally impressions received on the mind, rather than made on the page or the canvas.

Wilde's recklessly creative impressions, for all his celebration of the 'creative' over the 'imitative', are still the critic's, however subjective, still somehow a response to the artist's impressions. The impressionisms examined in chapter one might offer a set of principles for examining how impressions are made by deceivers and escapists in the late fiction, or how impressions are made by James and his representations of the exemplary novelist. But the impressions made by impressionism are still reactive and imitative. An impressionist painting makes an impression for the viewer by sharing the painter's impression with the viewer; as does the impressionist novel. But James's characters are not philosophers, or critics. The making of the deceitful impression is perhaps less reactive and imitative than these, more purely expressive. In looking at the late fiction in chapters five, six and the coda, I will find theories of performativity useful, those from speech act theory (Austin), deconstruction (Derrida, de Man), and queer theory (Butler). They offer a theory not only of how artistic impressions are made, but situate these within a spectrum of wider impressions made, including artistic, non-artistic, verbal, gestural, deceitful, and creative, which is helpful when analysing James's extended analogies of deception and fiction-making. A theory which conceives of language as action is useful for examining lies and deceit meant to influence the actions of others. These impressions are performative in that, like the words of Austin's title, they 'do things'. They also investigate signs that exist on the boundary between the imitative and the creative. But, as we will see, they also offer a way of conceptualizing how impressions are received: how the world is acknowledged or described, rather than intervened in; but also how, in acts of creative reading, registering the world may itself be creative, which is useful for understanding how the gullibility of dupes can actively contribute to collaborative fictions. Above all, they capture the insidiously creative capacity of the performative impressions of

James's late fiction to create an alternative world which pretends to be one which already exists; and they explain why repeated surface actions can create an apparently originary depth underneath the surface, how doing can become being.

### 3.2.1 J. L. Austin

The word 'performative' became popular following J. L. Austin's lectures at Harvard in 1955 (the William James lectures, as it happens). These were subsequently published as *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), and were based on lectures he gave to undergraduates at Oxford, 'Words and Deeds'. Austin wanted to account for a type of utterance that, although in the indicative, is not a statement. For example, saying 'I do' in the marriage ceremony, naming a ship, bequeathing something in a will, or making a bet (Austin 1962: 5).<sup>16</sup> In these instances, 'to utter the sentence [...] is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it' (Austin 1962: 6). Austin described such utterances as 'performative', 'indicat[ing] that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action' (Austin 1962: 6). He called utterances which make a statement or describe things, 'constative'. In doing this, Austin challenged 'an age-old assumption in philosophy – the assumption that to say something [...] is always and simply to *state* something' (Austin 1962: 12). 'The constative utterance is true or false and the performative utterance is happy or unhappy' (Austin 1962: 54). For example, if I report to you that my first marriage took place on a Friday, this constative utterance is true or false; but, if I say 'I do', this will be either an effective ('happy'), or ineffective ('unhappy' or 'void'), performative utterance, depending on whether a range of conditions are met, such as my not being related to my intended (Austin

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<sup>16</sup> Austin's incorrect description of the performative in the marriage ceremony as 'I do' instead of 'I will' has been much discussed.

1962: 11-34).<sup>17</sup> *How to Do Things with Words* described, then, how the use of certain words, within an appropriate context, could ‘do things’. Such actions were called ‘speech-acts’, and so Austin inaugurated ‘speech act theory’ (Austin 1962: 149). Austin also described how performatives could function in the absence of words: for example, when a cricket umpire raises his finger, or a judge puts on a black hood.

How can this help us understand James’s performative impressions? Are these not subtle displays whose suggestiveness is used to mislead, rather than any kind of definitive action which all present understand? Austin’s theory is most useful when the boundary between performative and constative begins to give way. As he begins to tackle more subtle examples, Austin struggles to define the performative either lexically or grammatically. Austin’s conclusion is that ‘every genuine speech act is both’ performative and constative, other than ‘extreme marginal cases’: since statements ‘are selected and uttered for a purpose’, ‘stating is [usually] performing an act’ (Austin 1962: 146, 144, 138). Similarly, Jamesian performative impressions, like performatives, are performed for a purpose, and are not true or false, but, like constatives, they also serve as a kind of statement or report, if often a misleading one. Their deceptively persuasive power comes since they hover between being constative and performative; they are usually subtler than bare-faced lies. If they are successful in their deception, they tend to influence people to behave in certain ways: they are ‘acts’, in this sense.

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<sup>17</sup> These conditions are that there must be ‘an accepted conventional procedure’; the persons and circumstances must be appropriate; the ‘procedure must be executed by all participants correctly and completely’; the person must have the ‘thoughts or feelings’ demanded by the procedure, or must intend to conduct themselves as the procedure suggests; and the person ‘must actually so conduct themselves subsequently’ (Austin 1962: 14-15). ‘If we sin against any one (or more) of these six rules, our performative utterance will be (in one way or another) unhappy’ (Austin 1962: 15).

While speech act theory continues as a branch of analytic philosophy (Austin, Searle, Strawson, Grice), the notion of the performative has also been extended by deconstructive literary critics, like Derrida, de Man, and Hillis Miller, and queer theorists, like Butler and Sedgwick. Various episodes in this literary branch of the performative's subsequent life are useful in examining James's performative impressions. 'Performative' also, of course, evokes the theatre, which is repeatedly alluded to in the figurative language that structures, or surrounds, James's performative impressions.

### 3.2.2 Jacques Derrida

Derrida's 1972 essay, 'Signature Event Context', in part explores whether words can have 'univocal concept[s]' attached to them (Derrida 1972: 82). He decides that the 'field of equivocality' of any word must be determined by 'context', but argues that 'a context is never absolutely determinable' (Derrida 1972: 83-4). The second half of the essay uses Austin's theory of the performative as an example of how context cannot be fully defined. This response to speech act theory inspired other literary theorists, especially Paul de Man and Judith Butler, as we will see.

Austin laid out six conditions for a felicitous performative, which Derrida decides is a kind of context (see footnote 17). Additions to these six conditions are that 'the words must be spoken "seriously" and so as to be taken "seriously" [...] I must not be joking, for example, or writing a poem', and that

a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy [...] Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (Austin 1962: 9, 22)

Derrida glosses this as Austin excluding from his model utterances which Derrida calls ‘citations’ (Derrida 1972: 103). Here Austin excludes literary language from consideration as ‘parasitic’ of ‘ordinary’ language. If Austin were right that any performative issued in citational language is infelicitous then, in Derrida’s view, there could be no such thing as a felicitous performative, since language is inherently citational. Derrida, arguing for a ‘general theory of this structural parasitism’, believes that all language is in this sense literary, citational (Derrida 1972: 103). For Derrida, ‘iterability [...] [is] a structural characteristic of every mark’ (Derrida 1972: 101). ‘The sign is born [...] when it is demanded by the absence of the object’, the referent: writing is constituted by ‘its iterability, by the possibility of being repeated in the absence [...] of its referent’ (Derrida 1972: 88, 94). For any written communication to be ‘written’, it must remain legible in the absence of both the author and the addressee (Derrida 1972: 90-1). So ‘every sign [...] can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context’, including the context of its author, his intention or ‘signified’, and its audience (Derrida 1972: 97). This characteristic of all language is excluded by Austin’s insistence, as one of his conditions, of ‘the conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject’ (Derrida 1972: 99).

Derrida argues that ‘citationality’, rather than invalidating a performative, is its prerequisite (Derrida 1972: 103). ‘Could a performative statement succeed if its formulation did not repeat a “coded” or iterable statement’, he asks Austin, continuing, by asking whether I could ‘open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage’ if my words were ‘not identifiable as *conforming* to an iterable model’, citational? (Derrida 1972: 104). Austin instead emphasizes the singularity of the performative.

Derrida’s theory that language was designed to be able to function when removed from contexts, and cited or quoted within others, does not just suggest that

Austin is wrong to exclude literary language. It suggests that Austin's attempts to set out an 'exhaustively definable context', 'the six indispensable, if not sufficient, conditions for success' of a performative, are futile (Derrida 1972: 100).

How does Derrida's modification of Austin's model of the performative help us understand James's performative impressions? Derrida's observations about signs in general, which he emphasized through Austin's model of performativity, are applicable to performative impressions, whether linguistic or not, in two ways: they are iterable and hence may elude the intentions of their authors, and they are citational. In *The Wings of the Dove*, Kate Croy performatively names Milly Theale a 'dove', a name which is also an impression, as it reflects Kate's impression of Milly. Kate's imagery is understood by Milly, Merton Densher and Maud Lowder, as it has been used in this way before and may again be so used. In fact, its iterability is confirmed when Milly appropriates it and uses it again in ways which exceed Kate's intentions. The impression of the dove is also citational as it draws on historical, literary and religious contexts for its authority. Kate is again not in full control of these contexts, which Milly mines for her own purposes.

### 3.2.3 Judith Butler

Judith Butler has developed Derrida's revision of Austin's notion of performativity to argue that gender is performative. For Derrida,

the performative's referent (although the word is inappropriate here [...]) is not outside it, or in any case preceding it or before it. It does not describe something which exists outside and before language. It produces or transforms a situation, it operates. (Derrida 1972: 98)

Such a definition describes gender, in Butler's view: 'the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all' (Butler 1999: 178). Derrida's arguments about the inherent citationality of performatives are

the keystone of her theory. We saw that, for Derrida, inherent to signs is their ability to function in citation, in the absence of their author's intention, and that this is ignored by Austin's condition for a successful performative that a person must have the 'thoughts or feelings' demanded by the procedure. If 'within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names', Butler explains how, 'in a critical reformulation of the performative, Derrida makes it clear that this power is not the function of an originating will, but is always derivative' (Butler 1993: 13).<sup>18</sup>

Building on Derrida, Butler construes performativity as 'that power of discourse to produce effect through reiteration', which is very far from Austin's notion that there had to be a conscious and sincere agent present (Butler 1993: 20). If a performative succeeds, 'it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices*' (Butler 1993: 227). She argues that gender is not something we are born into, but something we produce through our repeated actions and language every day, which themselves have been repeated many times in the past. But nor is gender a 'deliberate "act"', an 'act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names'; instead, 'the subject [...] is formed by virtue of having gone through such a process of assuming a sex' (Butler 1993: 2, 3). This discourse of gender manipulates us in so pervasive and subtle a way that we believe gender to be constative, a fact which exists within us, but which manifests itself in our outward behaviour, rather than a performative which our behaviour itself generates:

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<sup>18</sup> She reminds us that Derrida did not discount intention entirely, but put it in its place as not 'able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance', in his words (Butler 1993: 13).

the view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts [...] what we take to be an “internal” feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts. (Butler 1999: xv)

Genders are thus not essences or identities, not true or false, but ‘*fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs’ (Butler 1999: 173):

Gender is thus a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions. [...] The peculiar phenomenon of a ‘natural sex’ or a ‘real woman’ [are] compelling social fictions[.] (Butler 1999: 178)

Butler’s description of a collective conspiracy aptly characterizes, for example, the conspiracies of silence over Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s carnal attachment, Milly’s terminal illness, or the adultery within the Ververs’ marriages.

Butler’s work is not just descriptive, it is also normative, since it offers methods of resistance to our coercive gender norms: if gender is performative, then we can disrupt it, by adapting our own performance to include ‘parodic practices’ which may ‘denaturalize and resignify’ the ‘categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality’ (Butler 1993: xxxi). Such performances, such as drag, might undermine the authority of gender, ‘reveal[ing] this ostensible “cause” to be an “effect” ’ (Butler 1999: 178). Another example is offered by ‘the public assertion of “queerness” [which] enacts performativity as citationality for the purposes of resignifying the abjection of homosexuality into defiance and legitimacy’ (Butler 1993: 21).<sup>19</sup>

I will use Butler’s model to shed extra light on the performativity of James’s characters when I think it offers more than Austin’s does. In particular, more than Austin or Derrida, Butler stresses the importance of performative actions and gestures, which begin to eclipse language as the most important elements of

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<sup>19</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called such subversive strategies ‘queer performativity’ (Sedgwick 1995: 206). She claimed that Henry James offered ‘a kind of prototype’ for today’s queer performativity in his prefaces to the New York Edition (Sedgwick 1995: 236).

performative impressions in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, what Hillis Miller calls ‘sign acts’, which may be more ambiguous than performative words (Miller 2001: 116). Butler’s insistence that gender is neither surface nor depth, but a play between the two, helps us to see how performative impressions confuse a sense of surface and depth in *The Wings of the Dove*. Both novels, more than *The Ambassadors*, represent performative impressions as repeated acts, whose eventual discontinuity – Densher’s visits to the Palazzo, Maggie’s trips to her father’s house – changes characters’ identities. Of course, analogies between James’s fictional practice and Butler’s cultural theory are limited, too. For example, the deceit in James’s novels involves trying to disguise something which already exists (for example, the relationships between Osmond/Madame de Vionnet/Densher/the Prince and Madame Merle/Chad/Kate/Charlotte), whereas the deceit in Butler’s model is in asserting the true existence of something invented. Above all, Butler’s emphasis on the power of discourse, rather than the agency of the individual subject, seems incompatible with James’s representation of unique characters who make moral choices, and then worry about them. But this fit may not be as poor as it first seems: for example, one way to read Milly’s forgiveness and Densher’s *volte face* is that their collaborative, performative impression in Venice has become such a compelling social fiction that they are ultimately made its instruments, their fiction swallows them up. Similarly, James’s famous representations of the composing powers of consciousness, which we have analysed as creative cognitive impressions, may be illustrations of how discourse is influencing people’s perception, willy nilly, something the impressionist painters and Wilde would agree with.

### 3.2.4 Paul de Man

Paul de Man develops further Austin's model and Derrida's adaptation of it. For our purposes, his most useful elaborations of performativity are those which investigate a tension which Austin had willingly acknowledged, that it is hard to define performatives, and, related, that most utterances have both constative and performative elements.

De Man renames Austin's constative aspect of language 'cognitive', and so writes about the opposition between the cognitive and performative functions of language. 'Language as action', performative language, sits alongside 'language as truth', constative language (de Man 1979: 130). The cognitive is language's aim of 'transparency, to represent things as they are, to name things that are already there'; the performative is language's rhetorical operations, 'the acts of language, that undermine this claim by imposing linguistic categories, organizing the world rather than simply representing what is' (Culler 2007: 155). Cognitive language is 'adequate to reality', corresponding to it: unlike performative language, it 'does not itself predicate these attributes but receives them, so to speak, from the entity itself by merely allowing it to be what it is' (de Man 1979: 121). Performative language is 'a means and measure for us to *create* the real' (de Man 1979: 120). Jamesian cognitive impressions are descriptive and correspondent to a pre-existing world, while performative impressions are creative.

De Man demonstrates that cognitive and performative aspects of language are impossible to differentiate, that the performative often masquerades as cognitive, that the two functions often interfere with each other, but that, finally, the two can never be active simultaneously. De Man argues that all language is figural, rhetorical, as it is a vehicle pointing to an absent tenor, its referent. But, within language, there is a

‘distinction between rhetoric as a system of tropes and rhetoric as having to do with the skills of persuasion’ (de Man 1979: 130). Rhetoric as tropes is referential language, or ‘cognitive rhetoric’, since the trope’s vehicle points to a supposed tenor outside language, while ‘considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative’ (de Man 1979: 300, 131). There is a ‘discontinuity between [these] two rhetorical codes’, a distance between the two functions ‘so wide as to be nearly unbridgeable’ partly because, in the very beginning, ‘in order to come into being as text, the referential function had to be radically suspended’ (de Man 1979: 300, 131, 298). Miller explains that texts come about for de Man as a ‘violent act of self-positing by language’, which is performative; there is then an ascription of meaning as a cognitive process, ‘a secondary unwarranted positing’ (Miller 2001: 148). The performative always comes before the cognitive, since if a text does not act, it cannot state what it knows (Miller 2001: 153):

language is initially a speech act, a blind performative. It is blind because it is not governed or validated by any cognition that would guarantee its referential validity. Such positional language is a ‘trope’, not only because it figuratively stands for something absent, but also because it turns away from knowledge of that indirection. (Miller 2005: 45)

That, in language, a performative act precedes a cognitive one, reminds us of William James’s sculpting consciousness, and Wilde’s critic who is also an artist. Language is a ‘machine’ which we do not control since ‘writing always includes the moment of dispossession in favor of the arbitrary power play of the signifier’ which we, as subjects, experience as a ‘dismemberment’ (de Man 1979: 294, 296). So, as Derrida also argued, the performative effect of language will always exceed our intentions as speaker or writer.

De Man’s close readings in *Allegories of Reading* (1979) of passages from Nietzsche and Rousseau illustrate confusions between the cognitive/constative and the performative. In his chapter ‘Rhetoric of Persuasion (Nietzsche)’, de Man shows how

Nietzsche, long before Austin, distinguished the cognitive from the performative in his distinction between 'knowing' (constative) and 'positing' (performative).

Nietzsche argued that the law of non-contradiction, the foundation of logic, is not a piece of knowledge but something that is posited, not a 'speech fact' but a 'speech act', that in this case 'constative language is in fact performative' (de Man 1979: 122, 129). De Man thinks Nietzsche demonstrates 'the deconstruction of thought as act' (de Man 1979: 129). We sense that the statements 'A is B' and 'A is not B' cannot both be true, but 'the claim to know is just an unwarranted totalization of the claim to perceive and to feel', an 'unwarranted substitution of knowledge for mere sensation' (de Man 1979: 123). This is a little like Hume's sceptical argument of chapter two that 'all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation' since our notions of cause and effect are mostly governed by previous impressions which have coincided, for example impressions of a flame and of heat, rather than on 'any primary connexion betwixt ideas' (Hume 1960: 103, 92). We need the law of non-contradiction to be true in order to use all the other axia of logic, but it is not a truth in itself: it creates a reality, rather than being adequate to an existing one.

De Man's model captures the insidiousness of the performative impressions used by James's deceivers which are performative, but pretend to be cognitive. They are performative as they are not adequate to reality – they do not represent something which already exists – but, instead, they create it, they predicate it, they are action; despite this, they deceive by pretending to be cognitive, to refer to a pre-existing reality.

#### **4. James's Theory of the Impression in the Prefaces to the New York Edition, 1907-09**

The remainder of this thesis examines James's uses of the impression in his late work. The theoretical uses to which James puts the impression in the prefaces to the New York Edition of his work (1907-09) are the subject of the present chapter, which itself serves as a kind of preface to the final two chapters of the thesis and its coda, in which James's fictional treatment of the impression in the three novels of the major phase (1902-04) is considered. In the prefaces and the novels of the major phase, we shall see that the impression is less likely to figure as an empiricist counterweight to ideas and is more likely to be forced uneasily to accommodate within itself both empiricism and aestheticism, which we identified (in chapters two and three) as the impression's constitutive schools of thought. What James does with these uneasy accommodations is to make them the narrative focus of his late novels and, in the prefaces, to theorize their interest in these terms. The novel is still an impression, then, but of a different kind: thanks to James's use of point of view, it is now, first and foremost, the impression of a character at the heart of the novelist's drama of consciousness.

Between 1905 and 1909, after he had written what critics have called the novels of his 'major phase', culminating in *The Golden Bowl* (1904), Henry James, and his publisher, Scribner's, undertook the ambitious project of producing a collected edition of his fiction, which James named the New York Edition after the place of his birth. As well as meticulously revising many of the texts that he had chosen to include, James wrote eighteen prefaces that have since become a founding text of Anglo-American narrative theory. They document James's self-consciousness about his formal techniques as well as his desire that 'the craft of fiction', as one of

his formalist disciples would call it, be acknowledged as a fine art (Lubbock 1926). James's discussions, among other things, of narrative point of view, the importance of a sensitive protagonist, the relation of art to life, the role of bewilderment in narrative, and narrative economy, are famous. This chapter looks at all of these – and, in particular, the questions of what constitutes the germ of a narrative, and which point of view a narrative ought to offer of its subject – through the lens of the impression. It starts by examining James's particular and extended treatment of the impression in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*. It then looks at the general role played by the impression throughout the prefaces, first as a germ for fiction, and then as a metaphor for narrative point of view. Its argument is that, as the only term that figures both narrative germ and point of view, the impression bridges the two main themes of James's retrospective prefatory reflections on the narratives he has constructed. The impression thus invites comparisons of these two narrative procedures, and in some cases collapses the difference between them, revealing that it is the application of limited human intelligence to an author's impression of life that dramatizes that impression into a fiction.

James's late theory of the impression may be said to be a narrative theory, then, which offers a major challenge to pre-existing theories in emphasizing that 'the' impression is in fact always 'an' impression, belonging to a human actor or actors in a specific existential situation, and that there is no form of discourse more supremely suited to the task of depicting that impression than the narrative discourse of the novel. Of course, James never frames his prefatory reflections on impressions in terms of any such theoretical challenge or innovation, since (as we saw at the beginning of chapter two) he consistently adopts the posture, not of a forger of ideas, but of a *belletrist* master in the fine art of gathering and displaying impressions. In

this respect, his narrative theory of the impression is a surreptitious one, cast with apparent modesty as mere impressions of impressions.

#### 4.1 The Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* (1908)

The preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, of all the prefaces, offers the fullest account of the impression. This falls into two halves. In the first, James dismisses the ‘dull dispute over the “immoral” subject and the moral’ of a novel by arguing that the only true criterion is whether it is ‘the result of some direct impression or perception of life’ (James 1962: 45). The subject of a novel grows from the soil of the artist’s sensibility, which, James implies, absorbs impressions of life. In the second half, his famous metaphor of ‘the house of fiction’ describes how at each window a novelist stands, gaining a unique impression of the ‘human scene’ (James 1962: 45-46). This preface thus extends the role that James gave the impression in ‘The Art of Fiction’ (1884) while also further specifying its limits.

The development of James’s theory of the impression between ‘The Art of Fiction’ and the prefaces mirrors aspects of the wider history of the impression. James’s house of fiction recalls empiricist metaphors of the mind which envisaged the mind as a passive room or building, to be filled with experience, found in Locke, Hume, and Pater. But James extends this metaphor, since the novelist carves his own window –through which to receive an impression through his field-glass – in the house of fiction, which James says is equivalent to his literary form. This notion of a consciousness active in perception, not just a Lockean *tabula rasa*, evokes William James’s metaphor of consciousness as a sculptor. This idea, that perception is a relationship between subject and object, is matched too in the work of Brentano, and Pater, whose famous preface stressed the critic’s efforts to realise his own impression

of the art object. James's novelist seeks out his impression deliberately and collaboratively, shaping the window and training his 'field-glass' on certain areas of the 'scene of life', instead of passively watching whatever impressions life throws at him while he goes about his business.

In 'The Art of Fiction', James used the impression to smuggle the imagination into Besant's notion of 'experience': 'write from experience' became, implicitly, 'write from one's imaginative impressions of experience'. In the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, the impression performs a similarly insidious role, but an opposite one: the impression now smuggles experience into the creative moment in which the imagination conceives the subject of the novel. The passage in question reads as follows:

One had had from an early time, for that matter, the instinct of the right estimate of such values and of its reducing to the inane the dull dispute over the 'immoral' subject and the moral. Recognising so promptly the one measure of the worth of a given subject, the question about it that, rightly answered, disposes of all others – is it valid, in a word, is it genuine, is it sincere, the result of some direct impression or perception of life? [...] There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connexion than that of the perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it. The question comes back thus, obviously, to the kind and the degree of the artist's prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs. The quality and capacity of that soil, its ability to 'grow' with due freshness and straightness any vision of life, represents, strongly or weakly, the projected morality. That element is but another name for the more or less close connexion of the subject with some mark made on the intelligence, with some sincere experience. (James 1962: 45-46)

'The soil out of which his subject springs' invites us to consider the novel as growing out of a 'germ', which, as we shall see, is the prefaces' most common metaphor for the origins of fiction. For James, the novel is no longer an impression; rather, the integrity of the impression is a measure of the worth of the *subject* of a novel. The subject of the novel is not the same thing as the impression: it is 'the result of some direct impression or perception of life'. This impression is equated with 'felt life', felt by the artist's 'sensibility', which is figured as a 'soil'. So the soil receives, feels, an

impression of life, and then ‘ “grow[s]” with due freshness [...] any vision of life’, reception followed by transmission. The ‘projected morality’ of a novelist is presumably her ability to convert an impression of life into a vision of life, through a sensitive tremor which turns an inch into an ell, a hint into a revelation, a capacity for imaginative sympathy as keen as Ritchie’s. This receiving and giving forth reminds us of the spider-web in ‘The Art of Fiction’, which can also be read as a metaphor for how a fiction evolves from an impression of life. In this passage, by contrast, the soil and germ metaphor, as James presents it, emphasises how the empiricist impression allows experience to anchor the imagination. The impression is no longer an aesthetic unit of imaginative experience, but an empiricist unit of sincere, lived experience, where sincerity is measured by the impression’s cognitive aspect, its sensitivity in registering experience: ‘some mark made on the intelligence’, in other words the impression, is equated with ‘some sincere experience’.

The impression’s cognitive ability to register experience is thus given a new moral weight in this preface, where James asserts ‘the perfect dependence of the “moral” sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it’. The inverted commas around both ‘moral’ and ‘immoral’ alert us to the fact that James is contesting these terms. As we saw in the first chapter, James tends to use ‘moral’, as the French often do, to mean ‘related to human behaviour’ rather than ‘ethical’, casting himself as a ‘moralist’, not someone who moralises, but someone who is interested in human motivation. We can understand more fully what he means by ‘moral’ in this preface if we return to ‘The Art of Fiction’ where, having referred to Besant’s belief that ‘English Fiction should have a “conscious moral purpose”’, he declares that ‘the essence of moral energy is to survey the whole field’ (James 1884: 508, 519). This anticipates the ‘spreading field, the human scene’ of which the

novelist gains a unique impression from the house of fiction. For James, morality comes from an engaged perception of all forms of human behaviour, figured in this preface by the impression. As Pater argued in his conclusion, rules hinder perception and hence, for James, morality. Such unblinkingness is not available to those who, like Walter Besant in the first chapter, have rules as to the ‘moral purpose’ of English fiction, which James conceives of as ‘certain traditions on the subject, applied *a priori*’, or to those who pontificate in the abstract as to what makes a moral subject (James 1884: 507). Of course, James also intends the more conventional meaning of ‘ethical’ to be evoked in most of his uses: this polysemy is what redefines ‘moral’. Drawing all these meanings together allows us to see how the impression in this preface continues the work of ‘The Art of Fiction’ in reaching the moral beyond the sensible. The earlier essay explained how gifted novelists could intuit character from surfaces, the spiritual, psychological and intellectual essence of French Protestant youths from a glimpse of them. This preface extends the demonstration by arguing that such intuition is a moral act, or has moral ramifications. To argue that an impression is moral is to argue that morality ought to derive from experience and perception, and not be imposed on it *ex ante*; that morality ought to be judged empirically using evidence which is unique in each case. Art can only be truly moral if it engages with life in all its complexity. If morality is an impression, it exists somewhere between a sensation and an idea, between the sensible and the moral.

In the next section of the preface, James begins to make the transition from the organic metaphor of the novel as germ to the visual trope of the novel as impression of the novelist, familiar from ‘The Art of Fiction’. The ‘sensibility’, which had been a soil, now becomes the ‘enveloping air of the artist’s humanity’, a more ethereal and visual element (James 1962: 45). And as the metaphor becomes more visual, the

cognitive and performative sides of the impression begin to coalesce: the novelist's 'disposition to reflect and project' echoes the 'freedom to feel and say' of 'The Art of Fiction', while the absorbent 'enveloping air of the artist's humanity' performatively 'gives the last touch to the worth of the work' (James 1962: 45).

The stage is set for James's introduction of the (now famous) 'house of fiction' metaphor in which there is no intervening stage between the reception of an impression and the projection of a new one:

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. He and his neighbours are watching the same show, but one seeing more where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees white, one seeing big where the other sees small, one seeing coarse where the other sees fine. And so on, and so on; there is fortunately no saying on what, for the particular pair of eyes, the window may not open; 'fortunately' by reason, precisely, of this incalculability of range. The spreading field, the human scene, is the 'choice of subject'; the pierced aperture, either broad or balconied or slit-like and low-browed, is the 'literary form'; but they are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher – without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you of what he has been conscious. Thereby I shall express to you at once his boundless freedom and his 'moral' reference. (James 1962: 46-47)

The novel is now one sustained impression of the author's consciousness, of a watcher posted at a window of the house, who observes the 'human scene'.

While James's rather vaguer description of a synthesis in 'The Art of Fiction' merely suggested the performative aspects of Ritchie's impression, here the performative is figured more concretely. Instead of a glimpse becoming a picture, or a picture fusing with an idea, the artist aestheticizes his experience performatively by shaping his own window, which stands in for his 'literary form'. This may remind us

of William James's metaphor of each one of us shaping our own experience like a sculptor shaping stone. That metaphor stands in stark contrast to Locke's *tabula rasa*. So James's author is an empiricist who lives by his impressions, but he is a late-nineteenth-century empiricist, like William James, Pater or Brentano, one who, anticipating phenomenology, and perhaps under the influence of Kant, conceives of the mind as both shaping and shaped by perception. If, for James, the novelist is a sculptor of windows, for his brother each one of us sculpts our experience, as well as being sculpted by it. Just as James's novelist shapes the conditions under which he receives his impression, so Pater and Wilde described how the aesthetic critic could enrich his impressions through education. James's novelist exists in a mutually dependent, intentional relationship with what he observes, the human scene, as Brentano and Pater described. Perception is not prescribed and determined, something William James criticized Locke and Hume and later associationists for advocating, but partly an act of the human subject. The artist must pierce his aperture (according to the 'need of the individual vision') before he can see the 'spreading field, the human scene' below. So the performative precedes the cognitive: the impression no longer anchors the imagination in experience but instead ensures that the imagination determines experience. The artist's vision is so active and creative that its pressure pierces a hole in the wall like a laser. This had been hinted at twice in 'The Art of Fiction': when that essay inverted its premise that experience comprises impressions, and when it implied that reality is determined by individual preferences: 'the characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most, but the measure of reality is very difficult to fix' (James 1884: 510, 509). The preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* gives these hints full expression.

It does so, perhaps, at the cost of ‘experience’. In ‘The Art of Fiction’, the impression had been the unit of deeply felt experience, and had offered the kind of imaginative and sympathetic penetration that is the prerequisite for Jamesian morality. Here, though, the impression seems to have been abstracted from experience. James emphasises the isolation of the artist: ‘the posted presence of the watcher’ implies that he has been sent away by a community to exist on the margins, to watch on their behalf, perhaps. When James writes, ‘they are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life’, he invites a direct comparison with the door through which Ritchie glimpsed the French young men, a door through which she could have walked. By contrast, these artists are isolated from each other and from the human scene, and look through windows offering no access.

This metaphor puts under pressure the notion in ‘The Art of Fiction’ that the artist’s impressions are synonymous with his experience. The ‘scene of life’ is a long way below him: the act of perception happens in a place remote from the locus of life, while it seems unlikely that any airborne particles would find their way to the artist’s sensibility behind his window. The apparent disembodiment of the artist into pure vision or pure consciousness, a ‘pair of eyes’ or a ‘consciousness’ – in fact, James bizarrely suggests that he is more likely to have a field-glass than a pair of eyes – seems to deny him any form of the physical experience that is so strongly emphasised both by the elemental and organic earlier metaphor of the soil, and the tangibility of the burgeoning spider-web. What isolates the artist from experience are the structures he himself has raised: the house, the window, in other words, his use of literary form.

The final two sentences go some way to restoring the intimacy with experience offered by the impression: ‘Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you of

what he has been conscious. Thereby I shall express to you at once his boundless freedom and his “moral” reference’. This alludes both to the spider-web and the notion that experience is neither limited nor complete. The artist’s impressions at the window, what he has been conscious of, constitute his identity, just as the particles caught in the spider-web became part of the ‘tissue’ within the ‘chamber of consciousness’. The liberty for the novelist to expand experience through imagination, won by James in ‘The Art of Fiction’, is here reasserted as ‘boundless freedom’, but is also ambiguously limited by his ‘moral reference’. The impression’s augmentation of perception with imagination has vastly expanded the ‘experience’ from which the novelist is obliged to draw, but it still has its limits, those defined by the quality of the artist’s consciousness.

#### 4.2 The Other Prefaces

Up to this point, we have seen James using the impression to conceptualise how an artist’s perception may influence art or as a metaphor for the similarities between perception and art, and these uses continue in the other prefaces. But these other prefaces introduce a second kind of impression, that belonging to a character inside the fiction, which serves to describe the representation of perception within art. This section examines the impression, accordingly, as a germ for a fiction, in other words an ‘impression of life’, and as a metaphor for narrative point of view.

This bifurcation of the impression into ‘impression of life’ and impression as experienced by a character is perhaps anticipated in ‘The Art of Fiction’ and is certainly implicit in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*. In both texts, James needs two metaphors to represent the impression. There is, in each, a metaphor of organic accumulation – spider-web and seed within soil – and a representation of a person

observing other people, Ritchie and the author in the house of fiction. We have read both of these passages as figuring novel writing, but reading the prefaces as a whole encourages us to see how both may also represent human perception more generally, and how this may be represented fictionally. We may already have noted the similarity between Ritchie's glimpse, and Isabel Archer's revelatory impression of her husband and Madame Merle, for example; or how the novelist's supervision of the human scene from the house of fiction resembles Lambert Strether looking out over Paris from Chad's balcony in the Boulevard Maiesherbes. But now the spider-web and soil may be taken not just as representations of the novelist's mind, but also of a character's, as the analogy between author's and characters' perception is now made explicit.

As we will see, James's use of 'centres', 'registers' or 'reflectors', in other words, his focalization of the narrative through characters, means that a character becomes his 'deputy' in presenting the story: their impressions of the fictional world substitute for his (James 1962: 300, 327).<sup>1</sup> The impressions of the author's characters become, through focalization, those of the reader. The prefaces at times imply an equivalence between the impressions of author, character and reader, which suggests in turn that the impression's aestheticization of experience is not confined to the artist's mind, but is open to all. The novel as a whole aestheticizes life, while James's characters aestheticize their own experience for their own and for the reader's benefit. While such reflectors are far from being ordinary people – James acknowledges that others have satirically called them his 'supersubtle fry' (222) – they represent an opportunity that we all have, artists and non-artists, to redeem our experience through an artful sensibility, so often, as we shall see, figured as the harvesting of impressions.

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<sup>1</sup> All remaining page references are to Blackmur's collected edition of the Prefaces, unless otherwise specified (James 1962).

The metaphor of the impression as germ tends to regard it as a raw material for fiction, stressing the transformation it undergoes within the artist's imagination, whereas the impression as a metaphor for a character's conscious experience celebrates the role of the aesthetic within ordinary life, especially as the character's impressions, through focalization, become the reader's impressions. Let us now examine each in turn.

James's preoccupation in the prefaces with looking behind his fictions to their germs in impressions of life betrays an anxiety to prove their morality by showing their direct connection with experience. This itself reflects Hume's argument that one tests the validity of an idea by seeking out its earlier manifestation as an impression.

#### 4.2.1 The Impression as Germ

On occasions in the prefaces James uses 'impression' instead of 'germ' to identify the origin of a fiction, often to stress the urgency with which a perception of life strikes him: as he writes in the preface to *The Tragic Muse* (1908), 'I fail to recover my precious first moment of consciousness of the idea to which it was to give form; to recognise in it – as I like to do in general – the effect of some particular sharp impression or concussion' (79).<sup>2</sup> Sense impressions, like the observations of an empiricist, that figure the germs for fiction include: events observed by James (such as a young woman's entry into society), an anecdote overheard by him at a dinner party (an enmity between a mother and son), an inference made about English intellectual or public life (its mistrust of 'analytic appreciation' of literature, its

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the impression is synonymous with the germ, but sometimes it is anterior to it. For example, in the preface to *The Tragic Muse*, the idea to which the novel gives form is the result of an impression, but not the impression itself, as in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*. The preface to 'The Beast in the Jungle' describes how 'conceits' for fiction may be 'born of light impressions' (242).

neglect of the dead), or an anecdote acquired from literary history (for example, about Coleridge).<sup>3</sup>

The prefaces' conception of the impression-as-germ is similar to James's notion of the impression in his attacks on painterly impressionism: the impression is something raw which must be finished, given aesthetic treatment, an impression as a stimulus requiring a 'correlative expression', as we saw William James sometimes using 'impression' – not inherently very aesthetic in itself. The impression as germ seems to have few of the imaginatively transformative powers it displays in 'The Art of Fiction'. In the preface to *Daisy Miller* (1909), James suggests that the 'case', the germ, that underlies the short story 'Flickerbridge', may have issued from some 'charming impression' (284). If it had, "“Dramatise, dramatise!”" would have been the 'admonition' he would have had to apply to the 'case' in order to turn it into a story (284).

More commonly, though, the impression-as-germ in the prefaces, though it may have aesthetic potential, must be significantly worked on by the imagination. James suggests that, if, as some would have it, 'The Coxon Fund' represents real, identifiable people, the subject of the story 'persists as the impression not artistically dealt with, [...] shames the honour offered it and can only be spoken of as having ceased to be a thing of fact and yet not become a thing of truth' (230-1). Yet an impression 'not artistically dealt with' has already ceased to be 'a thing of fact', suggesting that becoming an impression involves some kind of immediate metamorphosis.

In the preface to 'The Lesson of the Master' (1908), James explores the chemical change within the 'impression of life' that is brought about through its

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<sup>3</sup> Germs for, respectively, *The Awkward Age*, *The Spoils of Poynton*, 'The Figure in the Carpet' and 'The Altar of the Dead', and 'The Coxon Fund' (100, 124, 227, 242, 230).

aesthetic use, echoing Pater's analogy of the aesthetic critic with the scientist in his own preface; because of this, he argues, it is not possible, in a single one of his stories, to identify a real person, since any 'morsel' that has emerged from the 'pot-au-feu' of the artist's imagination has been so saturated with rich juices that, through the new relations it has contracted with the rest of the stew, 'its prime identity [has been] destroyed' and 'it has become a different and, thanks to a rare alchemy, a better thing' (230). So the imagination fills with impressions which transform each other: as in a stew, each ingredient is altered by partaking of something of its fellow ingredients; as in alchemy, the identity of each changes to become something superior.

James enlarges on this chemical change in the preface to 'The Altar of the Dead' (1909), when he explains how the 'fact' – perhaps as it becomes an 'impression of life' – experiences freedom, but only to suffer further confinement when it encounters artistic criteria (248). As in 'The Art of Fiction', and Pater's preface, the impression liberates the artist and critic from the determinism of fact. An 'impression of life' is no longer a 'fact' but a 'cluster of actualities', suggesting already a greater flexibility, even before it has been consecrated for aesthetic use (248, 249). During the alchemy, fermentation or cooking, the 'sense originally communicated' within the impression has sufficient autonomy that it may negotiate its new imaginative terms of employment, presumably with the author (249). When still a fact, its job is unglamorous drudgery, like the draught-horse who drags a heavy cart behind it; but once its chemical structure changes within the imagination it enjoys the freedom and potential of the promising young horse who is eyed idling in the meadow and marked for the saddle (249). As in the preface to *The American*, through the 'romantic', the author can cut the ropes binding the imagination to *terra firma* (33-34). The

impression of life enjoys a temporary freedom in which its constituent actualities may be reconfigured according to the contours of art; temporary, presumably, as further demands in the future may inhibit it, demands, perhaps, of economy or verisimilitude. But the moment where life encounters art in the crucible of the imagination is a moment of freedom. There are analogies here with ‘The Art of Fiction’ where the transformative power of imaginative perception offered by the impression allows the author to range well beyond the facts of her own experience. Yet in that essay the impression is both the input and output of Ritchie’s art, and also the process whereby input becomes output. In the prefaces, and here in particular, the impression is invoked more narrowly as an input, as an ‘impression of life’.

Given the prominence attributed to the impression in the genesis of fiction by ‘The Art of Fiction’ and the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, it seems odd that, in the other prefaces, it features less often as a synonym for ‘germ’, and as something which, though seminal, is also rather primitive, and unartful. This shift reflects a change in James’s conception of the relationship between life or experience and art, which is expressed, in part, through a change in his model of the impression. In the earlier essay the impression bridges art and life, insisting on their proximity and continuity. This is reprised in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, though the emphasis moves from the impression’s footing in the imagination to its footing in life. The other prefaces do not use the impression in this way to accommodate and be receptive of life and experience; the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* is alone in looking back to ‘The Art of Fiction’. Instead they reprise the attitude of the reviews of the painterly impressionists: reality and form are at war with each other, as Wilde saw the ‘facts’ of realism threatening the ‘kingdom of romance’ in chapter three; the impression is an element of reality, and the artist must side with form. In other words,

the impression must be formalized, worked up. The prefaces generally conceive of life and art as quite separate, with the novelist safely ensconced in the house of fiction, a kind of ivory tower.

In 'The Art of Fiction', the fact that only a fleeting impression of life is needed to make a fictional impression, thanks to the artist's 'power to guess the unseen from the seen', means that his potential subject matter greatly expands; in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, 'a close connexion of the subject' with an impression of life ensures its morality by grounding it in sincere, lived experience. But in the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton* 'reality', 'clumsy Life continu[ing] at her stupid work', and the 'fatal futility of Fact' are constantly threatening to offer too much in the way of subject for fiction (121-2). In the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* art is assessed against the sincerity of life; in the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*, life is measured by the standard of art.

In the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*, James tells us how, at a dinner party one Christmas Eve, an 'amiable friend' of his 'spoke of such an odd matter as that a good lady in the north [...] was at daggers drawn with her only son [...] over the ownership of the valuable furniture of a fine old house just accruing to the young man by his father's death' (121). In 'but ten words [...] all the possibilities of the little drama of my "Spoils" [...] glimmered then and there into life' (121). But as the friend continues with her story beyond its first ten words, James sees 'clumsy Life again at her stupid work' (121). The more James hears, the less free is his imagination. The development of the story is of no use to James, who feels his infant fiction being strangled in its cradle. 'The turn taken by the excellent situation [...] had the full measure of the classic ineptitude' since 'life has no direct sense whatever for the subject', 'life being all inclusion and confusion, and art being all discrimination and

selection', offered, for example, by literary form, by the windows in the house of fiction (122). But, in the case of *The Spoils of Poynton*, James needs an even narrower aperture than a window, a needle hole:

This fineness [of the prick of inoculation of his imagination by the friend's 'stray suggestion'] it is that communicates the virus of suggestion, anything more than the minimum of which spoils the operation. If one is given a hint at all designedly one is sure to be given too much; one's subject is in the merest grain, the speck of truth, of beauty, of reality, scarce visible to the common eye – since, I firmly hold, a good eye for a subject is anything but usual. (119)

Like Ritchie, James needs only an 'inch' for his ell. William James might point to the many discriminations that his brother's selective attention had made in simply listening to his friend's story, but Henry James feels he must make a determined and conscious effort to confine his germ: 'I "took" in fine, on the spot, to the rich bare little facts of two related figures [Owen and Mrs Gereth]' (122). Rather than taking to himself 'the faintest hints of life' in order to convert 'the very pulses of the air into revelations', James here must stymie life's revelations, repelling even a 'hint'. Experience, rather than being expanded by the imagination, must itself be forcibly 'limited', 'reduce[d] almost to nought' to give the imagination the freedom on which it thrives (120). The artist's 'sense' or 'eye' for the subject is the instinct as to when to curtail life. What this means is that the germ or impression is by definition the product of an artistic decision, and hence already aestheticized. The prick of inoculation, what James calls the 'small private cheers of recognition' accompanying the identification of a subject, is also figured as the more active, deliberate and aesthetic process of 'art' searching for 'the hard latent *value*' within life, the artist's 'germ, his vital particle, his grain of gold' (120).

The impression is very little present in James's account of the origin of *The Spoils of Poynton* because, as a figure, the impression is too accommodating of, too open to, experience. In some ways, indeed, James is here advocating an insensitivity

to experience. In the prefaces, both to *The Portrait of a Lady* and to *The Spoils of Poynton*, artistic decisions confine the plenitude of life: on the one hand there is the shape of the window and the focus of the field-glass, on the other the point at which James tries to stop listening to his garrulous neighbour. The preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* stressed the proximity and continuity of life and art: the ‘close connexion of the subject with some mark made on the intelligence’ figured as a germ within a soil permeated with impressions; and then the house of fiction is evoked where the windows, although ‘perched aloft’, have a direct line of sight onto life below. Of the many different images that figure the germ in the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*, none suggests the reciprocity and proximity of life and art as fully as does the ‘impression’.<sup>4</sup> Instead of life and art being bridged by the revelatory power of the visual, as they are in ‘The Art of Fiction’, or by its discriminating and shaping power, as in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, in the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton* it is metaphors of movement that figure how the two may be joined. Metaphors of transit dominate.<sup>5</sup> This mobile imagery suggests a separation of life and art in that the speck of life has to be removed and sequestered, replanted in different soil, deposited in the bank, or injected into a foreign body. After such metaphors, life is so changed that the author is an ‘alchemist’ (123). There is also a sense in which the author’s own life and experience – of hearing an anecdote – somehow does not belong to him: ‘he has to borrow his motive’ (122).

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<sup>4</sup> These images include: germ as fragment of spoken discourse, germ as ‘virus’, as minute trace, nugget of gold, capital sum invested for a return, child in a cradle, ‘motive’ for a story, as a seductive lover, but only, finally, as we have seen, as a ‘prime impression’ (119-124).

<sup>5</sup> These include: a wind-blown seed ‘transplanted to richer soil’ (122), transmission through a needle by the ‘prick of inoculation’ (121), growth (a flower) (124), or accumulation (interest accruing on capital when a germ is ‘bank[ed]’ or ‘reinvest[ed]’) (120).

#### 4.2.2 The Impression as Point of View

In his last preface, James describes his narrative method ‘not as my own impersonal account of the affair in hand, but [...] my account of somebody’s impression of it’ (327). He uses the impression here as a metaphor for his narrative device of viewing the story from one or several characters’ point(s) of view, in other words his preference for ‘focalization’, to use a term from narrative theory.

Focalization is the narrative technique whereby ‘the story is presented through the mediation of some “prism”, “perspective”, “angle of vision”, verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his’ (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 71). ‘Focalization is essentially [...] a *restriction*’ (Genette 1980: 192). It refers to a relationship between the subject, the focalizer from whose perspective events are perceived, and the object, the focalized (Bal 1997: 144). Focalization can be either internal – whereby it lies with one character who participates in the story – or external – when it lies with an anonymous agent situated outside the story (Bal 1997: 146-8). James wrote in the preface to *The Wings of the Dove* (1909) that he never ‘embraced the logic of any superior process’ other than proceeding by ‘centres’, or by ‘my registers or “reflectors”’, or ‘mirrors’, as he also calls them (300, 70).

In calling his focalizers ‘reflectors’ or ‘polished [...] mirrors of the subject’ (70), James suggests that the reader, rather than being offered a direct line of sight to the action on stage, watches events, as it were, via an angled mirror. In calling them his ‘registers’, he evokes an image of the reader understanding events through the impression they leave on the sensitive surface of the central consciousness: the action of *The Golden Bowl* ‘remains subject to the register, ever so closely kept, of the consciousness of but two of the characters’, each with a ‘consciousness highly susceptible of registration’ (328, 329). So we encounter events in ‘the field [...] rather

of their second than of their first exhibition' due to the 'author's instinct everywhere for the *indirect* presentation of his main image', and 'the still marked inveteracy of a certain indirect and oblique view of my presented action' (256, 327). James is 'addicted to seeing "through" – one thing through another, accordingly, and still other things through *that*' (153-4). His subject, time and time again, is a 'subject residing in somebody's excited and concentrated feeling about something', a somebody who 'supremely matters [...] all the rest matter only as he feels it, treats it, meets it' (127, 37).<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes events are mediated by being presented not simply as the impression made on a character, but as the impression made on a character who is himself a spectator or observer. In such cases the whole story becomes more purely an impression made on a mediating 'register'. In the preface to *Roderick Hudson* (1907) Rowland Mallet is described as the 'centre' of the novel – 'what happened to him was above all to feel certain things happening to others, to Roderick, to Christina, to Mary Garland [...]'. As we have seen, James sometimes called his centres 'deputies'. One of the main things that happens to others is the early engagement between Roderick and Mary. By making Rowland fall in love with Mary, James ensures that the reader gets as vivid an impression of Mary as possible, and one that approximates to Roderick's own early infatuation with her:

[Rowland Mallet] having fallen in love with the girl [Mary Garland] who is herself in love with Roderick, though he [Roderick] is unwitting, at the time, of that secret – the conception of this last irony, I must add, has remained happier than my execution of it; which should logically have involved the reader's being put into position to take more closely home the impression made by Mary Garland. (16)

If Rowland is the centre, the reader's impressions are his. Here we have an equation of character's and reader's impressions, with the former deputising for the latter, as

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<sup>6</sup> As we saw in chapter two, Hume classifies emotions as impressions, too.

well as one character's impressions approximating another's. Note, too, how, in the last sentence just quoted, the impression is sandwiched between its cognitive and performative aspects. Any impression is a collaboration between impressor and impessee – Rowland and Mary, for example. A novel constructed around focalization is an impression and likewise comprises an extended collaboration between its focalizers and focalizees. James describes how this functions in *The Golden Bowl*, in imagery which recalls Locke's metaphor of the mind as a dark room with a door ajar:

It is the Prince who opens the door to half our light upon Maggie, just as it is she who opens it to half our light upon himself; the rest of our impression, in either case, coming straight from the very motion with which that act is performed. (330)

Half the impression is made on the reader through the characters' role as subject of focalization, as, that is, perceiver – 'the impression will vary according to the plate that takes it', as James says elsewhere – and half through their role as object, as perceived (James 1888a: 365). 'Open[ing] the door' reminds us that Ritchie too received her impression through an open door. But here the cognitive and performative aspects of the impression are confused: to receive an impression the Prince and Maggie must both, unlike Ritchie, open a door, so that an 'act is performed'. The reciprocity of the impression here reminds us that at any interpersonal moment in a novel an impression is both being made and received.

The prefaces' preference for metaphors other than the impression to examine links between an author's life and work, and their stress on focalization, invite us to construe the 'felt life' of the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* as also referring to a *character's* receptivity to experience. The cognitive aspect of the author's impression transfers this feeling from his life to his art. But, similarly, the 'damsel upon whom nothing is lost' of 'The Art of Fiction' is replicated in characters throughout James's fiction. His narratives are organised around women – and men – who notice things

and experience them intensely, ‘intense *perceivers*, all, of their respective predicaments’, again, they are, as we have seen, his ‘supersubtle fry’ (71, 222). Unsurprisingly, if James thinks such sensibilities essential for a novelist, he also requires them of the author’s ‘deputy or delegate’, ‘a convenient substitute or apologist for the creative power otherwise so veiled and disembodied’ (327).

When James conceives of the ‘impression of life’ as a kind of germ, he places it at the heart of a fiction, either as its subject, or as something giving rise to its subject. Yet, just as often, the impression is envisaged not as the germ, but as something applied to the germ or to the more developed story. Dramatizing an impression of life involves opening up an impression onto it, though in this case the ‘impression of life’ is called a fiction’s ‘subject matter’, ‘story’, ‘case’, ‘affair’, or ‘business’:

I have already betrayed, as an accepted habit, and even to extravagance commented on, my preference for dealing with my subject matter, for ‘seeing my story’, through the opportunity and the sensibility of some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent, witness or reporter, some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it. Again and again, on review, the shorter things in especial that I have gathered into this series have ranged themselves not as my own impersonal account of the affair in hand, but as my account of somebody’s impression of it – the terms of this person’s access to it and estimate of it contributing thus by some fine little law to intensification of interest. [...] My instinct appears repeatedly to have been that to arrive at the facts retailed and the figures introduced by the given help of some other conscious and confessed agent is essentially to find the whole business – that is, as I say, its effective interest – enriched by the way. I have in other words constantly inclined to the idea of the particular attaching case plus some near individual view of it. (327-328)

Although James is specifically describing the point of view of the detached first-person narrators of his short fiction here, he is making a broader point about focalization, which replaces the ‘mere muffled majesty of irresponsible “authorship”’ with the impressions of a more responsible, because accountable (at least to the

reader), character (328).<sup>7</sup> This contrasts with James's notion elsewhere in the prefaces that raw impressions need to be refined. Here it is the impression itself which refines. It is not the impression which must be dramatized, but the impression which dramatizes. This recalls impressionist arguments that their paintings recorded the unique response of an individual: Degas argued that it is the painter's '*personal bias*' through which a conventional representation of an object becomes art, 'transforming the thing *seen* into the thing *experienced*' (Nochlin 1966: 64). The performative aspect of James's impression is emphasized in this passage: the witness 'contributes to the case' both 'criticism and interpretation', and offers 'help'. In other words, the focalizer's impression transforms the subject of the novel, intensifying and enriching it, just as James wanted the painterly impressionists to give a finish to their raw impressions of life. The cognitive and the performative coincide: showing how events are felt is the best way of telling the story. In this way, there is much 'felt life concerned in producing' James's fictions. The 'criticism', 'interpretation', 'intensification of interest', the enriching, emerge from what narrative theorists have called the cognitive, emotive and ideological facets of focalization.<sup>8</sup> William James would describe such a process as apperception, as we have seen, in which impressions are construed by the unique collection of ideas within each mind. This is what James's early disciple Percy Lubbock would soon after call 'the importance of dramatizing the point of view', in other words lodging the point of view with a character rather than an impersonal narrator (Lubbock 1926: 122). As James writes of the 'interpretation and criticism' that Fleda Vetch brings to *The Spoils of Poynton*,

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<sup>7</sup> The narrators, perhaps, of short stories, such as, 'Brooksmith', 'The Next Time', 'The Author of "Beltraffio"', 'The Death of the Lion', 'The Figure in the Carpet', 'Greville Fane', 'John Delavoy', and 'The Beldonald Holbein'.

<sup>8</sup> The psychological facet concerns the mind and emotions of the focalizer (cognitive and emotive); the ideological relates to the norms which govern the focalizer's ideological position (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 77-82).

‘the thing is to lodge somewhere at the heart of one’s complexity an irrepressible *appreciation*’ (129). Criticism, appreciation and interpretation are not only activities of James’s focalizers but, according to him, something he himself does, for example, in his role as a ‘student of great cities’, as we have already learnt in the preface to *What Maisie Knew*, discussed at the opening of chapter one (155).

The performative task of the impression as narrative point of view is not just to intensify but to clarify. In the preface to ‘The Altar of the Dead’ James asserts that, instead of representing ghostly apparitions directly, he prefers to portray their effect on humans. He uses the impression as a metaphor for a residual, or clear imprint, of something itself uncertain or vague:

With the preference I have noted for the ‘neat’ evocation – the image, of any sort, with fewest attendant vaguenesses and cheapnesses, fewest loose ends dangling and fewest features missing, the image kept in fine the most susceptible of intensity – with this predilection, I say, the safest arena for the play of moving accidents and mighty mutations and strange encounters, or whatever odd matters, is the field, as I may call it, rather of their second than of their first exhibition. By which, to avoid obscurity, I mean nothing more cryptic than I feel myself show them best by showing almost exclusively the way they are felt, by recognising as their main interest some impression strongly made by them and intensely received. (256)

It is focalization here, with its various facets, which offers ‘accidents’ in their second rather than first exhibition, allowing them to be shown as they are felt, as an impression made on, and received by, a character. Similarly, Pater directs the critic’s attention not to the object in its first exhibition but its second, namely his impression, just as impressionist painters pursue not an objective representation of the landscape but their own impression of it. Again, fiction is an impression in that it is a collaboration between focalizer and focalized; were these accidents characters, we might say that theirs was a performative impression, while the focalizer’s was a cognitive impression. Conceived of in this way, the apparitions become the occasion for complex impressions within James’s characters. Events and actions are mere

catalysts for the ‘drama of [...] consciousness’, as, for Wilde, in chapter three, the art object might only be there to help the aesthetic critic realise himself (15). James goes on to say that a character’s impression is not something added to the subject of the novel. Her impression *is* the subject of the novel, makes the story:

The moving accident, the rare conjunction, whatever it be, doesn’t make the story – in the sense that the story is our excitement, our amusement, our thrill and our suspense; the human emotion and the human attestation, the clustering human conditions we expect presented, only make it. The extraordinary is most extraordinary in that it happens to you and me, and it’s of value (of value for others) but so far as visibly brought home to us. (257)

The contours of the cognitive impression displace the orthodox subject of the novel, its ‘accidents’. Though not mentioned, it is through the impression’s imaginative appropriation that the ‘extraordinary’ is ‘brought home to us’, one more instance of its tendency to figure the experiences of author, reader and character as interconnected.

The impressions of a focalizer who offers ‘interpretation and criticism’ not only performatively clarify, characterize, and intensify, as we have seen, but ultimately aestheticize, as James’s description of Fleda Vetch makes clear. A creative consciousness, like Fleda’s, can aestheticize her Humean impressions such that beauty is distilled, just as William’s sculptor did:

This intelligence, an honourable amount of it, on the part of the person to whom one most invites attention, has but to play with sufficient freedom and ease, or call it with the right grace, to guarantee us that quantum of the impression of beauty which is the most fixed of the possible advantages of our producible effect. It may fail, as a positive presence, on other sides and in other connexions; but more or less of the treasure is stored safe from the moment such a quality of inward life is distilled, or in other words from the moment so fine an interpretation and criticism as that of Fleda Vetch’s – to cite the present case – is applied without waste to the surrounding tangle. (128-9)

James uses the impression here to minimise the already small unit of beauty he gestures at: beauty is so remote and unapproachable that the nearest a novelist can get to it is as a ‘quantum’ of an ‘impression’ of it, a negligible amount of its trace or residue. But the use of the word here, and its collocation with ‘freedom’, makes us

think too of Fleda's impressions as imaginative treatments of her 'surrounding tangle'. These impressions are applied by both James and Fleda as an act of 'criticism' and, for both, the result is 'beauty'. James aestheticizes his 'impression of life', the anecdote heard one Christmas Eve, by presenting Fleda's impressions of it as her imaginative transformation of her own experience.

At its most intense, the impression's performative aestheticizing has the potential to redeem bad experience. It is the redemptive power of the impression that saves Maisie:

This precious particle was the full ironic truth – the most interesting item to be read into the child's situation. For satisfaction of the mind, in other words, the small expanding consciousness would have to be saved, have to become presentable as a register of impressions; and saved by the experience of certain advantages, by some enjoyed profit and some achieved confidence, rather than coarsened, blurred, sterilised, by ignorance and pain. (142)

Here, rather than the character-focalizer aestheticizing the novel, as Fleda Vetch did, the role of focalizer aestheticizes and hence redeems the character. The alternative to becoming a 'register of impressions' shows the underlying activity of the impression: it stops Maisie being 'coarsened', presumably by making her 'finely aware'; it prevents blurring through its clarity; it wards off sterility of the mind; and, by thus preventing 'ignorance', it also reduces 'pain'. James's formal requirements have saved his protagonist – something which is true to an extent of all his focalizers. The impression is an important metaphor, then, for the transformative powers of consciousness – this is its greatest performativity.

Later in the same preface James expands on this performativity. Though he does not use the word 'impression', the passage is a hymn to the *tabula rasa* that each of his impressionistic heroines (and sometimes heroes) constitutes:

She is not only the extraordinary 'ironic centre' I have already noted; she has the wonderful importance of shedding a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension; of lending to poorer persons and things, by the mere fact of their being involved with her and by the special scale she creates for them, a

precious element of dignity. I lose myself, truly, in appreciation of my theme on noting what she does by her 'freshness' for appearances in themselves vulgar and empty enough. They become, as she deals with them, the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art; she has simply to wonder, as I say, about them, and they begin to have meanings, aspects, solidities, connexions – connexions with the 'universal'! – that they could scarce have hoped for. (147)

Maisie's impression is so cognitively sensitive that it performatively creates an alternative world in which the shabby adults of her actual world become 'the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art'. Like Wilde's aesthetic critic, she discovers her own meaning and beauty within experience. Instead of being 'coarsened, blurred, sterilised' by experience, Maisie shapes it herself.<sup>9</sup> In the process she shines a light, a metaphor James uses in the same preface to figure the effects of his own imagination (141).

As the only term which figures both germ and point of view, the impression bridges the two main themes of James's narrative theory. The shared metaphor invites comparisons of the two narrative procedures, and in some cases collapses the difference between them: in both there is an interface between life and art in which each is enriched. At times, as their common metaphor suggests, the dramatizing of the germ *is* the application of point of view to a story: in other words, the impression aestheticizes events. For James, it is the application of human intelligence to a situation that is the defining feature of novelistic art. The impression figures the transformative power of the imagination's role within human consciousness in general: James has found in it a single term both to figure how art is made and how humans in real life, and in fiction, make sense of their experience, implying that the two are one and the same.

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, what the Governess of *The Turn of the Screw* calls 'my dreadful liability to impressions' may also be a curse, as in her own case and that of the narrator of *The Sacred Fount* (James 1898b: 48).

The Jamesian impression has shifted. It no longer traces a fiction's relationship to its external context: it now describes how its characters relate to their external context within a fictional world. This may look like a dilution in the importance of the impression, but it may prove to be the opposite, for if, despite his late formalism, James is still committed to representing life, then his prefaces and – as we will see in the next two chapters, and the coda – his late fiction must needs place the impression at the centre, not only of the artist's, but of human consciousness in general.

## 5. Impressions Received in *The Ambassadors*

If the prefaces suggest that, in James's late fiction, the novel is a character's impression, *The Ambassadors* is Strether's impression since the novel is entirely focalized through him. Strether's impression is a means for him either to discover the truth, an empiricist impression (which is a means to an end), or to appreciate beauty, an aesthetic impression (which is an end in itself). In its empiricist state, Strether's impression may help him to make better sense of his own experience, to see what is going on behind the deceptive surfaces of life, and hence avoid the traps of those intent on misleading him, and to make moral judgements. Or, as an aesthetic impression, it may help him to 'live', to make the most of life by imaginatively augmenting it, and thus to overcome briefly time and death, the grim determinants of empiricist reality, either by allowing the fullest appreciation of the moment, or by making a beautiful memento of that moment that may be enjoyed again and again. That the very same resource offers both exacerbates the potential conflict between truth and beauty. The impression is, then, the intersection, and site of potential conflict, of the freedom of the imagination and the exigencies of experience.<sup>1</sup>

This tension is evident, too, within aesthetic texts, like Pater's *The Renaissance*. When, suddenly in Paris again in middle age, 'the cup of his impressions seemed truly to overflow', Strether seems to be following Pater's injunction, in his conclusion, of 'courting new impressions' of pleasure, as a means of 'mak[ing] as much as possible of the interval that remained' (James 1903: 60; Pater

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<sup>1</sup> Horne describes a similar tension between life and art for James himself as he composed the late novels, a period in which he was 'caught between his businesslike wish to have them done and paid for and his artistic need to keep on intensely finishing them' (Horne 1990: 18).

1873: 212).<sup>2</sup> In his conclusion, Pater is pursuing sensual pleasure, especially aesthetic pleasure, ‘ecstasy’, ‘exquisite intervals’, ‘delicious recoil[s]’, ‘perfect’ forms, and ‘choicer’ tones: experience should not be pursued for a wider truth, but only for itself – ‘Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end’ (Pater 1873: 210, 207, 210). But, when Strether, during a Parisian ‘vigil’ in ‘the watches of the night’, tries to make sense of the day’s events by analysing his own deepening impression, he behaves more like the empiricist critic of Pater’s preface, who believes that ‘the first step towards seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly’ (James 1903: 413, 103; Pater 1873: viii). In his preface, Pater’s target is apparently truth, the ‘facts’ about our experience of beauty: ‘one must realise such primary data for one’s self, or not at all’ is his empiricist injunction (Pater 1873: viii).

### 5.1 Strether’s Empiricist Education

Strether is despatched to Paris from Woollett, Massachusetts, via England, with an empiricist task, by his rich fiancée, Mrs Newsome, to assess the status of her wayward son, Chad, and, if necessary, bring him home to take up the reins of the lucrative family business. As Madame de Vionnet says to Strether of Mrs Newsome, ‘“she sent you out to face the facts”’, ‘“empiricist” meaning your lover of facts in all their crude variety’ as William James put it (James 1903: 187; James 1975: 12). As part of his empiricist education, Strether learns to see for himself in Paris, to incorporate his impressions into his ideas, he learns when and how ‘types’ and theories may be useful, he discovers how to extract truth from his impressions, and, how, like a

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<sup>2</sup> All further references to *The Ambassadors* are indicated by page number only.

pragmatist, to test his ideas against the impressions of experience.<sup>3</sup> He gradually learns a form of negative capability, which involves trusting his own impressions, and understanding things on their own terms. Yet Strether is also a poor empiricist, the last to know the obvious fact about Chad and Madame de Vionnet, and keen to discount what doesn't fit in with his own ideas.

Before his mission, Strether, cloistered in Woollett – in Matthiessen's words, 'shut out from the opportunity of impressions of life' – trying to imagine Chad's life in Paris, had instinctively reached for his 'impressions' of 'types', specifically the artistic 'types' of novels and romances, relying on what Daudet would call the second-hand impressions offered by books (Matthiessen 1946: 29). During printing, it is 'type' which makes an impression of a character on the page.<sup>4</sup> Like 'character', this literal meaning of type as something stamped may give rise to its meaning as representative type or stock character. More often in this novel, though, types, rather than making impressions, are in opposition to them, an *ex-ante* categorization of experience which may be tested against impressions received on the spot. Reading that Chad has moved to the Latin Quarter, 'like so many young men in fiction as well as in fact', Strether has an 'envious vision of the boy's romantic privilege', causing a 'precipitation of a special series of impressions. They had proved, successively, these impressions – all of Musette and Francine, but Musette and Francine vulgarised by the larger evolution of the type – overwhelmingly intense', characters from *La Vie de Bohème* (1851) by 'Melancholy [Henri] Murger', whose tales of bohemian life in

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<sup>3</sup> For Armstrong, James, and, by implication, Strether, is an empiricist (Armstrong 1987: 91). Ryan claims that Henry James, especially after 1900, developed a variety of pragmatism, and that this novel is an 'empiricist quest' (Ryan 1991: 76, 80-1). Strether, by the end of the novel, has 'experienced impressionism' and become a pragmatist (Stowell 1980: 220). Strether most approximates, of all James's characters, to a pragmatist, and Strether most approximates to James (Hocks 1974: 107-8).

<sup>4</sup> 'Type' may refer both to the wooden block bearing the raised letter which makes an impression on the page, and to the printed character itself.

Paris inspired Puccini's opera (67, 68, 69).<sup>5</sup> Here Strether's impressions of literary characters combine and crystallize to form an *ex ante* idea of Chad.

Having disembarked from his transatlantic boat at Chester, Strether meets Maria Gostrey, a single woman in her thirties, an American ex-patriate living in Paris, who acts as his guide to Europe. In London with him, en route to Paris, she senses that Woollett may have already made up Strether's mind for him, so she urges, while they are at the theatre, a more profound empiricism than Strether's original mission might demand: ' "I don't know [whether Chad's mistress is 'bad for him']. One never does – does one? – beforehand. One can only judge on the facts" ' (41). But 'facts' prove relative in the novel, as did Pater's sense of beauty: Maria Gostrey's facts are not like those of Woollett. If Strether's job is, at first, to test Woollett's theories about Chad against the facts on the ground, it also becomes, unwittingly, a test of Woollett's morals and principles against the facts of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's individual experience. Strether's burgeoning knowledge is represented, as so often in James's texts, as a sharpening of vision. Late in the novel, he summarises his new awareness of Mrs Newsome as a new power of sight: ' "She's the same. She's more than ever the same. But I do what I didn't before – I *see* her" ' (455). James describes this process in his preface: 'he now at all events *sees*; so that the business of my tale and the march of my action, not to say the precious moral of everything, is just my demonstration of this process of vision' (James 1962: 308).

As part of the empiricist education that she offers Strether, Maria takes him to see a melodrama in a London theatre, thereby offering him 'a world of types', in particular, fittingly for his mission, 'a bad woman in a yellow frock, who made a pleasant weak, good-looking young man in perpetual evening dress do the most

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<sup>5</sup> *NYE* replaces 'overwhelmingly intense' with 'irresistibly sharp' (James 1909b: 93).

dreadful things' (40).<sup>6</sup> So Maria doesn't discard Strether's and Woollett's *ex ante* types: instead, she objectifies them on stage for Strether, which gives rise to a discussion about empiricism, during which, as we have seen, she urges him to look for facts. After the play Strether reflects that 'however he viewed his job, it was "types" he should have to tackle' (40). Maria's subtle treatment of types is prophetic. The two pivotal recognitions of *The Ambassadors*, almost incompatible, are that the Parisian cast do not fall into the types as conceived in New England, in the abstract, but also that they do: Strether finds that Chad and Madame de Vionnet, when tackled first-hand, do not do 'the most dreadful things', but then he finds, in the famous recognition scene in the countryside, that, in one sense at least, they do.

As templates passed down through the literary tradition, types might be seen as lazy theories, the antithesis of empiricist thought, the 'received opinions' of which Locke was suspicious, or the 'principles taken upon trust' which Hume wanted to remove (Locke 1961: 60; Hume 1960: xviii). For Locke, 'innate principles' are 'unfit to be the foundations of all our other knowledge'; for Hume, 'the only solid foundation we can give to this science [of man] itself must be laid on experience and observation' (Locke 1961: 19; Hume 1960: xx). But, as we saw in chapters two and three, pragmatism acknowledged that theories could be useful when they help us to navigate experience, and Pater described in his conclusion how theories could sometimes sharpen our observation. Maria's empiricism is flexible enough, too, to take advantage of types when they are useful. She offers Strether lessons in how to use types discerningly. She is

the mistress of a hundred cases or categories, receptacles of the mind,  
subdivisions for convenience, in which, from a full experience, she pigeon-

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<sup>6</sup> Bell views Maria Gostrey as a repository of fictional concepts who helps Strether to think about his experience in narrative ways, freeing him from his initial prescription (Bell 1991: 333-4).

holed her fellow-mortals with a hand as free as that of a compositor scattering type. She was as equipped in this particular as Strether was the reverse[.] (8)

Maria orders reality by making impressions on it, by ‘scattering type’. This in turn suggests that the novelist’s production – via a printer – of type is a way of categorizing experience, ‘typesetting’, or, even, ‘stereotyping’, stereotypes being copies of arrangements of type made to allow the expensive type to be redeployed elsewhere.

Strether takes Maria’s hint and tries to suspend his judgement in Paris.<sup>7</sup> His point of departure, like Pater’s in his preface, is Arnoldian disinterestedness. As he begins to find himself seduced by Chad’s life, even before he has met him in Paris, he resolves that ‘he must not dispossess himself of the faculty of seeing things as they were. He must bring him to *him* – not go himself, as it were, so much of the way’ (88). As we saw in chapter three, for Arnold, ‘to see the object as in itself it really is’, the ‘critical effort’, is summed up in the notion of ‘disinterestedness’. Arnold’s desire to see the object as it really is, using his own faculties rather than falling in with others’ prejudices, is empiricist in spirit. But Strether perhaps comes to see that if ‘seeing things as they were’ means insisting Chad see Paris in New England terms, it is hardly disinterested. So Strether replaces Arnold’s empiricist precept with his own version of it, which echoes throughout the novel, and which reflects what William James called empiricism’s ‘fatalism’, ‘taking things as they come’.<sup>8</sup> This is a new

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<sup>7</sup> Strether’s ‘impressionistic receptivity’, his ‘openness to life’, is a ‘refusal to exercise discriminatory judgement that would reduce perception to preconception’, and a resistance to ‘narrative preconceptions’, ‘a program not only for the hero but for the reader’; the novel thus ‘tests the Paterian impressionistic outlook’ (Bell 1991: 377, 332, 333). Strether ‘dedicate[s] himself to openness of spirit’ (Crews 1957: 36).

<sup>8</sup> Bellringer also notices this Arnoldian echo, noting, too, Strether’s Arnoldian desire for the ‘higher culture’, and his status as a detached observer; James was Arnold’s ‘principle disciple’ (Bellringer 1984: 26, 25, 23). James was an ‘early convert to Arnold’s culture’ (Matthiessen 1946: 32). Woollett may then be an example of the kind of philistinism that Arnold opposed.

model and aspiration for Strether, the opposite of his ingrained Woollett habit of making one's mind up before seeing the facts of the case:

Everything he wanted was comprised moreover in a single boon – the common, unattainable art of taking things as they came. He appeared to himself to have given his best years to an active appreciation of the way they didn't come[.] (62)

Taking things as they come means trusting one's own impressions of people, rather than one's preconceived ideas of them. Strether learns it from the Americans in Paris who have developed 'free discriminations', for example, Little Bilham, who looks out at the world without 'prejudice' (95, 94). It means understanding things on their own terms. Strether has a growing negative capability, through which he surrenders to experience rather than trying to rationalize it, for example Chad's transformation, '“of course what it has done for him – that is as to *how* it has so wonderfully worked – is not a thing I pretend to understand. I've to take it as I find it”' (208).

That Strether's experience in Paris is first-hand is emphasized by his and the narrator's frequent repetition of the phrase 'on the spot', as well as characters' frequent references to 'judging on the facts', or, most commonly, 'seeing for oneself'. For example, when Strether suggests that Mrs Newsome might be won over by the charm of Madame de Vionnet's apartment, Madame de Vionnet reminds him that he has told her about it in his letters, only for Strether to say, '“All about you? Yes, a wonderful story. But there's all the indescribable – what one gets only on the spot”' (306). It is indescribable since it can only be understood through personal observation, not second-hand. It is also indescribable in that abstract linguistic formulae are unable to do it justice. The novel is imbued with the same empiricist antimetaphysical sense as many of the empiricist and aesthetic texts we examined in chapters two and three.

Strether's formulae, theories and systems fail 'on the spot' when confronted with the impressions of first-hand observation: he realises, in the company of Chad, that the plan conceived in Woollett, took no account either of Chad's or of Strether's impressions: it

'was drawn up, as it were, in complete ignorance of all that, in this last long period, has been happening to him. It took no account whatever of the impressions I was, here on the spot, immediately to begin to receive from him – impressions of which I feel sure I'm far from having had the last.' (245)

As a critic, Strether is initially attached to what Pater disparagingly called the 'universal formula', such as thinking Chad a 'man of the world – a formula that indeed seemed to come now in some degree to his relief', or Madame de Vionnet a '*femme du monde* [...] though he felt the roughness of the formula, because, by one of the short-cuts of genius, she had taken all his categories by surprise' (Pater 1873: vii; James 1903: 112, 200-201). So he makes critical progress beyond such restrictive templates, but then worries that the Pockocks, despatched by Mrs Newsome to rein in her wayward ambassador, had 'come to make the work of observation as *he* had practised observation crack and crumble, and to reduce Chad to the plain terms in which honest minds could deal with him' (271).

Strether meets the most vivid of Maria's 'facts' as soon as he encounters Chad for the first time in Paris, entering, late, Strether and Maria's box at the Comédie Française. This is the fact of Chad's 'transformation unsurpassed', later to be attributed to his friendship with Madame de Vionnet (102). 'He was in the presence of a fact that occupied his whole mind, that occupied for the half-hour his senses themselves all together', a 'new vision [...] the remarkable truth' (101, 102). This fact is later described as behaving like an impression: Chad 'had impressed him that first night as knowing how to enter a box' (155). Later reflection on this impression – 'our friend was to go over it afterwards again and again' – allows Strether to reach 'the

remarkable truth', just as it does Pater's aesthetic critic: 'the fact [...] that she has saved him' (101, 102, 209). This fact, then, is one that confounds Woollett's theories about the harm to Chad's character caused by Paris. Though others, including Strether himself at the end of the novel, question whether this is indeed a 'fact', Strether is genuinely convinced for most of the novel that it is. For example, once his new self-appointed mission is to try to persuade Mrs Newsome of Chad's new friendship, rather than curtail it, he says to Madame de Vionnet:

'Ah, remember,' our friend replied, 'that she can't effectually recognise it without seeing it for herself. Let Chad go over and show her what you've done, and let him plead with her there for it and, as it were, for *you*.' (228)

Yet a degree of uncertainty about this new reality soon creeps in. Perhaps it will be imperilled, Strether worries, by the arrival in Paris of Sarah Pocock, Mrs Newsome's daughter, which might force of him 'the instant forfeiture of everything', all that Strether has learned in Paris, 'some concession on that ground that would involve a sharp rupture with the actual' (257). So to resume the principles of Woollett would be to lose touch with this new 'actual' with which Paris has engaged him. However, soon afterwards, he worries whether he is 'on this question of Chad's improvement, fantastic and away from the truth? Did he live in a false world, a rank world that he had grown simply to suit him' which was now, with the Pococks' arrival, 'menaced by the touch of the real?' (271). When the 'real' and the 'actual' seem to be at odds, where do facts lie?

Strether credits his empiricist impression with the discovery of the most important of all the 'facts' he discovers in Paris, especially the 'truth' about Chad's attachment:

'I've made it out for myself [...] I couldn't, without my own impression, realise [...] I understand what a relationship with such a woman – what such a high, fine friendship – may be. It can't be vulgar or coarse[.]' (207)

Yet Strether's impressions in this matter have been heavily nudged by Little Bilham's disingenuous statement earlier: ' "it's a virtuous attachment" ' (133). Maria Gostrey, ever the exacting empiricist, is not satisfied with this, though: Strether 'must see' whether Little Bilham has 'lied', must test this concept against his own percepts; Maria responds to Strether's subsequent suggestion that they have seen 'enough' with, ' "Wasn't what you came out for to find out *all?*" ' (139).

Mrs Newsome would accuse Strether of being a poor empiricist, for failing to spot the one fact that he had been despatched to verify, the impropriety of Chad's life in Paris. Having seen the virtue of the relationship through his own first-hand impression, Strether later also sees the vice through another impression, when, as we will see, he chances upon Chad and Madame de Vionnet in the countryside. Maria had left him to observe this for himself: she kept away from Paris for the majority of his stay as ' "I didn't want you to put it to me [...] The question of what you were at last – a week ago – to see for yourself" ' (438). This most famous of Jamesian recognitions is a highly empiricist moment: an impression of sensation strikes upon Strether's mind and gives rise to a more truthful idea than he has hitherto held. Maria Gostrey reflects that – once Strether has shockingly acquired 'a knowledge' that 'she had had from the first' about Chad and Madame de Vionnet – 'the facts in question had been stoutly confirmed' (436, 437).

## 5.2 The 'Visual Sense' *versus* the 'Moral Sense'

We can make our way from empiricist impressions, through which Strether reaches for the truth, towards his aesthetic impressions, through which he 'lives', by, in this section, looking at impressions at the intersection of empiricism and aestheticism. These conflicted impressions are the fuel of the novel, deferring the truth and

spinning out Strether's mission. They involve the confusion of the aesthetic with the moral and constitute a series of misrecognitions, on Strether's part, only redeemed by his devastating recognition in the countryside, in which the empiricist and aesthetic impressions have their most vivid clash. This scene will be examined at length in section 5.4.2.

Most of these misrecognitions are impressions through which Strether thinks he perceives the virtue of Chad's attachment. They are often also impressions duplicitously made on him by Chad and his friends, collaborations, then, between impressor and impressees. They include: Chad's entry into the box in the Comédie Française when Strether senses Chad's transformation, Strether's first impression of the exquisitely innocent Jeanne de Vionnet, Strether's impression of Madame de Vionnet as a pious worshipper in Notre Dame, Strether's first impression of Madame de Vionnet's apartment with its 'air of supreme respectability', Strether's last impression of her apartment and its objects which soothe him after the impropriety of the meeting in the countryside (181).

The tension within the impression between empiricism and aestheticism is tackled early in the novel in a comic conversation which we will now examine, centring on the conflict, in this scene, between the 'visual sense' and the 'moral sense'. The extra powers of vision that Strether acquires in Paris remind us of James's earlier views of the perceptiveness of French impressionist novelists lacking in their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. But Strether makes an uncharacteristically blunt criticism of the 'visual sense' of Little Bilham and Miss Barrace that perhaps reflects anxieties about the effects of his own new taste for it. In response to their characterization of sullen and censorious Waymarsh as a Moses of Michaelangelo, or an Indian chief

who has arrived in an American city, Strether says sadly, and it is worth quoting the exchange in full:

‘You’ve all of you here so much visual sense that you’ve somehow all “run” to it. There are moments when it strikes one that you haven’t any other.’

‘Any moral,’ little Bilham explained, watching serenely, across the garden, the several *femmes du monde*. ‘But Miss Barrace has a moral distinction,’ he kindly continued; speaking as if for Strether’s benefit not less than for her own.

‘*Have* you?’ Strether, scarce knowing what he was about, asked of her almost eagerly.

‘Oh, not a distinction’ – she was mightily amused at his tone – ‘Mr. Bilham is too good. But I think I may say a sufficiency. [...] I dare say moreover,’ she pursued with an interested gravity, ‘that I do, that we all do here, run too much to mere eye. But how can it be helped? We’re all looking at each other – and in the light of Paris one sees what things resemble. That’s what the light of Paris seems always to show. It’s the fault of the light of Paris – dear old light!’

‘Dear old Paris!’ little Bilham echoed.

‘Everything, every one shows,’ Miss Barrace went on.

‘But for what they really are?’ Strether asked.

‘Oh, I like your Boston “reallys”! But sometimes – yes.’

‘Dear old Paris then!’ Strether resignedly sighed, while for a moment they looked at each other. Then he broke out: ‘Does Mme. de Vionnet do that? I mean really show for what she is?’

Her answer was prompt. ‘She’s charming. She’s perfect.’

‘Then why did you a minute ago say, “Oh, oh, oh!” at her name?’

She easily remembered. ‘Why just because – ! She’s wonderful.’

‘Ah, she too?’ – Strether had almost a groan.

But Miss Barrace had meanwhile perceived relief. ‘Why not put your question straight to the person who can answer it best?’

‘No,’ said little Bilham; ‘don’t put any question; wait, rather – it will be much more fun – to judge for yourself. He has come to take you to her.’ (153-154)

This is a puzzling, amusing exchange which neither the reader nor Strether fully understands, though it seems to encapsulate Strether’s impatient reach for an empiricist truth which is always obscured by aesthetic smokescreens. With ‘run’

Strether evokes the broad brushstrokes of the impressionists, in which colours spill over boundaries, and ‘So much visual sense’ sounds like James’s description of French novelists’ ‘extraordinary development of the external perceptions’ (James 1888c: 648).<sup>9</sup> Strether makes the same criticism of those in Paris as James made of the painterly and literary impressionists: they rarely reach the moral beyond the sensible. Little Bilham’s and Miss Barrace’s vivid images of Waymarsh have, Strether suggests, distracted them from an appreciation of him as a man, or as a moral arbiter.

Strether is also attacking the imaginative impressions of the Paterian aesthetic critic, since the Paterian ‘moments when it strikes one’ that their sense is purely visual are moments when Little Bilham and Miss Barrace, like Pater, conjure a vivid image of Moses or of a chief, in order to caricature a man they make few efforts ‘really’ to know, as more earnest New Englanders might. Miss Barrace’s response is that the fine light of Paris makes everything so seductively picturesque that they cannot be anything other than impressionists – who invest all their efforts in tracing the light, rather than asking more searching questions of their subjects. Strether’s next move, in pursuit of empiricist truth, is to invoke Arnold, and to focus anxiously on his quarry, Madame de Vionnet: does everyone show ‘for what they really are?’, does Madame de Vionnet ‘really show for what she is?’. He has mistaken Miss Barrace’s ‘what things resemble’, and everyone seeming ‘to show’, for the notion that surfaces might ‘resemble’ depths. But Miss Barrace means that everyone’s displays, their performative impressions, are immediately and attractively visible. Miss Barrace’s next move, perhaps hearing Pater’s appropriation of Arnold, rather than Arnold himself, in ‘for what they really are’, is to deploy an aesthetic impression of Madame

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<sup>9</sup> In a revised version for *Essays in London and Elsewhere* (1893), James replaces ‘extraordinary’ with ‘profuse’ (James 1893: 162).

de Vionnet, as imperceptive morally as the earlier image of Waymarsh, using excessive but empty aesthetic words: Madame de Vionnet is ‘charming’, ‘perfect’, ‘wonderful’.

Miss Barrace’s amusement at his Boston ‘reallys’ both mocks his suspicions and suggests that his distinction between ‘show[ing]’ and ‘what they really are’ is naïve. Strether’s empiricism is defeated in this exchange as his reaction makes clear: he is eager, then resigned, then groans. This is mocked by Miss Barrace’s suggestion that he ask Chad about Madame de Vionnet – who is of course the least reliable witness – and by Little Bilham’s mock empiricist suggestion that he judge for himself. That Chad ‘“has come to take you to her” ’ anticipates Chad’s careful stage-managing of Strether’s impressions. This encounter will be one of a series of misrecognitions in which Strether mistakes his aesthetic impressions for empiricist impressions of sensation, or, in the language of the novel, that he mistakes his visual sense for his moral sense.<sup>10</sup>

### 5.3 Strether’s Aesthetic Education

Strether is given an aesthetic education, too, as well as an empiricist one. Like Pater’s aesthetic critic, Strether learns to appreciate the ‘genius’ of Madame de Vionnet, and of the transformation she has brought about in Chad, the ‘product of her genius’ (200, 299).<sup>11</sup> Strether’s impressions are, typically, like those of Pater’s preface, aestheticized versions of Hume’s impressions of sensation, ‘impression[s] of beauty or pleasure’ (Pater 1873: ix). But they are also as vitally essential – essential for life – as the impressions of Pater’s conclusion. Indeed, they are as bound up with living

<sup>10</sup> As we have seen, Cave argues that Strether’s ‘knowledge is contaminated by desire’ (Cave 1990: 434).

<sup>11</sup> Strether is an example of ‘Paterian man’ (Freedman 1990: 196). His rapturous reception of Madame de Vionnet in Gloriani’s garden evokes Pater’s famous description of the Mona Lisa (Matthiessen 1946: 41).

itself as they are in ‘The Art of Fiction’ (‘impressions *are* experience’): Strether’s famous ‘Live all you can’ speech, the novel’s most Paterian moment, is the fruit of an afternoon of vivid impressions of a garden party in Paris (James 1884: 510). This section examines these impressions and their flowering in Strether’s speech.

*The Ambassadors* is full of Paterian ‘moments’. As we have seen, through the ‘most dexterous training of capacity’, thanks to Maria Gostrey, Chad and Paris, Strether learns to live more in the Paterian ‘here and now’, as the narrator of *Marius* describes the training offered by New Cyrenaicism; James’s narrator calls it ‘the immediate and the sensible’ (Pater 1885a: 157; James 1903: 4). With Maria in London, he experiences ‘the moment filled to the brim’, and, in the Luxembourg Gardens, ‘the cup of his impressions seemed truly to overflow’ (37, 60).

Consciousness is figured here, as in the texts of William James and Pater, as a liquid, perhaps water, wine or a river, as it is, too, in several references to the ‘rush’ of Strether’s sensations (101, 161, 250). Miss Barrace explains to Strether that, although Paris’s charms will eventually break him down morally and stop him redeeming Chad, ‘“you’ll meanwhile have had your moments. *Il faut en avoir* [You must have them]” ’ (152). Above all, Strether perceives Chad as offering philosophical lessons in how to live, a New Cyrenaicism, as do Marius and Lord Henry: Chad has the facility, we are told twice, of ‘knowing how to live’ (369, 412). Chad serves in the novel, in part, as the dispenser of vivid and beautiful moments and impressions to Strether – both deliberate, performative impressions, and more incidental ones – which Chad regards as a kind of medicine: when Strether asks why, if he was ready to return to Woollett, Chad got Madame de Vionnet to speak on his behalf so urgently to Strether, Chad says, ‘“I wanted you really to know her and to get the impression of her – and you see the good that *has* done you” ’ (234). ‘“Nothing would have

induced me – nothing will still induce me – not to try to keep you here as long as you can be made to stay. It's too visibly good for you" ' (173). Strether receives this medicine willingly, almost greedily, as when he implies to Maria Gostrey that he is staying on in Paris to continue to receive impressions from Chad, "impressions of which I feel sure I'm far from having had the last" ' (245).

Since, as we learn during the course of the novel, Chad is tiring of Madame de Vionnet and amenable to returning to his late father's business empire, the performative impressions he lays on for Strether are not strategic attempts to influence events, to allow him to hold on to his beloved, as Madame de Vionnet's are. In this sense they are more purely aesthetic than hers: impressions for impressions' sake, as Pater might say, rather than a means to an end.

Chad thinks these impressions do Strether good, as they change him. In this he reflects James's thinking from as early as 'The Art of Fiction', which in turn shows the influence of Pater. First of all, although impressions are indeed fleeting, they are events. As James wrote in the earlier essay, glances, gestures and 'psychological reason[s]', are 'incidents' and 'adventures' (James 1884: 512, 516-517). Strether, remaining after the other guests have left Gloriani's Garden, in which his 'impressions were still present', reflects on 'an amount of experience out of any proportion to his adventures' (167-168, 168).<sup>12</sup> Second, if impressions can be such striking incidents, they can change us: Strether realises how formative his own impressions may be, especially with regard to his embassy: it was 'under the impression of Mme. de Vionnet's pause, that going straight began to announce itself as a matter for care' (157).

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<sup>12</sup> Strether fails to live, as his intensity of being is not matched by his life: he can't find a plot of sufficient quality (Bell 1991: 324-5).

### 5.3.1 Gloriani's Garden

After Chad has finally appeared to Strether in Paris, in his box in the Comédie Française, the two spend a lot of time together, Strether trying to persuade Chad, who is attentive, but non-committal, to return home. During this period, Little Bilham tells Strether, over a coffee, not only of the virtuous attachment, but that Chad is keen for Strether to meet two friends of his, a mother and a daughter. Chad takes Strether to a party at the house of Gloriani, a famous sculptor with a beautiful house and a walled garden, at which he will introduce Strether to Madame de Vionnet and her daughter, now named. It is a wonderful Spring day. Strether is struck not just by Gloriani, but by the glamour of the social world through which Chad moves with ease and authority, a world of Duchesses, ambassadors and *femmes du monde*, like Madame de Vionnet.

Part Fifth presents this day in a Parisian garden and its aftermath, a day teeming with impressions. If, in the following discussion, I sometimes apply the term 'impression' loosely, it is because impressions come thick and fast, constantly made and received, lingering ('impressions still present') and 'superimpos[ing]' themselves on each other (163): Strether has impressions of Chad (143), and recalls his earlier impression of him as a 'happy young pagan' (173); he has impressions of Madame de Vionnet (155, 157, 159), of Jeanne de Vionnet (163), of mother and daughter together (164); moreover, Miss Barrace and Maria Gostrey have impressions (168, 169), and Chad tells Strether that Strether himself has made an impression (173). Pre-eminent among all these are the impression made by the garden itself, 'the place itself was a great impression' (136), and, what Strether describes to Little Bilham as, '“this place and these impressions”', as well as the '“impressions of Chad and of people I've seen at *his* place”', recalled by Strether, impressions which have suddenly, in

Gloriani's garden, ' "had their abundant message for me" ' – ' "Live all you can" ' (144, 161).

In Gloriani's garden Strether's consciousness is represented in ways which evoke the new empiricism: as William James showed, impressions and ideas reinforce each other, and the distinction between self and world is not always clear, as impressions seem to compose before Strether's eyes. Strether's mistaking of parts of himself for the outside world, the subject for the object, is what allows impressions to offer imaginative freedom, what he will soon call the 'illusion of freedom' (161). Very quickly Strether's empiricist impressions become, through the activity of the imagination, aesthetic impressions of sensation, moments through which one might, in Pater's words, 'make as much as possible of the interval that remained'; these are figured by both aesthetic and empiricist imagery (Pater 1873: 212). But even during these moments and impressions, Strether has an eye on the clock, as shown in the episode's use of analeptic prolepsis, a narrative mode in the major phase which sometimes serves as a counterpoint to the impressionist vividness of passing moments: the moment is rarely allowed to be simply the moment. Strether seems to be looking for mementoes, as much as for moments, ones which, like his image of Gloriani's face (that we will soon examine), seem to stand outside time altogether. The effect of these is to objectify Gloriani, to turn him into a medallion. These efforts of Strether's impressions to halt time, seem, instead, to emphasize its passing. Strether's moments yield their 'utmost' in retrospect. They are motivated by the same desire which motivated the painterly impressionists to try to fix the passing impression, but Strether tends to handle and burnish his impressions, once fixed, unlike the painters. Towards the end of the afternoon, Strether's impressions of sensation seem to have become more intense with reflection, the first in a series of

impressions whereby memory intensifies impressions of sensation. This culminates in his famous ‘Live all you can speech’.

This is also a scene of performative impressions organized by Chad in order to win Strether over to his Parisian life – following on from his deployment of Little Bilham as substitute, and his calculated entry into the box at the Comédie Française – which culminates in his arranging for Strether to visit Madame de Vionnet’s apartment. Chad makes an impression on Strether using Jeanne de Vionnet. Her grace and innocence are construed by Strether as evidence that Chad’s attachment is to her, and that it is a virtuous attachment. This is the first of a series of misrecognitions in which Strether mistakes the aesthetic for the moral, which are not corrected until the boat scene.

Strether’s experience of Gloriani’s house, before he makes his speech, is of a single impression: ‘the place itself was a great impression’ (144). This impression begins as an empiricist impression, but soon becomes, for Strether, twice described here as Chad’s ‘critic’, an aesthetic one (144). Gloriani’s ‘small pavilion’ and walled garden – it is hard to distinguish the two – seem to become a single state of mind, Strether confusing mental with physical phenomena, to use Brentano’s distinction (144-145). Strether’s ‘great impression’ is an illustration of William James’s belief that perception is whole and continuous, and not only associative, and, more specifically, that ‘*any number of impressions [...] falling simultaneously on a mind which has not yet experienced them separately, will fuse into a single undivided object for that mind*’ (James 1903: 144; James 1981a: 462).<sup>13</sup> Strether experiences this fusion when confronted by Gloriani’s guests, ‘types tremendously alien, alien to Woollett’, never encountered individually before by him: the guests’ ‘liberty, their

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<sup>13</sup> Griffin notices this, too (Griffin 1991: 37).

intensity, their variety, their conditions at large, were in fusion' for Strether, who experiences, 'all about him', 'a whole range of expression all about him, too thick for prompt discrimination' (147, 144, 145). Strether's impression remains both socially and geographically alien to him, disconnected, a walled garden, hidden 'in the heart of the Faubourg St.-Germain', 'as striking to the unprepared mind, he immediately saw, as a treasure dug up', thoroughly disorienting Strether by 'sweeping away, as by a last brave brush, his usual landmarks and terms' (144, 145). Yet, with mention of a painter's 'brush', Strether's impression does not long remain the dislocated raw sensation it began as; the impression begins to compose itself, to become the painted picture, rich in artistic associations, of so many of his perceptions.<sup>14</sup>

Associations forged by Strether's impression now suddenly appear in quick succession: they are rural (birds), civic ('grave *hotels*'), religious (a 'convent'), and opulent aristocratic seclusion ('old noble houses' and 'names in the air') (145). His sense of the place's aristocratic distinction as something passive – Gloriani's is the first grand house he visits in Paris – anticipates very closely his subsequent reactions to Madame de Vionnet's apartment, as we will see: the trees and walls of the garden 'spoke of survival, transmission, association, a strong, indifferent, persistent order' (145).

Strether is partly unaware of his own romancing. The narrator suggests that he is beset by tantalizing suggestions, rather than evoking them himself: 'This assault of images became for a moment, in the address of the distinguished sculptor, almost formidable', reminding us of an earlier meaning of 'impression' as 'attack' or 'incursion' (145).<sup>15</sup> This apperceptive confusion of internal ideation and external sensation is also figured in Strether's experience of the garden as both natural and

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<sup>14</sup> Bradbury detects impressionism in James's style here (Bradbury 1979: 53).

<sup>15</sup> "impression, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2014. Web.

artificial, as both outside and within the old house: the garden's 'tall bird-haunted trees, all of a twitter with the spring and the weather' are enclosed by 'high party-walls', overlooked by windows, such that 'the open air, in such conditions, was all a chamber of state' (145).

If Strether is not aware of the extent to which his impressions are shaped by his own imagination, he is more aware of the extent to which they are shaped by others, namely Chad. Even before he has arrived at Gloriani's, Strether, already feeling 'rather smothered in sensations', anticipates further '*panem et circenses*' from Chad, perhaps since 'he had known beforehand that Mme. de Vionnet and her daughter would probably be on view' at the party; this imagery of distracting refreshment is repeated when Strether feels his mind 'drink[s] in' Gloriani's face (143, 146).<sup>16</sup> The appeasing bread and circuses, and the painterly 'on view', figure Chad as both political strategist and artist in his treatment of Strether. Continuing both strains, Strether wonders whether Chad was 'nursing his effect' in order 'to spring them, in the Woollett phrase, with a fuller force', the Woollett phrase indicating, as it did with the austere Latin quotation, that Strether's defensive cynicism originates from the New England part of his mind (144). 'Bread and circuses' is how the Newsomes might regard the aesthetic impressions which Strether so enjoys: superficialities designed by Chad to distract Strether from the moral and practical business at hand, Chad's honour and his future.

Later in the afternoon, after his speech, Strether's first encounter with Jeanne de Vionnet is a series of 'impression[s]' carrying both painterly and military force, organized, in Strether's eyes by Chad, again both artist and strategist: 'Chad now, with a consummate calculation of effect, was about to present her to his old friend's

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<sup>16</sup> *NYE* replaces 'smothered in sensations' with 'smothered in flowers' (James 1909b: 193).

vision' (164, 163). Jeanne, the object of so much manipulation and scrutiny, is soon not 'her', but 'it', the object of Chad's artistic 'effect' and 'calculation': Chad

had plucked this blossom; he had kept it, overnight, in water; and at last, as he held it up to wonder, he did enjoy his effect. That was why Strether had felt at first the breath of calculation – and why, moreover, as he now knew, his look at the girl would be, for the young man, a sign of the latter's success. What young man had ever paraded about that way, without a reason, a maiden in her flower? (163)

As Strether sees it, Chad arranges Jeanne for calculated artistic effect, like a curator, as well as parading her up and down, like a master of ceremonies. Strether believes that 'what was in the girl was indeed too soft, too unknown, for direct dealing; so that one could only gaze at it as at a picture', Jeanne again losing her gender as she is pictorialized (164). 'The whole exhibition, however, was but a matter of three or four minutes', since 'the author of it [...] took the girl off as he had brought her' (165).

Strether checks the cynicism of his thought of '*panem et circenses*' with an attack on his own 'odious inbred suspicion of any form of beauty', assuring himself 'that he should not reach the truth of anything till he had at least got rid of that' (143).<sup>17</sup> Here truth, pleasure and beauty appear in consecutive sentences. Strether perhaps realises that beauty will have to be faced, and reckoned with, if he is to get to the bottom of events in Paris, to the 'truth', as it is with beauty that Chad is surely entangled. In fact, Strether does quickly reach a truth of a kind through beauty, when his impressions of Gloriani's Garden spill over to become his advice to Little Bilham.

Empiricism and aestheticism are most entwined in the garden, when Strether has his host's attention for a brief interval. The narrator's representation of Strether's mind, 'drink[ing] in' the sunlight of Gloriani and his garden, recalls Locke's description of the infant mind as a 'closet wholly shut from light, with only some little

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<sup>17</sup> *NYE* is less critical of New England austerity, replacing 'odious inbred suspicion of any form of beauty' with 'odious ascetic suspicion of any form of beauty' (James 1909b: 193-194).

opening left, to let in external visible resemblances, or *ideas* of things without' (Locke 1961: 129).

Strether [...] had the consciousness of opening to it [the light of Gloriani's 'glory'], for the happy instant, all the windows of his mind, of letting this rather grey interior drink in for once the sun of a clime not marked in his old geography. He was to see again repeatedly, in remembrance, the medal-like Italian face, in which every line was an artist's own, in which time told only as tone and consecration; and he was to recall in especial, as the penetrating radiance, as the communication of the illustrious spirit itself, the manner in which, while they stood briefly, in welcome and response, face to face, he was held by the sculptor's eyes. He was not soon to forget them, was to think of them, all unconscious, unintending, preoccupied though they were, as the source of the deepest intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed. He was in fact quite to cherish his vision of it, to play with it in idle hours; only speaking of it to no one and quite aware he couldn't have spoken without appearing to talk nonsense. (146)<sup>18</sup>

Strether here populates his blank mind with external impressions but he also becomes, in the words of the narrator of *Marius*, one 'in whom those fleeting impressions – faces, voices, material sunshine – were very real and imperious' (Pater 1885a: 157). In fact, faces and sunshine become confused as the impressions Strether receives feel like a refreshing liquid, 'material sunshine', pouring out of Gloriani's face, a kind of unremitting, Italian, 'medal-like' 'sun' with a 'penetrating radiance', disorienting Strether as much as the garden does as 'the sun of a clime not marked in his old geography'.

Yet the narrator remains with this 'happy instant' of Strether's for a remarkably short time. No sooner are we presented with Strether enjoying unaccustomed artistic lustre 'for once', than the narrator begins to focalize the narrative through a later Strether who looks back on the encounter with Gloriani, deploying four verbs in what Dorrit Cohn has called the '“future in the past” (be to + infinitive)' tense: 'He was to see again repeatedly, in remembrance, the medal-like Italian face', 'he was to recall in especial [...] the manner in which [...] he was held

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<sup>18</sup> *NYE* renders the activity of Strether's memory as less of a visual process, less Lockean or Humean, replacing 'He was to see again repeatedly, in remembrance' with 'He was to remember again repeatedly' (James 1909b: 197).

by the sculptor's eyes', 'he wasn't soon to forget them', and 'he was in fact quite to cherish his vision of' the deep 'intellectual sounding' he received from Gloriani's eyes (Cohn 2001: 7). This tense is the central feature of a device James used often in the late fiction, described as 'analeptic prolepsis' by Cohn – borrowing a phrase of Gérard Genette's – in which 'the narrator looks forward to a future moment when the experience described will have come to lie in the past for the remembering consciousness' (Cohn 2001: 5). While analeptic prolepsis will be explored in more detail later – when we turn to Strether's day out in the country, in section 5.4.2, during which it contrasts markedly with another temporal device, 'delayed decoding' – some features of it are relevant at this stage in the argument (Watt 1980: 175).

This analeptic prolepsis only narrates those aspects of the scene that Strether remembers 'repeatedly' or 'in especial', which amount to an impression – though not explicitly named as such – of how Gloriani the artist looks at him, offering him 'the deepest intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed'. To be 'held' – almost sensually – by the eyes of such a genius, even for a moment, offers Strether a delightful memory, a 'vision' to 'cherish' and to 'play with'. What does the experience gain through recollection? Which reminiscential elements are unavailable in the present moment? The effect of Strether's memory seems to be to objectify and to aestheticize Gloriani: 'He was to see again repeatedly, in remembrance, the medal-like Italian face, in which every line was an artist's own': he becomes, in Strether's mind, a patrician face on a 'medal-like' coin, perhaps stamped by his own hand. The memory arrests, or perhaps sublimates, the corrosive effects of time, so that instead they merely make Gloriani more august: 'time only told as tone and consecration'. But the narrator's four-fold insistence on Strether's retention of these moments is weakened by understatement, 'he wasn't soon to forget them', which suggests they

will at some point be forgotten, and the wholeness of the experience has become dissociated so that it is only the ‘sculptor’s eyes’, disembodied, with which Strether must reckon, not his memory of Gloriani the man, which becomes ‘his vision of it’, not ‘him’. This ‘vision’ of Gloriani’s eyes becomes sufficiently object-like that Strether not only ‘cherish[es]’ it, but ‘play[s] with it in idle hours’, perhaps seeking himself to master a moment which at the time had made him feel unnervingly vulnerable, but not to the extent that he can verbalize it, ‘speaking of it to no one’. Here, Strether does not achieve the goal of Marius’s New Cyrenaicism, the ‘consideration’ of ‘how such actual moments as they passed might be made to yield their utmost’, to ‘make the most of what was “here and now” ’; Strether’s moments yield their utmost not as they pass, but in retrospect (Pater 1885a: 157).

Strether, due to his temperament, is not often able to enjoy ‘moments’: he tends to treat impressions as mementoes, rather than moments, memories which, in their attempts to fix and hold, end up objectifying their subjects, such as the sculptor, Gloriani, or Madame de Vionnet.<sup>19</sup> He is also often unable to enjoy impressions in and of themselves, a form of aestheticism celebrated both in Pater’s conclusion, and in various impressionisms, due to his habitual attempts to find a moral behind the sensible, as Ritchie tried to (and Pater often, too, outside the conclusion); in this respect, Strether and James are not impressionists. Strether is more like a classical artist, than an impressionist or an aesthete: his moments yield their utmost in retrospect.

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<sup>19</sup> Pippin makes a similar observation: Strether is temporally divided, can’t “take things as they come”, since he’s torn between his duty to the past and his aspirations for the future (Pippin 2000: 153).

### 5.3.2 'Live All You Can'

The climax of the Paterian strain in *The Ambassadors* is Strether's own version of the conclusion, his famous 'live all you can' speech, which is his own articulation of the lessons Chad and Maria are trying to teach him on the importance of 'the immediate and the sensible'. Strether, excited by the '“great” world' of Paris on display in the sculptor, Gloriani's, garden, but aware that it is too late for him to take his place in it, exhorts the young painter, Little Bilham, to 'live all you can', while he still has 'plenty' of time, since 'what one loses one loses', there being 'some things that had to come in time if they were to come at all' (4, 168, 161, 160). In empiricist terms, the speech marks the moment at which impressions become ideas, when, in Locke's terms, 'the senses at first let [them] in [...] and names [are] got to them': Strether tells Little Bilham that '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' (Locke 1961: 15; James 1903: 161). The 'message', the 'fruits of suggestion', dropped into his mind, is the phrase, 'live all you can', which is hardly expanded by Strether during the speech; the catalyst for this message is Gloriani's house and garden, 'this place and these impressions' (161, 162).

[...] don't forget that you're young – blessedly young; be glad of it, on the contrary, and live up to it. 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.' (161)

James remarks in the preface that the novel's idea resides in the fact that 'an hour of such unprecedented ease should have been felt by him *as* a crisis' (James 1962: 307).

Strether casts his story as a failure to appreciate freedom perhaps because he perceives so much of it around him at Gloriani's party: he 'positively rejoiced' in the other guests' 'liberty to be as they were', moments before Chad 'easily named' Gloriani to him, Chad then 'still more easily turn[ing] away', 'as easy' with 'the great artist as with his obscure compatriot' (144, 146-147). Such ease is infectious, 'little Bilham's own very presence [...] as easy a one as Gloriani's own, or as Chad's'; Strether, though, remains immune to this prevailing ease, repeatedly worrying 'whether, since he had been tested, he had passed' (147). 'To be as they were' is for others a 'liberty', whereas for Strether it is something inescapable, imprisoning: the affair of life couldn't have been different for him. If one can only live as one can, this is because consciousness is predetermined, shaped by a mould. All that redeems this is the 'illusion of freedom', perhaps the mistaken, though cherished, belief that our consciousness shapes rather than simply being passively shaped.<sup>20</sup>

Strether here expresses a sense of resigned fatalism: 'one lives in fine as one can'. This matches a certain passive strain of empiricism which both Pater and William James in different ways resisted, and which Strether himself resists on other occasions: the notion that experience is a given, a chaos of impressions which

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<sup>20</sup> Strether's speech, aside from the qualification he places on freedom, links him to Isabel Archer's Emersonian 'transcendental enlightenment' (Matthiessen 1946: 27).

overwhelms the individual with its predestination.<sup>21</sup> Strether may be suggesting one of two things: that our jelly-like consciousness is passively shaped by life, as it unfolds – life, in a sense, makes a single large impression on our yielding minds – or that we are born with a certain temperament, the ‘mould’ into which our consciousness is first poured.<sup>22</sup> This powerlessness of the individual in the face of experience is a note of the novel, sounded, not only in Strether’s leitmotif of negative capability, ‘taking things as they come’, but also, for example, in the last sentence of the novel, when Strether closes his conversation with Maria with ‘“Then there we are!”’, the third time this expression is used by them (313, 318, 458). Strether reveals himself to be a determinist (freedom is an illusion) but also a pragmatist (it is an illusion he wishes he could remember as once his).

If the speech is James’s version of Pater’s conclusion, it has an elegiac concern for belatedness, and a vagueness about what ‘living’ might involve, missing from Pater’s text, in which living is defined as using art to get the most out of the passing moment. Chad, as we are often told, has the facility of knowing how to live, but Strether still lacks this. Later, Little Bilham misremembers the speech as being an exhortation ‘to see’, not ‘to live’, which adds a Paterian hue missing from the original.

Little Bilham says to Strether:

‘Isn’t it very much the kind of beauty you had in mind [...] when you were so wonderful and so inspiring to me the other day? Didn’t you adjure me – in accents I shall never forget – to see, while I’ve a chance, everything I can? – and *really* to see, for it must have been that only that you meant. Well, you did me no end of good, and I’m doing my best.’ (206)

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<sup>21</sup> Bell sees the speech as caught between ‘impressionism’, a ‘confidence in the fertility of perception’, and a naturalist determinism, symbolized by the mould; at the end he draws back from pessimism ‘to assert the value of the belief in freedom’ (Bell 1991: 331).

<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere in the novel, Strether is thrilled by how Madame de Vionnet has ‘moulded’ Chad (113). In ‘The Art of Fiction’, James resents ‘traditional moulds’ which threaten the novel’s vital freedom (James 1884: 515).

Little Bilham unconsciously substitutes seeing for living. Strether urged Little Bilham to ‘live’; he did not prescribe, as Pater did, a ‘dexterous training of capacity’ so that we ‘may we see [...] all that is to be seen’ (in Little Bilham’s words, ‘to see [...] everything I can’) (Pater 1885a: 157; Pater 1873: 210). Furthermore, Little Bilham’s ‘*really to see*’ echoes Pater’s quotation of Arnold’s ‘To see the object as in itself it really is’, and Pater’s own ‘to know one’s own impression as it really is’ (Arnold 1921: 1; Pater 1873: viii). Strether does mention seeing to Little Bilham, but refers only to his own sight: he sees twice, the empiricists’ outer perception, followed by their inner perception. First, he receives ‘impressions of Chad and of people I’ve seen at *his place*’, impressions of sensation; then, he sees within his own mind the product of his reflection on these impressions: ‘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’. So Strether’s first-hand sight prompted his recognition about belatedness, which is figured as visual insight, and aural insight (he hears the whistle of the departing train).

Perhaps it is understandable then – but why does Little Bilham confuse living and seeing? Perhaps because of the relish with which Strether describes both his internal and external perception, processes in which Strether behaves like the ‘artist of genius’ of ‘The Art of Fiction’, Ritchie: he takes to himself ‘the faintest hints of life’ – ‘impressions’ of Chad and his friends, ‘mild as you may find them to wind a man up so’ – and then converts them into his revelation, ‘Live!’ (161). Strether’s secondary, or internal, perception is as intense, if not more so, than his impressions of Chad and friends: ‘“Oh I *do* see, at least; and more than you’d believe or I can express”’.<sup>23</sup> Yet perhaps Strether’s intense – largely visual – experience of overwhelming impressions

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<sup>23</sup> Without reference to empiricism, Matthiessen makes the same point: seeing is more inward than outward (Matthiessen 1946: 31-2).

in Gloriani's garden, which spills out into an equally intense speech, is a form of the very living Strether claims to have missed.

Yet, as we will see, Strether's impressions of Jeanne's beauty lead him to two misrecognitions, that Chad's lover is the daughter, not the mother, and that Chad's attachment is straightforwardly virtuous. This confusion of the aesthetic with the moral is anticipated by Strether's thought as he enters Gloriani's Garden that Chad's new friends might be 'very beautiful, very clever, or even very good' (144).

#### 5.4 A Clash of Impressions

Strether's 'day in the country' outside Paris, chapters XXX and XXXI, Part Eleventh, is the 'climax' of *The Ambassadors* (407, 403). This is the moment when Strether realises that Chad and Madame de Vionnet, with the collusion of others, have deceived him that their attachment is 'virtuous'. Strether, liberated by the Pockocks' departure to Switzerland, and realising that his French days were 'numbered', decides to devote one 'to that French ruralism, with its cool special green', especially as depicted in a painting by Lambinet that he had been unable to afford in Boston years ago, but he finds himself, instead, preoccupied with his burgeoning feelings for Madame de Vionnet (397). By an extraordinary coincidence, he happens upon Chad and Madame de Vionnet boating, and clearly intimately involved. Strether is shocked and pained, jealous at being excluded from such evident intimacy, and hurt that those he admires have deceived him, and even continue to do so, when caught red-handed. But, in fact, there is no 'moment' when Strether realises his deception; instead, there is a slow process from first glimpse of the strangers to 'recognition' of them, to later and richer rumination about their behaviour (407). As part of this, the 'impression' rings out in this chapter, as five repeated, and vague, attempts to capture Strether's

changing state of mind. The first two impressions are aesthetic impressions of the countryside, as the scenery around Strether composes itself into the Lambinet painting he remembers. The remaining three impressions are more empiricist. This shift from aesthetic to empiricist impressions reverses their usual transformation in the novel.

#### **5.4.1 Notre Dame**

Before we examine the scene in the countryside in detail, it is helpful to look at its counterpart, earlier in the novel, when Strether seeks sanctuary from his mission in the cathedral of Notre Dame, only to chance upon Madame de Vionnet. Although it is similar in many ways, its differences throw into relief what it is that makes the later scene a recognition and a catastrophe.<sup>24</sup> It is one of a series of misrecognitions through which Strether deceives himself, or is deceived, about Chad's entanglement, only to be demystified in the countryside. The particular contribution of this scene is that Strether's impression of Madame de Vionnet's apparent piety, as well as the presumed 'difficulties' which make her turn to God, galvanize him in his recent offer to 'save' her: he thinks to himself, 'Unassailably innocent was a relation that could make one of the parties to it so carry herself' so that he decides 'to give her a sign' that 'he understood', that 'she was free to clutch' at him (220, 221). Strether's impression of sensation of Madame de Vionnet prompts an aesthetic impression. But, in contrast with the Lambinet scene, Strether remains in control of this aesthetic impression which informs his misrecognition, and keeps empiricist truth at bay.

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<sup>24</sup> Recognition has long been a major topic in James criticism thanks to the work of Todorov, Bersani, Brooks, and Cave, among others (Todorov 1977; Bersani 1976; Brooks 1976; Cave 1990). As anticipated in the introduction, in the next section, I recast Jamesian recognition as a process in which Strether's cognitive impression sees beneath, or beyond, the deceptive performative impressions of Chad and Madame de Vionnet. See the introduction for an account of what I add to existing studies.

Strether seeks out the interior of Notre Dame hoping ‘to drop his problem at the door’ so that ‘the things of the world could fall into abeyance’, in search of ‘a sense of safety, of simplification’ (216). In the habit of studying ‘fellow-visitant[s]’ with the curiosity of a religious outsider, Strether notices, on two or three of his circuits of the church, a lady ‘strangely fixed’ and still, ‘within the focus of the shrine’, who had clearly ‘lost herself [...] as he would only have liked to do’ (217).

She reminded our friend – since it was the way of nine-tenths of his current impressions to act as recalls of things imagined – of some fine, firm, concentrated heroine of an old story, something he had heard, read, something that, had he had a hand for drama, he might himself have written, renewing her courage, renewing her clearness, in splendidly protected meditation. Her back, as she sat, was turned to him, but his impression absolutely required that she should be young and interesting, and she carried her head, moreover, even in the sacred shade, with a discernible faith in herself, a kind of implied conviction of consistency, security, impunity. (217-218)

Here empiricism gives way to the aesthetic. Strether’s empiricist impressions of sensation ‘act as recalls of things imagined’: they evoke impressions from novels, plays, paintings, which offer aesthetic modes for understanding experience. Once evoked, these new aesthetic impressions imperiously determine Strether’s perception: ‘his impression absolutely required that she should be young and interesting’. We soon learn that the source of the ‘old story’ is Victor Hugo, ‘whom, a few days before, giving the rein for once in a way to the joy of life, he had purchased in seventy bound volumes’ (218). The ‘exorbitance’ of his purchase implicitly contrasts with his earlier failure to buy the unaffordable Lambinet, which is hence now no longer ‘the only adventure of his life in connection with the purchase of a work of art’ (220, 397). In fact, the purchase of the Hugo is ‘out of proportion [...] to any other plunge’ (220).

In the nave of the church, Strether’s impression of the lady has prompted an artistic reverie in which he tries ‘to reconstitute a past, to reduce it in fact to the convenient terms of Victor Hugo’, ‘the great romancer’, perhaps extending his impression in the previous paragraph, his ‘reading’ of the lady as ‘renewing her

courage', searching for '“indulgence”' or 'absolution', just as in the countryside he will try to reconstitute a rural past in the terms supplied by Lambinet (218, 220, 218). In both he is interrupted by Madame de Vionnet, who happens by chance to have escaped to the same spot; in both, she 'checked, quickly and gaily, a certain confusion in him [...] by an art of her own', and an impromptu meal follows (218). 'All this was a good deal to have been denoted by a mere lurking figure' but, as we are told at the start of the Lambinet scene, 'Romance could weave itself, for Strether's sense, out of elements mild enough' (218, 397). Like Pater's impressions in *The Renaissance*, Strether's impression romanticizes objects for him. This impression is more Paterian than the one in the countryside, as, like an aesthetic critic's, it is triggered by an object, whereas the later one is imposed on a landscape until the lovers appear and shrug it off. But here, Strether's recognition of Madame de Vionnet, rather than puncturing the romantic impression, as it will later in the countryside, adds fuel to the flames: Strether comforts himself that 'subtle though she was, his impression must remain a secret from her': 'She was romantic for him far beyond what she could have guessed' (219). The experience of 'the hour' is described in a Paterian register which celebrates it as a vital, if fleeting, impression: 'he was called upon to play his part in an encounter that deeply stirred his imagination', the Hugo novels may be 'the fruit of his mission', 'the surprise of a still deeper quickening', 'the moments had [...] drawn their deepest tinge' (216, 217, 218, 218, 220). The sovereignty of this moment is unusual in a novel which tends to frame the moment as something to be remembered, either to be revised or to be cherished. But here there is no analeptic prolepsis: the moment inside the church is left unqualified: 'Justice was outside, in the hard light, and injustice too; but one was as absent as the other from the air of the long aisles' (217).

### 5.4.2 Strether by the River

This scene can be read in two ways. On the one hand, in these two chapters, empiricism defeats the aesthetic, sensation defeats ideation. The Paterian impression which the aesthetic critic, Strether, has been embroidering for himself, of Lambinet, of Maupassant, is abruptly torn by an incoming Humean impression of sensation. Strether finally ‘sees for himself’, in Maria Gostrey’s words, after months of aesthetically inspired self-delusion (438). The apparent autonomy and freedom of the individual who inveterately romances is shattered by the accidents of the physical world. These external perceptions are then fleshed out during a ‘vigil’ of internal perception in his hotel in the rue de Scribe, the kind of introspection practised by Locke, Hume and William James. On the other hand, Strether’s aestheticism may itself be the catalyst for a richer form of empiricism. As the narrator repeatedly implies, the aesthetic impression Strether has constructed itself seems to precipitate his subsequent recognition: the arrival of the illicit lovers in a boat is ‘exactly the right thing, [...] these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture’ that Strether has been imagining for himself (406). Strether does not only see through a painting here, as he often does in France, and as his creator is apt to do anywhere, but, by ‘boring so deep into his impression’ of Lambinet, Strether unearths ‘the central fact itself’ (398, 413). Then he sees the object – that has been in his sights all along – as it really is, by knowing his own impression as it really is, by discriminating it, and realising it distinctly. In this reading it is not only his impression of sensation which enlightens him, but also his aesthetic impressions, and his sustained internal impressions: as for Ritchie, it is with his ‘imagination assisting’, his imaginative impressions, that Strether reaches the truth. We will sketch both arguments here.

Before we look at the scene in detail, a quick summary of the five impressions will help us focus on our quarry through the impressionist haze. When he arrives, Strether is walking about inside his own aesthetic impression, ‘boring so deep into his impression and his idleness that he might fairly have got through them again and reached the maroon-coloured wall’ of the Fitchburg Depot in Boston (398). Then this aesthetic impression is referred to again, having deepened, just before the intrusion of the lovers: ‘the idle play of which [the river] would be, moreover, the aid to the full impression’ (404-405). Then, soon after, Strether receives the first of three more empiricist impressions, a Humean impression of sensation as two figures in a boat rear into view: ‘at the very moment of the impression, as happened, their boat seemed to have begun to drift wide’ (406). Then there is an ‘impression’ which borders on ideation, an inference that Strether’s insistence that they acknowledge each other means that ‘violence [is] averted’ (407). The third impression is the most important, a distinctly Jamesian one, the ‘impression’ that ‘they had something to put a face upon, to carry off and make the best of, and that it was she who, admirably on the whole, was doing this’ (410). This impression takes ‘fuller form’, and is then ‘destined only to deepen, to complete itself’, a recognition of deception which slowly flowers, passing from germ of sensation to bloom of thought, mostly during Strether’s private reflection afterwards in his hotel room (410). Locke might call it an ‘idea’ from reflection or ‘secondary perception, [...], or viewing again the ideas that are lodged in the memory’, memory being ‘the storehouse of our *ideas*’ (Locke 1961: 120, 117). As Hume explains, ‘memory’ is ‘the faculty, by which we repeat our impressions’: ‘whatever is present to the memory, strik[es] upon the mind with a vivacity, which resembles an immediate impression’ (Hume 1960: 8, 107-8). Like Locke and Hume, James often conceives of reflection as a kind of internal perception.

Now to the scene in detail. Common to both interpretations of the scene, aesthetic or empiricist impression ultimately dominating, are the initial aesthetic impressions. Perhaps to prevent himself missing a train – as he imagines he has in the ‘live all you can’ speech – Strether begins the day by getting on a train whose origin and terminus are ‘selected almost at random’ (397). Such spontaneity may also be intended to foster ‘the illusion of freedom’ of the same speech, something Strether has never had.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Strether’s attempt to obtain the Lambinet now is an assertion of the freedom of the imagination in the face of an exacting empiricist and materialist world, way of shrugging off the determinism of his earlier lack of money.<sup>26</sup>

Strether is actually pursuing three impressions, his impression of the Lambinet, Lambinet’s impression of the motif, and Strether’s impression of the Boston episode. Initially, he wants to see French ruralism *not* ‘through the little oblong window of the picture-frame’ of Lambinet (397). He is looking for the germ which became Lambinet’s painting, the motif before which the painter stood with his easel. He apparently wants to dissociate – to use William James’s term – the romantic impression made on him by Lambinet’s painting, to recover nature from art, ‘to see the remembered mixture resolved back into its elements, to assist at the restoration to nature of the whole far-away hour’ (398). But he finds that that ‘far-away hour’ includes not only ‘the poplars, the willows, the rushes, the river’, but ‘the dusty day in Boston’ (398). So he is also trying to recover his own impression of the painting, and to acquire the painter’s aesthetic impression of the motif. These three impressions are all mixed up: ‘it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet’ (398).

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<sup>25</sup> Strether’s random choice of train reflects his ‘impressionistic susceptibility’, since his ‘impressionism’ involves being open to chance, open to impressions (Bell 1991: 349, 333).

<sup>26</sup> The missed opportunity of the Lambinet is ‘emblematic of a typical Strether situation’: ‘when he finds what his imagination demands and deserves, it remains always just out of his reach’ (Cave 1990: 447).

Strether is described later as ‘out there in the eye of nature’, a phrase reminiscent of the impressionist painter’s aim of ‘remaking for himself a natural eye’ (James 1903: 408; Nochlin 1966: 15). Yet Strether never manages to resolve the painting back into its natural ‘elements’. Strether not only can’t help looking through the picture frame, ‘he was freely walking about in it’ (398). The elements are there but they immediately fall into a romantic composition so that his experience of the countryside at first is of the Lambinet painting, which is swallowing him up: ‘The oblong gilt frame disposed its enclosing lines; the poplars and willows, the reeds and river[,] [...] fell into a composition, full of felicity, within them’ (398). In this last quotation, Strether’s agency is masked: it is Strether whose memory and composing powers of vision make a painting all around him.

Looking for a vantage point to settle on, he climbs a hillside ‘whence [...] he should sufficiently command the scene’; he soon has the ‘sense of success, of a finer harmony in things; nothing but what had turned out, as yet, according to his plan’ (399). He ‘command[s] the scene’ with the *ex ante* ‘plan’ he left Paris with, rather like the plan he left Woollett with, the painting he was determined to reconstitute (399). His plan is a form of metonymy.<sup>27</sup> The aspects he seeks in his scene are metonymic of the France of the Baedeker tourist guide: ‘he saw himself partaking, at the close of the day, with the enhancements of a coarse white cloth and a sanded floor, of something fried and felicitous, washed down with authentic wine’; on his way home, his driver ‘wouldn’t fail of a stiff clean blouse, of a knitted nightcap and of the genius of response – who, in fine, would sit on the shafts, tell him what the French people were thinking, and remind him, as indeed the whole episode would incidentally do, of Maupassant’ (399). This is appropriate given that Maupassant was, in James’s view,

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<sup>27</sup> Armstrong detects this more generally: ‘Strether habitually invokes synecdoche to signify Paris’ (Armstrong 1987: 74).

highly skilled at metonymy which, James had earlier implied, is an impressionist technique.<sup>28</sup> James also celebrated Ritchie's power of metonymy: she could 'judge the whole piece by the pattern', 'guess the unseen from the seen' (James 1884: 510).

At this point, we begin to sketch the argument that the empiricist impression will dominate this scene. Strether's thought of Maupassant is the beginning of the end of his controlled aesthetic impression, his refreshing rural 'intermission' from the 'drama' in Paris (400, 403). Up to this point, his mental and physical landscape have been unpeopled. Now, with the mention of the novelist whose sole 'instrument' James had earlier described as 'the senses', above all the 'sexual sense', thoughts of Chad and, especially, Madame de Vionnet intrude (James 1888a: 367, 369). Maupassant's appearance also augurs a deepening of Strether's impression. James had earlier complained that Maupassant 'skipped the whole reflective part of his men and women' (James 1888a: 385). Although Strether has himself been very reflective, he has only seen the surface of the lovers' attachment and the surface of their treatment of him. As with Maupassant, 'the picture again in this case is much more dominant than the idea' (James 1888a: 383). In fact, Strether's rather thin, metonymic, picturesque impression soon begins to falter when he 'conversed with rustics who struck him perhaps a little more as men of the world than he had expected' (402).

If Strether's 'appointment [in the countryside] was only with a faded Boston enthusiasm', it is because Lambinet's school, the Barbizon school, was superseded by impressionism (400).<sup>29</sup> Some critics have claimed that this episode moves

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<sup>28</sup> As we saw in chapter one, James in 1888 regretted Maupassant's depiction of people as representative not individual, discerning 'in his easy power to generalise a certain absence of love, a sort of bird's-eye-view contempt [...] the whole thing is an impression, as painters say nowadays, in which the figures are cheap' (James 1888a: 368-369).

<sup>29</sup> *NYE* emphasizes the conservatism of Strether's taste, replacing 'a faded Boston enthusiasm' with 'a superseded Boston fashion' (James 1909a: 247).

descriptively from a pre-impressionist to an impressionist register.<sup>30</sup> Not only is the rural scene suddenly inhabited by leisured urban types with a hint of impropriety – as in many an impressionist canvas – but Strether’s ‘free indirect perception’ (to use Alan Palmer’s term) moves from representing his perception as romantically composed to one that is more abstract and defamiliarized: ‘a village that affected him as a thing of whiteness, blueness and crookedness set in coppery green, and that had the river flowing behind or before it – one couldn’t say which’ (Palmer 2004: 49; James 1903: 402). Beyond the obvious impressionism of a river which fools the eye, Strether’s initial impression of the village as a ‘thing’ of various blocks of colour is what Monet called a ‘naïve impression’, ‘the first real look at the *motif*’ (Nochlin 1966: 35). It recalls Lilla Cabot Perry’s account of Monet’s advice to her: ‘“when you go out to paint, try to forget what objects you have before you – a tree, a house, a field, or whatever. Merely think, here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you” ’ (Nochlin 1966: 35).

The abstract description of the village which renders it as a sensation, rather than a perception, also heralds a move to literary, as well as painterly, impressionism. Henry James reported that Maupassant’s ‘recipe’ to ‘“become original” ’ was to focus on an object for a long time until it ‘become[s] different for us from all other specimens of the same class’, in other words until its associative links are broken and it becomes a sensation, a technique James criticised as a ‘*naïveté*’, reminding us of Monet’s ‘naïve impression’ (James 1888a: 372, 373). Like his brother, Henry James thought *perception* more habitual and unconscious than *sensation*, and hence that art ought faithfully to record this; moreover, for both, a particular talent for ‘noting

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Winner, Anderson, Bell, and Williams (Winner 1970: 77; Anderson 1977: 270; Bell 1991: 349; Williams 1993: 82).

resemblances', as William calls it, is what distinguishes the artist (James 1888a: 372-373; James 1981a: 500). Nevertheless, he uses the technique briefly here.

Sweeney is right in arguing that 'as the dramatic moment in the chapter approaches, the touch and treatment of Impressionism compose the scene', but it would be wrong to suggest that it is impressionism alone which precipitates the catastrophe (James 1956b: 29). Impressionism is only one of a number of artistic paradigms in play: we begin with Lambinet, then Maupassant, a literary impressionist, then painterly impressionism, then melodrama, hinted at by Sweeney's 'scene'. The people one might meet while walking about within the frame of a Barbizon painting are peasants, not aristocrats and millionaires.<sup>31</sup> So when Strether finally acknowledges to himself his obsession with Madame de Vionnet and Chad – a disloyalty to his day's muse, Lambinet – the narrator represents his thought as (suddenly and newly) structured by dramatic metaphors:

though he had been alone all day, he had never yet struck himself as so engaged with others, so in midstream of his drama. It might have passed for finished, his drama, with its catastrophe all but reached [...] For this had been all day, at bottom, the spell of the picture – that it was essentially, more than anything else, a scene and a stage. [...] The play and the characters had, without his knowing it till now, peopled all his space for him, and it seemed somehow quite happy that they should offer themselves, in the conditions so supplied, with a kind of inevitability. (402-403)

It is as though the melodrama that Strether saw in London in which 'a bad woman in a yellow frock [...] made a pleasant weak good-looking young man in perpetual evening dress do the most dreadful things' has deposited its cast in the Lambinet landscape (40). This then strengthens the impressionist temper of Strether's imagination, so we get a second reference to the village rendered abstractly in blocks of colour, and the disorienting 'idle play' of the riverwater (403, 404). The fusion of painting – Lambinet and impressionism, perhaps – with drama is alluded to when 'the

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<sup>31</sup> Anderson suggests they would be at home in a Monet painting, Winner, a Renoir or a Manet (Anderson 1977: 275; Winner 1970: 77).

picture and the play seemed supremely to melt together in the good woman's sketch of what she could do for her visitor's appetite', which recalls James's description of his favorite literary impressionist, Daudet, in whose work, 'the idea and the picture melt everywhere into one', unlike in Maupassant's, where the picture disproportionately dominates (James 1903: 403-404; James 1888b: 199). Here the picture is provided for by Lambinet and the impressionists, the idea by Maupassant and the melodrama.

The scene is not dominated by impressionism because both Strether's consciousness and James's narrative method are here antithetical to various characterizations of impressionism. Strether's overactive imagination has disabled his natural eye, or naïve impressions, while James's representation of Strether's mind offers a narrative prolepsis to the recognition which takes us well beyond the immediate impression. Furthermore, the representation of Strether's semi-conscious activity is quite unlike what James saw as Maupassant's neglect of the 'reflective part' of his characters (James 1888a: 385). That 'at bottom the spell of the picture' was a play suggests that Strether's experience is deepening – from picture to play – beyond what James saw as the thin 'simplification' of the painterly and literary impressionists, their '*superficies*', and their 'the great surface of life' (James 1883: 501; James 1888c: 664; James 1956b: 217-218).

What follows the establishment of these four artistic genres is the incursion of Chad and Madame de Vionnet into Strether's aesthetic impression via a sudden Humean impression of sensation.<sup>32</sup> The first two paragraphs of this are impressionist:

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<sup>32</sup> Ellmann offers a similar account: after Strether has swapped 'his puritan glasses' for 'aesthetic ones', 'under the vivid impression of Paris', in this scene 'aestheticism fails him as, contemplating a country scene as if it were a painting, he is jarred by the sight of two compromised lovers, neither of them painted' (Ellmann 1983: 19). For Freedman, Strether's 'aesthetic imperialism is ultimately reprov'd, for it leads Strether to witness precisely that which he has sought to aestheticize and therefore efface' (Freedman 1990: 198).

not only do they describe events ‘at the very moment of the impression’, but the figures in the boat had been ‘wanted in the picture [...] more or less, all day, and had now drifted into sight, with the slow current, on purpose to fill up the measure’, a picture that is increasingly inflected by impressionism (406). The incoming Humean impression of sensation of the lovers is also the violent incursion of impressionism proper, not just a nod to a mode of perception – the village – but the violent ‘ascendancy’ of two impressionist figures, ‘a man who held the paddles’ in ‘shirt-sleeves’, a ‘lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol’ ‘easy and fair’ (406). Madame de Vionnet, ‘the first at recognition’, ‘remarked’ to Chad on Strether’s presence ‘sharply’, Strether then had a ‘sharp start of his own’ on recognising them, both feeling ‘the shock of their wonderful accident’ (407, 406). The effect is that a new impression displaces Strether’s previous aesthetic impression, which Strether’s romancing and associative mind had woven together from the four genres. He is the first to feel the ‘shock’; in effect, he loses control, no longer ‘commanding the scene’, as he was earlier described (407). This is the world of Pater’s conclusion, rather than his preface, in which the vulnerable empiricist subject is overwhelmed by a world of teeming impressions. Strether’s attempt to realise his own impression, as Pater describes in the preface, away from Paris and its deceivers, to revive his ‘sweet’ memory of a ‘faded Boston enthusiasm’, is rebuked by his sudden impression of sensation of the lovers. ‘Facts [...] have invaded the kingdom of Romance’ to use a phrase of Oscar Wilde’s with which he lamented the dominance of realism, or, in James’s words, the ‘unadorned reality’ and ‘hard truth and stern fact’ of the impressionists has disrupted the ‘small Lambinet that had charmed him’ (Wilde 2007b: 87; James 1956b: 114, 115; James 1903: 397).

The narrative mode becomes impressionist in its deployment of what Ian Watt, describing Conrad's fiction, has called 'delayed decoding', in which narrative expression is given 'to the way in which the consciousness elicits meaning from its perceptions' (Watt 1980: 175).<sup>33</sup> The narrator 'present[s] a sense impression and [...] withhold[s] naming it or explaining its meaning until later' (Watt 1980: 175). This is 'the verbal equivalent of the impressionist painter's attempt to render visual sensation directly': the reader is made 'aware of the gap between impression and understanding' (Watt 1980: 176-7). For example, during *Heart of Darkness* (1899), when Marlow's boat is attacked just before reaching Kurtz's station, he narrates his initial sense impression that " "little sticks, were flying about – thick" ", but soon, reaching a fuller understanding, Marlow names them as " "Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at!" " (Conrad 1923: 109-110). Such a rendering of sensations, rather than perceptions, was central to Ford's definition of both his own and Conrad's impressionism. He wrote that the 'canon of Impressionism' was " "You must render, never report" "; for example, 'you must never [...] write: "He saw a man aim a gat at him"; you must put it: "He saw a steel ring directed against him" ' (Ford 1995: 296).

The first empiricist impression of the scene occurs, appropriately, during this delayed decoding. The narrator reports Strether's perception and understanding of the scene as it unfolds, 'within the minute', 'at the very moment of the impression', though the latter perhaps reflects Strether's later understanding that this impression in particular would be important. The 'gap between impressions and understanding' is maintained by the narrator: 'Chad' is coyly named only in the last word of the opening paragraph of the chapter, hitherto the two being 'the lady in the stern', 'a young man in shirt-sleeves', 'these figures', 'two very happy persons' (407, 406).

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<sup>33</sup> Armstrong notices this, too (Armstrong 1987: 95).

Madame de Vionnet is not named until the second paragraph, despite being recognized first by Strether: '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' (407). Strether's inchoate understanding of her motives is still liable to slide back into naïve impressions of colour and form. We are told 'that he knew the lady', rather than the identity of the lady, perhaps because the first thing he intuits, before he can put a name to the face, is that the face is familiar.

Yet Strether has more immediate understanding than Marlow: Strether's decoding is so much less delayed than Marlow's that the passage stretches credulity as an instance of delayed decoding. In quick succession, Strether sees the two figures, sees that they recognise him, which explains why their boat begins to drift wide (Chad perhaps briefly freezes in shock at the oars), which takes it nearer Strether, which allows Strether to recognise them. He then realises that they will only acknowledge him, if they think that he has recognised them, something which would require him to make 'a demonstration' (407). Thus, very quickly, what ought to be a happy, chance encounter becomes, for Strether, a 'sharp, fantastic crisis, [...] horrible' (407). What is most significant is not the 'prodigy of their convergence', but their different reactions to it (410). Strether ends the stalemate by 'agitating his hat and his stick and loudly calling out', and they reciprocate (407).

Now Strether has his second empiricist impression. He experiences relief, an 'odd impression as of violence averted – the violence of their having "cut" him, out there in the eye of nature' (407-408). Of course, what is violent is their intention of cutting him which remains, albeit thwarted. Strether's 'impression' of this is inexplicable in the moment. This is a sophisticated impression, not a sense impression, a piece of decoding itself that flowers in the moment. Although Strether

does not manage to burrow into the question in the moment, he is acute enough to infer insincerity on the lovers' part, which opens up a gap between surface and depth: Madame de Vionnet reciprocates his greeting after 'blankness and wonder', which Strether knows to be feigned (407).

Delayed decoding is now complicated by a series of prolepses, beginning with the narrator's allusion to Strether's *later* decoding: the question of the 'stiffness' of the situation, already mentioned, is 'a question tackled, later on and in private, only by Strether himself. He was to reflect later on and in private that it was mainly *he* who had explained' (408). This is the first of six instances of analeptic prolepsis, all employing the 'future in the past' tense, in which we are told that certain aspects in particular of the encounter will be remembered.<sup>34</sup> These tend to be sense impressions which gain an additional meaning for Strether with retrospection, such as Chad's collusion – albeit limited – in what Strether later realizes to be deception (409). We will examine other instances of analeptic prolepsis shortly.

James's narrator is here doing exactly what many impressionist painters rejected, as is Strether's consciousness: Monet, according to a pupil, 'always insisted on the great importance of a painter noticing when the effect changed, so as to get a true impression of a certain aspect of nature and not a composite picture' (Nochlin 1966: 36). By contrast, this chapter records the composite picture, the *paysage composé*, which Strether composes in his mind at night using the *impressions* he

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<sup>34</sup> *The Ambassadors* has significantly more analeptic prolepsis than *The Wings of the Dove*, or *The Golden Bowl*. Other episodes containing it include: Chad entering the box at the Comédie Française, Gloriani's garden, as we have seen, Strether's wait for Chad alone in Chad's flat, and Strether's last visit to Madame de Vionnet (101, 146, 367-368, 422).

acquired and recorded *en plein air* as *études* and *éssquisses*.<sup>35</sup> However, James's narrator continues to call the overall picture an 'impression':

Strether was to remember afterwards, further, that this had had for him the effect of forming Chad's almost sole intervention; and indeed he was to remember further still, in subsequent meditation, many things that, as it were, fitted together. Another of them was, for instance, that the wonderful woman's overflow of surprise and amusement was wholly into French [...] after they had shaken down in the inn-parlour [...] it was inevitable that mere ejaculation over the prodigy of their convergence should at last wear itself out. Then it was that his impression took fuller form – the impression, destined only to deepen, to complete itself, that they had something to put a face upon, to carry off and make the best of, and that it was she who, admirably on the whole, was doing this. [...] and since we have spoken of what he was, after his return, to recall and interpret, it may as well immediately be said that his real experience of these few hours put on, in that belated vision – for he scarce went to bed till morning – the aspect that is most to our purpose.

He then knew more or less how he had been affected – he but half knew at the time. [...] What it all came to had been that fiction and fable *were*, inevitably, in the air, and not as a simple term of comparison, but as a result of things said; also that they were blinking it, all round, and that they yet needn't, so much as that, have blinked it – though positively if they hadn't Strether didn't quite see what else they could have done. Strether didn't quite see *that* even at an hour or two past midnight, even when he had, at his hotel, for a long time, without a light and without undressing, sat back on his bedroom sofa and stared straight before him. He was, at that point of vantage, in full possession, to make of it all what he could. He kept making of it that there had been simply a *lie* in the charming affair[.] (410-411)

Strether 'fits together' his earlier impressions, as in both the associationist model of mind and the classical method of painting. Yet, at the same time, there is a single, large impression which takes 'fuller form', which, for an impression, can only mean that it makes a deeper imprint on the mind, as an inference, a thought, rather than a sensation: that 'they had something to put a face upon, to carry off and make the best of, and that it was she who, admirably on the whole, was doing this.' Strether's metaphors characterize what he believes to be their behaviour in several ways: there is a deeper truth disguised by a social 'face', the deception, 'carried off' by them, is

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<sup>35</sup> So I think that Anderson is wrong to say that 'it is only when their little play is replaced for Strether by the Impressionistic picture coming back again into his mind that he is sure of the truth' (Anderson 1977: 274). Armstrong attributes Strether's joining up of the fragments during his vigil to his 'composing powers of consciousness', though he doesn't mention painting (Armstrong 1987: 95). Marshall uses the same phrase to describe Isabel Archer, glossing it as 'the constitutive power of the creative imagination' (Marshall 1998: 119).

experienced by him as a theft and a performance, but also as brave and generous, ‘the best’, given the circumstances.

The deepening of the impression means a deepening of focus: his insight into their behaviour is represented visually. His nocturnal vigil offers him Lockean and Humean inner perception, or William James’s introspection: he can now discriminate ‘the aspect that is most to our purpose’, and, just as he had earlier climbed a hillside ‘whence [...] he should sufficiently command the scene’, now, on his sofa at midnight, ‘he was, at that point of vantage, in full possession, to make of it all that he could’ (399). Charm becomes a surface through which Strether can suddenly see: ‘there had been simply a *lie* in the charming affair’.

Strether’s ‘belated vision’ of all this reminds us that he had earlier discovered in his impressions of Chad and Madame de Vionnet that he was ‘just simply too late’ to ‘live’ (160, 161). Strether’s vision is belated as he is only able to interpret his impressions hours after he has received them, but also only able to see through the couple’s lies months into his friendship with them. Of the two experiences, of the two kinds of perception, external then internal, the latter seems again the more vital for Strether, as when the impressions of Gloriani’s garden became stronger over time: ‘his real experience of these hours put on, in that belated vision [...] the aspect that is most to our purpose’. The hours are only ‘real[ly] experience[d]’ in belated, retrospective vision, perhaps because part of his immediate experience is unconscious: ‘He then knew more or less how he had been affected – he but half knew at the time’.

This contrast between ‘then’ (i.e. ‘now’) and ‘at the time’, deepening impression in the night, and impression on the scene, sets out two Strethers through whom this chapter is focalized. In the previous paragraph there are four such temporal

moorings for Strether's evolving impression: Madame de Vionnet's initial 'overflow of surprise' (the volley of 'charming chances'), Strether's impression taking 'fuller form' once they are in the inn (and the 'loud ejaculation' has subsided), the period during which Strether's impression will 'deepen', and the point at which it is 'complete'. These are prolepses with different 'reaches' from the first impression, to use Genette's term, but they are all internal to the chapter in that they all occur during the day in question, or the night following it in which 'he scarce went to bed till morning' (Genette 1980: 61).<sup>36</sup> Each analeptic prolepsis seems to advance its reach a little further, and, along with it, Strether's degree of interpretation: 'Strether indeed was afterwards to remember [...] was to remember afterwards, further, [...] was to remember further still' (409). Such prolepses mean that, from the third paragraph onwards of this chapter, the details of Strether's pre-reflective impressions could almost be called analepses. At one point the reach is sufficiently far to make it an external prolepsis: 'Strether didn't quite see *that* even at an hour or two past midnight' (410-411). So, with each prolepsis, the impression deepens, but never quite 'completes itself', remaining an impression, never becoming a Humean idea. Strether repeatedly reaches the same new conclusion, the iterative narrative indicating that it never quite becomes an idea: 'he kept making of it that there had been simply a *lie* in the charming affair'.

So James, like Conrad, explores in Watt's words, 'the gap between impression and understanding', but he puts the emphasis on the latter (Watt 1980: 176-7). Is this a neglect of impressions and impressionism? Not really, for, as we have seen, James considers perception and reflection to be part of the same process, as did Locke and

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<sup>36</sup> For Cave, the analepsis implied by the scene 'stretches far beyond the temporal limit of the *fabula* itself': 'the recognition is more heavily laden than in any other of James's novels with the overarching sense of a life-story, the recovery and loss of a past' (Cave 1990: 432).

Hume. The emphasis given to reflection, as opposed to perception, to the idea over the picture, is shared with Locke and Hume. Through the use of his own faculties, Strether is able to dispense with hearsay – Little Bilham’s account of the friendship – and the embellishments of his own fancy, as Locke recommended, ‘the best way to come to truth being to examine things as really they are, and not to conclude they are as we fancy of ourselves or have been taught by others to imagine’ (Locke 1961: 128-9). Strether’s seeing for himself involves much internal perception, whose visual aspects James explores in more detail than do Locke and Hume. Such internal perception had also earlier led Strether astray. The recognition in the countryside which is really a recognition in the Parisian hotel, corrects two earlier misrecognitions, in each of which an impression of sensation became, on reflection, a mistaken inference or concept: Chad’s entry into the box indicated that he had profoundly changed in Paris, Jeanne’s innocence in the garden proved the innocence of her mother’s relationship with Chad. So in each, a concept or idea is derived from a percept, to use William James’s model of the ‘cognitive relation’ in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, but now each of these concepts is tested against Strether’s percept by the river, and is invalidated, since, ‘a conception, to prevail, must *terminate* in the world of orderly sensible experience’ (James 1976: 27; James 1981b: 929). This is similar to Hume’s testing of ideas by trying to find the impressions they were originally copied from, a test which dismissed the idea of personal identity. It is also a version of William James’s earlier pragmatist belief that ‘concepts [...] are things to come back into experience with’ (James 1975: 50).

Mention of this scene’s precursor in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) is long overdue. If Strether’s trip to the countryside contains James’s most famous fictional impressions, then, almost as famous, are two impressions of Isabel’s. In a scene

strikingly prescient of James's description of Ritchie's impression, Isabel, a sensitive woman, receives an unexpected and illuminating impression through a doorway, a moment which – eventually – allows her, like Ritchie, to reach the 'truth' (James 1881: 356-357, 451). This first impression is a Humean impression of sensation which Isabel receives of Madame Merle standing and Gilbert Osmond sitting, an intimate silence between them. The second is the repeated return of this impression to Isabel during her famous late night 'meditative vigil [...] of searching criticism' (as James calls it in his preface), in chapter 42, in which she reflects on what she saw earlier that day (James 1962: 57). This is more of a Humean idea, viewed in an act of inner perception, though James continues to call it an impression.

So the two recognition scenes are very similar. The excluded party in a love triangle has a chance sighting of the secret intimacy that excludes them, which they reflect on overnight, both, like Ritchie, using imaginative reflection in order to extend an earlier sensation; outer perception followed by inner. As is Strether's, Isabel's first impression is a raw sensation, rather than a perception, strange, lacking existing ideas with which it might be apperceptively received, but is slowly accommodated within a new network of ideas.

The differences between the two scenes show how James's impression, and his representation of consciousness, have changed in the intervening twenty years. While both experience the initial impression of sensation as a violent shock from outside, Isabel experiences its return later similarly, whereas Strether more actively shapes his impression after the event. The passivity of Isabel's mind sometimes evokes the more passive associationist models of perception of the nineteenth century, such as those of James Mill, J. S. Mill and Mach, as a locus for formations of particles rather than an agency in command of its thoughts. By contrast, Strether's reflective

impression is a collaboration between himself and what he senses, as Brentano, Pater and William James conceived of consciousness. In *The Ambassadors* the impression incorporates most of Strether's reflection, all but replacing his 'ideas'; Isabel's returning impression is more of a catalyst to reflection, as in Hume's associative model.<sup>37</sup>

Isabel's impression, although it provokes imaginative thought, is mainly empiricist. The history of Isabel's impressions reflects James's emerging thoughts about the impression. In 'her determination to see, to try, to know' she seems to share what James would later call, in his essay on George Eliot, 'the effort of the novelist [...] to find out, to know, or at least to see' (James 1881: 43; James 1885a: 677). Like William James and Walter Pater, and Henry James in the literary essays of the 1880s, Isabel investigates the relationship, sometimes confused, between impressions and ideas. Above all, like the young novelist James addresses in 'The Art of Fiction', she must consider how these different sources of information might help or hinder her pursuit of freedom. Isabel begins the novel rather like James's representation of George Eliot in later life, confined at home, reading books rather than receiving impressions, or like Strether in the office of the literary review that he edits in Woollett. The impressions she discovers when she comes to Europe are initially aesthetic ones. In England, she enjoys beautiful, if superficial, impressions of English life and manners, rather like those James describes in the work of the painterly and literary impressionists, or like those of Chad's friends whose moral sense has run to a purely visual one. In Italy her impressions of Osmond develop to become those of an aesthetic critic, like Pater. But these aesthetic impressions romanticize Osmond in Isabel's eyes so that she is blind to his faults. The result is that Isabel imprisons

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<sup>37</sup> Perhaps reflecting a move towards a more phenomenological conception of the self: Strether is 'the model of the phenomenological philosopher' (Williams 1993: 25).

herself in what will become a loveless marriage, with a man who treats her like an object. It is only when Isabel receives a more empiricist impression that she fully recognizes her situation.

Yet Strether's scene in the countryside does not mark a similar triumph of the empiricist impression. At this point, I would like to explore the thought that Strether's experience by the river and in his hotel does not mark the unqualified success of the empiricist impression. If the Lambinet episode is the puncturing of aestheticism by empiricism, by 'the central fact', why, in the following chapter, is Strether still 'in the high clear picture – he was moving in these days, as in a gallery, from clever canvas to clever canvas' (413, 420)? Wasn't it by 'boring so deep into his impression' that Strether reached the truth (398)? Rather than an intrusion, the lovers' appearance may offer completion, 'as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture [...] to fill up the measure' (406). Strether's imaginative associations here offer a kind of determinism – instead of the usual freedom – antithetical to the sentiment of 'The Art of Fiction', in which James resisted 'a form to be filled out', as a prescriptive limitation of artistic freedom (James 1884: 507). In this case, impressionist art offers a template or matrix through which Strether understands his experience: 'Not a single one of his observations but somehow fell into a place in it; not a breath of the cooler evening that wasn't somehow a syllable of the text' (403).<sup>38</sup> Through his impression, he realises that the lovers have been, all along, to some extent, the 'types' that his romancing has resisted, a careless young man and his mistress who should know better.<sup>39</sup> Strether's appreciation of Chad's sophisticated grey hairs, and Madame de Vionnet's Cleopatra variety, have taken him too far from

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<sup>38</sup> It becomes a 'light tale' of *'la vie bohème'* (Bell 1991: 350).

<sup>39</sup> 'In the end', Strether realizes that Madame de Vionnet is 'both type and unfathomable individuality' (Bell 1991: 351). 'Woollett was right but wrong at the same time' (Armstrong 1987: 89).

the types of Parisian melodrama, what James calls in the preface ‘the dreadful little old tradition, one of the platitudes of the human comedy, that people’s moral scheme *does* break down in Paris’; he did after all meet Chad for the first time in Paris in the Comédie Française (James 1962: 316). His evolving impression in the countryside corrects this. So perhaps the aesthetic impression, too, has helped Strether reach the truth.

The narrator presents the scene by interweaving impressions from Pater’s conclusion with those of his preface. The incursion of the lovers is an aesthetic impression of sensation – beautiful but alarming, like those of the conclusion – which slowly becomes an aesthetic, reflective impression – but analytic, too, like those of the preface. The narrative structure lays the latter over the former, and we move between the two. It is at night in his hotel that Strether is most fully the aesthetic critic, seeing the object – that has been in his sights all along – as it really is, by knowing his own impression as it really is, by discriminating it, and realising it distinctly.<sup>40</sup> Again, the aesthetic impression is useful analytically, perhaps.

By contrast, Isabel’s daylight perception and nocturnal reflection are separated, in two non-consecutive chapters (40 and 42), just as, as we saw in chapter one, James described Daudet’s ‘faculty’ as split into ‘perception’ and ‘expression’. That Strether’s perception and reflection are interwoven by the narrator gives the illusion that, like Ritchie, he perceived, understood and created, in an instant. I say ‘created’, as Strether’s activity may also be conceived of as painterly, as well as critical: his impression of sensation may ‘deepen’ over time as he adds more layers of

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<sup>40</sup> Bell and Torgovnick make similar observations. For Bell, ‘not so much the visual similarity of the scene to a painting as the process of such viewing is impressionist and a correlative for the way’, when we step back from the impressionist canvas, ‘we pass from the sensation of the moment to understanding’ (Bell 1991: 349). Torgovnick notes ‘How often in James [...] “reading” a scene – especially in retrospect – as one “reads” a painting becomes crucial for the character’s understanding of reality’ (Torgovnick 1985: 22).

paint to the initial impression, the ground, as he joins up his impressions to make progress towards the *paysage composé*. The narrator fuses picture and idea, as James argued the best literary impressionists did.

What if, rather than being rebuked by reality for presuming to create his own romantic impression, even for a day, Strether desires the arrival of the lovers, his fear that they may suspect him of ‘having plotted this coincidence’ indicating voyeuristic pleasure (408)? The dance of deceit of the lovers becomes in itself a kind of intimate tryst that Strether watches, with fascination: ‘the deep, deep truth of the intimacy revealed’ lies in the effortless coordination of their ‘make-believe’ (413).

The mutual impression of sensation at the heart of this recognition becomes a raw ingredient for Madame de Vionnet’s subsequent fictions, just as it did for Ritchie, each a ‘woman of genius’ (200). Strether certainly admires these fictions. It also becomes a raw ingredient for Strether’s nocturnal reflections. As often, deceit is described in metaphors of artistic creation, an analogy Wilde made, too, in ‘The Decay of Lying’: ‘fiction and fable *were*, inevitably, in the air’, ‘it had been a performance, Mme. de Vionnet’s manner’, a ‘comedy’ (410, 411, 412). Strether notices that ‘it was she who, admirably on the whole’ was trying ‘to put a face upon, to carry off and make the best of’ the situation, rather than Chad (410). ‘Admirably’ because, to some extent, Strether seems to resist the new depth conferred by his impression of reflection and to continue to value surfaces in and of themselves. Strether’s admiration at the impeccable good taste of Madame de Vionnet’s efforts to keep up appearances indicates the importance to him of appearances – even at the

very moment where they are revealed as deceptive.<sup>41</sup> When he next sees Madame de Vionnet, he reflects that ‘he could trust her to make deception right. As she presented things the ugliness – goodness knew why – went out of them; none the less too that she could present them, with an art of her own, by not so much as touching them’ (423).

Describing Strether’s vigil, the narrator explains how Strether must face up to the abandonment of his theory that ‘the facts were, specifically, none of his business, and were, over and above, so far as one had to do with them, intrinsically beautiful’ (410). Yet this theory has perhaps not been disproved by Strether’s deepening impression because the word ‘intrinsically’ rejects notions of surface and depth. The facts may continue to be beautiful in and of themselves; they are only ugly once one considers their deceptive outward face. By repeating Strether’s theory, the narrator seems to affirm it even as Strether rejects it; it’s a celebration of the unstudied impression, as well as of the theory which is allowed to go untested by facts, perhaps even of the pleasures of the deceived.

Madame de Vionnet’s artistry is not only employed to deceive. In their last interview, during Strether’s last visit to her apartment, he represents himself as an appreciative audience of her art, and she implies that her art has been making impressions for him.

‘[...] You’ve been making, as I’ve so fully let you know I’ve felt,’ Strether said, ‘the most precious present I’ve ever seen made, and if you can’t sit down peacefully on that performance, you *are*, no doubt, born to torment yourself. But you ought,’ he wound up, ‘to be easy.’

‘And not trouble you any more, no doubt – not thrust on you even the wonder and the beauty of what I’ve done; [...] I ought to be easy and rest on my work.

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<sup>41</sup> Bellringer overstates the extent to which Paterian ‘moments of appreciation [are] retrospectively limited by irony’ (Bellringer 1984: 34). Strether may be wrong about Madame de Vionnet ‘but none of this cancels the general truth that she opens up for him, that there is value in fictions’ (Poole 1991: 53).

Well, then, here I am, doing so. I *am* easy. You will have it for your last impression. [...]' (427)

Her finest impression is Chad, the 'product of her genius', and her hand is also behind all the impressions Chad has made for Strether, too (299). Whereas Chad has made these impressions whimsically, to entertain his funny old friend, Madame de Vionnet's 'performance', the 'work' of her impressions, has been in earnest, first to mould the man she loves, and then to try to hold onto him. Just as James argued that 'In every novel the work is divided between the writer and the reader', Strether, thinking of Madame de Vionnet's Chad, 'had the sense that *he*, a little, had made him too; his high appreciation had, as it were, consecrated her work' (quoted in Rawlings 2006: 95; James 1903: 428). Strether's last conversation with Maria Gostrey reveals that Strether 'made' Madame de Vionnet, to some extent, too; to her accusation that he 'dressed up even the virtue' of the lovers' relationship, Strether replies,

'I had phases. I had flights.'

'Yes, but things must have a basis.'

'A basis seemed to me just what her beauty supplied.'

'Her beauty of person?'

'Well, her beauty of everything. The impression she makes. She has such variety, and yet such harmony.' (439)

The impression Strether received from Madame de Vionnet formed the 'ground' of his image of her, just as James describes how impressions become the bases of his fiction in the prefaces.

Strether decides to leave Paris at the end of the novel because he has no moral code within which to encompass all the impressions, empiricist and aesthetic, that he

has received.<sup>42</sup> Chad has been educated and improved by his time in Paris, but, as predicted in Woollett, he has had a sexual relationship with a married woman. Such a tension cannot be accommodated by Woollett's rigid code: the preface tells us that Strether leaves New England with 'a moral scheme of the most approved pattern which was yet framed to break down on any approach to vivid facts; that is to any at all liberal appreciation of them' (James 1962: 315). But Strether never finds another code to substitute in the place of Woollett's which might offer any certainty, other than his theory of the 'virtuous attachment', which has been so publicly and vividly discredited.

Does the novel offer any kind of conclusion as to which impression has most influenced events? Both empiricist and aesthetic impressions caused Strether to renounce his original embassy. Empiricist impressions, finally, cause him to leave Paris. Aesthetic impressions have offered Strether a thrilling imaginative freedom with which to transform his experience, a vital resistance to the empiricist, materialist reality in which, as he remarked in Gloriani's garden, loss is loss. In the boat scene he enjoys this freedom to its fullest extent: it is, inevitably, associated with his fantasies of Madame de Vionnet. However, as he finds in this scene, his freedom is rebuked by reality, and his pleasure is contaminated by its source in others' attempts to deceive him. This is ultimately unpalatable, and so he reluctantly turns his back on aesthetic impressions, though he seeks out a few to perfect and to take away with him from Paris. He goes to Madame de Vionnet's apartment: 'sure in a moment that, whatever he should find he had come for, it wouldn't be for an impression that had previously failed him', a characteristic understatement of his certainty of finding impressions to

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<sup>42</sup> For Ellmann, 'at the end of the book Strether is obliged to recognize that this aesthetic advice [to 'live all you can'] is too partial, that beauty loses its attraction when founded on deceit, that morality cannot be dismissed simply because it is gloomily unaesthetic' (Ellmann 1983: 19).

be relished in the Rue de Bellechasse (421). Despite Strether repeatedly mistaking the aesthetic for the moral, the value of aesthetic impressions of sensation, and of reflective aesthetic impressions, is nevertheless affirmed, if qualified.

Yet the Paterian sense that a life can be fully redeemed by impressions is alluded to, and implicitly refuted, at the very end of the novel, where it is impressions Strether walks away with, rather than Maria Gostrey, or Madame de Vionnet, both of whom he turns his back on so as, in his words, ‘ “not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself” ’ (457). Maria corrects him with, ‘ “But, with your wonderful impressions, you’ll have got a great deal” ’; to which, Strether replies, ‘ “A great deal [...] But nothing like *you*. It’s you who would make me wrong!” ’ (457). If impressions could redeem Strether’s life, then he wouldn’t, Puritan that he is, walk away with them.

## 6. Impressions Made in *The Wings of the Dove*

Impressions, in *The Wings of the Dove*, seem to be involved in deceit in the very same way they are in *The Ambassadors*: in both novels, performative impressions are manipulated by illicit lovers to disguise their erotic relations, past or present, from a third party, who then manages, eventually, through cognitive impressions, to see through this duplicity. However, *The Wings of the Dove* does turn the tables, to some extent. Milly herself confects a series of performative counter-impressions which undermine the deceivers' plans: she seduces Densher into falling in love with her, hence making real what he had previously feigned, meaning that he can only finally countenance marrying Kate without the money they have both striven for. So here the dupe realises that impressions are two-ended and may be made as well as received, something that Strether was unable to realise or act on successfully.

### 6.1 Overt and Covert Plots

I have just described a candidate for the novel's 'covert plot', rather than its 'overt plot', to use Cedric Watts' model (Watts 1984). A covert plot is morally 'paradoxical or self-contradictory' (Watts 1984: 13). 'To the extent that a main plot has gaps, ellipses and opacities which render it subject to strenuous acts of inference, it invites the kind of reading which is required by a covert plot' (Watts 1984: 111). For example, Watts writes of Conrad's *The Secret Agent* that

the overt plot of the novel shows how the forces of law and order in London prevail over the forces of anarchy, subversion and disruption. The covert plot, which is sustained by a series of ironic symmetries, [...] suggests [...] that there are troubling resemblances between the world of the authorities and the world of subversion. (Watts 1984: 111)

I will suggest that there are symmetries between the lovers' deceit and Milly's response to it. In the overt plot Milly is successfully deceived by Kate's and

Densher's plan which involves them making performative impressions on her: Densher is to make up to a dying girl in order to win her fortune, allowing Densher and Kate the wealth they need to marry. Milly believes the lovers' deceptive impressions that suggest Kate does not requite Densher's love, and Densher's that he is sincerely courting Milly in Venice. Any recognition that there is a clandestine bond between them, reinforced by her cognitive impression of them meeting secretly in the National Gallery, is subdued by their subsequent performances. But Milly's suspicion is vindicated when Lord Mark, piqued by Milly's refusal of him, perhaps in favour of Densher, goes to Venice to tell her that Densher and Kate have been secretly engaged all along. Bitterly disappointed, she closes the doors of her rented palace, the Palazzo Leporelli, against him, and 'turn[s] her face to the wall' (James 1902: 469).<sup>1</sup> After a consultation with Sir Luke Strett, in which he may have 'interced[ed]' on Densher's behalf, she apparently relents and sees him one last time, but never mentions his betrayal, and goes on to bequeath him a substantial amount of money in her will (518). After her death, Densher slowly falls in love with her memory, and, revolted by his and Kate's betrayal, abandons their plot by making his relinquishing of the legacy a condition of their marriage.

In the covert plot, Milly plays the lovers at their own game and wins. Far from flying away, above and beyond the exchange of impressions, she enters the fray, learning to confect them. By constructing her own surfaces, and adhering to them relentlessly, she manages to create a new reality in which she is victorious: her rival is defeated, and her beloved loves her. She seizes the medicine prescribed by Sir Luke. In this reading she is the dove of the Psalms – 'Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with

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<sup>1</sup> All further references to *The Wings of the Dove* are indicated by page number only.

yellow gold’ – in which God decorates and exalts meek women so that they are powerful and rich.<sup>2</sup>

As we saw in chapter three, the impression’s history after Pater’s *The Renaissance* – which I argued was an important context for *The Ambassadors* – occurs partly within Pater’s later book *Marius the Epicurean*, and partly in the work of one of Pater’s followers, Oscar Wilde. In this chapter I argue that *Marius* offers an illuminating context for the overt plot of *The Wings of the Dove*; in the novel’s more subversive covert plot, I detect the influence of Wilde’s more creative, more performative impressions.

How does *Marius* help us make sense of *The Wings of the Dove*? For Jonathan Freedman, ‘unlike *The Ambassadors* or even *The Golden Bowl*, *Wings*’s persistent echoings of aestheticist texts ring hollow’, since in this novel James’s deployment of ‘the imaginative structures of British aestheticism is [...] self-critical’ (Freedman 1990: 206). This latter comment could equally apply to Pater’s treatment of aesthetic impressions in *Marius*. Chapter three outlined how *Marius* rationalized, historicized, qualified and ultimately critiqued the aesthetic impressions of Pater’s earlier conclusion. Both novels close with the displacing of aesthetic impressions by something fuller and deeper. At the end of his life, Marius comes to understand his ‘elaborate and life-long education of his receptive powers’, in other words, his ability to receive the finest impressions, as a ‘preparation towards possible further revelation, some day – an ampler vision’, presumably the Christian visions of the closing pages (Pater 1885b: 241). Approaching death, Marius, in search of peace in the watches of the night, tries to fix his mind on ‘all the persons he had loved in life – on his love for them [...] rather than on theirs for him’, with the result that ‘In the bare sense of

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 68:13. This, and all further Biblical quotations, are from the King James Version.

having loved he seemed to find, even amid this foundering of the ship, that on which his soul might “assuredly rest and depend” (Pater 1885b: 245). If Kate is to be believed, Milly finds a similar peace, “The peace of having loved [...] Of having *been* loved [...] That is. Of having [...] realised her passion” (518-519). In the overt plot, Milly’s love survives Densher’s deceitful impressions and her forgiveness inspires an equal love in Densher, something beyond any impression she has made on him, so that Densher even visits church back in London. In Milly’s apotheosis, in the minds of other characters, she rises above Venice and enfolds them all within her wings. She rises above the hall of mirrors within which impressions are received and made.<sup>3</sup> While Strether leaves *The Ambassadors* clutching only his impressions, Milly finds the peace of reciprocated feelings.

The covert plot of *The Wings of the Dove* eschews any such Paterian ‘truce’ with Christianity, or with idealism or spiritualism, and adheres to the aesthetic impressions of mid-period Pater as tenaciously as Wilde did after *The Renaissance*.<sup>4</sup> Of course Wilde, as we saw in chapter three, went beyond Pater, by amplifying the creativity inherent in the Paterian aesthetic critic’s impression. The covert plot of *The Wings of the Dove* acts similarly on the impression it inherits from *The Ambassadors*. As we saw in chapter three, while Pater tactfully deferred the aim Arnold assigned to criticism of ‘see[ing] the object as in itself it really is’, by explaining that the first step was ‘to know one’s own impression as it really is’, Wilde, in ‘The Critic as Artist’, condemned it as a ‘very serious error’, since it ignored the fact that the best criticism is ‘purely subjective’ (Pater 1873: viii; Wilde 2007a: 155). Instead, ‘the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not’ (Wilde 2007a: 159). So

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<sup>3</sup> Surfaces are replaced by a new distinction between surface and depth, which, for some, has religious connotations: ‘the irruption of the divine order into the natural’ ‘pierces though the appearances, exposing to view the reality that lies beneath’ (Krook 1967: 229).

<sup>4</sup> F. C. McGrath describes Pater’s short story, ‘The Child in the House’ (1878), as Pater’s ‘truce’ with Christianity (McGrath 1986: 382).

Wilde abandoned Hume's copy principle which was the bedrock of the aesthetic critic's reflective impression, however imaginative. Wilde's impression is no longer an instrument of appreciation, but an end in itself, *l'impression pour l'impression*. The Wildean critic as artist uses the impression to express himself and discover his own meaning in the outside world, almost an idealist, in the philosophical meaning of the word.

As they go about welcoming her into English society, Densher and, primarily, Kate, are the Artists; Milly, the audience to which they play, is the Critic. But Milly goes beyond being a Paterian critic, like Strether, and becomes the Wildean Critic as Artist. If Milly walks so purposefully into the lovers' trap, she is also the Wildean critic who treats art simply as a starting-point for her own creation: as Kate tells Densher of their plot, he need ' "simply be kind to *her*" ' and ' "leave the rest to *her*" '. As creative critic, she collaborates with the artist, and is complicit in her own deceit: she takes the lovers' plot and embellishes it, expressing it in her own terms, in her own medium, renting palaces, changing dresses, and writing carefully-timed letters. Like Wilde when he plagiarizes, she appropriates others' impressions and makes them her own.

Another sign of this modulation from Paterianism to Wildeanism, is the relative absence of the empiricist, colloquial leitmotif so much more common in *The Ambassadors* and even *The Golden Bowl*, 'seeing for oneself'.<sup>5</sup> As we will see, potential recognition scenes tend to fall short of recognition in *The Wings of the Dove*: for example, the shock of Milly's sight of Kate and Densher in the National Gallery only briefly disturbs her settled view of them. In some ways, characters' failure to see the object 'as in itself it really is' seems almost an effort to see the object 'as in itself

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<sup>5</sup> Though some critics see Milly as an empiricist, for example Holland who sees this as a characteristically American quality (Holland 1964: 295).

it really is not', a deliberate denial of reality. This refusal to submit to one's impressions is a rejection of empiricism in the name of autonomy, seeing for oneself in the more subjective, even solipsistic, sense, as when Little Bilham tells Strether, '“you're not a person to whom it's easy to tell things you don't want to know”' (James 1903: 150). For Wilde, 'the meaning of any beautiful created thing' is as much in the 'soul' of the critic as the artist; for Milly, perhaps, too, the meaning of the beautiful fictions which deceive her belong to her, as well as to Densher and Kate (Wilde 2007a: 157). The delusions sustained by these misfiring recognitions are not necessarily ever punctured. If, for William James, true empiricism meant, as his theory of pragmatism suggested, provisionally accepting theories and principles, potential fictions, but then testing them by returning into experience with them, some characters manage to preserve their cherished fictions, their performative impressions, from this re-entry into experience, Milly by dying, Densher by turning inwards.

While Wilde offers one context against which to look at the creative impressions of *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*, his impressions are still the critic's, however subjective, still somehow a response to the artist's impressions. Empiricist and aesthetic impressions are fundamentally impressions received on the mind, rather than made on the page or the canvas. Theories of performativity – those of Austin, Derrida, de Man, Butler and Miller, in chronological order – are useful at this stage in my argument as they offer a theory not only of how artistic impressions are made, but situate this within a spectrum of impressions made, including artistic, non-artistic, verbal, gestural, deceitful, creative. But, as we will see, they also offer a way of conceptualizing how impressions are received: how the world is acknowledged or described, rather than intervened in; but also how, in acts of creative reading, registering the world may itself be creative.

## 6.2 Milly the Critic

The fullest enjoyment of aesthetic impressions, which Strether in *The Ambassadors* inclines towards but cannot quite reconcile himself to, is embraced, in *The Wings of the Dove*, by Milly Theale. This, indeed, is her doctor's prescription: ' "Well, see all you can" ', Milly's Harley Street physician, Sir Luke Strett, tells his terminally ill young patient (203). Sir Luke's prescription conflates Strether's 'Live all you can' with Little Bilham's misremembering of it as '*really* to see' (James 1903: 161, 206). Aesthetic impressions of sensation offer Milly and Strether the opportunity to live suddenly and intensely. Both have, in her words, ' "lived all these years as if I were dead" ', their past experience, especially of intimacy, curtailed by death; but both risk running out of time to remedy this, Strether because of his age, Milly because of her illness (165).

Milly's desperate need to live, to love Densher, becomes enmeshed with Densher's and Kate's need to live and love each other, as Strether's did with Chad's and Madame de Vionnet's. Milly seeks the kinds of impressions the secret lovers are equipped to provide. James describes the resulting collaboration in his preface in which the lovers 'promot[e] her illusion, under her importunity', but, of course, in their own interests:

If her impulse to wrest from her shrinking hour still as much of the fruit of life as possible, if this longing can take effect only by the aid of others, their participation (appealed to, entangled and coerced as they find themselves) becomes their drama too – that of their promoting her illusion, under her importunity, for reasons, for interests and advantages, from motives and points of view, of their own. (James 1962: 291)

Milly's hopes for intimacy with Densher, threatened by the clandestine bond that seems to her to exist between Densher and Kate – Kate never mentions her acquaintance with him, then Milly surprises them alone together in the National

Gallery – are revived by ‘the impression she had received, retained, cherished’ that ‘his passion for Kate had spent itself in vain’ (313, 311). But this impression is one of a series which Kate and Densher confect in order to deceive Milly, as a later exchange between the two explicitly reveals, in which Kate tries unconvincingly to absolve Densher of responsibility for Milly’s shabby treatment:

‘It isn’t a question for us of apportioning shares or distinguishing invidiously among such impressions as it was our idea to give.’

‘It wasn’t *your* idea to give impressions,’ Kate said.

He met this with a smile that he himself felt, in its strained character, as queer.

‘Don’t go into that!’ (510)

As Kate says to Densher earlier, ‘“Ah, leave appearances to me!”’ (290).

Milly’s *carpe diem* comes from Sir Luke who tells her: ‘“You’ve the right to be happy. You must make up your mind to it. You must accept any form in which happiness may come”’, summarizing this as, ‘“isn’t to ‘live’ exactly what I’m trying to persuade you to take the trouble to do?”’ (201, 204). Just as it is for Strether, to live, to be happy, is to have an ‘adventure’, in Milly’s and Kate Croy’s figure, which turns out to mean being ‘in love’, as Susan Stringham puts it (206, 293, 342). Kate explains to Merton Densher how he has enlarged Milly’s experience: ‘“To have met a person like you [...] is to have felt you become, with all the other fine things, a part of life”’ (292).

Impressions figure centrally in this ‘ordeal of [...] consciousness’ of Milly’s, since, as James wrote in ‘The Art of Fiction’, ‘impressions *are* experience’ (James 1962: 289; James 1884: 510). If Milly’s Paterian ‘doom was to live fast’ – ‘It was queerly a question of the short run and the consciousness proportionately crowded’ – then it is impressions that offer to crowd her consciousness most vividly (133). The novel’s Paterian vocabulary for describing such states of consciousness also includes

‘moments’ and ‘vibrations’ and, in the preface, ‘the fruit of life’ (James 1902: 183, 124; James 1962: 291).<sup>6</sup> One sees life, sees the world, through Humean impressions of sensation, but one also feels love through Humean impressions of passion: in New York, where they first met, Milly had a ‘happy impression’ of Densher, so that, when she next sees him in the National Gallery in London, the ‘great question’ was ‘whether [...] her impression of him would be different from the impression received in New York’ (220, 246).

Early in the novel, Milly’s cognitive impressions are reminiscent of Strether’s. Two, in particular, are evocative of *The Ambassadors*: the first – Milly’s confrontation with a Bronzino portrait of an aristocratic woman – evokes scenes in Madame de Vionnet’s apartment, Gloriani’s garden, and the Lambinet-inflected countryside; the second – Milly’s happening upon Kate and Densher in the National Gallery – not only evokes the Lambinet impression, but develops it significantly. In this second scene, Milly becomes the Wildean critic as artist, something Densher’s own cognitive impressions are quick to detect, shortly afterwards.

### 6.2.1 Milly at Matcham

Before Milly has met her doctor, Sir Luke Strett, and been told to ‘live’, she has begun to enjoy intense aesthetic impressions of sensation in England, such as those at the party at Matcham, which offer, as they do Strether in Gloriani’s garden, ‘an amount of experience out of any proportion’ to her ‘adventures’ (James 1903: 168). Three weeks after Lord Mark deems Milly a ‘success’ at Lancaster Gate, he rescues her from ‘the exhausted air [of London in August], that of the season at its last gasp’,

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<sup>6</sup> Milly’s plight and characterization offer a ‘highly Paterian exploration of the powers attained by a consciousness facing its own impending demise’, a central conceit of Pater’s conclusion; James’s preface is Pater *verbatim* (Freedman 1990: 205-6).

by taking Milly and Susan to a party at Matcham, a ‘great historic house’ (171, 172). Like Chad taking Strether to Gloriani’s party, Lord Mark presents Milly with a series of seductive impressions, culminating in his showing her the Bronzino portrait which he claims is her double, a gesture Milly decodes as an act of courtship. The American visitors are offered ‘impressions [...] [in] a splendid cluster, an offering like an armful of the rarest flowers’, and feel as though they are walking ‘in great pictures’ containing brilliant ‘impressions’ (171-172, 173). These ‘sundry impressions’ of sensation of Milly’s, we are told, are not all fully present to her ‘on the spot’ since she is preoccupied by her ‘detached quarter of an hour’ with Lord Mark and the painting – they presumably gain in vividness as impressions of reflection later (180, 182, 180). The portrait prompts a complicated emotional response in Milly in which she confronts her own mortality. In a sense, this is a repetition of Strether’s ‘Live all you can’: not only are his impressions of the garden more vivid later, but they too prompt a recognition that such afternoons may never be bettered, given his lack of time, or, in Milly’s words before the painting, ‘“I shall never be better than this”’ (183).

James’s narrator’s narrative mode is more strikingly impressionist here than in the Lambinet scene.<sup>7</sup> The first paragraph is a form of delayed decoding in which we are told about the unexpected refreshment of Lord Mark’s offered impressions, but not the source of such impressions. Only in the next paragraph is a house party mentioned, and only in the fifth paragraph is it called ‘Matcham’. The reader is disoriented, as Milly is, an impressionist heroine, with ‘all the freshness of response of her young life the freshness of the first and only prime’, overwhelmed with disorienting new impressions, just as Strether felt he had left behind the Paris he knew in Gloriani’s back garden (173). The narrative represents her consciousness through

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<sup>7</sup> Bradbury also calls James’s style impressionistic here, and compares the scene with Gloriani’s party (Bradbury 1979: 96).

free indirect perception in the form of ‘picture’ – which James distinguished in his prefaces from ‘scene’ (also called ‘drama’) – often a decidedly impressionist picture which seems to turn prose into painting, a kind of reverse ekphrasis: ‘The parenthesis would close with this admirable picture’ (174).<sup>8</sup> It interweaves Milly’s perceptions – including speech addressed to her, or overheard – and her thoughts – including what she infers people as meaning or thinking – into a seamless stream, complicating the reader’s job of discriminating these elements, and reminding us of William James’s conception of consciousness as fluid, mixing sensation and ideation. The narrative’s structural fluidity is accompanied by descriptions of Milly’s perception as comprising ‘elements melted together’, like the blurred outlines, or the colours that spill over borders, or the intermingled brushstrokes of an impressionist painting (172).

As William James described, Milly cannot disassociate a general impression into its constituent elements since she has not observed them individually: ‘Once more things melted together – the beauty and the history’ (182). Milly is repeatedly unable to disassociate, so that she cannot recognize the predatory character of all the gossiping socialites she meets: ‘everything now again melted together, and kind eyes were always kind eyes’ (182).

Repetition of the same words, or snatches of speech, is reported through free indirect discourse: positive words, like ‘charm’ (‘this relation was charming [...] anything, was charming when one was so justly and completely charmed’) and ‘love’ (Maud ‘loved Kate and loved Lord Mark, loved their funny old host and hostess, loved every one’), are disassociated and made strange through repetition, as William James also described (174, 178). Repeated direct speech becomes almost purely

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Scene’ is ‘as near an approach to the dramatic as the novel may permit itself’, often focused on a single ‘Occasion’, involving dialogue (James 1962: 90, 110). ‘Picture’ is the unmarked of the pair, often simply a metaphor for a fiction. Contrasted with scene, it is associated with description, rather than action, often pictorial, or depicting a character’s state of mind. See Lubbock (1926).

phatic: ‘“I say, Mark”’, is everyone’s response to his exotic guest (181). Unlike Strether in Gloriani’s garden, overlooked and side-stepped, Milly is thrust centre-stage: the unexpected and prodigious spectacle of the season. Milly’s disorientation among all this disassociation and defamiliarization, is also that of one at sea: Lord Mark is ‘launch[ing] them at Matcham’, the day is, for Milly, ‘a high-water mark of the imagination’, ‘they were all swimming together in the blue’, and Milly’s ‘impression’, en route to the Bronzino, is of ‘fellow-strollers more vaguely afloat than themselves’ (177, 173, 176, 180). By the time they reach the Bronzino, the melting and the watery perception are caused by Milly ‘looking at the mysterious portrait through tears’ (183).

Anachronies undermine the impressionistic mode of the narrative.<sup>9</sup> In keeping with the Bronzino’s evocation of long tracts of time and decay, the representation of Milly’s later impressions of the portrait include two analeptic prolepses: ‘A prime reason, we must add, why sundry impressions were not to be fully present to the girl till later on was that they yielded at this stage, with an effect of sharp supersession, to a detached quarter of an hour – her only one – with Lord Mark’, and, ‘as she afterwards made out, it was Lord Mark who said nothing in particular – it was she herself who said all’ (180, 182-183). So some of the vivid impressions presented to us are recalled by Milly, rather than vividly experienced at the time, though there are fewer analeptic prolepses than during the narration of the scene in Gloriani’s garden, since Milly is better able to enjoy impressions of the moment than Strether.

As in the Lambinet scene, impressionism is only one register among others which offer more order and composition, if less vividness and energy. For Milly the

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Anachronies’ are disruptions in the relationship between the ‘*order* of succession of the events of the story’ and the ‘order of their arrangement in the narrative’, such as analepsis and prolepsis (Genette 1980: 88, 35).

house is framed by ‘terrace and garden’ in an ‘almost extravagantly grand Watteau-composition’ (172). Watteau’s eighteenth-century rendering of aristocratic social life celebrates the structures and codes of sociability, demonstrated too in the way the Matcham party seems to run itself, ‘serenely sociable’: Milly is magically furnished by ‘somebody’ with a ‘small cup of iced coffee’, from the ‘marquee that had been erected [...] as a temple of refreshment’ (174, 172, 174). Watteau helps Milly make historical sense of the scene and is a touchstone among the more contemporary impressionist fluidity. A more threatening historical vista is offered by the sixteenth-century Bronzino painting *Lord Mark* shows her which, as we will see, is for Milly a representation, itself decaying, of a specific lady, now dead, whose ornamentation seems somehow futile. For Winner, the Bronzino symbolizes mortality in contrast with the timeless idealization of aristocratic life offered by Watteau (Winner 1970: 82-84). The impressionism of the narrative style, the Watteau, and the Bronzino, all represent different, but interwoven, temporal aspects of Milly’s consciousness. The impressionism represents her vibrant and confused impressions of sensation, her experience ‘on the spot and at the hour’, ‘on the spot’ occurring four times in this chapter (172, 175, 182). Although iced coffee is being drunk, Aunt Maud is not alone in her effusiveness and ‘spiritual ebriety’ (173). Milly is being offered a figurative ‘armful of the rarest flowers’, ‘so beautiful and interesting an experience’, in short, a lot of things to ‘happe[n] to her’, a way of ‘feeling life’, ‘the brilliant life’ (172, 172, 172, 173, 181). The Watteau represents the cyclical nature of time, what we imagine as the end of season landmark, offered by the Matcham party (although experienced by Milly only for the first time). The Bronzino organizes the interaction of both of these by suggesting, as Strether did to Little Bilham, that ‘“what one loses one loses;

make no mistake about that”’: Milly’s fleeting impressions of this party are not to be repeated in the following season, as she is terminally ill (James 1903: 161).

The pathos of Bronzino’s portrait of the lady, ‘so strange and fair’, is due to the fact that, despite her efforts to ornament herself, and the painter’s efforts to record this, she has not only died, but her record is itself decaying (183).<sup>10</sup> On the one hand she has ‘a mass of hair, rolled back and high’, and ‘recorded jewels’; on the other she is wearing ‘wasted reds’, her face is ‘almost livid in hue’, and her hair, ‘fading with time’, no longer matches Milly’s own red hair (183). On the one hand she is a ‘very great personage’, but on the other she is ‘dead, dead, dead’, the monosyllabic tricolon indicating that death need make only the most minimal effort to counteract human effort to impress or perpetuate (183).<sup>11</sup>

As a result, the party is a ‘climax’ and, as we have seen, a ‘high-water mark’ (173, 173). This concept reaches a pitch during the Bronzino scene: Milly feels the party represents ‘civilization at its highest’, ‘it was a sort of magnificent maximum, the pink dawn of an apotheosis, coming so curiously soon’ (181, 182). When Milly vocalizes the thought that their witnessing of the painting is ‘perhaps as good a moment as she should have with any one’, she does so in an ambiguous way which Lord Mark interprets as her identifying herself with the lady in the painting: ‘“I shall never be better than this”’ – than ‘this’ lady (183)? This implies that the ‘apotheosis’ offered to Milly is to become the painting itself, a chilling compensation, perhaps, for the loss of ‘so beautiful and interesting an experience’ as that of ‘feeling life’ at parties such as Matcham’s (173, 172). We are reminded of Browning’s Duchess (1842), whose cheek’s ‘spot of joy’ contrasts with this lady’s state, ‘unaccompanied

<sup>10</sup> Holland reports Miriam Allott’s identification of the Bronzino portrait as that of Lucrezia Panciatchi, in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, which Brooks reproduces on the cover of his edition (Holland 1964: 302; James 1984).

<sup>11</sup> ‘The reader is also reminded of a sense in which any work of art, no matter how brilliant is dead’ (Holland 1964: 303).

by a joy' (James 1902: 183; Browning 1991: 159).<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Milly's only hope of perpetuity at this stage is to be appended to a ruthless aristocrat who will immortalize her as part of his collection, a successor to Gilbert Osmond, before she dies prematurely.

So Milly's impression of the Bronzino helps her to organize her other confused impressions of the party. But, above all, it is a recognition scene, in which Milly recognizes two things: her own terminal illness, and Lord Mark's amorous intentions, which make of him a sinister Lord Warburton.<sup>13</sup> Milly is helped in her recognition, as Strether is in Madame de Vionnet's apartment, and in the countryside, by paintings and art.<sup>14</sup> Lord Mark's presentation of the portrait to her is a performative impression, which Milly is able to decode successfully in her own ekphrasis:

it was as if the thing had practically been said by the moment they came in sight of the picture; since what it appeared to amount to was 'Do let a fellow who isn't a fool take care of you a little.' The thing somehow, with the aid of the Bronzino, was done[.] (182)

What I call Milly's ekphrasis of a performative impression has also been called 'hypothetical discourse' or 'imputed monologue' and is, as we will see, particularly characteristic of *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* (Marshall 1998: 161;

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<sup>12</sup> Browning's poem, 'My Last Duchess' (1842), is commonly thought to describe a painting of Lucrezia de Medici, first wife of Alfonso II, fifth Duke of Ferrara, whom Bronzino painted (Browning 1991: 157).

<sup>13</sup> This is one of James's 'supreme recognition scenes' (Matthiessen 1946: 65). Horne compares it with Isabel Archer's return to Gardencourt to attend the dying Ralph Touchett; looking at the Touchetts' paintings, Isabel experiences 'the cruel contrast between human beings, who decay, and works of art, which seem so permanent' (Horne 1990: 224). For Cameron, when Milly looks at the painting, she experiences an externalizing of her own thought of her death (Cameron 1989: 145).

<sup>14</sup> This scene prompts Freedman to remark that 'The transforming encounter between self and art object is [...] perhaps *the* central topos of the aesthetic imagination in England' (Freedman 1990: 210-216).

Hoople 2000: 38).<sup>15</sup> Lord Mark's impression is performative in the sense that it immediately casts a frame around Milly so that she is confused with the painting by Lady Aldershaw, who 'look[s] at Milly quite as if Milly had been the Bronzino and the Bronzino only Milly', herself led to the painting by Kate, keen also to point out the resemblance (185, 184). We will see later how it is again Lord Mark's intervention which casts Milly as a figure in a Veronese painting in Venice. At that stage, however, she is not yet able to appropriate and resignify his performative impression, and turn it against him, to turn herself into a work of art, like the Wildean critic, rather than allow others to aestheticize her. Here it is experienced more as an act of aggression. However, the impression Milly takes from the gesture is not wholly passive, for it is not the one Lord Mark intends, as his incomprehension of her tears makes clear. Milly's recognition is critically creative in the Wildean sense in that it sees something in the art object not intended: she is frightened, rather than flattered. The deictic in Milly's response to the painting – 'I shall never be better than this' – does not refer to the painting, as Lord Mark thinks, but, as the later free indirect discourse reveals, refers to this Paterian 'moment', perhaps the day at Matcham itself. Like Wilde's critic as artist, Milly's criticism here is more subjective even than Pater's response to *La Gioconda*: as Wilde urged, art is here the occasion for the critic's self-knowledge (Wilde 2007a: 154-155).

Milly falls short of a possible third recognition, that her new friends view her as an object to be exploited for their own good, emphasized by the visits the painting receives successively from Lord Mark and from Kate. The possessive imputed monologue that Milly attributes to Lord Mark echoes an earlier explicit invitation

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<sup>15</sup> Hoople describes it as a 'technique' that 'burrows into the operations of the mind and the processes of data-sorting', James's 'supreme achievement in literary impressionism' (Hoople 2000: 38).

from Aunt Maud: ‘ “You must make your home with us; [...] and you must let us all think for you a little, take care of you and watch over you” ’ (177). Milly’s cognitive impressions here fail, in the first of a series of instances, to recognize the bad faith of Aunt Maud, Kate and Lord Mark. In fact the recognition she does make – that her time is limited – is inclined to make her blind to their bad faith. While she can appreciate that Kate is – perhaps not wholly fortunately – ‘made for great social uses [...] exerting just that sort of glamour in just that sort of frame’ – she does not realize the sinister intent in Lord Mark’s parading of her, and his indication that ‘if she didn’t mind, he seemed to suggest their letting people [with their ‘lingering eyes’], poor dear things, have the benefit of her’ (175-6, 181). The narrator’s description of Milly as ‘a little girl playing with dolls when conventionally “too big” ’ recalls Strether’s thought about himself, once the scales have fallen from his eyes, after his day in the country: ‘he almost blushed, in the dark, for the way he had dressed the possibility in vagueness, as a prattling little girl might have dressed her doll’ (James 1902: 175; James 1903: 413).

### **6.2.2 Milly in the National Gallery**

In this section, and the following, we again examine three groups of cognitive impressions which offer recognitions – the first to Milly, the second and third to Densher. These are strikingly similar to Strether’s impression in the countryside outside Paris, but, in each, rather than ‘Facts [...] invad[ing] the kingdom of Romance’, as Strether and Wilde find, instead Milly and Densher, like Wilde’s critic as artist, ‘see the object as in itself it really is not’ (Wilde 2007b: 87; Wilde 2007a: 159). While these impressions may, as a result, be seen as self-deluding, they also

celebrate the power of the imagination to create meaning, to ‘len[d] to the beautiful thing its myriad meanings’, as Wilde’s critic as artist does (Wilde 2007a: 157).

The National Gallery scene, chapter XVI, Book Fifth, is significant in two ways. First, Milly has her first ‘impression’ of Densher in London, which, she realises, is as amorous as the impression she formed of him in New York (247). Second, Milly disturbs a scene of apparent intimacy between Kate and Densher, offering her a kind of recognition. Although James does not describe this recognition explicitly as resulting from an ‘impression’, the similarities between this scene and the Lambinet scene, in which the impression was central to recognition, imply the presence of the concept of the impression, if not the word.<sup>16</sup> The dupe, the unrequited lover, through whom the episode is focalized, by remarkable coincidence comes across the other two parties – Chad and Strether, Densher and Milly – in the love triangle in an unguarded moment, thus exposing the love affair they had sought to conceal: a sudden image clarifies a relationship. In both, the dupe, Strether and Milly, makes an expedition in search of the aesthetic – Strether seeks the inspiration for the Lambinet, Milly heads for the ‘Titians and Turners’ – as a way of escaping what Milly calls ‘the personal question’, in search of what Strether calls an ‘intermission’ from his ‘inward exercise’, or, in Notre Dame, a place where he could ‘drop his problem at the door [...] the things of the world could fall into abeyance’ (James 1902: 237, 238; James 1903: 400, 216). In both, after a confusion of the aesthetic with the moral, the aesthetic is disrupted by an incoming impression of sensation. In both there is a possibility that one or other, thinking they have not been recognized, might ‘cut’ the other. The experience is vivid for all – narrated with a degree of delayed decoding – involving ‘violence’ for the dupe, excluded from intimacy and deceived,

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<sup>16</sup> I discuss my approach to the relationship between words and concepts in section four of the introduction.

and embarrassment for everyone (242). In both, the other two follow the cues given by the female plotter, Madame de Vionnet and Kate Croy, as to the social forms that may gloss over the awkwardness, before all three sit down to a meal together.

What are the differences? Strether's recognition involves the dislodging of an incorrect idea by an impression of sensation which deepens over time. But Milly fails to have a recognition, or has a misrecognition, so that her mistaken idea that Densher's love is not reciprocated is, by the end of the episode, strengthened. While Strether is disillusioned and disenchanted by his impressions, Milly 'extract[s]' from the scene a 'soothing secret' (245). While Strether has five 'impressions', Milly's only explicit 'impression' is identified as such only later, while the narrator tells us about events in Milly's hotel, a first impression of Densher that she analyses over time; hitherto, the narrator has only spoken of Milly's 'perception' and 'recognition' of the lovers in the gallery (242). It is through her analysis of this impression that Milly discovers her renewed desire for Densher. This desire has already been evident in the extent to which Milly, for the sake of Densher, participates in, and embellishes, the immediate pantomime led by Kate, designed to give the scene a natural air which disguises its jarring oddness. Strether, by contrast, is a bemused spectator of the lovers' efforts to pretend that they are merely daytrippers like him.

These differences can be seen if we follow the scene chronologically. Milly feels that she has neglected culture, '“pictures and things”', during her 'continental tour', since she has pursued 'life, as opposed to learning'; but 'life was now beautifully provided for', so she pays a visit to the National Gallery, allowing Sir Luke to visit Susan Stringham alone (237). But Milly is unable to concentrate on the paintings, preferring the human picture, and finding that, for her, 'the pride of the place' is 'the lady-copyists' and 'the Baedekers' (238, 239). By contrast with the

Matcham episode, here Milly is ignored, especially by the American tourists, whose type Milly finds she can discriminate more keenly than the schools of the paintings. In particular, she notices a family of three women whose interest is piqued by a specimen of the 'English style' (241). Following their gaze, she sees that they are admiring not a painting but a man, on the other side of the room; as at Matcham, then, a person has been confused with a painting, this time by Milly. She is similarly arrested by him, then realises that he is none other than Densher, whom she last saw in New York. Wondering if she might pretend not to have seen him, but worried in case he notices, she suddenly finds her scrutiny of him is being scrutinized, by someone much nearer to hand, Kate, whom she had last seen that morning, 'a perception [...] that surpassed the first in violence' (242). Kate, initially blank, smiles at Milly, who interprets this as her 'handl[ing]' her, an 'instant reduction [of the awkward situation] to easy terms' which makes Milly 'provisionally take everything as natural' (242). Densher then affectionately acknowledges Milly. In the ensuing dance of manners, Milly works hard to be 'brave for Kate', and to 'show' Densher 'how she eased him off', by joining in with gusto in their 'sublimely civilized' attempts to pass off as natural the fact that they both know Densher, to avoid 'phrasing' their 'predicaments', to try to treat the 'anomaly' as 'not funny – or at least as not unpleasant' (243).

So Milly's reaction to their deceptive performative impression is to help them refine it. The narrator does not call this an 'impression', but George Butte has recently written that here 'One of Milly's strategies is to deflect the violence by encouraging a kind of masquerade: by allowing the violators to restage the moment of violence and to promote the impression that the restaging has succeeded' (Butte 2009: 136). In my view, the 'masquerade' is a staged impression, led by Kate who, Milly perceives,

offers ‘hint[s]’ to both Milly and Densher (243). Milly joins her deceivers on stage. First, Kate’s smile, and then, Densher’s ‘ “Why Miss Theale: fancy!” ’, restage the moment of violence, but remove its teeth, as they recast the initial recognition as a joyful impression rather than a problematic one, in which Milly’s and Kate’s stares are ‘blank’ ones (243, 242). Milly works hard to give the lovers the impression that their revised impression has been convincing, above all by collaborating in it. She does this by drawing on ‘her unused margin as an American girl’ because this disguises her particular anxiety as a general ‘New York agitation’ that may be ‘beautifully discounted’ by the other two (244).<sup>17</sup> Her ‘margin’ suggests that she is drawing on a literary type here, perhaps Daisy Miller, one through which she can gloss stiltedness with apparent naturalness and paradoxical ‘reserves of spontaneity’; she is also playing a part which Kate recently assigned to her when she said, the night before, ‘ “you’re a dove” ’, a part Milly privately and willingly adopts, and feels embraced by, and associates both with ‘perch[ing] on a finger’ and with being a ‘princess with whom forms were to be obeyed’ (244, 233). Her efforts to ‘be of most service’ to the lovers are gentle and submissive, like the dove on the finger, while her invitation of them to lunch shows the largesse of the princess (244). The narrator describes her with dove-like imagery: she ‘said things in the air’, in ‘her own native wood-note’, and ‘touched her highest point’ (244, 245). Milly’s fulfilling of this role makes Kate’s naming of her performative. Later Milly will ‘resignify’ this role, to use Butler’s term, but here she is happy simply to play it.

We have to wait until nearly the end of the chapter for an impression, despite the elements of the scene that are analogous with those in other famous Jamesian

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<sup>17</sup> As Graham puts it, Milly becomes the ‘American *ingénue* turned discriminating and self-conscious’ (Graham 1975: 171). She begins ‘to look and act the part of the spontaneous American’ (Holland 1964: 297).

impressions, a shocking image which challenges received ideas, whose initial impact and subsequent analysis is rendered with a mixture of delayed decoding and analeptic prolepsis (241, 243). The narrator describes how, at the hotel, after lunch, ‘now that she was a quarter of an hour alone with him’, Milly is again preoccupied, now acutely, as she has been to a lesser extent ‘from the moment of their leaving the museum; it kept her company through their drive and during luncheon’, with ‘the question of whether [...] her impression of him would be different from the impression received in New York’ (246). But ‘She couldn’t tell if he were different or not [...]: these things had ceased to matter in the light of the only thing she did know. This was that she liked him, as she put it to herself, as much as ever’ (246). Milly finds that it is her impression of Densher which dominates, not that of Densher and Kate together. She tries to manage the force of her Humean impression of passion through an exercise in reflection which seeks to compare it with her previous impression of Densher.

Milly’s impression of Densher presumably motivates her desire to help him by playacting, though ‘what depended on this for Mr Densher was all obscurity to her’ (244). But it also motivates her desire to help Kate deceive her. Milly’s mistaken idea that Kate does not reciprocate Densher’s affection is built out of several elements: her knowledge, thanks to Aunt Maud and Mrs Condrip, that Densher loves Kate, combined with her own observation that Kate has never mentioned him to Milly, and, finally, Aunt Maud’s lie, ‘“She doesn’t care for him” ’ (160, 219). Part of the ‘violence’ of seeing them together must be the violence done to this very idea (242). But, to use William James’s pragmatist framework for reconciling impressions with ideas, Milly’s inchoate idea, that Densher and Kate are lovers, does not seem usefully to account for her next experience of them over lunch. This is because Kate deploys

performative impressions in the hotel to try to restore Milly's earlier idea about the two of them, and forestall recognition, with the result that 'the probabilities fell back into their order' (246). For Milly, that Kate seems to prefer being '“thrown with” Susan Shepherd rather than with their other friend', Densher, even though in the past 'Susie had been a bore to the handsome girl', speaks volumes for Milly (246, 245). However it does not explain 'why she had gone out with him for the morning' (246). The 'probabilities' are that 'Merton Densher was in love and Kate couldn't help it – could only be sorry and kind' (246).

[W]ouldn't that, without wild flurries, cover everything? Milly at all events tried it as a cover, tried it hard, for the time; pulled it over her, in the front, the larger room, drew it up to her chin with energy. If it didn't, so treated, do everything for her, it did so much that she could herself supply the rest. She made that up by the interest of her great question[.] (246)

Like an invalid with a blanket, she tries to draw over herself comfortingly the idea that Densher is free. The blanket falling short, Milly supplies the rest herself by invoking her impression of him, the subject of the 'question' we have just examined.

### **6.2.3 Densher's Early Impressions of Milly in London**

The next group of impressions are a legacy of these, five which come thick and fast at an important moment in the plot: Kate's plan is filling out, and is increasingly grasped even by the obtuse Densher ('“What you want of me then is to make up to a sick girl” '); Aunt Maud, though ignorant of this, has told Densher that she is actively plotting on his behalf, hoping to rid her charge, Kate, of him, to clear her way for marriage to the socially superior Lord Mark ('“I've told the proper lie for you” ', that Densher's love is not reciprocated); and the last line of the preceding chapter, before Densher pays his first visit to Milly alone, is: 'So Milly was successfully deceived' (295, 305, 306).

What are these five impressions? Shortly after the National Gallery scene, Densher, as Milly has just done, renews his former impression of her, now in a new city. Visiting Milly alone for the first time in London, he receives again his ‘old impression’ of Milly as an ‘eas[y]’ and affable ‘American girl’, which is the very exuberant type Milly had mimicked in the gallery (309). Milly’s performance makes Densher’s job of deceiving her easier and more pleasant. Seeing how pleased Milly is by his attentions, Densher tries to imagine the misleading ‘impression [...] of his own failure’ with which Kate has equipped Milly (311). Rather as Wilde saw the value of an artistic work enhanced by its expression in the critic, Densher sees the value of Kate’s ‘work’, her deceptive impressions, increase as they are embellished and given feeling by Milly: ‘the ground was there, that is, in the impression she had received, retained, cherished’, a ‘ground’ and ‘pretext’ for her own feelings and instincts towards Densher (313). One such expression and extension of Kate’s false impressions is Milly’s apparent adoption of another literary type, the go-between who has unreciprocated feelings for one party – this is the ‘impression’ Milly makes on Densher at this point (316). In this, there are analogies between Milly’s strategic behaviour, and the lovers’, signs, perhaps, of a covert plot. Moved by her sincere response to artifice, and the compelling fictions that he and Milly seem to be propagating, Densher finds himself tempted to feel the emotions ascribed to him by Kate in order to be worthy of Milly’s compassion.<sup>18</sup> This is the first sign that Kate’s plan may unravel: her *ex ante* idea of deception is disrupted by the interaction of Densher’s and Milly’s impressions. These five key impressions are covert elements in a more general economy of impressions, as the narrator’s rendering of the hidden

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<sup>18</sup> And, though Milly loves truth, she can’t help but take ‘the most romantic and generous course in her judgments of people’ (Crews 1957: 70).

kernel of Milly's talk makes clear, a kernel which was 'folded finely up in her talk – all quite ostensibly about her impressions and her intentions' (314).

Densher, despite arriving in Brook Street 'with a margin consciously left for some primary awkwardness' (that 'margin' again suggesting that these characters feel that they exist within fictions), 'found his burden, to his great relief, unexpectedly light' since, 'on the spot', he finds 'his old impression, which he now fully recovered – the impression that American girls, when, rare case, they were as charming as Milly, were clearly the easiest people in the world' (308, 309).<sup>19</sup> Densher's recovery of this impression is due to Milly's deliberate resumption of it in the National Gallery as a way of accounting for her agitation at seeing them. Milly makes this performative impression even before her 'probabilities fell back into their order' ('under the vividness of Kate's behaviour' in the hotel), after the shock of the recognition (246). It seems that Milly is willing to participate tentatively in fictions even when she perceives that they may be at her expense.

Now that she is 'deceived', Milly gives fuller reign to her creative powers. In fact, the nature of her deception seems to Densher to have an intrinsic aesthetic quality that belongs to her. Densher guesses that Milly is deceived by making a series of logical leaps along her supposed train of thought beginning from her attentive behaviour 'on the spot':

If he was interesting it was because he was unhappy; and if he was unhappy, it was because his passion for Kate had spent itself in vain; and if Kate was indifferent, inexorable, it was because she had left Milly in no doubt of it.  
(311)

Densher guesses that Kate has given Milly an impression that she is indifferent to him, as well as an explicit account of his lack of success in courting her:

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<sup>19</sup> *NYE* replaces 'they were as charming as Milly' with 'they had the attraction of Milly' (James 1909f: 72).

That, above all, was what came up for him – how clear an impression of this attitude, how definite an account of his own failure, Kate must have given her friend. His immediate quarter of an hour there with the girl lighted up for him almost luridly such an inference[.] (311)

As we know from the rest of the novel, Kate's deceptions are rarely bald lies, so Densher is probably wrong about how specific Kate has been.

Densher goes on to make a more imaginative reconstruction of the role of impressions in Milly's current beliefs and behaviour.

This brought him round again to the acceptance of the fact that the poor girl liked him. She put it, for reasons of her own, on a simple, a beautiful ground, a ground that already supplied her with the pretext she required. The ground was there, that is, in the impression she had received, retained, cherished; the pretext, over and above it, was the pretext for acting on it. That she now believed as she did made her sure at last that she might act; so that what Densher therefore would have struck at would be the root, in her soul, of a pure pleasure. It positively lifted its head and flowered, this pure pleasure[.] (313)

The impressions Kate has made on her, or equipped her with, are – in Densher's imagination – cherished by her, as Milly cherished the impression she took away from Sir Luke's consulting room, or Strether his final impression from Madame de Vionnet's apartment. This impression is also a 'ground', simple and beautiful, and a 'pretext'. Milly's 'pretexts' for 'acting', for attending to Densher are really two-fold: that he is sad and unfulfilled, as his love is unrequited, is a ground for Milly to look after him, to some extent; and that Kate does not love Densher in return, is a ground for becoming more invested in him. Since she wants to attend to Densher, because she desires him, these impressions or pretexts are also the 'root' of a 'pure pleasure'. That Milly is exploiting pretexts makes her sound as much the plotter as Kate and Densher, Lord Mark, or Aunt Maud. A critic as artist can be conceived of as taking his impression, ground, pretext, or root, from the work of art, and making it the first layer of paint, or line of text, or foundation, in a new creation, '*translat[ing] into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things*' (Wilde 2005: 167). This

is what Milly does with the impressions Kate gives her. Densher thinks of her deception as though it were a work of art, ‘her beautiful delusion and her wasted charity’, which is itself an expression of Kate’s earlier artistic ‘work’ in deceiving her:

it was almost as if the other party to their remarkable understanding had been with them as they talked, had been hovering about, had dropped in to look after her work. The value of the work affected him as different from the moment he saw it so expressed in poor Milly. (312)

Madame de Vionnet refers to the impressions she confects for Strether as her ‘work’ (James 1903: 427). The work of making up to a sick girl is invested with different meanings by Milly which are vivid for Densher, just as the critic as artist can hold sway over his art object. To use James’s description of Maisie in his preface, discussed in chapter four, here Milly’s ‘freshness’, as a ‘register of impressions’, turns ‘appearances in themselves vulgar and empty enough’ into ‘the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art’, ‘lending to poorer persons and things, by the mere fact of their being involved with her and by the special scale she creates for them, a precious element of dignity’ (James 1962: 142, 147, 142). Milly is emboldened, in Densher’s eyes, to undertake her own ‘work’, like Kate, to make certain impressions, for example to adopt another literary ‘type’, that of the invested, but overlooked, go-between:

It wouldn’t really have taken much more to make him wonder if he hadn’t before him one of those rare cases of exaltation – food for fiction, food for poetry – in which a man’s fortune with the woman who doesn’t care for him is positively promoted by the woman who does. It was as if Milly had said to herself: ‘Well, he can at least meet her in my society, if that’s anything to him; so that my line can only be to make my society attractive.’ She certainly couldn’t have made a different impression if she *had* so reasoned. (316)

The complex tentativeness of the last sentence suggests that Densher is unsure to what extent such apparent agency of Milly’s is in fact the construction of his imaginative impressions. Densher earlier perceives several other of Milly’s apparent fictions: she perhaps stays in for him at her hotel in case he should call, but, when he does, she

turns away from her table as though interrupted from letter-writing (310). Yet, earlier in their interview, the extent of Milly's emotional and imaginative engagement with Kate's fable prompts Densher to consider elaborating further fictions by deceiving himself in order to be worthy of her pity and join in her 'exaltation'. Densher is unprepared for the 'degree of tenderness' shown him by Milly: 'he had made his visit to be sorry for her, but he would repeat it – if he did repeat it – in order that she might be sorry for *him*' (311). Kate's plan is already disrupted – 'the question placed there by Kate, should so of a sudden find itself quite dislodged by another' – Densher finding that he might return perhaps not to perpetuate his deceitful suit but to enjoy the warmth of Milly's pity (311). He realises this would put him in a false position:

Since it was false that he wasn't loved, so his right was quite quenched to figure on that ground as important; and if he didn't look out he would find himself liking in a way quite at odds with straightness the good faith of Milly's benevolence. [...] If it wasn't proper for him to enjoy consideration on a perfectly false footing, where was the guarantee that, if he kept on, he wouldn't himself pretend to the grievance in order not to miss the sweet? (312)<sup>20</sup>

Densher can see that he is being worked into Milly's painting from its inception, 'figur[ing]' in its 'ground'. But this is also an important moment as it suggests that, at times, Densher will become persuaded by the fiction in which he is participating. To 'pretend to the grievance' in front of Milly would be following Kate's plan, though not if Densher's motive were 'in order not to miss the sweet'. Furthermore, to appreciate Milly's benevolence would be at odds both with his straightness not only with Milly, but also with Kate. This reminds us of how Strether's *ex-ante* Woollett plan faltered 'under the impression of Madame de Vionnet's pause', when 'going straight began to announce itself as a matter for care' (James 1903: 157). It is ostensibly Densher's sense of propriety that he suspects might lead him to deceive himself. But here, as elsewhere, he feels caught up in a wider current that draws him

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<sup>20</sup> *NYE* replaces 'liking' with 'appreciating' (James 1909f: 76).

into deceit. What Densher and Kate discover is that their words and gestures, their performative impressions, designed to deceive, in fact have a life of their own. De Man's understanding of how performative language can exceed our intentions offers a useful analogy here.

Kate's and Densher's deceitful impressions act performatively, in de Man's sense. His trip alone to Brook Street in this chapter is his first of many of these, and it builds on Kate's preceding performative impressions. They are performative as they are not adequate to reality, they do not represent something which already exists, they create it, they predicate it, they are action; despite this they pretend to be speech fact, not speech act. Of course, they deceive by pretending to be cognitive, to refer to a pre-existing reality. This is analogous to the behaviour of the law of non-contradiction, in de Man's reading of Nietzsche, a blind performative which pretends to be knowledge, fact. Kate and Densher intend their impressions to be performative in that they wish to create a fictional world which Milly will believe in, and which will thus influence her actions; in the short run, Milly will offer them a pretext to meet; in the long run, she will leave them sufficient money in her will that they may marry, either with Aunt Maud's consent, or with sufficient funds to ignore it.

However, the lovers' performative impressions exceed their intentions both in that Milly ultimately sees through them, but also in that they create a fictional world so compelling that Densher is seduced into entering it – they influence Densher's actions, unexpectedly – and remaining in it, and in no longer sharing Kate's world, a world in which they would accept Milly's money and marry. We can see this beginning to happen in this passage: Milly's pity, exceeding Kate's and Densher's intentions, seems as though it might generate Densher's sadness, just as, as we will

see, de Man argued that, in his *Confessions*, Rousseau's excuses might generate the guilt they were supposed to assuage.

De Man's essay 'Excuses (*Confessions*)' is a close reading of an episode in Rousseau's *Confessions* which illustrates how, as Derrida also argued, the performative effect of language will always exceed our intentions as speaker or writer (de Man 1979: 278-301). It also shows how the cognitive and performative functions of language can interfere with one another, the one inhibiting the other, so that the other's job is never finished, so that paradoxically they perpetuate each other. 'The interest of Rousseau's text is that it explicitly functions performatively as well as cognitively', but that there is an 'interference of the cognitive with the performative function of excuses' (de Man 1979: 282, 290). De Man focuses on an episode twice treated by Rousseau, a shameful series of events in which Rousseau, while in the service of an aristocratic family, stole a ribbon, and then lied about this, blaming it on a young maid. The text *confesses*, a cognitive act of 'stating things as they are', which is associated with guilt, but 'Rousseau cannot limit himself to the mere statement of what "really" happened' since 'it is not enough to *confess*, one also has to *excuse*', a performative act (de Man 1979: 279, 280). But, if the performative excuse is too effective, it may 'exculpate the confessor', thus making the cognitive *Confessions* 'redundant', or, perhaps, necessitating further confession to try to swamp all the exculpation achieved by the excuses (de Man 1979: 280). In fact, far from being too effective, Rousseau's excuse fails to fulfil the performative aims of its author, which is indicated by the fact that he returns to the episode of the theft later in the text. Why might Rousseau's performative excuses fail? Excuses are made out of language which is a 'machine' we do not control, since 'writing always includes the moment of dispossession in favor of the arbitrary power play of the signifier', something we, as

subjects who try to control our words, experience as a ‘dismemberment’ (de Man 1979: 294, 296).

It is no longer certain that language, as excuse, exists because of a prior guilt but just as possible that since language, as a machine, performs anyway, we have to produce guilt [...] in order to make the excuse meaningful. Excuses generate the very guilt that they exonerate [...] No excuse can ever hope to catch up with such a proliferation of guilt [...] There can never be enough guilt around to match the text-machine’s infinite power to excuse. (de Man 1979: 299)

Milly’s pity is a performative act meant to diminish Densher’s cognitive sadness, just as Rousseau’s performative excuses are meant to diminish his guilt. Since Kate and Densher have deceived Milly, her pity exists prior to any sadness of Densher’s. Milly’s pity, which she thinks corresponds to something real, is in a way the blind performative act of positing that de Man believes language starts as, although language pretends to be referential. Kate and Densher had not bargained for the strength and conviction of Milly’s pity. Kate’s lies have been performative in bringing Milly’s pity into existence, which begins here to generate Densher’s sincere sadness. This is because his appreciation of Milly’s ‘benevolence’ towards him, the ‘sweet’, is disrupted by his ‘scruples’, his ‘conscience’, which worries that the situation is not ‘straight’, or ‘proper’, but ‘false’ (311-312). Densher is guilty that Milly’s pity exists in a vacuum, so he is inclined to respond by supplying the sadness, a cognition which might ‘validate’ the initial blind performative that is Milly’s pity. But if Densher becomes sadder than Milly may respond with more pity, and a vicious circle such as de Man’s excuse-guilt-excuse may be established.

Densher reins in his guilt with the thought

that he had himself as yet done nothing deceptive. It was Kate’s description of him, his defeated state, it was none of his own; his responsibility would begin, as he might say, only with acting it out. The sharp point was, however, in the difference between acting and not acting: this difference in fact it was that made the case of conscience. He saw it with a certain alarm rise before him that everything was acting that was not speaking the particular word. ‘If you

like me because you think *she* doesn't, it isn't a bit true: she *does* like me, awfully!' (312)

This is the first of a number of occasions in which Densher prides himself on the fact that he is not lying to Milly. Another salve to his conscience, of which this is the opening note, is his policy of stillness, in which he persuades himself that he is following the altruistic course of doing nothing, simply allowing Kate's lies to colour Milly's impressions of him: this both protects Milly, delights her, even, and cannot be a culpable act on his part, not being an act at all. To set Milly straight would be an action, whereas not to would not: 'Wouldn't it be virtually as indelicate to challenge her as to leave her deluded?', he asks himself (312). To speak the truth without her prompt would be 'aggressively to set her straight', and in fact her speech, Densher perceives, actively silences him – 'there were things she seemed to say that took the words out of his mouth' – and 'the beautiful little eloquence involved in Milly's avoidances' of Kate's name ensure he will return (313, 313, 316). Anything he could do would be 'more gross than doing nothing' (313).

Densher clings to passivity just at the time when Milly becomes more active, begins to cling to her own burgeoning dream, such that for Densher to act would be 'the peculiar brutality of shaking her off' (316). As we have seen, theorists of performativity, like de Man, can clarify Milly's agency by showing us how perception and thought can have the force of an act. They can also shed some light on the 'difference between acting and not acting'. Densher's repeated argument is that he is passive, inactive. There is nothing performative about his behaviour, above all because he does not lie: he has 'done nothing deceptive', since 'It was Kate's description of him, his defeated state, it was none of his own' (312). Hence he cannot be held responsible for Milly's deception since 'his responsibility would begin [...] only with acting out'. But he is self-critical enough to perceive that 'everything was

acting that was not speaking the particular word. “If you like me because you think *she* doesn’t, it isn’t a bit true: she *does* like me awfully!” ’ It is in these moments that Densher understands the importance of what speech act theorists would call ‘context’, or ‘situation’. Austin, finding more and more that the distinction between statements and performatives seems to be disappearing, remarks that ‘Once we realize that what we have to study is *not* the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech situation, there can hardly be any longer a possibility of not seeing that stating is performing an act’ (Austin 1962: 138). This is also true of ‘sign acts’, Miller’s term for ‘gestures that function as implicit speech acts’, and also, I would argue, for performative impressions (Miller 2001: 116). When Densher imagines that, in Venice, his daily visits to the Palazzo are consistent with his policy ‘to do nothing’, and ‘creating, studiously, the minimum of vibration’, he is guilty of ignoring the context or situation in which his impression is made (455). The context of his words and actions includes not only the lies that Aunt Maud and Kate have told Milly about his ‘defeated state’, but also the fact that everyone else has left Venice. Densher’s belief in his own passivity is as misplaced as the cricket umpire who claims that raising his forefinger on the pitch is not tantamount to forcing a batsman to walk to the pavilion. The context gives everything he says or does not say (for example, his silence about Kate), does or does not do, a potential added performative force. He does sometimes understand how being still, how remaining may be just as performative as any more obvious act: ‘he would stay in spite of her, stay in spite of odium’ since the ‘disagreeable[ness]’ of it would ‘mark his virtue’ by being ‘a proof of his not having stayed for the thing – the agreeable, as it were – that Kate had named’ (467). ‘Remaining was of course, on the face of it, the most “marked” of demonstrations’ (445).

Indeed, what Austin calls the ‘circumstances’, the appropriate conditions for a successful performative act, including the intentions and expectations of participants, and unspoken rules and conventions, are in place as a context for Densher’s deceptive impression, in other words, a willing young man and woman are alone, and ‘An uncriticised acquaintance between a clever young man and a responsive young woman could do nothing more, at the most, than go, and his actual experiment went and went and went’ (315). But, as we have seen, Derrida and, following him, Butler have argued that the ‘power’ of the performative is not ‘the function of an originating will, but is always derivative’ (Butler 1993: 13). Butler instead construes performativity as ‘that power of discourse to produce effect through reiteration’ (Butler 1993: 20). If a performative succeeds, ‘it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices*’ (Butler 1993: 227). So we might ask: is it purely Densher’s intention that is making the situation ‘go’. Or is he instrumentalized, to some extent, as Butler thinks we, as gendered subjects are, by some wider ‘discourse’? Her characterization of the gender roles that discourse enforces as a ‘tacit collective agreement’, or ‘compelling social fictions’, are apt descriptions for the atmosphere that exists between Densher and Milly for the second half of the novel: at Brook Street, Densher ‘was kept face to face with this young lady by a force absolutely resident in their situation and operating, for his nerves, with the swiftness of the forces commonly regarded by sensitive persons as beyond their control’ (315). It is not just Kate’s script which Densher feels impels him, it is what he and Milly build on top of it.

### 6.3 Milly the Artist

If Milly in London increasingly becomes the Wildean critic as artist, in Venice she becomes an artist to match Kate herself.<sup>21</sup> In London Kate, Densher, Aunt Maud, and Lord Mark all sought to make impressions on her, many of them deceptive. Milly imaginatively engaged with them and helped to embellish them, as though complicit in her own deception. In Venice she not only appropriates the roles that others have assigned to her, but makes her own deceptive performative impressions which disrupt the plots of others.<sup>22</sup> Three key impressions disrupt and then overturn Kate's plan: in the first, Densher is suddenly overwhelmed by the general impression Milly makes from within the rich context of her gilded seat in Venice, which somehow persuades him not to respond to his pangs of conscience by leaving Venice; in the second, Milly throws a party in which she appropriates roles that others have assigned to her – Kate's 'dove', Densher's 'American girl', Susan Stringham's 'princess', and Lord Mark's Veronese figure – in order to make an impression on the lovers of beauty and power, such that Kate begins to realise that her plan, and Densher's loyalty, may be imperilled; and, in the third, Densher describes to Aunt Maud the impression that

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<sup>21</sup> Bersani disagrees: in Venice, Densher is the critic of Milly, the text, who 'literally makes her his own, destroying the real peculiarity of her presence which we feel early in the work' (Bersani 1976: 145).

<sup>22</sup> Critics are divided on the degree of Milly's agency. On the one hand, 'even when exerting her power, Milly is somehow passive', 'at the social mercy' of Kate and Densher (Crews 1957: 67, 59). Her 'passive suffering' disqualifies her from the role of tragic protagonist (Matthiessen 1946: 79). On the other hand, Milly (and Maggie Verver) have a 'conquering passivity' (Bersani 1976: 154). Graham regrets the 'exaggeration of Milly's qualities of sickly passivity', which results from 'the "religious" or "transcendental" interpretation' of her character (Graham 1975: 182). Milly plots against Kate as much as she is plotted against by Kate: 'it is *her* design – call it love and sacrifice – that her bequest to Densher finally imposes although it seems most to fulfil the aim that Kate and Densher have worked for' (Bell 1991: 302). Milly 'takes on the role in which Kate's plan has cast her, and so makes it her own that she effectively turns the tables' (Poole 1991: 120). 'Densher's climactic "aftersense", his new sense of human possibilities, is brought about by his experience of Milly Theale's magnanimous character' (Horne 1990: 185).

Milly made on him in their final interview, the most important impression of the novel.

### 6.3.1 Densher's 'Unexpected Impression' of Milly in Venice

Milly chooses to go to Venice which had been, for an English readership, 'symbolic of the central tenets of aestheticism' since Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3) (Jottkandt 2005: 71). Milly's instructions to her Venetian fixer, Eugenio, before she arrives, is that he find her 'part of a palace, historic and picturesque, [...] with servants, frescoes, tapestries, antiquities, the thorough make-believe of a settlement' (360). Unlike Strether, who may only ever admire other people's houses and objects in Paris, Milly, having been a guest in Aunt Maud's imposing and vulgar house in Lancaster Gate, now plays host in a home of her choosing.<sup>23</sup> But this is all 'make-believe' as the house, Palazzo Leporelli, is borrowed, rented: its owner, perhaps an aristocratic guardian of the past, like Madame de Vionnet, had 'preserved and consecrated, and she [Milly] now – her part of it was shameless – appropriated and enjoyed' it (360). The novel's Venetian stretch begins with a passage rendered through Jamesian picture, rather than scene: 'Milly moved slowly to and fro as the priestess of the worship' in the palazzo 'hung about with pictures and relics, the rich Venetian past' (361). But such apparently scene-setting, iterative narrative proves to be crucial in the plot for Milly, her picturesque props making a performative impression on Densher which keeps him in Venice, despite his growing scruples about deception.

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<sup>23</sup> Crews argues that Milly, at this point, gives up trying to be accepted as normal, and 'hop[es] to find love [...] by frankly cultivating the social impressiveness of her position', but that she is too late (Crews 1957: 68). But he sees even her new habitat as another sign of her passivity: 'fully resigned to her role as a fairy princess, [she] rents a palazzo', her existence within it 'passive floating' (Crews 1957: 72). Holland sees her as more active here: she begins, 'with the motifs of wealth', like the palazzo, 'to act the part', now self-conscious about her money (Holland 1964: 297).

Densher, having been in Venice with Kate, Maud Lowder and Susan Stringham, by now, for three weeks, faces an ‘awkwardness of his conscience’ over his insincere courtship of Milly – ‘even the high wonder and delight of Kate couldn’t set him right with himself’ – and so is ‘thinking of immediate departure’ (400). ‘He had however only to cross again the threshold of Palazzo Leporelli to see all the elements of the business compose, as painters called it, differently’: he reminds himself that he has not done anything other than indulge other people’s actions, and thinks, ‘the single thing that was clear, in complications, was that, whatever happened, one was to behave as a gentleman’ (401).<sup>24</sup> No doubt the palace composes itself before Densher’s eyes, as English cathedrals do before James’s, but its effect is to make Densher’s view of his situation recompose itself.

And what he had prepared least of all for such an anti-climax [of being a ‘brute’ by leaving Venice] was the prompt and inevitable, the achieved surrender – *as* a gentleman, oh that indubitably! – to the unexpected impression made by poor pale exquisite Milly as the mistress of a grand old palace and the dispenser of an hospitality more irresistible, thanks to all the conditions, than any ever known to him.

This spectacle had for him an eloquence, an authority, a felicity – he scarce knew by what strange name to call it – for which he said to himself that he had not consciously bargained. Her welcome, her frankness, sweetness, sadness, brightness, her disconcerting poetry, as he made shift at moments to call it, helped as it was by the beauty of her whole setting and by the perception, at the same time, on the observer’s part, that this element gained from her, in a manner, for effect and harmony, as much as it gave – her whole attitude had, to his imagination, meanings that hung about it, waiting upon her, hovering, dropping and quavering forth again, like vague, faint snatches, mere ghosts of sound, of old-fashioned melancholy music. (402)

Densher surrenders the scruples that might keep him away, defeated by the impression Milly, within her palace, makes on him. He feels himself co-opted into a drama, Milly’s ‘spectacle’, in which one ‘behave[s] as a gentleman’ by avoiding ‘anti-climaxes’. Milly’s impression, ‘thanks to all the conditions’, is an overwhelming combination of drama (‘spectacle’), ‘melancholy music’, ‘disconcerting poetry’, and

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Arguably, it is the Palazzo Leporelli which manages to make Densher fall in love with Milly’ (Buelens 2001: 414).

painting (of ‘effect and harmony’). It appeals to Densher’s ‘imagination’, and sets trembling a variety of romantic associations, suggestive ‘meanings that hung about it’. Like Madame de Vionnet in her apartment, like English cathedrals in their closes, Milly and her ‘grand old palace’ mutually compose.

So Milly’s performative impression spurs on Densher to pay court to her: it allows him to recast his own brutality in feigning romantic interest in a dying girl as a form of tasteful gentility: not to court such an exquisite girl, to decline her ‘irresistible’ hospitality, would be churlish. ‘Milly’s high style and state’ appeals to his social aspirations: they make him feel like a ‘gentleman’, partly because his appreciative response to them confirms his own aesthetic sense, his knowledge and taste (which had earlier allowed him to pen an imaginary article on Aunt Maud’s vulgar interiors). To feel like a gentleman means one must be behaving as one, so why deviate? His thoughts here are shot through with a desire to make all surfaces consistent with each other, an instinct which compounds deception on deception, cumulatively.

How does Milly’s impression compromise Kate’s plan? Densher is still there, plotting, after all. Is not Milly unwittingly complicit in her own deception by continuing to present her best face to Densher in this way which only encourages him to court her disingenuously? Later in the paragraph this impression is described as a ‘recognition’ of Densher’s (403). Like other recognitions, it is ‘unexpected’ – ‘he had not consciously bargained’ for it – and it disrupts existing ideas and plans – ‘he had been rather taken in by not having known in advance!’ – and means he finds himself in a new relation with both Milly and Kate (402). This impression of Milly’s is the first threat to Kate’s plan, to her ‘idea’: the chapter closes as Densher thinks, ‘he was

not *there*, not just as he was in so doing it, through Kate and Kate's idea, but through Milly and Milly's own, and through himself and *his* own, unmistakably' (403).

### 6.3.2 Milly's Party

The party Milly throws in Venice in honour of the arrival of Sir Luke Strett is more than just a defiant demonstration of her health to him, and to others.<sup>25</sup> Through it, Milly makes two performative impressions, first on Kate, and then on Densher, in which, by appropriating for herself roles or 'types' performatively assigned to her by others – that of dove, princess, character in Veronese painting, American girl– she impresses on them her power and wealth.<sup>26</sup> Since it is Densher through whom this scene is focalized, both impressions are, in a sense, his, but both are, paradoxically, also Kate's. First, though the 'reasons [are] hidden from him [just then]', he intuits that Kate is 'exceptionally under the impression' of the part of Milly's wealth which projects power (428). Second, he realises that Kate is scrutinizing his own, later impression of Milly's imposing wealth, 'pursuing his impression to the depths' of his eyes (437). Again, as in London, the narrator emphasizes that these significant impressions float in a sea of more fleeting ones: Densher experiences an 'immersion in an element rather more strangely than agreeably warm', a 'sense' which only grows as he is 'fed to satiety by several other impressions' (423).

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<sup>25</sup> 'What lies revealed in the impress of Kate and Densher's experience is that Milly, though sick, has put on the superlative performance of her career so far, as the sumptuous hostess, the spontaneous American, the dove' (Holland 1964: 309). 'Milly's festival represents an active affirmation of her desire and will to live, to live in the Veronese style' which is later ironized, by contrast, by the lovers' explicitness about Densher's task of deception (Winner 1970: 85).

<sup>26</sup> 'The effort to represent each others' characters in literary terms is universal in the novel' (Bell 1991: 314). The novel's vocabulary 'derives from a multiplicity of minds proposing with conscious art a variety of artistic paradigms'; 'the myth-making process is part of the manipulative categorization of other people', suffered by a variety of characters, not just Milly (Bradbury 1979: 81, 86).

The impression Milly makes on Densher also alludes to, or even restages, several earlier impressions: it gives a specific instance of the impression – just examined – made on Densher of ‘poor pale exquisite’ Milly in her palace; Milly’s use of Veronese to frame her impression evokes Lord Mark’s attempt to frame her as a Bronzino; as one side of what becomes a triangle of glances between three people across a room, the impression repeats the encounter in the National Gallery, but this time with Milly in control; and finally, as the narrator tells us, Milly’s striking, late entrance to the party recalls, for Densher, the ‘impression’ made on him by Kate when she entered a party at Lancaster Gate, in chapter XIX, Book Sixth.<sup>27</sup>

For Densher, the first indication of a party is that the great saloon of the palazzo is lit by ‘even more candles than their friend’s large common allowance’, suggesting that Milly’s aim is to blind everyone to her illness by chasing away the shadows of death with dazzling light, to prevent ‘glimpses – rare as were these – of the inner truth about the girl’ (416). If Susan Stringham is to be believed, Milly’s inspiration is a ‘Veronese painting’, probably one which depicts a wedding party (418). For Susan, all Milly’s friends are ‘in the picture’: Susan jokes that she is the ‘inevitable dwarf’, while Densher is the ‘grand young man who surpasses the others’, perhaps the bridegroom, Brooks suggests (James 1984: 525). Assigned this starring role, Densher feels an addition to that ‘weight, on his heart, of conscious responsibility’ – just as he also wonders ‘what part was there for *him*’ in the Veronese painting – perhaps operatic as well as dramatic, as Milly’s effort to stage the painting

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<sup>27</sup> ‘The adoption and gradual perfection of a manner by Milly accompanies her initiation into the complexities of the society she confronts’ (Holland 1964: 298).

include ‘ “music – beautiful instruments and song” ’, as Susan promises (419).<sup>28</sup> Milly is thus ‘housed in Veronese pictures’ in Densher’s view, and, for Susan, ‘ “lodged for the first time, as she ought, from her type, to be” ’, within ‘court life’, her type being ‘ “my princess” ’ (419, 418, 422, 420). Leaving Eugenio and Susan to craft this setting, Milly arrives to maximum effect (or perhaps because she is too frail) ‘after dinner’, and the scene is set for her to make her two impressions on the lovers (423).

As only Densher is focalized at this point – according to James’s technique of ‘successive centres’, as he calls it in the preface – the impression Milly makes on Kate can only be inferred by Densher (James 1962: 286). Milly is ‘let loose among them in a wonderful white dress’, the liberation Densher infers perhaps arising from ‘his seeing her for the first time in white’ as opposed to ‘her almost monastic, her hitherto inveterate black’ (424, 424-5). Why the change? ‘She was acquitting herself to-night as hostess, he could see, under some supreme idea’, thinks Densher (425). Perhaps the ‘Veronese picture’ so often referred to. Or perhaps, as Densher perceives, the ‘type’ she has chosen is ‘the American girl’, as she did in the National Gallery, and then alone with him in Brook Street (425). Or perhaps Kate is shrewder: ‘ “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” ’ (428). Milly adds to the ‘lustre’ in the candlelight of her white dress with ‘old lace’ trimming and a set of pearls (426, 427). All in all, the effect of ‘Milly’s aspects’ is, for Densher, ‘embodied poetry’ (427).

It was Kate who had first called Milly a dove, when the two were alone in Milly’s hotel, the night before she went to the National Gallery, a ‘felicitous’

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<sup>28</sup> James’s revisions emphasize Densher’s awareness of his own theatrical performance, his creative deceit, as well as Milly’s complicity in this, to some extent. *NYE* replaces an addition ‘to that weight, on his heart, of conscious responsibility’ with an addition ‘to that weight as of expected performance’; this weight does not merely ‘settle’, but ‘settle[s] on his heart’ (James 1909f: 208). *NYE* then replaces ‘He had incurred it, conscious responsibility’ with ‘He had incurred it, the expectation of performance’ (James 1909f: 208).

performative act of naming, in Austin's terms, since Milly embraced the name (233).<sup>29</sup> In Kate's 'dove' Milly felt herself either 'a dove who could perch on a finger', or 'a princess with whom forms were to be observed' (233). 'Princess' is Mrs Stringham's repeated conceit, a romantic symbol of her awe and devotion to Milly, the most striking of which is her 'impression' of Milly as an isolated 'angular pale princess' in a Maeterlinck play (114, 142, 212, 364, 367). Kate early on borrows the conceit, deeming her a princess of Bayswater, an 'impression' which is 'a tribute positively to power', whose source is Milly's deep pockets (145). Despite Kate's playfulness, Milly begins to adopt Kate's impression, 'began to borrow from the handsome girl a sort of view of her state' (145). Hence, perhaps, her easy conflation here of the two 'types' assigned to her, dove and princess. As we will see, doves are associated with gentleness and virtue, but also, less often, with wealth and power. So Milly's 'princess' is rather unexpected, and is forgotten until the night of her party.

Doves in the Bible are associated with recognition: in Genesis, Noah recognizes God's forgiveness when his dove returns with an olive branch – the waters will abate and he will be saved.<sup>30</sup> In the New Testament the Holy Spirit descends as a dove when Christ is baptized, and the voice of God recognizes Jesus as his son.<sup>31</sup> Kate's naming of Milly is a moment of self-recognition: 'She met it on the instant as she would have met the revealed truth; it lighted up the strange dusk in which she lately had walked. *That* was what was the matter with her. She was a dove' (233). But such recognition is confused by Milly's sense of 'the measure of the success she could have as a dove' – 'dove' is only a recognition, then, of what she might become (234)? Going on to 'stud[y] the dovelike', which has become 'her [new] law', she

<sup>29</sup> Showing her 'ability to adopt a suggested image, and to work it for herself as others work their companions' (Bradbury 1979: 103-4). Or, she is 'beginning to act out the role [dove] named for her by Kate', which involves lying to protect her friends (Holland 1964: 297).

<sup>30</sup> Genesis 8.

<sup>31</sup> Luke 3:22, Matthew 3:16-17, Mark 1:9-11, John 1:29-34.

finds a template that is mild, retiring, co-operative: advising Aunt Maud that Densher is not in London yet (to protect him and Kate), like ‘dove cooing to dove’, letting Susan Stringham receive Sir Luke Strett alone (234). Christ instructed his apostles, before he sent them out, ‘Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves’.<sup>32</sup> But in English drama and poetry the dove’s mildness has sometimes become frailty, or even foolishness, as in the *Oxford English Dictionary’s* definition 2c), which quotes Shakespeare and Tennyson, ‘A gentle, innocent, or loving woman or child; also an innocent or simpleton’.<sup>33</sup> Since doves were easily caught by birdlime, they came to symbolize the gullible – characters such as perhaps James’s dupes, Strether and Milly.<sup>34</sup> This may well be what Kate is getting at, especially as she has just sinisterly given Milly her ‘“honest advice [...] to drop us while you can” ’ (232).

Yet Christ’s advice indicates the duplicity of the dove, too: they may be shrewd. This may be Kate’s recognition in this scene, as Densher realises, though her only vocal concession to the orthodox dove imagery has been that Milly is unexpectedly bejewelled, so perhaps Densher is more perceptive (Densher normally thinks of her not as a princess but as the American girl).

[H]e 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. (428)

Milly’s sudden shift here, in Densher’s eyes, from one kind of dove to another, her exaltation from meek woman to princess was anticipated in Milly’s first reaction to the name, as well as in The Psalms: ‘Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye

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<sup>32</sup> Matthew 10:16.

<sup>33</sup> “impression, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2014. Web.

<sup>34</sup> In American slang a dupe is sometimes called a ‘pigeon’.

be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold'.<sup>35</sup>

The Holy Spirit is mild and airy, but derives omnipotence from this freedom. The novel's title alludes to The Psalms, 'Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest', which is also the epigraph to Pater's *The Renaissance*.<sup>36</sup>

Milly is free and mobile in almost every respect, thanks to her huge wealth and lack of family ties, apart from that of her terminal illness. The spectacle she organizes that evening is a futile but touching demonstration of her will to live, an appetite for which Kate takes the credit (429). Nevertheless, Densher's impression of Kate's impression goes on to imagine Milly's wings as spreading to protect all of them in Venice.<sup>37</sup>

Milly is a princess here, too, due to the efforts she has made to stage a Veronese painting. Veronese was originally suggested by Lord Mark during his first trip to Venice, when, perhaps in response to Milly's melancholy feeling that as tenants they are somehow excluded from 'the impossible romance' of the palazzo, he told her that there ought always to be people at the top and bottom of her staircase, attending her, 'in Veronese costumes' (371). Lord Mark's compliment is a reminder of his earlier performative impression in which he presented the Bronzino portrait to Milly as her double. She takes his hint but, with it, the upper hand, over Mark, Kate and Susan Stringham. As they try to aestheticize her, to mould her into their own impressions of her as dove or princess, she takes the initiative by borrowing and

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<sup>35</sup> Psalm 68:13. Holland associates this particular dove allusion to Milly's effort 'to live by an act of will', to be the American girl (Holland 1964: 303-4).

<sup>36</sup> Psalm 55.6. Holland sees this allusion as referring to Milly's 'anguished withdrawal from life into death' (Holland 1964: 303). This allusion, perhaps, contributes to what Graham sees as too much emphasis on the novel as 'mystic meditation on the nature of the eternal'; instead, James is able to 'naturalize' the 'transcendental', so that Milly's 'qualities, including her supreme quality of mercy, are not angelic but personal' (Graham 1975: 162). In Bersani's view, 'we of course recognize the profound Christian bias in this notion of a generosity which can be acknowledged only by a reenactment of the generous life', a bias he detects in Milly's story and Maggie Verver's (Bersani 1976: 153-4).

<sup>37</sup> This chapter makes 'vividly present' a 'vision of Milly [...] which she makes real by enacting it and which sinks so deeply into Densher's consciousness that he can never get away from it, even though at the time he does not fully appreciate it' (Holland 1964: 308).

revising their impressions, and by turning herself into her own work of art, rather than being subsumed into their Bronzinos or Maeterlincks. Mendelssohn has described Wilde's unorthodox method of reviewing, 'review-as-revision', in which, as well as evaluating, he rewrites an author's work with a view to improving it, showing a 'talent for creating novel impressions by appropriating and opposing others' ideas', most famously in 'The Decay Of Lying', where, as we saw in chapter three, his jokey conceit about the impressionist painters is lifted from Whistler (Mendelssohn 2007: 108, 104). Milly's active revision takes the form of merging the impressions of princess and dove, in a way which brings out the regal power available to a certain kind of dove. Veronese paintings contain aristocratic young women, but his Annunciations also contain doves: with the lustre of her white dress and the pearls that dazzle Densher and Kate, Milly perhaps deliberately invokes the iconography of renaissance depictions of the Annunciation where a bright white dove descends towards Mary on a beam of celestial light. The Accademia in Venice has a famous Annunciation (1578) by Veronese.<sup>38</sup> As the impressions concern herself, she is also making herself into a work of art, something Wilde advocated for the critic as artist, and Lord Henry appreciated in *Dorian Gray*. Lord Henry implicitly recognizes the success of his earlier instruction that 'the aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly' when he congratulates Dorian with ' "Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are sonnets" ' (Wilde 2005: 183, 352). Milly also sets herself to music at this party. Milly uses the impressions of others as an occasion for self-knowledge and self-expression, like the critic as artist.

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<sup>38</sup> The more obvious allusions are to two other paintings by Veronese, both depicting Christ at a party, *The Supper in the House of Levi* (to which Susan Stringham's reference to herself as a dwarf applies), and *The Marriage Feast at Cana* (which James saw in The Louvre, and whose steward Susan associates with Densher) (Holland 1964: 307-8).

Another way to conceptualize how Milly begins to turn the tables on the deceivers at this party with her performative impression is to borrow elements of Derrida and Butler's theories of performativity. Derrida used the weaknesses he found in Austin's model to illustrate aspects of language more generally, not just performatives. Austin's insistence that context be fully determined for a successful performative, along with his exclusion of literary language, for Derrida, ignored the fundamental characteristic of all language, that it is 'iterable' and 'citational': it must be able to be 'iterated' in different contexts, especially in the absence of its speaker's intentions, and it is – and must be – citational of previous language. When Kate performatively names Milly dove, when Susan names her a princess, and when Lord Mark tells her she is in a Veronese painting, the imagery of Milly's critics is understood by others, as it has been used in this way before and may again be so used: they are 'types'. In fact, these types' iterability is confirmed when Milly appropriates them and uses them again in ways which exceed her critics' intentions. The impressions of the dove and princess are also citational as they draw on historical, literary and religious contexts for their authority. Milly's critics are not in full control of these contexts, nor of the contexts in which these critical impressions may be redeployed by Milly.

For Butler, following Derrida, performatives, as we have seen, reflect not the authority and intention of individuals but of a discourse which compels them. She gives, as an example of performativity, an exclamation during birth in the delivery room, ' "It's a girl!" ' ; that this deterministically anticipates the performatives of the marriage ceremony is satirized in cartoon strip, in an example of a 'queer appropriation of the performative' – 'the infant is first interpellated into discourse with "It's a lesbian!" ' (Butler 1993: 232). This is a small example of the kind of

resistance to coercive gender norms to which Butler's work repeatedly points. If gender is performative, then we can disrupt it, by adapting our own performance to include 'parodic practises' which may 'denaturalize and resignify' the 'categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame' (Butler 1999: xxxi). These performances, such as drag, might undermine the authority of gender, 'reveal[ing] this ostensible "cause" to be an "effect"' (Butler 1999: 178). Another example is offered by 'the public assertion of "queerness" [which] enacts performativity as citationality for the purposes of resignifying the abjection of homosexuality into defiance and legitimacy' (Butler 1993: 21).

Milly's performative impression responds subversively to her interpellations, to use Butler's term, as dove, princess, Veronese painting and 'American girl'.<sup>39</sup> The 'types' assigned to her throughout the novel do behave as though derived from a 'power of discourse to produce effect through reiteration'. Although individuals actively name her, the resulting names pass among her critics without any apparent agency, in a 'tacit collective agreement', to use Butler's description of the fiction of gender. Their reiteration in the thought and speech of others can often seem coercive of Milly. What she does is to cite some of these types removed from their original context. For example, the dove and the American girl were London types where Milly was 'a poor girl – with her rent to pay' (210). In Venice, at this party, Densher feels he is 'stand[ing] in it up to his neck [...] they were all together, for that matter, like fishes in a crystal pool' (424). At the party, Milly 'came down after dinner' like a dove and Densher 'felt her as diffusing, in wide warm waves, the spell of a general, a

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<sup>39</sup> Other critics find Milly more compliant. Milly is placed in the compartments of various roles assigned to her, but she finds them 'comfortable', and a way to get by within the system, as Kate does, too (Graham 1975: 185). Holland claims that clinging to her role as American girl and dove is an attempt to ward off death (Holland 1964: 319).

kind of beatific mildness' (424). In 'a Venice of cold, lashing rain from a low black sky', when the water is rising, a dove becomes a much more powerful presence, a symbol of divine power, than in land-locked London (460). Milly's citation of these types simultaneously has the effect of putting each between a pair of quotation marks, emphasizing their fictive status. As we have seen, these types are also 'impressions': that Milly is a princess is Susan Stringham and then Kate's impression. Milly's performance gives body to these perceptions, turning their cognitive impressions into her performative impressions.

Furthermore, Milly's performance involves a series of gendered acts: putting on a white dress instead of a black one, arriving late, wearing pearls, acting the exuberant and vivacious 'American girl' (425). In a sense, this confirms Milly's critics in their prejudices, their types. But, as in Butler's theory, these acts 'denaturalize and resignify' these categories by mixing them up. Milly had worn pearls and a lace collar before – when she played the American girl on her drive alone with Densher in London – but never with a white dress (328). The white dress makes her more regal, a princess, but a princess who chats like an American girl. Milly's customary black is a habit carried forward from when she wore 'robes of mourning' in New York; it becomes symbolic of both her 'romantic isolation', in Susan's view, and her own approaching funeral (89). Milly's role as a princess is thus associated with gloom, melancholy and isolation, but here she is a bright, white and sociable princess. Early on in Venice, the narrator, focalizing the narrative through Susan Stringham, presents an 'impression' of Milly, drawn from a Maeterlinck play: in 'the twilight that gathers', a 'dim scene' of 'delicate dusk', she is an 'angular, pale princess [...] mainly seated, mainly still', isolated behind a moat (364). Milly's switch to white coincides with her sudden gregariousness, and dispels any thought of death.

Although it may represent virginity, hence isolation – as the white doves in Annunciations do – it could just as easily be the white of a bride in rude health in a Veronese painting. The addition of the white dress also lends strength to her pale face: usually ‘constantly pale, delicately haggard’, she now seems ‘different, younger, fairer’ (89, 424).

Milly’s parody does not overcome Butler’s ‘binary frame’, but it does reverse one for a while: that of Kate versus Milly. Throughout the novel, these two are paired, presented as alter egos: both are orphans (given that Lionel Croy has virtually disowned Kate) who dress as in mourning, both love Densher, both are proposed to by Lord Mark. Now in this scene, the comparison is made again, but, unlike so often in the novel, it is now to Milly’s advantage: Densher and Kate are so struck by Milly’s pearls, her ‘royal ornament’, since ‘pearls were exactly what Merton Densher would never be able to give’ Kate (428).<sup>40</sup> For Densher, Milly’s entrance recalls – to Milly’s advantage – an earlier one of Kate’s at Lancaster Gate:

he noted that Kate was somehow – for Kate – wanting in lustre. As a striking young presence she was practically superseded; of the mildness that Milly diffused she had assimilated all her share; she might fairly have been dressed to-night in the little black frock, superficially indistinguishable, that Milly had laid aside. This represented, he perceived, the opposite pole from such an effect as that of her wonderful entrance, under her aunt’s eyes – he had never forgotten it – the day of their younger friend’s failure at Lancaster Gate. (426-427)

Milly has claimed Kate’s usual lustre: Kate is in black tonight, her dress so like Milly’s usual one that she seems to be wearing Milly’s cast-off. Has the binary been switched? Milly now occupies Kate’s position, as the most compelling woman in the room, ‘the opposite pole’. Witnessing Kate’s ‘beautiful entrance’ at that earlier party, Densher had had an impression that he was an excluded party, only able to watch

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<sup>40</sup> Many critics notice that the lovers are separated by their different reactions to Milly’s pearls, Densher’s elevated, Kate’s mercenary (eg. Crews 1957: 74; Holland 1964: 310; Graham 1975: 215).

Kate perform in a play, under Aunt Maud's direction (277). Now Milly seems to appropriate this performative impression of Kate's, but to make her entrance with a freedom Kate never had – that of the hostess, without superintending aunt.

Though Kate declares that Milly's intention is to persuade Sir Luke that she is well – ‘ “She wants to be for him at her best. But she can't deceive him” ’ – her impression may be more intended for the lovers (429). Even as their plan reaches its fullest articulation (‘ “Since she's to die I'm to marry her?” ’ (433)), Milly suddenly begins to exercise a genuine attraction over Densher, as Kate notices: ‘ “Don't you think her good enough *now*?” ’ (427). When Densher complains that ‘ “one has to try a little hard to propose to a dying girl” ’, Kate replies, “She isn't for you as if she's dying”, and then tries to take the full measure of Densher's impression of Milly, perhaps testing his loyalty to her:

It had determined in Kate the flash of *justesse* [accuracy] that he could perhaps most, on consideration, have admired, for her retort touched the truth. There before him was the fact of how Milly to-night impressed him, and his companion, with her eyes in his own and pursuing his impression to the depths of them, literally now perched on the fact in triumph. She turned her head to where their friend was again in range, and it made him turn his, so that they watched a minute in concert. Milly, from the other side, happened at the moment to notice them, and she sent across toward them in response all the candour of her smile, the lustre of her pearls, the value of her life, the essence of her wealth. (436-437)

This moment restages Densher's earlier impression of Milly and her irresistible Venetian hospitality, but this time Kate scrutinizes the impact of Milly's impression on Densher, triumphing, perhaps, in the success of her plot, her fiction. When Kate turns her attention from Densher to Milly, she evokes the triangle of glances in the National Gallery. Then, Milly saw only Densher who in fact turned out to be looking at Kate, who Milly suddenly and shockingly found was looking at her. Then Densher was looking at Kate, Kate at Densher and then Milly, and then Milly at both of them. Now Densher is looking at Milly rather than at Kate, and Milly is the object of

attention of both lovers, not just Kate. In fact, when Kate transfers her attention to Milly, a side ominously drops out of the triangle to leave Milly as the intersection of two lines. Now Kate is the voyeur, rather than Milly, and Milly, accordingly, has none of her earlier embarrassment, only poise.

### **6.3.3 Densher Outside Florian's**

Later in the novel, Densher, like Milly in the National Gallery, like Strether in the countryside, receives a violent 'impression' of sensation, a sudden image which offers a glimpse of an underlying reality beneath what are increasingly enigmatic surfaces, an impression which offers to clarify a relationship (462). As often, this is one significant impression among a welter of others, here impressions of tawdry tourists and the Piazza San Marco emptying with the autumn (462). As does Strether's impression, Densher's later 'deepen[s]' (465). But whereas Strether is a dupe who finally discovers he has been deceived, and Milly is a dupe who fails to take an opportunity to be undeceived, Densher is a deceiver who suddenly discovers that his duplicity has been discovered. Yet, much like Milly, Densher's reaction is to delude himself, rather than face up, as Strether did, to the reality that 'Facts [...] have invaded the kingdom of Romance' (Wilde 2007b: 87). Although Densher's treatment of his impression is less creative than many of Milly's, he still manages to 'see the object as in itself it really is not', by lending his own self-serving and idiosyncratic meanings to the object before him.

Densher's daily, three-week courtship of Milly in Venice is abruptly interrupted when one day, in the court of the Palazzo Leporelli, Milly's gondolier, Pasquale, tells him that 'the signorina padrona was not "receiving"' (458). Further enquiries prompt Eugenio, her fixer and valet, to appear, telling him that the ladies are

‘a “leetle” fatigued’; his manner is even more supercilious than usual, his customary slight smile now barely offered to ‘the young man from London [...] [who was] after Miss Theale’s fortune’ (460, 459).<sup>41</sup> Such marked unfriendly vagueness makes Densher suddenly despondent, hit by ‘a sudden sharp sense that everything had turned to the dismal. Something had happened’ (460). The breach in Densher’s and Milly’s routine is matched by a turn in the weather, ‘the first sea-storm of the autumn’ (459). ‘Threading his way among loungers as vague as himself’ in the Piazza, ‘the drawing-room of Europe, profaned and bewildered by some reverse of fortune’, Densher muses repeatedly on his ‘shock’, while noting the few desultory entertainers and tourists still clinging on to the season, until a particular impression stops him in his tracks: ‘these were impressions for Densher too, but he had made the whole circuit thrice before he stopped short, in front of Florian’s, with the force of his sharpest’ (462).

As in the French countryside and the National Gallery, the narrative mode is one of delayed decoding. On his third circuit of the Piazza, Densher spots a man in profile at a table in a café, Florian’s, reading *Le Figaro*. During ‘a minute’, once the man, perhaps with ‘the sense of being noticed’, has turned his head, offering Densher a ‘wider view [that] showed him *all* Lord Mark’ (463). Lord Mark looks at him simply ‘as one of the damp shuffling crowd’, until ‘recognition’ comes (463). But neither rival acknowledges the other. Unusually, the impression is not the shock or the violence it had been for Strether and Milly: Densher has already had his ‘shock’, that ‘the palace had for the first time failed of a welcome [...] that gave the harsh note and broke the spell’ (462). The impression then soothes him, offering him an ‘answer to the riddle of the day’: ‘it was a great thing for Densher to get this answer. He held it

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<sup>41</sup> *NYE* replaces ‘after Miss Theale’s fortune’ with ‘pressing Miss Theale’s fortune hard’ (James 1909f: 257).

close, he hugged it', just as Milly had earlier left Sir Luke Strett's consulting room with the 'impression' she had 'gained' of him, a 'relation', 'done up in the softest silk [...] under her cloak' (463, 463-464, 192). Lord Mark's sudden appearance makes 'the difference':

it explained – and that was much, for with explanations he might somehow deal. The vice in the air, otherwise, was too much like the breath of fate. The weather had changed, the rain was ugly, the wind wicked, the sea impossible, *because* of Lord Mark. It was because of him, *a fortiori*, that the palace was closed. Densher went round again twice, and found the visitor each time as he had found him first. (464)

The impression, once Lord Mark is recognized, has the 'effect of establishing connections – connections startling and direct', new apperceptive links; it catalyses an 'explanatio[n]' whose effect is so comforting that it displaces anxiety about the wider truth that the game is now up – that, with Mark's meddling, Milly has realized that Densher's suit is insincere and mercenary, as he has been secretly engaged to Kate all along (463, 464). The comfort lies in a revelation of what lies behind the 'visible conditions', what has made the air a 'non-conductor of messages': 'he only wanted a reason' and, with it, 'the obscure had cleared for him' (465, 461, 464, 464). Densher realises that he is not facing divine punishment, 'the breath of fate', but a human adversary he has never respected (464). The recognition is so comforting that Densher tries to repeat it by making three more circuits of the Piazza. This contrasts with Strether's impression in the countryside in which a turbulent undercurrent of reality, 'facts', suddenly disrupts a picturesque surface, 'romance'.

Perhaps to compensate for his loss of control of events at the palazzo, having 'just to *take* such things', Densher had fallen into the egotistical trap Ruskin defined as the 'pathetic fallacy', judging the wind and rain to augur 'the breath of fate', his own divine punishment (464). But this romantic fantasy is dislodged by the incoming impression of sensation of Lord Mark. However, like Milly in the National Gallery,

his capacity to interpret impressions in self-protective, or self-serving, ways persists: ‘the vice in the air’ persists, but is now located in its villainous source, Lord Mark (464). Instead of realizing that it’s his and Kate’s duplicity which has bleakened Venice, he displaces his own guilt and villainy onto Lord Mark, his specious logic emphasised by the narrator’s showy Latin, ‘it was because of him, *a fortiori*, that the palace was closed’ (464).

As the impression deepens, as Densher’s mind adds layers to it, the guilt implicit in the ‘breath of fate’ is fully transferred to Lord Mark. Mark, ‘the brute, as he now regularly imaged him’, offers him ‘purification’ by providing a foil against which Densher feels ‘blameless’, ‘washed but the more clean’, so that ‘with time, actually – for the impression but deepened – this sense of the contrast, to the advantage of Merton Densher, became a sense of relief, and that, in turn, a sense of escape’ (466, 465, 464, 466, 465). Lord Mark’s visit was ‘a descent, an invasion, an aggression’, one of the ‘stupid shocks that he himself had so decently sought to spare her’ (465). Later, in London, Densher tells Kate that, ‘“It was his visit that she couldn’t stand – it was what then took place that simply killed her”’, a statement that echoes Densher’s earlier private fear that ‘It was on the cards for him that he [Densher] might kill her’ (509, 454). Lord Mark’s active interference contrasts with Densher’s policy of being ‘still’ which, as we have seen, is a self-protecting fallacy.

### **6.3.4 Densher’s Last Impression of Milly**

The most important impression of the novel occurs in Densher’s last conversation with Milly, in the great room of the Palazzo Leporelli, a scene hidden from the reader in an ellipsis between Book Ninth and Book Tenth. Book Ninth ends with Sir Luke Strett, as he leaves Venice, telling Densher that Milly is in better health and passing

on an invitation to visit her, which brings to an end Milly's 'act of renouncement' of her suitor (524). Book Tenth gives two accounts of the final meeting. In its first chapter, which James represents scenically, Densher and Kate, reunited in Lancaster Gate, discuss the estrangement and rapprochement, and Kate tells Densher that Milly is dying in Venice. In the second, there is a pictorial description of a series of surprisingly intimate conversations between Densher and Aunt Maud in which they reflect on Milly's tragedy. Densher tells Aunt Maud of his last impression of Milly, 'his supreme personal impression' (525). This last performative impression of Milly's is so effective that it constitutes, for Densher, a 'recognition' – one, it is implied, that causes Densher's love to become a reality, rather than a pretence (525).

After spotting Lord Mark outside Florian's, Densher had continued to 'keep still', awaiting a sign from within the palazzo, listening to the wind in his rooms and 'shuffling about in the rain' (467, 465). Although he continues to feel purified by Lord Mark's aggressive revelation, he wishes 'to mark his virtue beyond any mistake' by 'stay[ing] in spite of odium, [...] perhaps of some final experience that would be, for the pain of it, all but unbearable' (467). He begins to feel alienated from Kate, too, for the first time, and resents her prohibition of letters. Then Susan Stringham arrives suddenly in Densher's rooms in the rain, telling him that Milly is dying, and that '“She has turned her face to the wall”' (469). Susan tells Densher that Lord Mark has told Milly of his secret engagement; she doesn't know if Milly now hates Densher: '“She'll never tell”' (473). Susan's response and request to the situation is pragmatic: '“I promise to believe you down to the ground if, to save her life, you consent to a denial”' (487). Densher does not answer this request, and we later learn, when Densher and Kate discuss it, that Densher had never countenanced lying, although Kate says she wished he had (511, 510). As often in Venice, Densher seems

able to perpetuate a false impression, but not to lie. Then Sir Luke arrives and, between visits to the Palazzo, is hosted in Venice by Densher, though there is almost no discussion of Milly, until he passes on his message.

Later in London, Milly's predicament, and Densher's perceived attachment to her, open a new chapter in his relationship with Aunt Maud: 'he felt himself on terms with her that were absolutely new', terms which include frank interviews alone with her, and a necessary extra distance from Kate (521). But Aunt Maud's changed view of him also effects a change in Densher himself: he begins to 'surrender to Mrs Lowder's view of him' as 'blighted and ravaged, as frustrated and already bereft', though he worries about his 'sincerity' (521-522). But then, rather than feeling he is 'professing to her [...] the possession of an aftersense that wasn't real', he realises that this 'aftersense, day by day, was his greatest reality' (522). Although he finds her sentimentality distasteful, these discussions are comforting, partly as she is also inclined to speak of Milly as though already dead, which helps Densher try to put out of his mind Milly's 'consciousness, tortured, for all he knew, crucified by its pain' (524).

It is to Aunt Maud that Densher reveals the most important impression he has received, one which Milly has made on him so powerfully. In effect, Densher narrates to her a recognition scene, in vague terms which protect Milly from London gossip – 'as to the wonderful scene, they just stood at the door' – just as James narrates Milly's death indirectly to his readers, since, as he writes in the preface, 'the poet essentially *can't* be concerned with the act of dying' since it is through 'the act of living' that the sick appeal (James 1902: 527; James 1962: 289-290).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Cave calls Milly's last interviews with Lord Mark and Densher a 'double peripeteia', and concludes that it is reasonable to call the latter a recognition scene (Cave 1990: 430-1).

They spoke of the dying girl in the past tense; they said no worse of her than that she had *been* stupendous. On the other hand, however – and this was what wasn't, for Densher, pure peace – they insisted enough that stupendous was the word. It was the thing, this recognition, that kept him most quiet; he came to it with her repeatedly; talking about it against time and, in particular, we have noted, speaking of his supreme personal impression as he had not spoken to Kate. It was almost as if she herself enjoyed the perfection of the pathos; she sat there before the scene, as he couldn't help giving it out to her, very much as a stout citizen's wife might have sat, during a play that made people cry, in the pit or the family-circle. (525)

So Milly has made a 'supreme personal impression' on Densher at their last meeting, before her death, which he revisits again and again with Aunt Maud. This is the final and most vivid of the impressions she manufactures for the lovers. It's an unusual impression in that it is both a confected image – the princess in her palace – and a 'recognition,' as the narrator calls it. In other words this impression is both cognitive and performative. It is cognitive on Densher's part, performative on the part of both Milly and Densher. Normally recognitions occur when a deceiver has dropped their performative guard, but here Milly's is resolute. Whereas in *The Ambassadors* Strether's deepening impressions discerned the fictive status of his previous impressions of the lovers, here Densher is both cognitively aware of the artifice of Milly's final Venetian impression, but nevertheless collaborates with her by further embellishing it, almost performing it for Maud, through successive narrative acts, as actor, playwright and novelist; and Aunt Maud is a further audience who adds to the performance, too, when 'they spoke of the dying girl' – 'she met *him* halfway. Nothing could have been broader than her vision' (523). This is the impression he transmits to Aunt Maud:

He had let her know, absolutely for the girl's glory, how he had been received on that occasion with a positive effect – since she was indeed so perfectly the princess that Mrs. Stringham always called her – of princely state.

Before the fire in the great room that was all arabesques and cherubs, all gaiety and gilt, and that was warm at that hour too with a wealth of autumn sun, the state in question had been maintained[.] (526)

Despite her illness, Milly's 'princely state [is] [...] maintained', so that she 'was indeed so perfectly the princess that Mrs Stringham always called her' (526). Again, despite her condition, she did not receive him in her room but, he tells Kate, '“She received me just as usual: in that glorious great *salone*, in the dress she always wears, from her inveterate corner of her sofa”', her customary black dress resumed after the party (515). Densher tells Kate that Milly made no reference to his betrayal of her. The scene is apparently unaffected both by Milly's illness and her knowledge of her own deceit. He speculates that she had invited him there to ask him to deny it, but relented – perhaps because she was 'affected' by the fact that he had thought it proper to stay on even after being unmasked (514). Kate speculates that Sir Luke had mollified and persuaded her. Milly wanted to tell him 'face-to-face' that if he was only staying for her, this was unnecessary.

For himself, more privately, Densher frames the impression aesthetically, as an episode from a story: 'he himself, for that matter, at moments, took in the scene again as from the page of a book' (527). As we will see happens in *The Golden Bowl*, the impression here is a form of aestheticized memory which can be returned to, just as art can be returned to, here for emotional, rather than Maggie's analytic purposes. What is his recognition? It is a cognitive impression which, like Strether's in the countryside, discerns the disparity between surface and depth. Densher often thinks appreciatively of Milly's 'poetry'; her poetry lies above all in the way that her appearances belie the reality of her situation. And this is nowhere more marked than in the final impression she makes, which is all the more affecting for Densher in that it is offered generously – in spite of her knowledge of his betrayal and her rapidly deteriorating health. Over time Densher's impression does the cognitive work of interpreting Milly's final glossy pageant as evidence of both her bravery and, more

importantly, her forgiveness of him.<sup>43</sup> As he tells Aunt Maud, ‘it was the front so presented that had been, in Milly, heroic’, or Kate, ‘“She showed nothing but her beauty and her strength” ’ (526, 516). There are two layers of depth beneath Milly’s bright surface: the first is the one that Aunt Maud and all London knows – she’s dying; the second is one that only Densher, Kate, Mrs Stringham and Lord Mark know – she knows she has been deceived. Densher

had known then, at the same time, of what the young man [i.e. Densher himself] had been conscious, and he was to measure, after that, day by day, how little he had lost. [...] The essence was that something had happened to him too beautiful and too sacred to describe. He had been, to his recovered sense, forgiven, dedicated, blessed; but this he couldn’t coherently express. (527)

Milly’s most performative use of impressions – here – is to make them into reality by doggedly adhering to them at the very moment where she might be expected to abandon them, when Densher’s duplicity comes to light. When Milly finds that Densher has deceived her she shuts the door of the Palazzo against him. By doing this she apparently abandons the collaborative impressions that had been constructed by her and Densher of suitor courting princess. But her decision to readmit him to the palace to receive one final exquisite impression of her and, crucially, to make no mention at all of his deception, is a redeployment of her own impression in defiance of the ugly depths that have opened up beneath the previous impressions Densher had given her. By reasserting her version of their story she implicitly denies the truth of Lord Mark’s story and, by implication, Densher’s act of betrayal. The effect is not simply denial or evasion of reality. As we have seen, Densher’s ‘after-sense’ of Milly has become ‘his greatest reality’. His love for her, once feigned, is now real. By maintaining a ‘front’, and adhering to familiar surfaces, Milly has made a profound

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<sup>43</sup> In Densher’s eyes, ‘Milly is touching not simply because of her poignant situation’ and the palace and her manner, ‘but because she is spiritually *good*’: he falls in love with her ‘spiritual beauty’ (Crews 1957: 73, 74).

difference: Densher stops cooperating with Kate's plot, and renounces the money.<sup>44</sup> In the final chapter Densher will only marry her '“as we were”', without the money, to which Kate replies, with the famous last line of the novel: '“We shall never be again as we were!”' (576).<sup>45</sup> This has been the work of Milly's final and very deliberate impression.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Milly's life is exchanged simply for Densher's thought of it; there is no deliverance for her (Cameron 1989: 162). Bersani feels that 'her death seems hardly to matter when she has been treated for so long merely as an appeal to [Densher's] consciousness' (Bersani 1976: 144). But Graham claims that James was attached to 'the notion of immortality through the memory of others' (Graham 1975: 222).

<sup>45</sup> Kate's closing statement 'proclaims that the Dove has triumphed'; 'the full effect of the Dove's descent' has been 'shattering' (Krook 1967: 220, 219). 'Milly has come and gone, nothing is afterwards the same' (Lubbock 1926: 183).

<sup>46</sup> 'The interview with Milly has made it impossible for Densher to take the money' (Krook 1967: 197).

### **Coda: Impressions New and Used in *The Golden Bowl***

An examination of impressions in *The Golden Bowl* offers a suitable coda to this thesis, as the novel itself may be said to form a coda to James's use of impressions, providing thematic completion by way of a recapitulation, while also posing new questions. This coda begins by offering a summary of the Jamesian impression, as presented in the previous chapters, with examples drawn from *The Golden Bowl*; it then examines what is new in the impressions of *The Golden Bowl*. In the first instance, we see how impressions have become, by *The Golden Bowl*, a conventional part of James's narrative, 'codified', as the title of section one suggests; in the second instance, we see the most striking example of this codification in *The Golden Bowl*, two chapters unprecedentedly dense in impressions, all of which are painstakingly interconnected by the narrator, and by Maggie, in order to reach a recognition; we also see that, in a new move, impressions have become tools to be 'used' by characters, rather than aesthetic ends in themselves, as they had often been in James's two previous novels. Viewing *The Golden Bowl* first as a recapitulation, and then as an innovation, involves a degree of duplication, but it is hoped that this may add some further clarity to my argument at its terminus.

*The Golden Bowl* rehearses and combines many of its predecessors.<sup>1</sup> Like *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Ambassadors* and *The Wings of the Dove*, it portrays a love triangle in which secret lovers try to disguise their erotic relationship from a third party; similarly, again, it charts the innocence, bewilderment and final clarity of this third party who uses her empiricist impressions to reach the truth. As in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove*, a fortune hunter (Osmond/Densher/Amerigo)

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<sup>1</sup> Bradbury says that *The Golden Bowl* is a 'palimpsest' of James's previous novels, mistakenly attributing this thought to Krook (Bradbury 1979: 128).

seeks marriage with a young American woman (Isabel/Milly/Maggie), from whom he hides a relationship with an earlier or existing mistress. As in *The Ambassadors* and *The Wings of the Dove*, an ingénu(e), an excluded third party to a love triangle, feels under pressure to learn ‘how to live’, how to get the most out of an existence, and a series of relationships, which others are also trying to exploit.

Maggie uses most of the impressions we have seen earlier in the thesis in an effort to save her marriage. She uses cognitive impressions – which combine empiricist and aesthetic elements – to discover that her husband is unfaithful: she must learn to see both her own marriage and the behaviour of her husband and his mistress more clearly. Like Isabel, Strether and Milly, Maggie, in the midst of her bewilderment, engineered by those around her, has ‘“no one to turn to, no one to help me to make things out; no impression but my own, don’t you see? to go by” ’ (James 1905b: 366).<sup>2</sup> As she begins to realise that all is not well with her marriage, she has the Lockean thought that ‘her faculties had not for a good while been concomitantly used’ (292). By the time she is discussing the recently-purchased golden bowl with Fanny Assingham, ‘Maggie, however, was seeing for herself’, ‘Maggie herself saw the truth’, enough to proclaim a little later ‘“my possession at last, I mean, of real knowledge” ’ (412, 408, 432).

If *The Golden Bowl* revisits the kind of perceptual acuity offered to Isabel, Milly and Strether by their empiricist cognitive impressions, it also revisits the kind of agency offered to Milly by her performative impressions. Once Maggie has realised her deception through a series of impressions, she fights back by making a series of impressions on Amerigo and Charlotte. The challenge of how to save her marriage is implicitly presented as a problem of how to aestheticize her experience, which often

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<sup>2</sup> All further references to *The Golden Bowl* are indicated by page number only.

echoes James's reflections on the problem of form in the prefaces. Maggie is, indeed, often figured – when the focalizer of the second half of the novel – as a playwright or actress.<sup>3</sup> Like Milly, Maggie uses performative impressions to ensure that, by the end of the novel, the man she loves reciprocates this love.<sup>4</sup> Like Milly's, her performative impressions reassert the fantasy of an unsullied innocence before recognition with such force that they defeat evil. Unlike Milly's, the new situation exists in reality (her husband's new passion for her, her rival's departure), which Maggie is there to enjoy, rather than as a memory after her own death, as exists Densher's love for Milly.<sup>5</sup>

The most important impressions in *The Golden Bowl* figure in three areas of the novel: first, during the week following Amerigo's and Charlotte's adulterous weekend in the country; second, the impressions associated with the golden bowl itself, when Charlotte and Amerigo first discover it in Book First, later, when Maggie buys it and is visited by its vendor, and then when Maggie presents it to Fanny, who smashes it just as Amerigo walks in; and, third, during two scenes at Fawns, late in the novel, when Maggie, watching the others playing bridge from the terrace, is confronted by Charlotte about her suspicions, and then, several days later, when Maggie follows Charlotte into the garden to discuss Adam and Charlotte's departure to the United States.

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<sup>3</sup> Though in *The Wings of the Dove*, characters put forward various fictive interpretations, they 'failed to perceive their own story until it was over; but Maggie creates, or re-creates, her plot' (Bradbury 1979: 124). 'The fictions which Maggie rather ruthlessly imposes on everyone else in the novel leave no room for truth – they create reality instead of hiding it'; 'she does absolutely nothing but wait for the single fiction she promotes – that of her own and her father's happy marriages – to stifle every other way of living the story' (Bersani 1976: 147, 150).

<sup>4</sup> 'Maggie appears for a while to be nothing less than a reincarnation of Milly'; she later seems more like Kate (Crews 1957: 95). 'Maggie is a fusion of Isabel Archer and of Madame Merle' (Bersani 1976: 147). 'She has had her initiation into evil. She has won not only the Prince's respect for her forbearance, but also his deep love' (Matthiessen 1946: 101).

<sup>5</sup> Crews makes a similar observation: 'Instead of turning her face to the wall [as Milly did] she confronts the problem of social deception directly, and masters it' (Crews 1957: 111). 'There is no convenient death, as in *The Wings of the Dove*, to dissipate antagonisms in an allegory of posthumous reconciliations' (Bersani 1976: 148).

## 1. Impressions Codified

*The Golden Bowl* encapsulates the major features of the Jamesian impression as presented thus far in this thesis. The impression is above all, for James, an individual's first-hand perception. It is a perception, rather than a sensation, as it is immediately imaginative and artful.<sup>6</sup> The impression covers a wide spectrum of imaginative involvement in perception, or 'reflection', to use an empiricist term. In fact, James uses the word 'impression' to refer both to what we might think of, at one end of the spectrum, as sense impressions and, at the other, as ideas.<sup>7</sup> In calling the novel an impression, he was suggesting that the novel is an idea rooted in an individual's view of life, and is hence both representational and imaginative. Characters' ideas, too, tend to derive from their sense impressions. The use of a single word for both suggests a continuum between sensation and thought, and perhaps that the two are the same. An impression is always unfinished, transitional, capable of being revised, evoking the painter's physical, rather than psychological impression, a preparatory attempt at a painting. This reflects James's views about both perception and thought: a perception and a thought may always be revisited, deepened. The imaginative aspect of the impression is apperceptive, in other words the impression is immediately associated by the mind with other impressions and ideas. This typically involves the subject using their memories of art, or history, or their previous experience, to make better sense of what they confront.

Through their impressions, James's characters may apprehend either beauty or truth, though the two are sometimes in harmony. By offering beauty or pleasure, the

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<sup>6</sup> To adopt William James's distinction between 'sensations' and 'perceptions', discussed in chapter two.

<sup>7</sup> I adopt here the Humean distinction between 'impressions' and 'ideas' (discussed in chapter two) which is obscured by James's consistent use of 'impression'.

impression may help them to ‘live’, to make the most of life, and thus to overcome briefly time and death, the grim determinants of empiricist reality, either by allowing the fullest appreciation of the moment or by making a beautiful memento of that moment that may be enjoyed again and again, an impression stored in the memory. Typically, an impression is made more beautiful or pleasurable by a character’s imagination, which embroiders their impressions, rather as a painter adds successive layers to a painting, beginning with the ground. This happens both during perception, and in memory. For example, turning now to *The Golden Bowl*, we are told, in the following paragraph, that Maggie’s vivid impression of her unprecedented evening with her husband, when he returned from his illicit weekend at Matcham, is a painting hung on the wall of her memory which she can view over and over again (the concept of the impression emerges here, but is not named until the next paragraph).<sup>8</sup> Maggie is

living over again any chosen minute – for she could choose them, she could fix them – of the freshness of relation produced by her having administered to her husband the first surprise to which she had ever treated him. It had been a poor thing, but it had been all her own, and the whole passage was backwardly there, a great picture hung on the wall of her daily life, for her to make what she would of. (294)

So Maggie relishes the opportunity, offered by the impression, to repeat her pleasurable sense of the renewal of her marriage. Her ‘fixing’ of ‘any chosen minute’ suggests that her imagination may arrest time, a Paterian aspiration.

By offering truth, the impression may help characters to make better sense of their own experience, to see what is going on behind the deceptive surfaces of life, and hence avoid the traps of those intent on misleading them, and to make moral judgements. Like Strether during recognition, Maggie’s cognitive impressions

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<sup>8</sup> The next paragraph compares the remembered episode to ‘a scene on the stage’ which has ‘left a great impression on the tenant of one of the stalls’ (294). But both metaphors, painting and dramatic scene, are then subordinated to the more general metaphor of Maggie’s impression: ‘her impression could continue sharply to discriminate between’ the ‘parts of the experience’ (295).

suddenly discern a depth beneath the surface. Just as Strether discovers that Chad and Madame de Vionnet have ‘something to put a face upon’, Maggie, during the game of bridge at Fawns, is suddenly aware, with the help of her ‘impression’, of ‘the horror of the thing *hideously* behind, behind so much trusted, so much pretended, nobleness, cleverness, tenderness. It was the first sharp falsity she had known in her life’ (James 1903: 410; James 1905b: 455). These truthful impressions are the central element of Jamesian recognition: a striking perception leads to clarity of thought, either immediately, or, more often, during a prolonged period of reflection. As we will see, during the week after Amerigo returns from Matcham, Maggie pieces together six striking perceptions, expressions or gestures of Amerigo and Charlotte, to reach the conclusion that they were ‘*treating* her’ (316).

Yet whenever an impression is received, an impression is also made. James’s fiction shows that impressions need not always be reactive, be occasioned by something, but can be creative expressions in themselves. The villains of James’s fiction augment their experience with their imaginations not only by receiving impressions in a certain way, but by *making* imaginative impressions on their victims. Charlotte ‘always dressed her act up’, ‘her doom [...] to arrange appearances’, both early on in the novel to disguise her ‘abjection’, and later, when she is ‘brought in [...] to do the “worldly” ’ for the retiring Ververs (35, 226). An example of one of her performative impressions is the very public embrace into which she co-opts Maggie, at the moment when Amerigo, Adam, and the Assinghams appear, having finished their bridge game (465-6).<sup>9</sup> We infer that, through this audacious performance, Charlotte is trying to entrench the collective silence over the infidelity at the heart of

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<sup>9</sup> Although the narrator does not name the embrace an ‘impression’ in this paragraph, it occurs very soon after Maggie imagines what impression the two of them might make as they watch the others: she wishes that her father would look up from the bridge game and see them looking in, only to be moved on by Charlotte who, Maggie guesses, becomes similarly conscious of ‘the more ways than one in which their impression could appeal’ (461).

the two marriages. However, while the lovers in both previous novels make many deceptive ‘impressions’, the word is rarely used to describe Amerigo’s and Charlotte’s duplicitous behaviour; instead, we are told of their ‘good appearance[s]’, the ‘perfection’ of their ‘outward show’, ‘their apparently straight play’, ‘the beauty of appearances’ and the ‘conquest of appearances’ (205, 500, 452, 457, 452).

The cognitive impression – the impression received – may be aesthetic as well as empiricist. At the start of the process of recognition, the initial impression is experienced as strange, defamiliarized, lacking associations with expected impressions, like the raw impressions of painterly impressionism, because the deceiver has been caught in an unguarded moment: he or she is not making the usual deceptive impressions to which the dupe’s apperception has become accustomed. For example, by waiting unusually at Portland Place after the Matcham weekend, Maggie gets an impression of Amerigo, not only off his guard, but disoriented. She remembers Amerigo’s impression of her, an ‘impression of something unusually prepared and pointed in her attitude and array’ (289). She reads in his face an embarrassed uncertainty, unprecedented in a man with such self-possession: he was ‘*visibly* uncertain – this was written in the face he for the first minute showed her’, ‘it had been written large’, strangely, for ‘she hadn’t expected the least shade of embarrassment’ (297-298).

The process of reflection involves the memory repeating the impression later on, either voluntarily or involuntarily. For example, during the week after Matcham, Maggie’s reflection and recollection of impressions is figured in two ways, one implying voluntary memory, the other involuntary. In the first, she is a housewife looking for diamonds in the dust, a voluntary memory; in the second, the impression of Amerigo’s second uncertain smile, as he left her salon to dress that first evening, is

represented as a nosey servant who, dismissed, finds a pretext to return to the room, an involuntary memory (316-317). The mind then works on the impression, ‘deepening it’, treating it as a classical painter treats his first impression, embodied in the ‘ground’ of the painting, adding further layers of paint. Maggie’s piecing together of her six impressions is evocative of the painter whose *paysage composé* comprises six preparatory sketches. Hence the initial passive impression is contained within a wider, more active one.

Aesthetic impressions tend to be impressions through which characters ‘live’, to be an end in themselves, rather than a means to an end. Traditional painterly and literary impressionism is associated with enjoying the sensations of the moment, what James calls in *The Ambassadors* ‘the immediate and the sensible’ (James 1903: 4). They are sometimes the very deceptive impressions described above. In fact, in *The Ambassadors* Strether suggests that in order to ‘live’ it is necessary to deceive oneself that one is free, to have that ‘illusion’ (James 1903: 161). A character intent on deception may thwart the truth-seeking impressions of his victim by offering him misleading impressions that are also designed to appeal to his sensibility, to offer aesthetic pleasure. In *The Golden Bowl* Amerigo and Charlotte do not try to seduce Maggie with deceptive performative impressions. Amerigo’s seduction is more literal: he seduces her either with acts of kindness or with physical contact. She is usually so overwhelmed by such Humean impressions of passion that she loses sight of her plan, and does anything to spare Amerigo the shame of her knowledge. Amerigo embraces her three times during the evening after Matcham, with the effect that, on the third occasion, ‘She gave up, let her idea go, let everything go; her one consciousness was that he was taking her again into his arms’; the combination of his ‘tenderness’ and her ‘sensibility’ creates a ‘weakness’ in her that terrifies her; she had ‘never felt so

absorbingly married' (307, 307-308, 302). 'Under' the 'impression' of Amerigo's new attentiveness to Adam, 'everything in Maggie [...] melted and went to pieces' (314). Charlotte, as we have seen, uses impressions aggressively rather than seductively.

Dupes in late James begin to realise that they can make their own impressions. They often begin by embellishing the impressions made by those intent on deceiving them. Sometimes they invest them with such feeling that they become the very reality that the deceivers were simulating, so that the deceivers' impressions of pleasure exceed their author's intentions. This is an odd mechanism in some of James's fictions in which those being deceived invest so much in deceptive surfaces, so deny the reality of what lies beneath the surface, that the surface becomes the depth, too. At these moments the dupe is no longer the critic appreciating the fictions of another, but an artist, wresting control of deceptive performative impressions from their antagonist. Strether tries to recreate his Lambinet, but this aesthetic impulse is crushed by empiricist reality. Milly helps her deceivers to make their deceptive impressions, in the National Gallery, for example, but goes on to make her own more extravagant ones in Venice. And one way of interpreting Maggie's rescue of her marriage is that she appropriates the deceptive attempts of others, of Amerigo, Charlotte and Fanny Assingham, to assert that all is well in the two marriages; but while their attempts are meant to assert continuity with the treacherous past, the impressions that Maggie makes that all is well, to protect her father, result in a break with the past, in which Charlotte is cleared away, and her husband has a new passion for her.

## 2. Impressions Used

Yet *The Golden Bowl* does more than recapitulate James's earlier impressions; it makes them anew; and it does so, especially, when it charts the week following the return of the lovers from Matcham when Maggie signals her suspicions to Amerigo and Charlotte.

The first two chapters of Book Second, the half-way point in the novel in which the point of view transfers, broadly speaking, from Amerigo to Maggie, culminate in Maggie's 'first shock of complete perception' of her marriage (at the end of the second chapter); largely in picture form, they summarize a week in Maggie's life in which her impressions are the main events (319). Maggie's recognition is not the result of one striking impression that she has reflected on, as is the case with earlier protagonists, but of her reflective comparison of six separate 'impressions', some forgotten 'on the spot', but recalled later (298). Rather than Isabel's or Strether's nocturnal vigil, Maggie's 'vigil' lasts a week (305). These six cognitive impressions record the reactions of Amerigo and Charlotte to a crucial performative impression that Maggie makes on Amerigo, by waiting for him at Portland Place: she becomes a critic to her own work as an artist, rather as James behaves in his prefaces. These impressions fuel her existing suspicions about her marriage – gestured at in the sinister metaphor of the pagoda – and culminate in the shock of perception just referred to, the recognition that Amerigo and Charlotte have noticed her suspicions and so are '*treating*' her in a coordinated way (316).

These impressions are fitted together by Maggie's mind like studies arranged for a final painting, despite efforts by others to fragment her vision, such as Amerigo's lies and obfuscation, and Fanny Assingham's later smashing of the golden bowl. James's narrative mode is not impressionist: analeptic prolepsis, on seven

occasions (294-5, 298, 298, 301, 304, 305, 317), both allows the narrator to present to us chronologically those impressions which Maggie does not consciously notice at the time, and makes repeated bridges between Maggie's experience 'on the spot' and her 'later and more analytic consciousness' (309, 301).

Maggie makes an impression on Amerigo, as he returns from an adulterous weekend with Charlotte at Matcham, by unexpectedly waiting to have dinner with him at their house in Portland Place, rather than remaining with her father at his house in Eaton Square, as she would normally do, so that both couples might eat together. Although Maggie likes to think to herself that the impression is designed by her as a demonstration of a new passion for her husband, through which she offers him 'the flower of [her] participation', in an effort to disrupt the old 'form' of the two marriages, Maggie's mounting suspicions give it an air of confrontation, and Amerigo reacts to it as a threat, which makes Maggie more suspicious (305, 291). As we have seen, it looks as though Maggie wants to stage a recognition scene, forcing her husband to recognize not only her suspicions, but also her love and her capacity to surprise him.

At this stage, a brief summary of the six impressions, numbered in square brackets in the order in which they appear in the story, may be useful.<sup>10</sup> The first impression is technically Amerigo's of Maggie, though, since Maggie is focalized, we will treat it as her impression of his impression. Maggie has a vivid impression of Amerigo's shocked impression of her action, 'the impression of her rather pointedly [...] awaiting him', 'with an infinite sense of intention', 'the impression of something

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<sup>10</sup> I borrow the structuralist distinction between 'story' and 'discourse': story is 'the content or chain of events (actions, happenings)', 'the what'; discourse is 'the expression, the means by which the content is communicated', 'the how' (Chatman 1978: 19). The order in which these impressions appear in the 'discourse', with page numbers in brackets is: 1 (293), 2 (294), 1 (298), 3 (300-301), 4 (309), 4 and 1 (312), 5 (313), 6 (314), 5 (316), 3 (316-317), 1 and 4 (362).

unusually prepared and pointed in her attitude and array', as he arrives to find her unexpectedly at their house, instead of her father's [1] (293, 298). His 'blankness' has a 'meaning [...] beyond the importance of momentary expressions' for Maggie, and he blushes (298). Maggie forgets this impression, but it returns to her fifty pages later (362). Maggie's impression of the evening as a whole is then described, as we have seen, as a 'great picture hung on the wall of her daily life', or a 'scene on the stage', both of which, available for 'conscious repossession', allow her 'to liv[e] over again any chosen minute' [2] (294, 295, 294). A short time later, we are told that, though she forgets it now, Maggie will 'remember afterwards [...] how he had looked, for her, during an instant, at the door', as he smiles uncertainly and declines her offer to accompany him while he dresses for dinner, a 'whole impression' through which lights will later 'play', as though this memory is the 'great picture' just mentioned [3] (300, 301). This impression returns at the end of the week as an involuntary memory, as we will soon see (316-317). The next day Maggie has an aesthetic impression of Charlotte, who is as taken aback as Amerigo by Maggie's new confident and suspicious demeanour, as Charlotte turns from a window 'to begin to deal with her' [4] (309, 362). Maggie forgets this impression on the spot, but it returns later, at the same time that her impression of Amerigo's first blankness [1] returns since 'Maggie sometimes felt reminded of other looks on other faces', here by Fanny Assingham's look: her earlier impressions of Amerigo and Charlotte are 'two strangely unobliterated impressions' [1 and 4], the 'physiognomic light that had played out in her husband at the shock' and 'the wonder of Charlotte's beautiful bold wavering glance', both prompted by Fanny Assingham's similar 'blankness' and then 'flush' (362).

Over the course of the week, Maggie has two more ‘impressions’, this time of the lovers’ new attentiveness to her father and to herself [5 and 6] (313, 314). Maggie’s ‘impression’ of Charlotte’s solicitousness [5], which she interprets as an attempt to smother ‘any objections and retorts’, prompts Maggie’s great recognition, the culmination of this week of six impressions, a ‘reflection’, which the narrator compares to a ‘great flower grown in a night’, and describes as a flash of light, that Amerigo and Charlotte were ‘*treating*’ her (316). As we will see, the notion that the lovers are ‘treating’ her equates their efforts to stifle her new suspicions with a painter’s efforts to include a new object in an existing composition. This ‘reflection’ prompts further retrospection on Maggie’s part, which is described as Maggie’s treatment of her past impressions, represented by two metaphors, as we have seen: one figures her as a housewife sifting ‘small shining diamonds’ out of dust, the most important of which is her earlier impression of Amerigo’s smile [3] which now ‘gave out its full power’ (317). Like Ritchie, Maggie here converts a hint – Amerigo in a doorway, young Protestant men in a doorway – into a revelation. Maggie’s active reflection is figured as housework, not as sculpture, as William James might have figured it. Her earlier impression of Amerigo [3], rediscovered by Maggie as a shining diamond, is then figured as a nosey servant who, dismissed by Maggie, finds a pretext to come back into the room, to learn the business of the house (317).<sup>11</sup> The proliferation of such metaphors in *The Golden Bowl* shows James’s persistent fascination with, and exploration of, what, as we have seen, Locke and Hume called

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<sup>11</sup> This anticipates the shopkeeper’s later intervention, and evokes Isabel’s similarly involuntary impression-as-memory of Osmond and Madame Merle, intimately together.

internal perception.<sup>12</sup> The ‘pretext’ is her ‘observed necessity of comparing – comparing the obvious common elements in her husband’s and her stepmother’s ways of now “taking” her’ (317). So an empiricist comparison of two impressions [5 and 6] – how they ‘take’ her – prompts the recovery of another, more important impression, the ‘dismissed vision of Amerigo, that evening, in arrest at the door of her *salottino*’ [3] (317).

The performative impression of Maggie’s, moving from Eaton Square to Portland Place, which triggers these six impressions is a very small gesture – especially compared with Milly’s – which nevertheless quite markedly breaks with habit: it ramifies, an inch becomes an ell. It meets one of James’s most important criteria for art, economy, one which Ford Madox Ford argued constituted James’s impressionism.<sup>13</sup> Like the raw impressions of an impressionist painting, the impression Maggie presents Amerigo with is unfamiliar. Like Milly’s final impression, it involves sitting in a salon wearing a particular dress: Maggie wears her finest outfit for the occasion. Maggie in essence organizes, perhaps semi-consciously, for Amerigo, like a Jamesian dupe, to receive the shock of recognition, which, unusually in these novels, is shocking because he apprehends Maggie *alone* in an unexpected place, rather than the usual recognition scene in which someone is apprehended in an unexpected place *with* someone. Through this performative

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<sup>12</sup> It is not clear which metaphors are Maggie’s, and which are the narrator’s, since free indirect discourse is vague in making such attributions. Cohn calls them ‘psycho-analogies’, ‘imagistic distillates’ used to objectify psychic forces (Cohn 1978: 37, 42). She writes of these two chapters, ‘Some of these metaphors are strikingly mixed, with their inconsistencies no doubt signifying that they are to be attributed to Maggie’s own groping mind’, but the narrator is also ‘at times a highly self-conscious image-maker’ (Cohn 2001: 3-4, 5). For Marshall, ‘the composing power of consciousness or the creative imagination is manifested primarily in the capacity to “image” experience’ (Marshall 1998: 199).

<sup>13</sup> Ford, then writing as Hueffer, wrote in his study of James in 1913: ‘I desire to say that the supremest discovery in the literary art of our day is that of Impressionism, that the supreme function of Impressionism is selection, and that Mr James has carried the power of selection so far that he can create an impression with nothing at all’ (Hueffer 1918: 151).

impression, she plunges Amerigo and Charlotte into an agonizing state of uncertainty, never resolved, as to whether Adam also knows about the adultery, everyone's great anxiety in the second half of the novel. The result of the impression Maggie makes on Amerigo is that the lovers spend less time with each other and become more attentive to the Ververs, which she interprets as an attempt to stifle her, to confine her new powers of observation. But the 'succession of moments' that she inaugurates also creates a thrillingly 'freshness of relation' between her and her husband.

Maggie's recognition is the result of her mind, consciously and unconsciously, sifting, comparing and compounding a series of impressions, 'recovered identities of behaviour, expression and tone', in a startlingly associationist manner, which evokes the older empiricism of Locke and Hume, rather than that of William James (316).<sup>14</sup> Strether's mind approximated to the more dissociative model of mind offered by William James. His impression of the scene by the river was one large continuous impression which he refined over time. Locke and Hume, associationists, write of how the mind compares its ideas, and sometimes puts them together, which Locke calls 'composition' (Locke 1961: 125). For Hume, 'resemblance' is one of the three 'uniting principle[s]' of the 'association of ideas', according to which the mind combines 'simple ideas' into 'complex ideas' (the others being 'contiguity' and 'cause and effect'); 'our imagination runs easily from one idea to any other that *resembles* it' (Hume 1960: 10-11, 11). William James's conclusion to his chapter, 'The Stream of Thought', which introduces the metaphor of the mind as a sculptor,

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<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Henry James's narrator refers to Maggie's more important moments of recognition as 'firm pearls on a string', a metaphor that William James rejected in *The Principles* when he challenged (in his chapter 'the Perception of Time') the idea that 'the constitution of consciousness' is 'that of a string of bead-like sensations and images, all separate' (James 1905b: 294; James 1981a: 570). Bradbury makes an implicit analogy between the novel's representation of consciousness as fragmented and impressionist painting: she argues that the plethora of architectural images 'threatens to dominate the narrative, converting the novel into a mosaic made up of many tiny, distinct parts, and conceivable only as a total impression, not a process' (Bradbury 1979: 157).

examined in chapter two, makes a similar point, though for him comparison more often means filtering and sifting a large amount into a smaller amount, rather than combining separate elements (since he thinks that dissociation is more common in thought than association, thought being fluid rather than atomized):

We see that the mind is at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities. Consciousness consists in the comparison of these with each other, the selection of some, and the suppression of the rest by the reinforcing and inhibiting agency of attention. The highest and most elaborated mental products are filtered from the data chosen by the faculty next beneath, out of the mass offered by the faculty below that, which mass in turn was sifted from a still larger amount of yet simpler material, and so on. The mind, in short, works on the data it receives very much as a sculptor works on his block of stone. (James 1981a: 277)

So Maggie's week-long vigil can be seen as a sustained act of William James's sustained 'attention', which produces '*Clearness*', i.e. '*distinction from other things and internal analysis or subdivision*'. These are essentially products of intellectual *discrimination*, involving comparison, memory, and perception of various relations' (James 1981a: 403-4). Both William James, here, and Henry James, in this section of *The Golden Bowl*, employ a metaphor of the mind as a theatre. As we have seen, Maggie (implicitly) stages a play, and then watches it, a 'tenant of one of the stalls', over the course of the week, as she views and reviews her impression of the evening with Amerigo, filtering, sifting and comparing her six impressions (294). Maggie is described as both artist and critic when her acts of memory are imaged as her shining a light through smoke over a painting which she herself has originally painted. She is described, as we have seen, first as painting (implicitly) the 'great picture hung on the wall of her daily life, for her to make what she would of', and then, as experiencing critical 'conscious repossession': 'Before the subsequent passages, much later on, it was to be said, the flame of [Maggie's] memory turned to an equalising glow, that of a lamp in some side-chapel in which incense was thick', or, her impressions return to

her just as ‘such things [...] played through her full after sense like lights on the whole impression’ (294, 295, 295).<sup>15</sup>

‘The Art of Fiction’ argued that impressions are the air we breathe. This startling claim is most actualized in *The Golden Bowl*. A contemporary critic of James’s described reading the novel as like being ‘shut in a small bright room with four clever people, all bent on conveying a false impression’, an image which recalls James’s own imagery in the novel of claustrophobic rotundas, churches and pagodas (Alice Miller quoted in Hoople 2000: 213). When William James describes our ‘whole neural organism’ as ‘but a machine for converting stimuli into reactions’, he might be describing the behaviour of each of the ‘four clever people’ who must second-guess the others, symbolized, towards the end of the novel, by the game of bridge at Fawns (James 1981b: 994). Each character is simultaneously receiving and making the most finely discriminated and discriminating impressions which have all but replaced language as the medium of communication. We can apply William’s further description, of just such an organism adapting to its environment, to the novel’s characters: ‘Every impression which impinges on the incoming nerves produces some discharge down the outgoing ones’ as ‘some form of bodily activity’, an ‘expression’ of ours, or ‘reaction’, habitually associated with the impression (James 1983: 70, 30, 95). But ‘bodily activity’, or activity of any form, is often limited in the novel, to ‘conveying false impressions’. So exacting is everyone’s scrutiny, so circumscribed is everyone’s room for manoeuvre, that the most important reactions to impressions become the impression one makes while one is receiving an

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<sup>15</sup> Bradbury, instead of contrasting Maggie’s roles as artist and critic, sees in her ‘an uneasy balance between immersion and observation, passivity and active interpretation’; ‘the narrative shows her acting out her scenes, but looking back on them too’ (Bradbury 1979: 161, 126). Bersani sees Maggie as an artist whose work, the two marriages, is being misread, in her view, by the critics, Amerigo and Charlotte (Bersani 1976: 149-155).

impression. Maggie's most important deceit is to convey an impression to her father and to Charlotte that her husband's adultery has *not* made an impression on her.<sup>16</sup>

If a character is making an impression while receiving one, where does the infinite regress of impressions stop? William James describes how our incoming impression prompts an expression of ours of which we then form another impression, this 'return wave of impression pertain[ing] to the completeness of the whole experience' (James 1981a: 32). William's work in this area, later to inform his pragmatism, laid the foundation of the 'cognitive paradigm', influential in both science and psychology, which is 'interactive and based on the idea of organisms orienting themselves in a particular environment', 'by focusing on a *cybernetic circularity of experiential feedback*' (Ludwig 2002: 3). Maggie, the artist, makes impressions on others which Maggie the critic construes with further impressions, acting then reacting, giving feedback on her own creations. Her reaction to her impressions of her domestic environment (her suspicions of Amerigo and Charlotte) is to make an impression on Amerigo by waiting for him at Portland Place; when he arrives Maggie has an impression of Amerigo's impression of the impression she first makes by being there; furthermore, Maggie's impression is that Amerigo is trying to gauge, first of all, Maggie's impression, 'what had made the particular look [of Amerigo's] was his thus distinguishably wishing to see how he should find her [...] *first*' (298). Maggie's realisation of this leads her to feel 'overwhelmingly, that she was significant', a feeling which itself makes an impression on Amerigo, since 'so she

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<sup>16</sup> For Crews, 'Because she appears to be naïve on a colossal scale and is willing to maintain this appearance even after she has discovered the truth, she can prevent her opponents from dealing with her on the basis of accepted knowledge'; power consists in 'not letting one's antagonists know what is on one's mind' (Crews 1957: 88, 89).

must instantly strike him’, with ‘a kind of violence beyond what she had intended’ (298).<sup>17</sup>

The lovers learn to their cost the lesson that when we receive impressions we also make them. The impression the bowl makes on Maggie is the last in a chain of impressions which link Charlotte’s original appearance in the shop to the shopkeeper’s final revelation to Maggie (74-86, 414-451). After her visit, Charlotte ‘was to be full of impressions, [...] and one of the impressions had been that the man [the shopkeeper] himself was the greatest curiosity they had looked at’ (75). She tells Amerigo, ‘“I’ve often recalled the bowl and the little swindling Jew, wondering if they’ve parted company. He made,” she said, “a great impression on me” ’ (255). Amerigo replies, “Well, you also, no doubt, made a great impression on him” ’, which is confirmed by Maggie’s later report: ‘he had never forgotten either their talk or their faces, the impression altogether made by them’ (255, 446). A result of this impression made on Charlotte by the man and his bowl is that she mentions the curiosity shops of Bloomsbury to Maggie; Charlotte’s suggestion is described by the narrator as James described impressions germinating fictions, ‘an allusion of Charlotte’s, of some months before – seed dropped into her imagination in the form of a casual speech’ (400). Charlotte’s remark makes an ‘impression’ on Maggie because Maggie is so impressionable when with Charlotte, a ‘sign of the impression made on her, and always so long retained, so watchfully nursed, by any observation of Charlotte’s, however lightly thrown off’ (400).

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<sup>17</sup> Butte uses a phenomenological framework to describe a similar phenomenon in modern fiction, including in late James, which he calls ‘deep intersubjectivity’, pithily summarized by the title of his book, *I Know That You Know That I Know* (2004): ‘The process begins when a self perceives the gestures, either of body or word, of another consciousness, and it continues when the self can perceive in those gestures an awareness of her or his own gestures. Subsequently the self, upon revealing a consciousness of the other’s response, perceives yet another gesture responding to its response, so that out of this conversation of symbolic behaviours emerges a web woven from elements of mutually exchanged consciousnesses’ (Butte 2004: 28). For a specifically Jamesian application, see Butte (2009).

Maggie, at one point during the ensuing confrontation with Amerigo, decides that in ‘a certain traceable process’ he is struggling to contain his recognition of the bowl, and that he then is ‘visibly, palpably, traceably’ avoiding mentioning Charlotte (423, 426). That traceable impressions determine the sudden reappearance of the golden bowl is shocking for Maggie, Amerigo and Fanny Assingham.<sup>18</sup> It shows that, in a world in which impressions are experience, are the very air we all breathe, as James puts it in ‘The Art of Fiction’, we are making as many impressions as we are receiving, we are leaving palpable traces of ourselves, impressions, on every mind we encounter. In such a world, what chance can there be that Adam Verver is without suspicions?

If Adam Verver knows, we suspect that he would never say anything. This absence of verbal candour in *The Golden Bowl* means that impressions serve, at times, a linguistic function. This has two particular manifestations throughout the novel. The first is that characters frequently try to verbalize in their minds the impressions and gestures of others, much like aesthetic critics who write ekphrases in response to paintings, as Pater did with da Vinci, and Ruskin with Turner.<sup>19</sup> In a sense, this is what Ritchie did when she saw the young men: in an act of imaginative sympathy, she transcribed a visual cue into a verbal record which purported to account for their way of life.<sup>20</sup> Maggie, in the second half of the novel, when she is mostly the sole focalizer, seems more like a playwright than an aesthetic critic, writing long,

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<sup>18</sup> As Poole remarks, even when Charlotte and Amerigo get a rare moment to themselves, they face ‘the impossibility of forgetting the general conditions of surveillance that govern their world’ (Poole 1991: 130).

<sup>19</sup> Hoople (2000: 160) calls it ‘hypothetical discourse’, Marshall (1998: 160) ‘imputed monologue’. Marshall (1998: 199) says that this ‘capacity to project or construe the unvoiced discourse of an interlocutor’ is part of the ‘composing powers of consciousness’. Bersani claims that ‘these conjectures are generally set apart from the “real” text in quotation marks, like a warning to the text not to let itself be seduced by its own suggestiveness’ (Bersani 1976: 150).

<sup>20</sup> Marshall makes a similar point: Maggie’s attempts to inhabit other people are akin to James’s descriptions of the author’s attempts to do this in the prefaces (Marshall 1998: 200).

imagined speeches for her interlocutors. In these two chapters there is only one example of Maggie imagining a speech, a speech of Charlotte's (315). But there are many in the novel, a famous example being Maggie's impression that Charlotte, late on, belittles Maggie's 'relation' with Amerigo, in comparison with hers, since Charlotte's was 'everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness' (520).

Another way, in addition to their ekphrastic reception by Maggie, in which impressions have acquired a linguistic function, is that impressions are often made in place of speeches. While the narrator often uses direct speech to represent Maggie's impressions of other people, he also uses it to represent what Maggie intends to signal by the impressions she makes. For example, a speech – which reveals what Maggie intends Amerigo to understand by her waiting for him at Portland Place – apparently beginning, ‘“Why, why” have I made this evening such a point of our not all dining together?’’, ends with the narrator remarking that ‘Some such words as those were what *didn't* ring out, yet it was as if even the unuttered sound had been quenched here in its own quaver’ (299, 300). In this way, performative impressions, deployed to seduce and deceive in earlier novels, now become tools of persuasion and sometimes aggression, in place of language, just as Charlotte's embrace of Maggie, already discussed, is a violent impression made on the others which prohibits further language, or her showing Maggie the bridge game at Fawns makes an impression on her of the cost to the family's equilibrium that any accusation of Maggie's would entail.

In this, James's last complete novel, aesthetic impressions are used by Maggie to a moral end, in the expansive Jamesian meaning of the word 'moral', meaning a sensitive and imaginative reaction to life as well as an ethical one. Whereas Strether's

moral sense, his intelligent appreciation of others, was often obscured by his aesthetic sense of their beauty, the aesthetic aspects of Maggie's cognitive impressions enhance their empiricist, analytic power.<sup>21</sup> Both Milly and Maggie use aesthetic performative impressions to erase the evil exposed by earlier recognition scenes. But Milly is motivated in this, in my reading of the covert plot, by her seduction by surfaces, whereas Maggie privately always holds in mind what lies beneath the surface. Milly develops a fascination with the impression as impression, whereas for Maggie it is always a means to see or a means to intervene in events, an impression is 'used'.

The aesthetic and the moral are aligned in *The Golden Bowl*, unlike in the previous two novels. This is achieved by Maggie's central position as the figure of the artist who restores the two marriages.<sup>22</sup> What is common to the aesthetic and the moral is form. With control of form comes power. Maggie is locked in a struggle with Charlotte and with Fanny to master the form of the novel.<sup>23</sup> Her 'plan', in these two chapters, is to disrupt the 'funny form of our life' (305). Maggie's formal choices change during the course of the novel. Her first reaction to her inchoate recognition of deception is to arrange recognition scenes of her own, dinner *à deux* at Portland Place, the golden bowl placed prominently on the mantelpiece for her husband. But, like her creator, she turns away from such melodrama, and finds another way of controlling

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<sup>21</sup> 'The ultimate refinement is directed not towards the accumulation of choice external objects but towards the eliciting of latent personal qualities for the sake of love. The result is beautiful, but it is not beauty merely that is being sought [...] James makes the fastidiousness of aestheticism and its insistence upon beauty central to life's concerns rather than opposed or peripheral to them' (Ellmann 1983: 20).

<sup>22</sup> 'The redemptive theme is contracted into a simple act of *restoration*: Maggie Verver has to restore what has been lost, or fatally impaired, by the adultery of her husband the Prince with her friend Charlotte Stant' (Krook 1967: 240). By contrast, for Bersani, 'human relations are seen entirely in terms of their composition appeal' (Bersani 1976: 147).

<sup>23</sup> Maggie's reaction to Fanny's smashing of the golden bowl is to pick up the pieces and put them back together. Maggie's pretext for following Charlotte into the garden of Fawns before their final great confrontation is to take out to her the first volume of the three-decker novel she is embarking on (she has picked up the second volume in error): thus Maggie is 'setting the story straight from the start' (Poole 1991: 191).

and regulating information, disguising her own recognitions from Charlotte and her father.<sup>24</sup>

Maggie's impressions are purposive, pragmatic, intended to understand or influence events, and subordinated to the task of problem-solving.<sup>25</sup> As we have seen, Maggie's challenge of understanding and manipulating the relationships around her is figured as a critical task and an artistic task of 'composition': appreciating the composition and 'values' in others' work, then implementing her own. An impression can 'fix' others both when it is received and when it is made. In his prefaces, James assesses formal choices, in pragmatist fashion, by their consequences for reader and character. Like James's in the prefaces, Maggie's preoccupation with form is always subordinated to the task of representation, of understanding life and telling the story. We will now look in more detail at the role of form in Maggie's cognitive and performative impressions.

Making her cognitive impressions into works of art, by envisaging them as a painting or a play, offers Maggie creative control in the first instance, and then critical control when returning to the impressions in reflection. Strether and Milly also use artistic templates, genres from painting, drama and fiction, to make sense of their experience. As we have seen, Maggie's impression of her evening with Amerigo after he returned from Matcham is described as being a play which can be rehearsed whenever she wants: 'It fell, for retrospect, into a succession of moments that were *watchable* still; almost in the manner of the different things done during a scene on the stage, some scene so acted as to have left a great impression on the tenant of one

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<sup>24</sup> Horne describes how 'confrontations consisting of plain statements of facts previously suppressed' are only indirectly presented in *The Wings of the Dove* (Milly and Lord Mark) and *The Golden Bowl* (Maggie and the shopkeeper); James began to avoid the melodrama of such scenes as early as *The Portrait of a Lady* in which Isabel's reaction to the Countess Gemini's revelation about Pansy's parentage is an anti-climax, much to the Countess's disappointment (Horne 1990: 215-216).

<sup>25</sup> Poole and Ryan also call Maggie a pragmatist (Poole 1991: 135-6; Ryan 1991: 88).

of the stalls' (294). Similarly, she fixes the memory of Amerigo's smile at the door (on the way to dress for dinner) by treating it as a painting on the wall of her memory such that later she can hold a critical light to it:

she was to preserve, as I say, the memory of the smile with which he had opined that at that rate they wouldn't dine till ten o'clock and that he should go straighter and faster alone. Such things, as I say, were to come back to her – they played, through her full after-sense, like lights on the whole impression[.] (301)

So treating an impression as art allows Maggie to store information, to revisit it at will, to gain some objective distance from it, to analyse it creatively, but above all, to construe it in a way which is useful to her.

Maggie's first cognitive impression of Charlotte after the Matcham weekend 'fixes' her as a problem in need of a solution, like the kind of formal conundrum discussed in James's prefaces:

Charlotte, at the window, looking into the side-street that abutted on the Square, might have been watching for their visitor's advent before withdrawing; and in the light, strange and coloured, like that of a painted picture, which fixed the impression for her, objects took on values not hitherto so fully shown. It was the effect of her quickened sensibility; she knew herself again in presence of a problem, in need of a solution for which she must intensely work[.] (309)

Maggie's sensibility has been Paterianly 'quickened' into creativity by her realisation of her need to act, to participate: so the scene composes before her, as though she were a painter, as her mind gets to work on the 'problem' in front of her, Charlotte. Maggie's aesthetic impression here 'treats' Charlotte in a certain way, as a painter might the subject of a painting.

Yet Maggie becomes aware of the powerful and manipulative capacity of such aesthetic cognitive impressions, when she infers that she is herself the subject of the lovers' aesthetic impression. At this point the distinction between cognitive and performative impressions becomes blurred. Maggie can feel herself being arranged or

composed into someone else's painting. Her recognition, the culmination of her string of impressions, is that Amerigo and Charlotte are 'treating' her:

The word for it, the word that flashed the light, was that they were *treating* her, that they were proceeding with her – and, for that matter, with her father – by a plan that was the exact counterpart of her own [...] with a depth of unanimity, an exact coincidence of inspiration that, when once her attention had begun to fix it, struck her as staring out at her in recovered identities of behaviour, expression and tone. (316)

Their efforts to manipulate her are equivalent to the painter's in deciding how to treat a subject formally.<sup>26</sup> So Maggie is trying to 'fix' an artistic effort of the lovers which is itself an attempt to counter her own performative impression: she is, like a subject of a painting, to be 'treated', with 'inspiration', by the lovers. That the lovers' artistic treatment of her is aggressively constraining is figured by a shift from pictorial to architectural imagery: not only were they treating her, they were 'buil[ding] her in with their purpose', 'above her, a vault seemed more heavily to arch' (317, 318). She is confined not just to a 'solid chamber of her helplessness', but to 'a bath of benevolence artfully prepared for her', like a 'a patient of some sort, a nervous eccentric or a lost child' (317, 318). They were 'directly interested in preventing her freedom of movement' (318).

The Paterian idea that impressions 'count' – so prevalent in *The Ambassadors*, where aesthetic impressions of sensation were sustained during reflection – as aesthetic experiences in and of themselves, has a different cast in *The Golden Bowl*. Like William James's pragmatist, who turns away from the finality, artificiality and abstraction of rationalism 'towards facts, towards action, and towards power', Maggie turns away from aesthetic impressions as an end in themselves towards aesthetic impressions as tools (James 1975: 31). She assesses impressions, like a pragmatist, by

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<sup>26</sup> Holland also links Maggie's detection of others' artfulness with her own emergence as an artist: 'it is after she begins to act dramatically with a conscious view of her own effect and with duplicity that she can recognize that Charlotte and the Prince are themselves acting in concert and "treating her"' (Holland 1964: 382).

their use value, what William James calls their ‘cash value’, asking of them, ‘What difference would it practically make?’ (James 1975: 28). The impression Maggie discerns on Amerigo’s face when he returns from Matcham ‘had been, essentially, what had made the abrupt bend in her life’ (297).

[I]t had been bitten into her mind, all in an hour, that nothing she had ever done would hereafter, in some way yet to be determined, so *count* for her – perhaps not even what she had done in accepting, in their old golden Rome, Amerigo’s proposal of marriage. (294)<sup>27</sup>

These impressions count as defining moments in which Maggie takes action to save her marriage, not, as for Strether and Milly, as mementoes to be cherished in themselves. It is not that there are in *The Golden Bowl* new impressions, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, used impressions: the new impressions of James’s last complete novel are precisely those that Maggie puts to such effective use.

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<sup>27</sup> *NYE* replaces ‘all in an hour’ with ‘just in an hour’ (James 1909c: 10).

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