

**HENRY JAMES, EMMANUEL LEVINAS,
AND THE ETHICS OF LITERATURE**

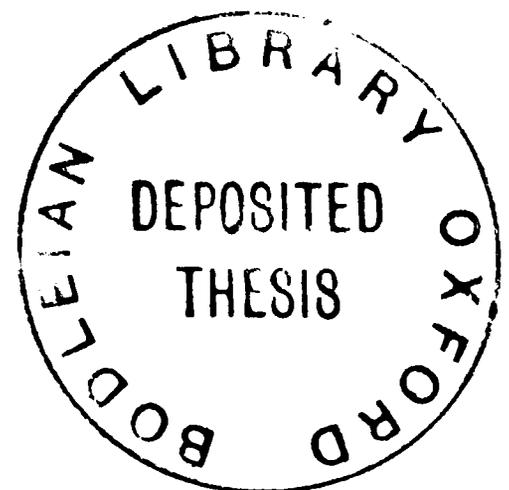
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Abstract

This study constitutes an attempt to isolate and elucidate the event of personal relations in the later writings of Henry James. I argue that James' singularity rests on his treatment of personal relations in a radical and unfamiliar way. The main goal of this piece is, then, to trace the workings of personal relations, and to understand the peculiar way in which they figure and unfold in the later narratives. By reading James through the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, I wish to reconstruct James' major phase as primarily "ethical." Levinasian ethics differs from the branches of moral philosophy in its insistence on the absolute priority and exteriority of the ethical relation between persons: its disengagement from the realms of psychology and consciousness. The ethical relation is envisioned as flourishing precisely in the absence of cognition and thought. Rather than relating to one another as potentially knowable beings, then, persons in James and Levinas relate to one another as mutually unfathomable others. I maintain that this breaching of cognition and knowledge essentially characterizes Jamesian sociality. Read through ethics, as divorced from ideas of consciousness, James' major phase finds its meaning outside the traditional reign of James studies, which takes James as the master of complex elaborations on modes of consciousness. Not consciousness but alterity is James' defining feature, and it is through the readings of alterity that the fundamental event of Jamesian sociality emerges as both primary and unique. "Ethics" thus opens up a new horizon in which the Jamesian is no longer synonymous with consciousness, a horizon which transforms the understanding, not only of James in particular, but of literature in general.

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Introduction: Henry James, Emmanuel Levinas, and the Loom of Alterity¹

The social relation itself is not just another relation, one among so many others that can be produced in being, but it is its ultimate event. (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 221)

Preliminary

This study constitutes an attempt to isolate and elucidate the event of personal relations in the later writings of Henry James. I wish to argue that James' singularity largely rests on his treatment of personal relations in a fundamental and unfamiliar way. The main goal of this piece is, then, to trace the workings of personal relations, and to understand the peculiar way in which they figure and unfold in the later narratives. What did James "see" in the personal relation which had such a singular impact on his writing, and which, I shall argue, is largely responsible for James' permanent notoriety?²

¹ "Looming," as a mode indicating vague or semi-presence, is one of James' favourite expressions. The "language of the loom" (*AS* 340) particularly suits the imperceptible but decisive impact of alterity on the self that encounters it. See Chapter 3 (127n), in which I note James' use of the loom of alterity to convey Aunt Maud's "looming 'personality'" (*WD* 73).

² James' "notoriety" is far from simple. James was and is notorious for being "difficult," and almost infuriatingly decorous in matters of physicality. In many ways, recent Jamesian "revivals" have been motivated by the desire of critics to puncture James' embarrassingly "comfy" facade, and unearth an authentic turbulence within. Under the umbrella of "critical theory," James has been deconstructed, psychoanalyzed, and post-colonized. James' writings have been put through the Foucauldian, Marxist, feminist, commercial, postmodernist, and queer filters, and subjected to a wealth of post-identity or post-foundationalist theories such as those of Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. For an introductory survey of the different branches of critical theory and their manner of addressing James, see the Introduction to John Carlos Rowe's *The Other Henry James* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998. 1-37). Rowe's "Introduction: Henry James and Critical Theory" is, in fact, a catalogue of dubious interpretations of James. The impact of Theory on James' reception and standing has in effect been rather small in comparison with the rigour and wealth of the critiques applied. There is an odd immunity about James' texts which itself regulates the number and kinds of interpretations the texts welcome and allow.

The strangeness engulfing personal relations in the later narratives seems at odds with the critical insistence on James' elaborate psychologism and his unrivaled, at times overripe, subtlety in rendering the mannered interactions of civilized society. In other words, the personal encounter appears to rupture rather than comply with the narrative in which it figures. In *The Wings of the Dove*, Kate and Densher learn of the strange ability of the interpersonal relation to override their conscious intentions or tactics and establish itself as *the* decisive event. In *The Golden Bowl*, personal relations riot in a state of moral and social obliviousness until almost the very end of the novel. *The American Scene* goes so far as doing away with conventional "characters" and leaving unpeopled the event of relation itself. And the *Autobiography*, as an extended essay on James' literary vision, maintains the commitment to the interpersonal relation as the basis of James' experiential appreciation of the world and his formalist technique.

Relations are thus at odds with the psychological mastery associated with James' later narratives. These narratives do not attempt to penetrate relations, demystify them or reveal why or what for they occur. Instead, relations are carefully outlined, consolidated and concreted in the text without, however, undergoing explication or being broken down to their fundamental causes. Relations are not subjected to systematic questioning of any kind. On the contrary, they are preserved in their essential alterity by the very narratives which bear them. James' masterful linguistic intricacies may, then, be construed not as the expression of a highly analytical mind and roentgen-deep vision, but as the efforts to sustain the alterity of the relations James is representing, in the very act of their

(conscious) representation. Thus the personal encounter is crystallized in the text while remaining strangely distinct from it.

Interpersonality is, then, the ghost in James' splendid machine. Relations inhabit James' texts in much the same way as the encounter in *The Europeans*, between the Continental cousins and their New England relatives, is described. The arrival at the Wentworths' American household of Felix and Eugenia is envisaged by James as "[t]he sudden irruption into the well-ordered consciousness of the Wentworths of an element not allowed for in its scheme of usual obligations" (71). What does this early description, written in 1878, foretell about the terms in which James would later imagine the encounter between the one and the other person?³ The personal encounter for James consists in this unpredictable and unwarranted explosion of otherness into the unsuspecting, defenseless self: the "sudden irruption into the well-ordered consciousness" of something foreign and incalculable. If consciousness stands for everything that is or may be known, all that is or may be contained in the individual psyche, all that belongs to the safe arena of cognition and thought, the other enters this personal domain as a radically foreign element, a surprise invasion which the conscious mind cannot so much as anticipate, and which it therefore cannot but allow in, precisely because it hasn't the means by which to shut or

³ Ezra Pound's essay on James takes this irruption to disclose James' fundamental preoccupation with the differences between the western races (296, 301). Although Pound beautifully invokes the sense and scale of James' literary stature, his specific understanding is misplaced: while acknowledging James' creations as cosmic and colossal as well as "microcosmic" (301), Pound proceeds to specify the content of these creations as the art of racial discrimination. Pound therefore takes the "international theme" in its literal sense as pertaining to the marked differences between nations. Yet, even in the early *The Europeans*, the "international theme" may be seen as James' attempt to thematize an encounter between two utterly different elements. In this sense, the international theme does not simply refer to, as Pound would have it, racial or cultural differences. ("Henry James," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. Ed. T. S. Eliot. London: Faber and Faber, 1954. 295-338).

close itself off from the radical alterity with which it is suddenly flooded.⁴ Not only does James stage the personal encounter as an encounter between elements (the self and the

⁴ Rowe misunderstands the function of openness in James when he claims that James has been correctly included in the philosophical canon of American pragmatism:

Henry James adds to the American pragmatist tradition that is often traced from Emerson to Richard Rorty. James's literary pragmatism is distinguished by a consistent *openness to ideas*--one might say to an understanding of thinking itself as an open system--that challenge existing habits and behaviors, thereby making something "happen" in the public sphere. Indeed, nothing so interests James as a disturbance in the otherwise smooth surface of social life, especially when that society encompasses the ruling class. (I emphasis added)

But in James, otherness does not irrupt into the consciousness of the self in the form of an "idea" which the self can decide to either accept or reject. As something radically unfamiliar, otherness is precisely that which cannot be theorized or thematized. The relation to otherness does not, then, express the openness to new ideas. Interpersonality as the primary event in James of the relation to alterity in fact takes James away from the pragmatist tradition invoked by Rowe. The celebration of Jamesian openness of thought reflects Rowe's underlying motivation in the book to make James or show him to be socially and politically "relevant." With a hefty dose of theoretical and cultural relativism, Rowe claims to banish an older, stiffer, and more "archaic" (181) James, and replace him with a new, "postmodern" James who would allegedly appeal to contemporary readers. Rowe would like this new James to

grant new respect to readers [by relinquishing his status as author], and reduce the myth of literary authority to the rhetorical features of an 'author-function.' As I argue in the final chapter of this book, this Henry James is not only more accessible to contemporary readers but also far more *teachable*. (x)

Rowe's eager characterization of James as a disturber of the social peace through the interpretation of Jamesian openness as an openness to new ideas, leads him to assume that James' fiction is socially and politically subversive. But how is Rowe's move from the theory to the practice of openness justifiable? Can James' fiction simply be endowed with subversive social and political efficacy? By taking the event of interpersonalit as an event which is not an event of thought, I hope to show how such easy shifts between theory and activism are generally problematic, and particularly unsuitable to James. Moreover, Rowe's motivation in "making him [James] more relevant to our contemporary debates" (xiii) is questionable. Rowe seems untroubled by the professed bias of his readings of James. It is as if James were no longer marketable (was he ever?) and now requires cutting-edge marketing ploys to make him more appealing. This is a far cry from the political subversiveness to which Rowe's book itself aspires. Further, why does Rowe assume that contemporary readers prefer a repressed and vulnerable James (x) and are sure to be attracted to that "other Henry James," practically constructed by Rowe as a saucy teaching-aid, and referred to puzzlingly as a "decidedly more human and accessible" (x) James? This other Henry James is an exhaustive all-in-one figure,

in the newer fashion of the writer struggling with changing social attitudes toward gender, sexuality, class, race, and nation. (182)

It is difficult to imagine how the promise of erotica and revolution, which James' texts are sure to disappoint, will sustain new readers through the pages of, say, *The Golden Bowl*. Rowe also berates formalist approaches to James (182-185) as out-dated and irrelevant. But as Dorothy J. Hale's superb *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), published the same year as Rowe's book, demonstrates, formalism is probably still the most fruitful and exciting way of approaching James. Hale's important book is an occasional co-conspirator here. From James' emphatic formalism in the *Autobiography* (discussed at length in my fourth chapter) to the notion of "contentless discourse" (Hale 225), Hale's book is a thought-provoking counterpart to my Levinasian readings of James.

other) of a mutually foreign nature who irrupt into each other's lives, he also regards this encounter as conditional on the absence of a common denominator between the two relating parts. The relation between the one and the other person, then, serves James as a model for a relation between the conscious mind and radical alterity. To put it slightly differently, this mode of relation between the self and what is irreducibly alien to it is embodied in the interpersonal event. For James, other people are essentially unknowable. In relating to others, the self cannot reduce their alterity into a familiar cognitive content. Reading the later works through the notion of interpersonality as a relation bearing the ultimate mark of alterity disturbs James' reception as a psychological master. In place of relations reducible to the tenets of psychology and sociology, the personal relation as a relation to an irreducible alterity introduces the thought of ethics as the nucleus of James' late period. What does "ethics" mean, and how is it more specifically worked in this thesis? In what way does ethics pose a significant alternative to traditional, psychologistic readings of James?

The Psychological Fallacy

Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) remains one of the most insightful studies, not merely of Jamesian method and form, but also of Jamesian thought and ideas. Lubbock's greatest merit in this study is, perhaps, his ability to keep Jamesian complexity under control by limiting his discussion to the techniques of narrative point of view. As Dorothy J. Hale observed, Lubbock's contribution inevitably reaches beyond the elucidation of technique to the outer regions of the Jamesian vision (Freedman 88-89).

When Lubbock comments of the method in *The Ambassadors* that in the novel Strether's "thought [...] can be made to reveal *its own inwardness*" (158 emphasis added), he is making a formal judgment concerning James' dramatic strategy. Lubbock explains that Strether's mind is neither recorded nor chronicled by the author's omniscient narration (as in Thackeray), nor represented autobiographically in the first person narration of Strether himself. Strether's mind is revealed, as of itself, without either the author's or the character's intervention. Thus,

we watch the thought itself, the hidden thing, as it twists to and fro in his [Strether's] brain--watch it without any other aid to understanding but such as its own manner of bearing may supply. The novelist [...] could of course *tell* us, if he chose, what lurks behind this agitated spirit; he could step forward and explain the restless appearance of the man's thought. But if he prefers the dramatic way, admittedly the more effective, there is nothing to prevent him from taking it. **The man's thought, in its turn, can be made to reveal its own inwardness.** (157-158 emphasis added)⁵

This appraisal of narrative technique nonetheless triggers off a whole range of non-technical questions: if neither the author nor the character "speaks," then on behalf of whom does thought speak? What does it mean for thought, rather than for the author or the character, to speak for itself? What could the inwardness of thought mean? If thought possesses its own inwardness, what is its relation to the character in which it is supposedly contained? How far might one take the dissociation between the inwardness of a character and the inwardness of thought?

⁵ To differentiate between an author's italics and my own while quoting, my emphasis shall appear in bold. When the quoted source is not italicized, any italics used are my own.

Consciousness is psychologically located “inside” individuals as their interior mental processes. Consciousness is the inwardness of persons. In Lubbock’s deceptively simple phrasing, however, thought is said to “reveal its own inwardness.” What could this mean? Instead of speaking about thought as the inwardness of a character, Lubbock refers to the inwardness of thought itself, thereby altering the way in which thought, as well as narrative point of view, is conceived. Although this is not Lubbock’s purpose in *The Craft of Fiction*, his study implies that in *The Ambassadors* thought is represented as an independent force, as if it belonged to no one, and was free to tell itself, of itself. In Lubbock’s formal analysis, then, thought or consciousness differs considerably from the psychological depictions of thought as essentially private and subjective.

Not until Sharon Cameron’s *Thinking in Henry James* (1989) was this crucial dissociation in James between psychology and consciousness made explicit. Cameron rendered visible what other James critics merely implied, at times unknowingly. This said, it is peculiar that Cameron does not list Lubbock as one of her chief predecessors, for in *The Craft of Fiction* the initial dissociation between thought and psychology is already dormant. Cameron argued that late James is characterized by the dissociation between thought (another word for the almighty Jamesian “consciousness”) and psychology. While traditional James criticism tirelessly laboured to define and refine a plethora of forms and functions of Jamesian consciousness, Cameron pointed elsewhere by showing how “consciousness” may not altogether be the basic building-block of James’ house of fiction. But Cameron’s argument did not merely challenge the structure or reality of consciousness in the manner of deconstructive criticism. The latter merely dismisses the

presupposition of a Transcendental Subject as a subject whose consciousness is substantive and fixed. Such a reading would have remained mundane and uninspiring. Cameron's point was, daringly, that James revises "thought" so profoundly as to virtually eradicate its hold in the text as a recognizable or workable feature. *Thinking in Henry James* introduced the possibility that the focus in James criticism on the concept of "consciousness," whether as a transcendental or as a quasi-transcendental feature, may be exaggerated, if not erroneous. Thus Cameron marked a turning point beyond which James criticism needed to find new ways of thinking about and articulating the "Jamesian phenomenon" outside the domain of psychology.⁶

A considerable portion of Jamesian scholarship, before and after Cameron, falls prey to what may be called the psychological fallacy. This fallacy broadly consists in equating James' later work with the representations of the activities of consciousness, when, as Cameron has shown, there is little in James' representations of consciousness that resembles thought as psychologized (Cameron 10). The lack of verisimilitude between "thought" in James' novels and thought as it is psychologically conceived complicates approaching James as a psychological realist.

Questions regarding consciousness fall short of the mark in elucidating James' late novels. They moreover tend to pile high irrelevant speculation concerning James' own mental disposition, and particularly his sexual identity. Such probings may be psychologically thorough, but they seem to leave unattended the fundamental mystery of

⁶ It is generally acknowledged that James' *oeuvre* constitutes a "phenomenon" or a "world" more than just a body of works. See, for instance, Dorothea Krook's *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1967. 24), and the previously mentioned essay by Pound. Van Wyck Brooks makes interesting allusions to the planetary in *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (New York: Octagon, 1972). I shall return to Brooks' remarks in my Conclusion.

James' late novels, their strangeness or alterity. Psychology may be James' long shadow, but it mysteriously fails to touch his work in a meaningful way.

Cynthia Ozick's "What Henry James Knew" is indicative of the critical tendency to refer James back to the psychological. Ozick's title already discloses a preoccupation with consciousness and cognition, and it sets up the Jamesian premise as one which concerns competing knowers and the proportion or degree of their knowing. Ultimately for Ozick, James' texts know more than their author, which makes them emblematic of Modernism's preoccupation with the unconscious. Unlike other Modernists, however, whose work has been successfully (perhaps regrettably) demystified, Jamesian mystery has been unimpaired, even enhanced, by time. The great Modernists'

idiosyncrasies may not pall, but neither do they startle. Their pleasures and their stings, while far from humdrum, nevertheless open out into psychological references that are largely recognizable. (99)

What is different about James is the persistence in his work of a quality of "strangeness":

in the ripened Henry James, and in him almost alone, the sensation of mysteriousness does not attenuate; it thickens. (100)

The year 1895 (the year James' play *Guy Domville* flopped) marked the thickening of the Jamesian veil. Yet oddly, having asserted the endurance of mystery in James, Ozick promptly moves to dispel it by looking behind James' veil. Behind the Master's veil, Ozick finds another master; she finds Freud:

under the tutelage of Freud, later readers have [...] named, on James' behalf, a type of horror he could not or would not have brought to his lips. What was implicit in James became explicit in Freud. (101)⁷

Instead of inquiring why James resists psychological illumination where others welcome it, Ozick commits the psychological fallacy. She "outs" Jamesian mystery by identifying it as the unspeakable and repressed content of the Freudian unconscious. The allocation of mystery to the "new found land" of the Freudian unconscious is not only inherently contradictory (how is the *discovery* of the *unconscious* to be reckoned with?), it complicates Ozick's own powerful claim of the survival of mystery in James.

The experience of reading late James is a constant reminder of the inadequacy of the psychological as a model for appreciating the Jamesian drama. The psychological does nothing to either expel or amplify the play of mystification. Resisting classification, the mysterious occupies a unique place in James' work. To put it differently, the function of mystery in James is not merely alien to the conscious mind (as Ozick and others agree), but alien to the unconscious mind as well. James does not allow mystery to be dispelled by subjecting it to psychological necessity; he wants precisely to represent the separation between mystery and the psychological.

The fact of adultery in *The Golden Bowl*, for example, has no serious psychological bearings on the rest of the plot. On the contrary, the adultery is psychologically inconsequential, since none of the characters seems affected by it in any

⁷ No two writers or thinkers could be more different than James and Freud. The two make a fascinating pair, but precisely because they seem to have so little in common. Their resemblance is one of range: both James' and Freud's visions are total. But their total visions move in different orbits, precisely because they are the self-contained visions of worlds. The dissimilarity between James and Freud ought to be the starting point for an exchange between them, not, as Ozick suggests, their alleged adaptability.

psychologically realistic way. Nor is the fact of adultery a “secret knowledge” on whose discovery or concealment the plot turns. Did Adam Verver “know” about Charlotte’s and the Prince’s affair? Plausibly he did, but it makes no difference. The kind of questions one initially asks about the novel stem from the disparity between the act of adultery, and the manner in which this act is represented. Mystery in *The Golden Bowl* is directly related to the novel’s dissociation between what is obviously happening, and its profound lack of impact on the characters to whom it happens.

The veil of mystery Ozick correctly sees as thickening during James’ major phase thickens in proportion to mystery’s alien nature. James achieves this thickening effect by making mystery precisely inexplicable in psychological terms. For this reason James’ fiction continues to exude mystery long after the opening wide of Freud’s Dora’s box. To engage with mystery in James is, then, to engage with something radically other. The encounter with alterity does not signal a delving down into the psychic abyss, but, on the contrary, a soaring outward, out of consciousness, to the realm of alterity.

Ironically, the traditional focus in James studies on psychological critiques of consciousness seems to spring from James’ very indifference to psychology. James’ unabashed dismissal of psychology backfires again and again, resulting in an overload of psychological criticism that grapples with the very absence which had urged it in the first place. One way of coping with the psychological vacuum in James’ texts is to interpret it (psychoanalytically) as “resistance.” If psychology is visibly absent from James’ fiction, this is because James resists and represses the psychological. The measure of this absence is exactly the measure of James’ profound unconscious battling with the psychological. To

retrieve psychology from the depths of repression thus becomes the defining task for psychological criticism. Both James' fiction and his historical or biographical self are thereby subjected to the subversive readings of resistance, "digging up the dirt," and interpreting James' fiction as concealing or covering up unspeakable content.

The problem with such critiques, particularly of the late novels (which, as Ozick's case illustrates, are the ones most appealing to the readings of resistance by virtue of their non-psychological facade), is their neglect of surfaces. Psychological criticism tends to dismiss the Jamesian narrative surface as ornate complication or distraction, or as mere "style" to be decoded and cracked. Are such psychological readings of resistance best suited to the kind of fiction James writes? James in his *Autobiography*, for example, pays special attention to the validity and authenticity of surfaces. The place devoted in the book to simple objects and to "mere" appearances as inherently significant and pleasurable explicitly opposes the psychological treatment of objects as trivial or symbolic.

What if the absence of psychological depth were to be understood *positively*, beyond the negativity of the unconscious, as sign-posting an alternative route into the heart of the Jamesian terrain? The ethics of the contemporary philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) surfaces here as what lies beyond the grasp of consciousness, yet as what has nothing to do with the negative gestures of repression and concealment. The relation to alterity, says Levinas, is prior to consciousness, hence alien to the domain of experience as such, "but," Levinas insists,

this does not make it unconscious or subconscious, and I see no other possibility than to call it mystery. (*Ethics and Infinity* 68)

“Ethics,” defined as the relation to the radical alterity or mystery of persons, provides the Jamesian with a positive horizon out of consciousness, and beyond psychology.

Out of Consciousness

The present work thus seeks to reread the late writings of Henry James outside the psychological domain of “consciousness” in the manner I have defined as ethical. As sketched in the previous section, ideas of consciousness have long been central to James studies and have determined James’ reception as a psychological writer who specializes in complex elaborations on modes of consciousness.⁸ By disengaging late James from ideas of individual consciousness, I wish to gesture towards the ethical event of interpersonality as James’ fundamental feature in his later fictional and non-fictional writings. Not the interiority of individuals, but the relation between individuals occupies James of the major phase. I wish to illustrate, moreover, that James conceives of the interpersonal relation as an event which categorically exceeds individual consciousness, and hence as an event which is not accountable in terms of psychological realism.

Two main sources other than the Jamesian text itself have been crucial to the development and method of my argument. The first is Sharon Cameron’s aforementioned *Thinking in Henry James* which challenges the consciousness-centred readings of traditional James criticism. Cameron argues that in late James “consciousness” remains

⁸ The near exclusive focus on consciousness in James also pertains to the interpretation of the “late style” as pronounced authorial self-consciousness. The opening remarks to Jeremy Tambling’s recent study of James repeat the assumption that in late James

[e]verything [...] is markedly more self-conscious, and the novels very deliberated, with all the difficulties associated with Modernism [...]. (2)

(*Henry James*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000). As I hope to show in the course of this thesis, the identification of James’ narratives with (characterological, narrational, authorial, or thematic) consciousness overlooks those narratives’ blatant breaching of psychology and consciousness.

disengaged from individuals, functioning instead as an impersonal and all-encompassing force, free-floating in the text without belonging, as it were, to any particular character. Cameron's reading is of paramount importance here because it stretches to its limit the idea of consciousness as a coherent feature of late James. If consciousness is breached rather than reified in James, how is the Jamesian enterprise to be coherently thought *beyond* the field of consciousness?

Levinas' notion of ethics opens up precisely such a field beyond consciousness. Levinas regards the relation between the self and the other person as an event which exceeds the scope and capacities of individual consciousness.⁹ Levinas' work, then, proposes a framework for reconstituting James' major phase otherwise than "consciousness" or beyond the psychological field of thought. If Cameron's study marked a threshold for James studies to cross, then Levinasian ethics gives a name to what lies beyond this threshold. I argue, therefore, that Levinasian ethics may in fact be treated as a continuation and development of Cameron's ideas concerning the breaching of consciousness in James. My own project is, in essence, a reformulation of some of Cameron's ideas in the context of Levinasian ethics. Backed by Cameron's observations concerning James' motioning away from psychological realism, Levinasian ethics, or the ethics of radical alterity, add something valuable and new to our understanding of James. Alongside Cameron, then, Levinas presents the second main theoretical framework for my

⁹ I refrain throughout from capitalizing the word "other." This is in order to avoid the designation "Other" which has by now become a cliché and an inaccurate privileging of "otherness," making it the kind of metaphysical substantive which it precisely *is not*. Otherness and alterity are employed interchangeably and indicate the radical difference signaled by the other person in the encounter with the self.

readings of James. By introducing Levinasian ethics into James studies I wish to reconstitute the “Jamesian” as primarily “ethical.”

“Ethics” is, to be sure, a troublesome term. It resonates all too heavily of the “moral,” or worse, of the “moralizing,” from both of which my claims about James must at the outset be sharply distinguished. “Ethics” in Levinas’ thought, and thus also in this thesis, is independent from moral considerations, considerations which Martha Nussbaum has defined as answering the question: “how should one live?” (*Love’s Knowledge* 23). “Ethics” as it is used here does not offer any such reply to this important question. It otherwise refers to the primacy attributed in James’ late novels, logically, structurally, and narratively, to the event of personal relations. This event precedes for James the problems raised by moral philosophy. James’ later work reaches beyond moral questioning to the primordial event of the attachment between the self and the other person. The distinction between ethics and morals in both Levinas and James can therefore be articulated in the following manner: whereas “ethics” refers exclusively to the relation between the one and the other person as a relation of an “intimate society” (*Entre Nous* 20) of two, “morality” presupposes the interaction of not two, but at least three terms. Such an interaction between three no longer reflects the intimacy of the couple, but introduces concerns of a communal or social nature into the proximity of the two. The entry of a third term into what Levinas terms the face-to-face relation of the two awakens the ethical relation into the consciousness of sociality: suddenly there are not merely two in the world facing one another directly, but three.¹⁰ The intervention of a third term in the exclusivity of self-

¹⁰ Levinas conceives of the third term as the third person who intrudes on the self-other relation. The third is also an other person to whose alterity the self relates. But as soon as the third appears, he

other relation marks the passing into consciousness of the event of interpersonality. Not only, then, is social consciousness absent from the ethical relation, it is at odds with it. For socio-moral considerations necessarily disrupt the absolute intimacy of two which the ethical relation denotes.

To understand the kind of intimacy the thought of the ethical relation commands in James and Levinas, one may try the following riddle: how many participants are there in a conversation between two? Levinas' answer would have been "three." These are the two conversing parties, and the object of their talk: a total of three participating terms. Any conscious interaction between two people (as a communication, commerce, or exchange of any kind in which two people acknowledge or otherwise perceive one another) necessarily involves the participation of a third term. Consciousness, Husserl famously taught, is intentional: consciousness is always a consciousness of something. Thus to interact in reality always involves an object of consciousness. Being conscious is already enjoying the mediation of something we are conscious about. Even if the two parties are not speaking aloud, their mere mutual presence to one another presupposes the consciousness of a third term. To get to the face-to-face, the relation with which Levinasian ethics is concerned, is essentially to imagine what it would be like to meet the other without the mediation of a third term. It is to ask what it would mean for the self and the other to meet outside intentional consciousness. The entirety of Levinas' ethical

shatters the dual intimacy between myself and my neighbour. I do not exist solely with my neighbouring other, but with a multiplicity of neighbouring others.

Can that responsibility toward the other who faces me, that response to the face of my fellow man ignore that third party who is also my neighbour? Does he not also concern me? (*Entre Nous* 202)

Such questions already correspond to Nussbaum's definition of morality as finally demanding "how should one live?"; these are questions of a social or communal nature.

thought may be deduced from this small exercise of imagining meeting the other outside all content and context: out of consciousness.

An encounter which does not entail a third term would, then, have to be thought as an encounter outside consciousness, since consciousness is always a consciousness of something. This would be a pure encounter, an encounter which has no object, no concept, no purpose, and no content. Like Levinas, James may be said to imagine this pure encounter between persons which does not involve the participation of a third term. Jamesian interpersonality is thought in this fashion, as a meeting between people which has no object outside the event of relation itself. It is as if James first saw, then built his narratives around this bare relation, without, however, subjugating it to the mediation, the content or context of additional terms, and without this relation awakening into consciousness and becoming a relation *about* something.

This is a somewhat convoluted way of saying that the interpersonal relation does not merely offer James an obvious vehicle for representing a variety of issues, but is itself the rudimentary particle of the Jamesian universe. Watered down to its bare essentials James' text does not reveal the lonely pulsation of a mind in action, but the ethical relation between persons as an indestructible relation. Individual consciousness does not appear in isolation as the solitary feat of an unrelated subject, but is always secondary to the complex multiplicity of interpersonality. "Relation," that ubiquitous Jamesian term, is thus to be understood not in any psychological context, but ethically, as indicating the fundamental and unconditional bond between persons. This relation between the self and the other is the very first event whence all subsequent events of the plot derive. So that

relationships are not explored for their psychological or epistemological content, but for their combinatory potential, “bringing people together who would be at least more correctly separate; keeping people separate who would be at least more correctly together” (*The Art of the Novel* 143). James presupposes, then, an intimate and irrevocable tie between persons, and he sets out to exhaust the literary possibilities inherent in it. The interpersonal imperative is the primary Jamesian event.

My sense of the major phase’s unprecedented literary achievement lies in James’ rendering in terms of consciousness of that which evades and escapes consciousness: the ethical relation to alterity as the relation between persons. What Cameron brilliantly recognized as James’ repudiation of psychology is thus encapsulated in what Levinas named the ethical event of interpersonality, an event belying the thought and language of consciousness.

Writing Alterity

I have explained that James and Levinas regard interpersonality as a relation which is extraneous to consciousness. In the interpersonal encounter the self is confronted by the other as something unthinkable. The other person differs categorically from regular objects which are available to the self by means of ordinary perception. Wholly unlike the ordinary relation to objects, the relation to the other represents an event of extra-ordinary proportions.¹¹ Levinas does not fictionalize this personal encounter, but like James,

¹¹ One may begin to philosophize here about the origins of Jamesian formalism. Hale sees this formalism as a starting point for reading James. Yet as I suggest throughout this piece, the relation to the thinkable exteriority of ordinary “things” is dependent on, or passes through, the unthinkable alterity of persons. My readings of the objectification of persons in *The Golden Bowl*, and of the relation to worldly objects in the *Autobiography*, imply that the relation to the radical alterity of persons is itself the condition

Levinas too is fascinated by the relation between persons as something unprecedented, something extraordinary and paramount. Levinas seemed to acknowledge philosophically what James was inscribing fictionally: the mystery, perversity, and anarchy of human relations as an event quite “out of this world,” passing through the realms of rationality and discourse while remaining starkly separate from both.

Even before the thought of participation in the daily life of consciousness--of experience, communication, and commerce--the other person signals a failure of cognition. Levinas compares this failure of the self to comprehend the essential otherness of persons to the cognitive failure of the self to cognize about or experience its own death. Death is not an event one can properly know, because in death cognition itself is eliminated. The radical unknowability of death is, therefore, akin to the unknowability of other people: neither death nor the other may be approached as an ordinary object which my consciousness can master. But whereas death destroys the self to which, in the event, it “relates,” the relation to the other leaves the self intact, while at the same time escaping cognition.

The encounter with the other, then, is a unique event in which consciousness is transcended, but not killed. It is, literally for consciousness, an “outstanding” encounter in which the “I” breaks away from the world and safely returns to it. The encounter with objects in the world is an encounter which occurs in and as consciousness. It is an encounter with something other to myself, but which the self can nonetheless master and comprehend. This comprehension is the very fact of cognition. The world is, then, a finite

of thought and cognition. The relation to the external world may, then, be thought through the ethical relation which breaks with, or exceeds the world. Hale’s notion of James’ “appreciation of alterity” (Freedman 82) in relation to objects is, then, conditional on the relation to the alterity of persons.

field of consciousness in which the mind grasps external objects and incorporates them into its own inwardness. Thus consciousness implies the solitude of thought, since in consciousness the subject ultimately returns to him or herself. Even in the wondrous act of thought in which the mind reaches out to the world and perceives what is not itself, existents remain “cooped up” in their own existence, their own identity. As opposed to this solitary and enclosed relation to objects in consciousness, the relation to alterity introduces something infinite and non-identical into the very finitude and identity of thought. Facing the radical alterity of the other momentarily shatters the solitude and sameness of being. The encounter with alterity of the other person frees the “I” from itself and allows it to enter into a relation with something other, not simply as other as the ordinary objects encountered in the world, but something so radically other that thought cannot contain it. Meeting the other is the cue for an openness beyond the closed-circuit of thought; it is possible to give this openness the name of love, though both James and Levinas fittingly resist it.¹²

The failure of cognition in the open encounter with the other is the very condition of Jamesian sociality. When Susan Stringham tells Milly Theale to “Risk everything!” she expresses this openness to others beyond the safeguards of knowledge, status, or intention. The Jamesian drama does not simply revolve around the safe sociable adventures of the privileged few. This is the drama of the naked milieu, a drama of exposure and openness *before* the security of knowledge and privilege have taken hold. Jamesian sociality represents the risky relation between those who cannot understand,

¹² “I myself don’t use it much, the word love,” says Levinas in the essay “Philosophy, Justice, and Love”, “it is a worn-out and ambiguous word” (*Entre Nous* 108). “Love” is rarely deployed in James.

dominate, or possess one another, but who are committed to one another unconditionally and without end.

Yet, if by this account of a cognitive failure the personal encounter risks figuring as a purely negative event, discernible solely by what it *is not*, Levinas wants finally to approach it positively and beyond negation. The body of Levinas' work can thus be thought as an effort to present the event of personal relations positively as if on its own terms, to carefully make its invisibility visible in a manner which would least betray its mercurial nature. To achieve this positive account of the relation to alterity, Levinas uses a number of names, "ethics" among them, which render the relation affirmatively while maintaining that it is effectuated outside consciousness.¹³ James too achieves a positive depiction of the ethical relation. He does so precisely by weaving ethics into his narratives, by staging and telling this relation as if it were an action or a theme. But ethics nonetheless indicates something radically foreign to both drama and narrative. To think of James' writings as the writing of alterity may seem like a contradiction in terms, but the history of James' reception, encapsulated in Ozick's comment on the persistence of mystery in James, suggests that alterity is successfully harboured by James' texts, against all odds, even in the course of the illuminating and conscious act of representation. I now turn to the individual chapters of this thesis to trace more closely the way ethics is pursued in each of James' later works.

¹³ Additional formulations used by Levinas to designate the ethical relation include "responsibility" and "transcendence," and the phrases "one-for-the-other" and "face to face." "Alterity" functions differently from those in that it is the so-called "quality" of the other person. Alterity indicates the other's essential unknowability. In the ethical relation, the self does not relate to something known about the other, but paradoxically, to the other's alterity or unknowability. Because the other is "characterized" by alterity--his otherness and unknowability--the self cannot relate to the other in consciousness.

Survey of Chapters

Each chapter in the thesis addresses a particular aspect of interpersonalit as it is manifested in one late text by James. While each chapter individually explores a different theme, there is also an overall continuity between the chapters (where relevant and interesting, I note the cross-over between chapters). By virtue of its immediate setting and plot, each book necessarily offers a slightly different version of the ethical event. It is important to recognize, however, that the basic event of relation--its status as primary and its fundamental alterity--is in each case unchanged. The separateness of the ethical from the "circumstantial" pressures of plot is a significant effect of the Jamesian text; so that while differing from one another dramatically and thematically, the texts nonetheless encourage the emergence of a consistent sense of "Jamesian sociality."

Levinas on his part also approaches the ethical relation from a variety of perspectives. I have tried throughout to match the fictional and philosophical contexts by adhering to what James' texts themselves invite. The compatibility between the different fictional and philosophical contexts, as well as between all five works by James' should become increasingly palpable in the course of the thesis. Accordingly, the final chapter on James' *Autobiography* draws together the various aspects of interpersonalit as discussed in the earlier chapters in an attempt to catch sight of James' broader literary vision. I begin with the idea of time in *The Wings of the Dove* and address the interlacing in the novel of time, death, and sociality (Chapter 1). The transition from an unruly ethics of interpersonalit to a system of social justice is the subject of my reading of *The Golden Bowl* (Chapter 2). James' impersonal vision, his motioning away from the psychological

category of the “individual” towards the impersonal notion of “singularity” underlies the perusal of *The American Scene* (Chapter 3). Finally, I use the parameters of “economy” and “panorama” to unravel the peculiar literary vision in *Henry James: Autobiography* (Chapter 4).

Chapter 1, “*The Religion of Foreign Things: Time, Death and Sociality in The Wings of the Dove*”,¹⁴ sets out to illustrate the novel’s redemptive time-scheme. I argue that *Wings* undermines the conventional conception of time as linear and continuous by introducing a different notion of time. This “other” time is conceived as a radical discontinuity of instants, so that each new moment signals a pure future and a release from the burdens of the past. Under the sign of this new and benevolent time, Milly achieves the future she so badly needs. She is neither cured nor saved, but discovers, in the midst of mortality and death, the time to live.

The scene which introduces and enacts this radical notion of time is the meeting between Milly and her doctor Sir Luke Strett. I focus on this particular scene as the key to the novel’s temporal logic. Dr. Strett’s relation to Milly is literally “unprofessional” and “useless”: he makes no use of his reputed medical expertise and fails to disclose to Milly any details concerning her physical condition. But if Sir Luke fails as a physician, what is his role in the novel? I argue that Sir Luke, precisely by withholding knowledge and information, becomes the other person whose relation to Milly grants her the gift of time. Coming into contact with the doctor’s alterity (he offers Milly nothing she can later coherently convey to Kate Croy) is described in the passage as Milly’s acquiring a “new

¹⁴ The part of my title “the religion of foreign things” (*WD* 115) looks back to F. O. Matthiessen’s chapter “The Religion of Consciousness” in *Henry James: The Major Phase* (London: Oxford UP, 1946. 131-151). My aim is to challenge the common tie between James and consciousness.

resource altogether” and an “absolute possession” (*WD* 203). This utter newness which escapes definition and thematization is the gift of a future. Once in possession of a new moment, Milly is prepared to “live.” In Milly’s relation to her doctor, then, the novel’s themes of time, death, and sociality operate interdependently. Not the familiarity of what is knowable, but the ultimate foreignness of others determines life and death in *The Wings of the Dove*.

The relationship between Milly and Sir Luke is paradigmatic of the type of sociality practiced in *The Wings of the Dove* as a whole. Milly’s relation with Kate and Densher is another instance in which knowledge is repudiated in favour of alterity. Sociality as the brush with alterity is precisely the way in which time as a radical discontinuity is made possible. Milly gains time precisely by entering into “hazardous” relations with (unknowable) others. It is this riskiness of one’s relation to the other person which also holds the promise of transformation and deliverance: not eternal life, but the will to live arising within the finitude of death. Kate’s final words, “we shall never be again as we were!” (*WD* 509) are not, as sometimes understood, the tragic outcome of the lovers’ treacherous plan. The end of the novel asserts on the contrary a total break with Kate’s and Densher’s guilty past in the sudden presence of a new sense of time. At the end of the novel, through Milly’s alterity in death, Kate and Densher too receive the gift of time.

Chapter 2, “*Miracles of Arrangement: Structures of Multiplicity and the Birth of Justice in The Golden Bowl*”, explores the “fuzzy logic” governing the confused relations between the novel’s four main characters and the subsequent resolution of this confusion

through the separation which occurs at the end of the novel.¹⁵ The initial state of multiple simultaneous attachments between characters which takes place regardless of the characters' official social and sexual roles, does not, I claim, constitute a transgression from established social and sexual norms. The novel is initially governed by such a logic of multiple and indiscriminate attachments in a state which I call "polygamy." The reading of polygamy challenges the traditional view of *The Golden Bowl* as a novel about "adultery" (Amerigo's relationship with Charlotte), "incest" (Maggie's relationship with Adam), and the restoring of the marriages (James' social conformity).

The readings of "adultery" and "incest" do not adequately describe the novel's unfolding drama. The polygamous structure of relations in fact renders these "deviant" models unintelligible, since both adultery and incest rely on an established sense of monogamy and on the institution of the family for their meaning. I show that polygamy in *The Golden Bowl* in fact precedes such a monogamous logic, since both monogamy and the family emerge at the very end of the novel and are themselves the products of the polygamy which preceded them. Once the primacy of polygamy has been demonstrated in the text, the notions of adultery and incest cease to function coherently in explaining the characters' final separation. The intricate set-up of relations in Book I (indicated by Adam's radical image of the "selfish mass") reflects an anarchic state of intimate attachments which *positively* constitutes the basis for the social order which is achieved at the end of Book II. The ideas of marriage (monogamy) and the family come into being at the very end of the novel, and can only do so on the basis of the polygamous relations

¹⁵ A shorter version of this chapter was published in the *Henry James Review* Spring 21.2 (2000): 115-132.

which preceded them. The emergence in Book II of the institutions of marriage and the family out of the polygamous premise in Book I, I call the birth of the order of justice. Far from enforcing or reaffirming late-Victorian values of social propriety, then, *The Golden Bowl* unearths the precisely improper conditions of social order as such.

Chapter 3, “Missing Persons: (Im)personality and the Social Relation in *The American Scene*”, addresses the problem of the absence of persons in *The American Scene*. How can the ethical relation still be said to occupy James in a book without people? Can the interpersonal relation take place in the absence of persons? In an attempt to sustain a continuity between *The American Scene* and James’ explicitly “social novels” (*The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*), I look at the ways in which James relates to the scene as “personal.” Throughout *The American Scene*, the inanimate landscape assumes a variety of personal forms: the voice of the air, the haunting of ghosts, the idea of history as a relation to particular persons. James also depersonalizes the few “real” people he meets, treating them as distinct features of the scene itself, and investing the scene with their personality. James bestows on simple objects the alterity which he elsewhere attributes to persons. Conversely, the few actual people James meets on his travels are not treated (psychologically or realistically) as individuals, but (impersonally) as singular components of the scene. Therefore, the absence of persons in *The American Scene* does not signal James’ motioning away from the ethical relation, but is the epitome of an impersonal mode of relations which takes persons outside the context of individual psychology. Through this double motion--the personalization of the scene

and the depersonalization of persons--James retains the priority of the interpersonal relation in the absence of "characters."

This impersonal mode of relation, I argue, operates at the very heart of James' explicitly social novels, most notably in *The Ambassadors*. James' depersonalization of persons in *The American Scene* coincides with Strether's depersonalization of the people he meets in Paris. Strether's relationship with Maria Gostrey exemplifies this impersonal mode of relation. Resisting a romantic and highly personal attachment with Miss Gostrey, Strether chooses to render her another one of his "wonderful impressions" (*Ambassadors* 512). Like James in *The American Scene*, so Strether in *The Ambassadors* converts individual persons into singular impressions. *The American Scene* is, in this sense, but a radical reworking of the type of relation already present in *The Ambassadors*. For *The American Scene* does away with the last traces of individuated and realistically conceived subjects in an attempt to show the ethical relation in its most acute and unadulterated form. In his search for increasingly refined ways of rendering the event of relation, James finally does away with all the superfluities of psychological realism: "relations" now appear stripped of the "excess baggage" of character and plot.

Chapter 4, "Economies and Panorama in *Henry James: Autobiography*", examines the anatomy of James' literary vision. How does the Jamesian economy of vision operate? What are its materials and how are they worked? The *Autobiography* introduces many of James' familiar themes: the undermining of death and the impersonal relation to ghosts, the relation to others as a relation to alterity, and the relation to material objects. James combines all these in an intricate scheme which belies the conventionally autobiographical.

In this chapter I dwell on several of James' literary economies to elucidate the anatomy of his vision, and its ethical backdrop.

The *Autobiography* is one of James' most worldly books. James is fascinated by the material and objectal and the *Autobiography* devotes much space to surfaces, forms, and objects such as food. James invokes the notion of "sincerity" to describe his relation to the world. "Sincerity" expresses the trust in the validity and integrity of appearances, and the compatibility between consciousness and the world, by which, in the act of cognition, the world is disclosed. "Panorama" (*AUB* 166), as both superficial and extensive, describes James' manner of looking at his world as unequivocal and revealing. James' panoramic gaze and his belief in the sincerity of the external world clash with the psychological reading of objects as symbolic and derivative. The sincerity James attributes to objects resists the psychologistic readings of the *Autobiography* which dismiss the sphere of the objectal as dissatisfying and displaced.

But the "superficial economy" of the world which readily yields objects and forms to the inquiring mind is sharply contrasted to that other-worldly realm of alterity. Whereas being-in-the-world is an event of consciousness, one's relation to the other person marks a break from the world as a field of consciousness. The definitive separation between what occurs in and as consciousness (the relation to objects), and what occurs categorically outside it (the relation to the other's alterity) illustrates once more James' rejection of psychological profundities in favour of metaphysical exteriority. By setting up the experience of the world as a knowable field of consciousness, James clears the way for the event which breaks with the world: the event of interpersonality. This latter relation is

represented throughout the *Autobiography* through the “spectral economy” of ghosts, and through James’ allusions to other people as unknowable. It is, I argue, the striking combination of James’ “superficial economy” of the worldly, and the “other” economy of the relation to alterity which together make up the extensive range of the Jamesian vision.

From James’ conception of the world as knowable and sincere one can also deduce an important principle of literary composition. James’ belief that worldly appearances do not mislead underlies his own representation of objects. Like the world which is material and sincere, so James sees his narrative as a revealing and sincere surface. The *Autobiography* is “panoramic” rather than “archeological” in that its narrative lacks the covert dimension of (psychological) depth, and its textual surface is all-revealing. The questions one asks about this kind of narrative are not *what* it means, but *how* it means it: how is the material arranged, in what pattern, and by what principle of organization-- questions of economy. Accordingly, the notion of “economy” guides my reading of the *Autobiography*. Economy expresses James’ concentration on themes of the use and production of literary material, its arrangement and processing, and the attempt to avoid material “waste.” Rather than writing a psychological account of his artistic development, James provides a panoramic view of the artist’s life: weaving together a wide range of semi-disjointed scenes which form a vast and varied tapestry rather than constitute a personal history. James likens literary composition to the glance of the eye which perceives surfaces and grazes contours without, however, attempting to penetrate the surface and refer it to some more profound level of meaning. The *Autobiography* is not the history of a great mind, but the feat of a spectacular eye.

Thesis Outline

Introduction: James, Levinas, and the Loom of Alterity

Chapter 1: *The Religion of Foreign Things: Time, Death, and Sociality in The Wings of the Dove*

Chapter 2: *Miracles of Arrangement: Structures of Multiplicity and the Birth of Justice in The Golden Bowl*

Chapter 3: *Missing Persons: (Im)personality and the Social Relation in The American Scene*

Chapter 4: Economies and Panorama in *Henry James: Autobiography*

Conclusion: Planet James

Chapter 1 - *The Religion of Foreign Things: Time, Death, and Sociality* in *The Wings of the Dove*

Time adds something new to being, something absolutely new. (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 283)

“we shall never be again as we were!” (*The Wings of the Dove* 509)

Introduction: Two Notions of Time

“Time, which is doom in *The Wings of the Dove*,” concludes Nicola Bradbury in the essay “‘Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is’: The Celebration of Absence in *The Wings of the Dove*” (Bell 86). Indeed, time dutifully runs out for the novel’s stricken characters. From hour to hour, as from page to page, the well of time drains away; and with its final parching after Milly’s death, it would appear that all hope and prospects depart. Thus, argues Bradbury, the novel

ends with Kate Croy’s elegiac recognition, “We shall never be again as we were!” and this echoes, but changes, Strether’s conclusion to *The Ambassadors* (published later but written earlier): “Then there we are!” In *The Wings of the Dove*, that fixity of time and place in an eternal present has altered to the ellipsis of future (“we shall...be”) and past (“as we were”) which articulates through the tenses of the verb the recognition also voiced in the negative (“never”) of a felt absence: the absence of Milly, and of the possibilities of life she represents. (83)

Bradbury’s reading of Kate’s final declaration as “elegiac” perceives at the end of the novel a nostalgia for a lost past, hence also the mourning for an unobtainable future. Unable to follow their plan through to its conclusion, Kate and Densher must now

separate. Their once joined past and their anticipated future together thus figure negatively, a negativity whose very vacuity mimics Milly's absence, annihilating the lovers' future and past alike, and making their present void.

Yet, as I will try to show, such a reading of *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) makes use of a particular conception of time, a conception which the novel itself works to undermine. As opposed to the elegiac and tragic notion of time--the sense of time running low or running out--the novel levitates an idea of time as the possibility for resurrection and renewal. "Time, far from constituting the tragic," offers Levinas, "shall perhaps be able to deliver us from it" (*EE* 79). The novel's last line does not, as it first appears, inscribe temporality in the negativity of loss, as Kate's and Densher's failure to seize their time. In this last difficult line *The Wings of the Dove* testifies to a future which affirms itself as an unprecedented newness, a future which precisely knows no past. This is a future so new that it defies the elegiac with its melancholy hindsight. Such a future, I argue, is granted to Kate and Densher in the form of Milly's ultimate alterity which assumes its full impact in her alienation in death. The work of time in *The Wings of the Dove* is not, then, that of negation or deprivation, but on the contrary, the positive and prodigious work of pardon: of an entirely new chance, blind to the depleted, sterile present in which the parting lovers are caught.

The Wings of the Dove thus contrasts two notions of time. The first is a linear conception of time in which one moment follows another in an inevitable temporal succession. This is the time that runs out, the time which condemns Milly to death, and which weighs heavily upon Kate and Densher at the end of the novel, destroying their

past, present, and future by stringing them along a single guilty continuum. There is, however, a second notion of time at work in the novel, whose covert yet positive operation this chapter sets out to sketch. This time does not consist of the linear progression of moments and the fatal causality it determines. Rather, this is time conceived in its radical discontinuity. Time thought of as the constant renewal of instants, each precisely failing to proceed from its preceding moment, and thus replacing it as a new and fresh beginning. Milly herself becomes acquainted with this latter notion of time on her meeting with the doctor Sir Luke Strett. I therefore treat this meeting in Chapter 3 of Book Fifth as paramount to the novel's temporal logic. Kate and Densher (belatedly) receive this gift of time from Milly, and it is to this new time that the novel's last line attests. Finally, the introduction of this strange time into the linear continuity of the narrative in effect opens up the text's ethical horizon, since the gift of a wholly new future is made possible solely in and as the event of sociality itself.

1. Real Time

The question of time propels itself as one of the major concerns of *The Wings of the Dove*. “[T]ime's everything” (118) says Merton Densher to Kate Croy at the end of a conversation in the second Book concerning their uncertain future together. Aunt Maud's “keeping” of Kate poses a serious complication for any prospective union between the lovers. For people rarely give something for nothing, and Aunt Maud will surely harbour her own ideas about her niece's marriage. It is not so much a matter of Aunt Maud's predatory patronage as the inevitability of “strings attached”: Kate's loyalty is naturally to

be expected in return for the kindnesses shown to her by her Aunt. Kate and Densher need to buy more time. They would like to maintain the status quo by which Aunt Maud knows them to be only vaguely and uncommittedly acquainted. But, says Densher to Kate of this indefinite state of affairs,

“it will *never* do--we must remember that--*from the moment* you allow her to found hopes of you for any one else in particular. *So long as* her view is content to remain as general as *at present* appears I don't see that we deceive her. *At a given hour*, you see, she must be undeceived: the only thing therefore is to be *ready for the hour* and to face it. Only, after all, in that case [...] one doesn't quite make out what we shall have got from her.” (117 emphasis added)

Kate's reply to Densher's question is that

“we shall have *gained time*. And so, for that matter, will she.” (118 emphasis added)

“Yes; no doubt,” Densher returns, “in our situation, time's everything” (118).

The intolerable vagueness imposed by their secret tie has prompted Kate a little earlier to say, “with extraordinary beauty”:

“I engage myself to you *for ever*.” (117 emphasis added)

With this promise of eternity and their pledge for more time, the lovers feel their bond intensified and enlarged. Their closeness now seems more secure precisely because it is threatened by the external force of circumstance (their lack of independent means and their consequent dependence on Aunt Maud). Their predicament is unique and it renders their togetherness all the more insular and more complete. Densher goes as far as rejoicing in their situation:

“there's the joy of it. [...]. Not so much of our secret in itself, but of what's represented and, as we must somehow feel, secured to us and made deeper and closer by it.” And his fine face, relaxed into happiness, covered her with all his meaning. “Our being as we are.” (118)

This scene, a mere two pages before Milly Theale is introduced, pre-emptly the rest of the novel. “Our being as we are” shall, of course, be echoed in reverse in the novel’s very last line, “we shall never be again as we were!” (509), rendering Kate’s and Densher’s faith in the continuity of time futile and false. Can Kate and Densher make use of the present to secure a future? How much time do they need? These are the questions the lovers ask themselves. But if the novel ends by dismissing the lovers’ temporal strategies, their attempts to master the present in order to fasten a future, this is because a different sort of temporality takes hold of the narrative, and in its sway all measurements and calculations subside.

With Milly’s entry in Book Third of *The Wings of the Dove*, questions of temporality assume a fatal urgency. How long has Milly got to live? How much time is left to her? When will death come? Such questions correspond to those facing Kate and Densher, since, like the unfortunate pair, all Milly seems to need is more time. Moreover, Milly’s impending doom offers Kate and Densher the solution to their own temporal difficulties. The predicament which all three characters share, then, is one in which time, and the passing of time, is crucial. Milly’s illness presents a golden opportunity for Kate and Densher to make good of Milly’s limited time, to use it up with her, as it were, and to thereby ensure their “for ever” together after Milly’s death. One’s demise as another’s eternity: Milly’s shortage of time as Kate and Densher’s temporal affluence.

Yet it is difficult after all to decide whether one is here reading a novel about the future, perhaps a future beyond any foreseeable future, or whether the novel takes the finitude of living as its temporal frame: is *The Wings of the Dove* a novel about mortality

or immortality? *The Wings of the Dove* explicitly addresses temporality, inseparable from the novel's thematics of death, in a way which problematizes the relationship traditionally posited between time and consciousness.¹ Conscious time, the time of the present enshrined in Densher's carefree assertion of "[o]ur being as we are," gives way in the face of Kate's final and decisive "we shall never be again as we were!" (509). What occurs in the novel between these two timely declarations, the first just preceding Milly's arrival and the second following her departure, is a radical shift in the characters' understanding of time itself.

The Wings of the Dove stages an ongoing interplay between time, death, and interpersonal relations. The novel's problematization of time seems to stem directly from the social entanglements between its main characters, entanglements which have serious bearings on the way in which time and death are conceived. An important task in reading *The Wings of the Dove* is, then, the task of rethinking the inter-connections between the novel's notions of time, death, and sociality. How are we to understand the transformation in Kate and Densher's temporal sensibility and how is this transformation dependent on their relation with Milly? Conversely, how is Milly's own sense of time and death transformed through her relations with Kate and Densher? What, to use Levinas' own

¹ "Cosmological and phenomenological approaches to time cannot be reconciled" writes Genevieve Lloyd in the opening to *Being in Time: Selves and Narrators in Philosophy and Literature*, "[t]here is an 'intractable reality' to time which resists all attempts to reduce or internalize it to consciousness. Nor can we offer a coherent account of time without consciousness" (11). Levinas makes a similar point when he asserts that "[t]raditional philosophy, and Bergson and Heidegger too, remained within the conception of a time either taken to be purely exterior to the subject, a time-object [the cosmological approach], or taken to be entirely contained in the subject [the phenomenological approach]" (*Existence and Existents* 94). Although time and consciousness cannot be thought separately, their compatibility, that is the thought of time through subjectivity, remains incomplete. James' problematization of the tie between temporality and consciousness, then, does not merely implicate time, but must also take aboard the presence of the "I think" who thinks time.

terms, is the relation between diachrony, mortality, and responsibility? Finally, in what respect does the complex interplay between time, death, and sociality signal to the ethical?

I do not here intend to give a full reading of *The Wings of the Dove*. Rather, I wish to concentrate on the reading of one particular scene which, I argue, encompasses the novel's temporal paradigm and through which the common idea of time as a linear succession of moments and the empirical events that comprise this succession, is overturned. The meeting between Milly and the doctor Sir Luke Strett is one of the most significant moments in the novel insofar as the novel's two temporal frames are concerned. The highly unconventional meeting between Milly and Sir Luke sheds a new light on the novel's treatment of time as conditional on the events of sociality and death. Both time and death derive their meaning from the interpersonal relation. So that by the end of the novel, time and death have become intertwined with ideas of sociality, and their common definitions no longer function comprehensively. Sir Luke's role in issuing this rethinking of time and death is "vital." Sir Luke's relation to Milly is both unexpected and unconventional: the famous doctor fails to diagnose Milly or offer her cure or relief from her illness. Rather, Dr. Strett allows Milly to explore her mortality in a wholly new way. He does not, then, "buy" Milly more time by fending off illness, but transforms her understanding of time, and therefore also her understanding of life and death. A close reading of the meeting between doctor and patient begins to reveal the distinctly ethical dimension of time, which, I claim, gradually overtakes the novel's linear time-frame.

This challenging of linear time is one important aspect of the novel's ethical vision, a vision which this thesis places at the very core of James' major phase.² *The Wings of the*

² In the writings of the major phase, James' ethical vision reaches full maturation and

Dove offers a temporality that “sees” beyond the time of the present, beyond the time of consciousness and of subjectivity, to a future detached from all present, hence a future which one can neither plan for nor anticipate. This is the idea of the future as radical alterity; and if one can at all speak of a lesson learned by Kate and Densher in *The Wings of the Dove*, it is that of the future in its pure newness. Despite dissolving Kate’s and Densher’s plan at the end of the novel, time is not the cruel and invisible hand of retribution, but the scrapping of all past as the possibility for regeneration and change.

expression. But the traces of what I refer to as ethics are nonetheless to be found in earlier works. Examples include *Roderick Hudson* (1878), particularly the unusual relationship between Rowland Mallet and the minor but fascinating character Christina Light. The return of Isabel Archer to Gilbert Osmond and Pansy at the end of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) can also be viewed through the ethical as Isabel’s irrevocable responsibility to her husband and his daughter. In *The Europeans* (1878), the ethical encounter between the one and the wholly other takes the form of the “international theme.” Interestingly, the international theme makes a modest but distinctly ethical appearance in *The Wings of the Dove*. We are told that Kate Croy had spent a considerable amount of time abroad, and had consequently acquired “the religion of foreign things” (*WD* 115):

[s]he had herself, as a child, lived with some continuity in the world across the Channel, coming home again still a child; and had participated after that, in her teens, in her mother’s brief but repeated retreats to Dresden, to Florence, to Biarritz [...] from which there stuck to her [...] the religion of foreign things. (115)

In the following sentence, it is Merton Densher who appears to Kate as a foreign land:

[w]hen it was revealed to her how many more foreign things were in Merton Densher than he had hitherto taken the trouble to catalogue, she almost faced him as if he were a map of the continent or a handsome present of a delightful new “Murray.” (115)

James consistently employs the idea of travelling and tourism as a means to dramatize the encounter with otherness. That Densher himself appears to Kate as a foreign continent demonstrates that travelling for James is not merely an encounter between different cultures. The otherness James is concerned with is of a more profound nature. Milly’s alterity, then, exceeds the superficial otherness of the American in England. Kate’s otherness, I will later maintain, is also depicted in terms more radical than cultural or national difference.

2. Strange Time

To understand the mystery of the work of time, we should start with the hope for the present, taken as a primary fact. [...] At the very moment where all is lost, everything is possible. (*EE* 92)

“We shall never be again as we were!” (509). The last sentence of *The Wings of the Dove* opens up to a future beyond the knowledge of expectation and anticipation, a future which is torn away from the continuous stream of time, and which receives its futuricity by virtue of its unknowability. Kate Croy and Merton Densher face the future in its alterity, in the form of an unlikeness to anything that has passed before. Kate understands that Densher cannot marry her despite the apparent success of their plan that he inherit Milly Theale’s fortune after her death. The lovers have carefully mapped out their future, but their calculations, though correct, fall short of issuing the desired effect on that future. Although Densher is the legal recipient of Milly’s money, he can no longer carry out the plan to its logical conclusion. It is as if the plan no longer applies to Densher, not because he has changed his mind, but rather because he has changed his *being*. What could such a change in one’s being mean?

The novel closes with the assertion of a transformation, and one which carries with it the full weight of an ethics.³ Yet James characteristically resists the moralistic overtones which would reduce the novel to a tale of crime and punishment.⁴ The novel’s ethical

³ In Book Third, on Milly’s first introduction, Susan Stringham is said to feel herself as under “a weight of responsibility” (125) in relation to her young companion. Milly’s invisible “weight” is also the note on which the novel ends.

⁴ *The Wings of the Dove* does not encourage reading Kate and Densher as evil conspirators, and Milly as the innocent victim of their conspiracy. Frederick C. Crews notes that in spite of the biographical evidence which suggests that James “invented Kate Croy as a foil, first passive and then positively evil

sway does not proceed from the narrative's basic prototypical plot (which in itself would on the whole fail to establish *The Wings of the Dove* as an allegory of good and evil), but rather from the novel's weaving together of its central themes: time, death, and personal relations.

Early on in the novel, Susan Stringham observes Milly sitting on the "dizzy edge" (134) of a rock: "the girl's seat was a slab of rock at the end of a short promontory or excrescence that merely pointed off to the right at gulfs of air and that was so placed by good fortune, if not by the worst, as to be at last completely visible" (134-135). Mrs. Stringham first fears Milly is contemplating suicide (135), but she then decides Milly is rather contemplating the opposite:

if the girl was deeply and recklessly meditating there she wasn't meditating a jump; she was on the contrary, as she sat, much more in a state of uplifted and unlimited possession that had nothing to gain from violence. She was looking down on the kingdoms of the earth, and though indeed that of itself might well go to the brain, it wouldn't be with a view of renouncing them.
(135)

Mrs. Stringham quietly retreats, leaving Milly gazing over the Alpine precipice, "and," James adds of Mrs. Stringham, "she never knew afterwards *what time had elapsed*" (135 emphasis added).

Not many minutes probably, yet they hadn't seemed few, and they had given her so much to think of, not only while creeping home, but while waiting afterwards at the inn [...]. (135)

Mrs. Stringham's quantitative assessments of time (she even scribbles a temporal "a bientôt!" on Milly's book before leaving the scene) are contrasted with a different notion

[...] this should not be emphasized too heavily. Kate Croy and her fiancé Merton Densher, once created are just as involved in the novel's meaning as Milly is" (*The Tragedy of Manners* 58-59). Stephen Spender has written that in James "there are no villains" (qtd. in Rahv 100).

of time, the realization of which seizes Mrs. Stringham on her return:

she now saw that the great thing she had brought away was precisely a conviction that *the future wasn't to exist for her princess in the form of any sharp or simple release from the human* . (136 emphasis added)

What is this future which is no longer merely quantitative but mysteriously corresponds to the “human predicament”? The future, Mrs. Stringham concludes,

wouldn't be for her [Milly] a question of a flying leap and thereby of a quick escape. It would be a question of taking full in the face the whole assault of life, to the general muster of which indeed her face might have been directly presented as she sat there on her rock. Mrs. Stringham was thus able to say to herself during still another wait of some length that if her young friend still continued absent it wouldn't be because [...] she had cut short the thread. She wouldn't have committed suicide; she knew herself unmistakably reserved for some more complicated passage. (136)

Mrs. Stringham believes to have grasped the meaning of Milly's meditation on the edge of the cliff. Milly was not simply calculating time, or its end. She was rather thinking of time as “some more complicated passage,” time as related to the “human predicament” and the “whole assault of life.” In the passage above are already balanced two different notions of time. The first is linear and cumulative and it resembles a thread which (as the Fates know) will be “cut short” in death. The second is a future which can neither be counted nor cut, and whose equivalent is the “human predicament.”

The future as the “human predicament,” unthinkable as measurements and lengths, appears to negate Milly's nearing doom. If due to her illness Milly may in fact be said to have no future at all, the scene on the cliff introduces the work of time as positive and redeeming. This time of the future glimpsed from the cliff disregards and dismisses Milly's

imminent death. Mrs. Stringham's sense of the opening wide of some futural horizon contrasts with the commonplace image of Milly's gradually emptying hourglass of conventional time. How could the future pictured by Mrs. Stringham in the form of some openness to life really be equated with the adding and subtracting of moments until Milly's death? What kind of time, then, is being alluded to here? Moreover, what kind of death? And how can one explain the strange analogy between the future, and the readiness to engage with the "whole assault of life"? *The Wings of the Dove*, I argue, requires one to take up these questions together in a manner that thinks time, death, and sociality, as related issues.

The scene which most radically conflates time, death, and the inter-personal relation, and which thus also introduces the novel's sabotaging of ordinary time, is Milly's first meeting with Sir Luke Strett (202-213). At the outset, Milly's time, her life and death, seem in the hands of her physician. The doctor/scientist more than any other, it is assumed, is qualified to deliver Milly's fate: will she live or die? And how long will she live for? Moreover, it is in the doctor's skill and power to control these. He may cure Milly, and if he must fail, he might at least prolong her life, defer death. In a drama of sickness and health in which we have been told that "time's everything," the doctor or medicine man emerges as a key figure.

Restlessly conscious of the physician's role in deciding not only Milly's future but Densher's and her own as well, Kate accompanies Milly to her first meeting with the famous doctor. James' description of the meeting is significantly "punctual." Sir Luke has very little time to spare, he had

but ten minutes to give her; ten mere minutes which he yet placed at her service in a manner that

she admired still more than she could meet it [...]. He was presently to jump into his carriage, but he *promptly* made the point that he must see her again, see her *within a day or two*; and he named for her *at once another hour* [...]. The *minutes* affected her in fact as ebbing more swiftly than her little army of items could muster, and they would probably have gone without her doing much more than secure another hearing, hadn't it been for her sense, *at the last*, that she had gained above all an impression. (202 emphasis added) ⁵

The passage persistently deploys the rhetoric of time cut short, only to demonstrate that this thrifty clockwork, ticking away in minutes, hours, and days, is by no means compatible with the “impression” it yields:

[t]he impression--all the sharp growth of the final few moments--was neither more nor less than that *she* [Milly] *might make, of a sudden, in quite another world, another straight friend* [...].

(202 emphasis added)

Ordinary time, during this ten-minute session, fails to signify. For there is a disparity and disproportion between the actual time spent with Sir Luke, and what Milly feels she has gained by her visit.

The segments of time which the chapter meticulously details do not, however, render time in its temporal authenticity. By counting and measuring time, the text provides a spatial rather than temporal account of time. For to list the number of moments or to calculate the overall length of the session is really to relate to time as distance, as a collection of points in a single order, what Levinas calls time in its “numerical multiplicity” (*TI* 220). Indeed, ordinary clock-time may be said to reflect the conversion of time from the temporal to the spatial. By thinking about time as a succession of moments in space,

⁵ It is perhaps interesting to note the resemblance between Sir Luke's “use” of clock-time and Jacques Lacan's famous five minute session. The situation is temporally similar, where ordinary time has little bearing on what the session achieves. In both cases there operates a different notion of time independent of the time of the present.

time's temporality is compromised. Ordinary time is, therefore, the *space* of time, as it represents time as the ordering of points in space. Chapter 3, in which Milly and Dr. Strett first meet, inverts the very workings of this ordinary or inauthentic time by rendering these measurements on the whole inane.

Amidst the calculations of inauthentic time, an exceptional event occurs. Milly finds herself, in a flash, given over to her interlocutor, with no knowledge of how, why, or *when*. Milly's surprise surrender, as inexplicable as it is unsolicited, takes place as if out of time, and in disproportion to the length of time spent in the presence of her "captor":

[a]t the same time that she struggled, however, she also surrendered; there was a moment at which she almost dropped the form of stating, of explaining, and threw herself, without violence, only with a supreme pointless quaver that had turned the next instant to an intensity of interrogative stillness, upon his general good will. (202-203 emphasis added).

In a simultaneity of resistance and abdication, Milly experiences a sort of rupture. A "moment," then an "instant" in the company of her doctor suffice to make Milly experience something that far exceeds a scientific or informative exchange. In a resignation of self, Milly throws herself upon the doctor's "good will." The "interrogative stillness" of this rupture marks a sudden breaking away from the presence of time, also a break from the presence of self. It is as if time itself stood, still and discontinuous, hurling Milly into the abyss and then retrieving her. The short minutes spent with Sir Luke thus run up against an infinity glimpsed in Milly's new relation. Against the space of time, the "ten mere minutes" (202), Milly receives something that does not only grant her an unprecedented impression, but which effectively affords her a kind of salvation. No longer just a man of science, Sir Luke now

looked, *in the oddest manner*, to her fancy, *half like a general and half like a bishop*, and she was soon sure that, within some such handsome range, what it would show her would be what was good, what was best for her. She had established, in other words, *in this time-saving way*, a relation with it; and the relation was the special trophy that, for the hour, she bore off. It was like an *absolute possession, a new resource altogether*, something done up in the softest silk and tucked away under the arm of memory. *She hadn't had it when she went in, and she had it when she came out*, she had it there under her cloak, but *dissimulated, invisibly carried* [...]. (203 emphasis added)

This “dissimulated” “absolute possession” and “new resource,” I would like to suggest, is none other than time itself. Time before and beyond continuous duration, limitless or timeless, time in its radical discontinuity. Time in its temporal authenticity.

There appear, then, in the passages devoted to the meeting between Milly and Sir Luke to operate two separate conceptions of time. The first subscribes to the ordinary notion of “time”: clock-time which measures the passing of time from moment to moment, from day to day, from life to death. The second conception of time, which I have called time in its temporal authenticity, is only barely recognizable as time, for it cannot be alluded to in the familiar terms of duration or distance.⁶ Instead, this mysterious “new resource” appears in the form of a personal relation to which Milly irresistibly surrenders. Does not this sudden and overwhelming surrender to a new relation with its enormity of remission recall the aforementioned “human predicament”?

If Milly previously contemplated the future in the form of the “human predicament,” the meeting with Dr. Strett embodies this very notion of the future as a new

⁶ I shall be using “clock-time,” “ordinary time,” “linear time,” or “economic time” to indicate inauthentic time. All other references to time, namely as “diachrony,” “temporality,” or “time,” indicate time in its temporal authenticity.

personal relation. Read alongside the scene at the top of the cliff, in which Milly prepares to meet the future “which wasn’t to exist for her [...] in the form of any sharp or simple release from the human predicament” (136), the encounter with the doctor is the coming true of Milly’s vigil. As predicted in this solitary vigil, the new relation with Dr. Strett is Milly’s exquisite gift of a future. How is this gift of time to be understood?

In *Time and the Other*, Levinas insists that temporality perceived in its authenticity precisely escapes conceptual descriptions because it indicates a relation to what is not present. The kind of “time” Levinas speaks of, also the time imparted by Luke Strett to Milly, is therefore not to be thought of as an entity or a quantity, but in terms of a relation between uniquely discontinuous moments. The early premonition of a future becomes a concrete reality when Milly meets the strange doctor who, in a moment, brings her into contact with something she cannot properly understand, but which she nonetheless considers as a sort of deliverance. The good doctor, then, in instantly effecting an unplanned attachment, places Milly in a relation which, by virtue of its mysterious newness, one might simply call the future. If Sir Luke cannot cure Milly’s ailment, he can reveal to her a horizon of time far beyond the terminal economy of life and death.

Economic or linear time is characterized by a privileging of the present. In thought, both past and future are carved out of the present. The implicit discontinuity of the three separate tenses--past, present, future--is annulled by their subsequent subservience to the order of the present. Consciousness gathers into its own presence both past and future through the activities of memory and anticipation. Only as something present in thought can authentic time be made intelligible:

the intelligibility and intelligence situated in thought [...] consists in privileging the present in

relation to the past and future. To comprehend the alteration of presence in the past and future would be a matter of reducing and bringing back the past and future to presence--that is, representing them. (*TO* 99)

Ordinary time is, then, the representation of temporality itself. It is not time proper, but indicates the cognitive reduction of time's heterogeneity of past and future into a single and unified present.

However, recalling Levinas' declaration from *Totality and Infinity* that time "adds something new to being, something absolutely new" (283), it is precisely not the intelligibility of time in consciousness but its unavailability to consciousness and representation--the inexhaustible newness of temporality--which is time's most startling feature. Conceived as a collection of uniquely new moments which do not follow one another in a causal succession, time holds the promise of something new, a new beginning at every turn. This newness is the radical discontinuity of time:

time no longer expresses the unintelligible dispersion of the unity of being [...] in an apparent and phantasmal series of causes and effects; time adds something new to being, something absolutely new. [...] Time is [...] an ever recommencing alterity of the accomplished--the "ever" of this recommencement. The work of time goes beyond the suspension of the definitive which the continuity of duration makes possible. There must be a rupture of continuity, and a continuation across this rupture. (283-84)

Time in its pure temporality, what Levinas calls "diachrony," is not to be thought of as issued from a pre-existing present which then breaks up into successive moments whose unity is sustained as duration. Such a notion of time is inauthentic because it binds past and future to the present in a single flow. As a linear succession of instants, time seems to originate (and that point of beginning cannot be thought independently of the

consciousness who thinks it so that time and consciousness, problematically to say the least, must in some way begin together) in a unity that is subsequently dispersed. Such is the logic of linear time.

To allow for a future and a past which are not in themselves versions of the present, one cannot begin to think time from this original unity. Conversely, time has to be thought from a multiplicity irreducible to the unity of the present. To think of time in its heterogeneity of past and future is to avoid taking time as a single succession of moments. In order for past and future to resist this gathering into a succession (a gathering that takes place through the workings of consciousness), it will not do simply to position past and future in sufficient distance from one another. Once issued from the present, any distance between past and future would remain traverseable, no matter how far apart the two tenses are positioned. For them to remain authentically separate, past and future need to be thought of not as (spatially) distant but as (temporally) non-contemporaneous: a future so new that it could never be reduced to a not-yet-now, and a past so ancient that it could not be conceived as what is no-longer-now. This irreducible difference between the tenses which cannot be discerned in terms of spatial distance, is time itself. The radical non-contemporaneity of time ensures the utter newness of the future, and the immemorial pastness of the past. So that when Milly leaves Dr. Strett's office in possession of something "absolutely new," she is in possession of what she had absolutely never had before, that is, in possession of the future: "[s]he hadn't had it when she went in, and she had it when she came out" (203).

Yet, how can diachrony, discontinuous and outside consciousness, still be thought

as a possession or a relation? If the future is what categorically evades one's consciousness, how can Milly be put in touch with the future? Levinas stresses that time "begins" with a multiplicity and a discontinuity that is nonetheless placed in some kind of a continuum. "[P]ast, future, and present" he writes in the essay "Diachrony and Representation," "are tied together in time, without this resulting from a simple degradation that the unity of the One could have" (*TO* 119). To think time authentically is to understand the fundamental plurality of past and future as the origin of time. Rather than beginning with the unity of the present, Levinas begins with the "radical multiplicity" (*TI* 220) of absolute past and future. As Milly's rupture begins to suggest, *The Wings of the Dove* thinks time as a relation between the subject and what is not properly present, something wholly outside one's conscious gaze, something one cannot grasp, something so other that it remains invisible and thus can only be, as on Milly's leaving Dr. Strett's surgery, "invisibly carried" (*WD* 203). Milly's "new resource" remains hidden away and "dissimulated" (203). Although precious, Milly is unable to assimilate the new "trophy" into her consciousness as a regular object or as a concept of knowledge. It remains "tucked away" (203) and concealed. This new relation is thus represented in terms of some beneficial alterity. Such a beneficial to alterity defines the Levinasian notion of time.

Diachrony

is a relationship with the In-visible, where invisibility results not from some incapacity of human knowledge, but from *the inaptitude of knowledge as such*--from its in-adequation--to the Infinity of the absolutely other [...]. (*TO* 32 emphasis added)

Kate, who unlike Milly is still immersed in the spatial calculations of economic time (saving, buying, gaining time), hastens to find out the doctor's verdict. She awaits

Milly outside his office with the blunt question: “[i]s it out?” Milly’s reply, as under a spell, sounds obscure: “[h]e’s a dear. I’m to come again.” “But what does he say?” Kate presses,

Milly was almost gay. “That I’m not to worry about anything in the world, and that if I’ll be a good girl and do exactly what he tells me he’ll take care of me *for ever and ever*.”

Kate wondered as if *things scarce fitted*. “But does he allow then that you’re ill?”

“I don’t know what he allows, and I don’t care [...] I don’t hate it a bit.”

Still, however, Kate stared. “But could he, *in so few minutes*, ask you enough--?”

“He asked me scarce anything--he doesn’t need to do anything so stupid,” Milly said.

(203 emphasis added)

Indeed, the dry details of Milly’s visit to her doctor hardly satisfy. Consequently, Milly’s giddiness seems misplaced. As Kate’s reaction confirms, a mere “impression,” even a friendly one, is wholly irrelevant to Milly’s plight. Moreover, Sir Luke’s unorthodox approach contradicts his reputation as a fine practitioner. Milly does not indicate to Kate the objective gravity of her condition. But her peculiar phrasing does not imply that she is concealing information from Kate so much as intending her words to be received beyond the empirical and the factual. Milly’s report to Kate is true to her meeting with the doctor; so that in not providing Kate with the information she craves, truth is not withheld, repressed, or denied: it is breached.

On leaving Sir Luke, Milly does not, then, possess the truth about her condition. Instead, she is in “possession” of her existence, an existence strangely invigorated and renewed. As for her mortal fate, Milly is undecieved: “Shall I at any rate suffer?” (212) she soberly asks. “Not a bit.” is Sir Luke’s reply. To which Milly responds with another

question:

“[a]nd yet then live?”

“My dear young lady,” said her distinguished friend, “isn’t to ‘live’ exactly what I’m trying to persuade you to take the trouble to do?” (213).⁷

Milly’s relation to Sir Luke does not entertain the delusion of longevity, but rather, the promise of responsibility: “he tells me,” says Milly of Dr. Strett, that “he’ll take care of me for ever and ever” (203). The too few minutes reserved to her by Sir Luke are not a sign of the doctor’s negligence, they foretell Milly’s own shortage of time: it is not the doctor who cannot give Milly enough time, it is life itself which has no time to give. Yet this countdown of real time at once clashes with Milly’s sense of an immense and unprecedented acquisition. This mysterious acquisition is the doctor’s true and only remedy.

The meeting between Milly and Sir Luke is initially distinguished by an overwhelming negativity: the doctor offers no information, no diagnosis, no course of treatment, no cure. Yet these negations, by their excessive nullity, constitute the illustrious ground on which James renders visible the prodigious work of time. Dr. Strett’s

⁷ Milly’s meeting with Dr. Strett in Chapter 3 of Book Fifth of *The Wings of the Dove* suggests some very interesting connections with James’ reproduction of Minny Temple’s letters at the end of *Notes of a Son and Brother*. I comment on these connections at some length in Chapter 4 of the thesis, “Economies and Panorama in *Henry James: Autobiography*.” I argue that James appears to have concocted the figure of Sir Luke Strett by inverting the figure of Minny Temple’s doctor, Dr. Bassett, of whom Minny Temple complains that he subjects her to a fierce medical regime, depriving her of much desired human company and sending her in relentless pursuit of warm weather. Dr. Strett, on the other hand, tells Milly: “I ‘send’ you nowhere. England’s all right--anywhere that’s pleasant, convenient, decent, will be all right. You say you can do exactly as you like. Oblige me therefore by being so good as to do so” (*WD* 212). In direct opposition to Dr. Bassett, then, Dr. Strett (whose very name is reminiscent of the real doctor) gives no orders at all: “Milly was ready, under orders, for the North Pole; which fact was doubtless what made a blinding anticlimax of her friend’s actual *abstention from orders*” (*WD* 211 emphasis added). It is also significant that Dr. Strett is referred to repeatedly as Milly’s “friend,” and not as her physician. This reversal between doctors, over and above the well-noted analogy between Minny Temple and Milly Theale, seems to me as crucial to James’ ethical thinking.

professional “uselessness” may appear as negligence, but his failure to expertly intervene in Milly’s illness is paradoxically what positively conditions Milly’s transcending of the finite economy of life and death. Ordinary time will ultimately fail everyone in *The Wings of the Dove* on all counts: it will neither prevent Milly’s premature death, nor profit Kate and Densher. Yet, with the bankruptcy of linear time confirmed, Kate, Densher (and the reader) are obliged to consider that other “resource” given to Milly in the form of her extraordinary relation with the doctor. This resource does not save Milly’s life, but it nonetheless transforms it. I have been arguing that this resource is best thought of as the gift of time.

Milly’s transformation, envisioned on the edge of the cliff but set into motion through the relation with Sir Luke, is not the promise of physical health. This transformation otherwise furnishes Milly with a seemingly irrelevant friendship, a new personal relation. The visit to the doctor shall, then, prove as no more than one social encounter among others. Yet to Milly, these encounters and the close personal ties they yield are neither merely recreational nor time-consuming. They possess a “critical” dimension. As Milly’s meeting with Sir Luke demonstrates, this critical dimension may be considered in distinctly temporal terms, for it amounts to a vindication (by the doctor/bishop) of each moment by its release from the tedious continuum of actual time. Once surrendered to the doctor’s “good will,” Milly finds herself in possession of something utterly new. Defined in this very newness itself, Milly’s mystery possession denotes the future. For the future is what is absolutely new, what has never before been present. A future unburdened by a past. “She hadn’t had it when she went in, and she had

it when she came out” (*WD* 203); does not Milly insist that her mystery prize is unprecedented?

The personal relation occasions the sudden upsurge within ordinary time of a brand new moment. Milly’s “letting herself go” marks her release from the continuous present in which she has so far been mired: a release from self-presence, but also a release from the time of the present. Effectively a new birth, then, an instant is released from the bitter grip of ordinary time through Milly’s giving herself away to another (and his time). The release of a new and absolute moment liberates the present from its bond with the past. This miraculous extrication of the instant from the unhealthy linearity of time reshapes Milly’s awareness of the work of time, and of the possibilities of the present:

[i]s not the future above all a resurrection of the present? [...]

We believe that time is just that. (*EE* 92)

Precisely this kind of resurrection is offered to Milly through her relation with Luke Strett.

On leaving Dr. Strett’s office, then, Milly is prepared to do as the doctor (in *abstaining* from instruction) commands: to simply and unreservedly “live.” This new attitude towards life echoes Mrs. Stringham’s view that the future would ultimately prove “a question of taking full in the face the whole assault of life.”⁸ If the future is what Milly most needs in order to be “saved,” this future becomes available in the peculiar form of Milly’s dissimulated trophy. She is now in possession of a futural newness, won as a prize from her personal relation with Sir Luke Strett.

The scene at the doctor’s reads so very oddly precisely because it is constructed

⁸ In his discussion of temporality in the section “The Infinity of Time,” Levinas describes the future in similar terms to Mrs. Stringham as “resuming the adventure of existence” (*TI* 282).

positively, as against the negativity inherent in “bad” practice. The consultation is wholly un-professional, non-informative, and does not live up to the standards of the properly “scientific.” Yet the scene strikes the reader almost as marvellously as it does Milly herself, by letting go of the scientific as pointless and absurd. With Milly’s happy affirmation at the end of the meeting, scientific deficiency is transformed into the plenitude of alterity. Negativity transmutes into positivity. But neither Milly nor James can render this plenitude precise and objectal, since it is a plenitude which is irreducibly other. Whereas the conventional doctor supplies his patient with a medication or a cure, exactly formulated, coded, and labelled, Luke Strett offers a “cure” lacking a chemical formula. He therefore cures by virtue of his own (incurable) alterity.

3. Alterity as Sociality and Time

A being independent of and yet at the same time exposed to the other is a temporal being: to the inevitable violence of death it opposes its time, which is postponement itself. [...] Time is precisely the fact that the whole existence of the mortal being--exposed to violence--is not being for death, but the "not yet" which is a way of being against death, a retreat before death in the very midst of its inexorable approach. (TI 224)

The doctor's healing alterity is time itself. Milly could sense it from her lonely seat on the edge of the rock. But she cannot achieve the future alone. Milly's mind cannot of itself muster the radical otherness of time, since the conscious mind by definition perceives what is familiar and graspable. In order to come into contact with the authentically new, Milly requires the intervention of something her mind cannot master. This otherness which transcends consciousness and comprehension is the otherness of the other person. As Levinas explains:

[h]ow indeed could time arise in a solitary subject? The solitary subject cannot deny itself; it does not possess nothingness. If time is not the illusion of a movement [...] then the absolute alterity of another instant cannot be found in the subject, who is definitely *himself*. This alterity comes to me only from the other. **Is not sociality something more than the source of our representation of time? is it not time itself?** [...] **The dialectic of time is the very dialectic of the relationship with the other, that is, a dialogue** which in turn has to be studied in terms other than those of the dialectic of the solitary subject. (EE 93 emphasis added)

The very discontinuity implicit in diachrony between time and consciousness, insists Levinas, determines one's relationship with authentic time as a relationship with

what is wholly other. For both Levinas and James, such a paradoxical conception of relationship--a relationship with what is not present--accurately discloses the fundamental structure of the interpersonal relation. In the relation with other people, one encounters an otherness to which one nonetheless responds. The responsiveness of people to one another, the very miracle of human interaction (as either friendship or intrigue) discloses the temporal dimension of sociality.

As Kate will learn, Milly's dialogue with Sir Luke differs significantly from the communication of the familiar between doctor and patient. Since, as I have shown, their relation excludes the communication of knowledge and facts, Milly's relation to Sir Luke takes place on foreign ground, as a sudden rupture, "in quite another world" (*WD* 202). Devoid of the sound mediation of facts, the encounter slips into the realm of the unknown. This absence of mediation is precisely what characterizes their relation as both ethical and temporal. Here is a relation which does not involve

a participation in a third term--intermediate person, truth, dogma, work, profession [...] that is, it is not a communion. It is the fearful face-to-face situation of a relationship without intermediary, without mediations. (*EE* 95)

This immediate relation confronts Milly with an alterity so radical that it exceeds the spatial difference between Milly and her interlocutor. The representation of a rift in time, and the rupture it constitutes, is, then, the temporality characteristic of the relation. When Milly leaves Sir Luke's office, she has been touched, so to speak, by a new sort of time. This time is neither an idea or a thought inside Milly's mind, nor is it an entity or an object exterior to it. Time is neither fanciful nor phenomenal. This strange time, "the relation [that] was the special trophy" (203), is the time of alterity, or the time of

redemption, and it is essentially an event of the meeting between two discontinuous elements: the self and the other. As oblivious to the novel's linear temporal economy, Milly's relationship with Sir Luke embodies the paradigm of interpersonality as such.

It is as an encounter with a radical (that is a temporal) difference, surpassing the flow of ordinary time, that Milly conceives of her other London relations:⁹

[a]s Milly made out these things--with a shade of exhilaration at the way she already fell in--she saw how she was justified of **her plea for people and her love of life**. It wasn't then, as the prospect seemed to show, so difficult to get into the current, or to stand at any rate on the bank. It was easy to get near--**if they were near; and yet the elements were different enough from any of her old element, and positively rich and strange.**

(149 emphasis added)

The people of Lancaster Gate, Aunt Maud, Lord Mark, and Kate Croy, are in relation to Milly not in spite of the fact that their "elements were different enough from any of her elements" but because of it. The faulty image of sociality as a mere "going with the flow" will not suffice for Milly's new attachments. Sociality as flow (like the flow of linear time) implies an overall uniformity and sameness. Nor will it do for Milly to stand on the bank as an uninvolved observer watching as others move together in concert. The close proximity of elements which are nonetheless "different enough" implies a new sort of interpersonal closeness: neither humdrum participation nor detached inspection, but the intimate involvement between mutually unfathomable ones.

⁹ The metaphor of "flux" rather than flow better describes the dynamics of diachrony. For this image of "flux," see Fabio Ciaramelli's "Levinas' Ethical Discourse: Between Individuation and Universality" (*Re-reading Levinas*. Eds. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991).

Milly knows such an odd notion of relations will not be easy to explain: “[s]he asked herself if her right-hand neighbour would understand what she meant by such a description of them should she throw it off; but another of the things to which precisely her sense was awakened was that no, decidedly, he wouldn’t” (149).

Milly thinks of her relation to Kate in precisely such incommensurate terms. Theirs is a relation with an unbridgeable difference, a discontinuous relation. Kate is perceived in her uncompromising alterity:

the odd result of the thought was to intensify for the girl that side of her friend which she had doubtless already been more prepared than she quite knew to think of as the “other,” the *not wholly calculable*. [...] she wondered if the matter hadn’t mainly been that she herself was so “other,” so taken up with the unspoken; the strangest thing of all being [...] that when she asked herself how Kate could have failed to feel it she became conscious of being here *on the edge of a great darkness*. She should never know how Kate truly felt about anything such a one as Milly Theale should give her to feel. Kate would never--and *not from ill will nor from duplicity, but from a sort of failure of common terms*--reduce it to such a one’s comprehension or put it within her convenience. (176-77 emphasis added) ¹⁰

Already on the eve of their departure for London, the idea of sociality appears before the two travelling companions a strange and unknowable prospect:

[t]he idea of “people” was not so entertained on Milly’s part as to connect itself with particular

¹⁰ These thoughts about Kate follow Milly’s realization that Kate did not tell her of her acquaintance with Merton Densher. There are, in light of this, two possible ways of reading the passage. The first interprets it ironically (and tragically) as demonstrating Milly’s misapprehension of Kate, her naiveté concerning Kate’s manipulations. For the truth is, of course, that Kate *is* ill willed and duplicitous. Yet to take the passage as one of tragic irony has some devastating consequences for the remains of the novel. With the function of the passage thus reduced, the novel is catapulted back to its basic structure as a (moralistic) tale of good and evil. This, in turn, leaves the novel’s many peculiarities--the most characteristic features of James’ “late style”--as “excesses” which cannot be accounted for or contained within the confines of the prototypical plot. It is only when we take Milly’s statement at face value as

persons, and the fact remained for each of the ladies that they would, completely unknown, disembark at Dover amid the completely unknowing. They had no relation already formed; this plea Mrs. Stringham put forward to see what it would produce. (142)

On arrival, Susan Stringham decides to contact her old English school friend Maud Lowder.¹¹ The renewal of their relation over the abyss of time is an inherently risky affair:

[t]here was the danger [...] it was the sort of danger that, in renewing relations after a long time, one had always to look in the face. To gather in strayed threads was to *take a risk*--for which however she [Mrs. Stringham] was prepared if Milly was. (145 emphasis added)¹²

This gathering of strayed threads necessitates looking in the face of the unknown, as in facing the future. The novel's important motif of "risk" is essential to the idea of relationships as one's contact with the unknown. But it is also this riskiness, which as Jacques Derrida pointed out characterizes the conception of the future, whence all real value proceeds. The future as supreme risk typifies one's relation to the irreducible alterity of other people. The "human predicament" thus entails both the perils and the blessings of the not wholly predictable attachment to others. Milly naturally understands this, and at once consents to Mrs. Stringham's proposal by voicing the novel's underlying motto: "Risk everything!" (145).

4. Sociality and Death

But the "human predicament" does not merely signal temporality implicit in the relation between wholly incomparable persons. In addition to the interpersonal relation,

¹¹ Like the alien Kate, Aunt Maud is referred to by Mrs. Stringham as "florid, alien, exotic--which had been just the spell--even to the perceptions of youth" (145).

¹² For both James and Levinas the encounter with the other as sociality and temporality is linked to an experience of the face.

the “human predicament” signals to the end of one’s own time, its very finitude, one’s mortality. Indeed, the “human predicament” is perhaps, first and foremost, the “human condition” of finitude and death. Can the two meanings of the “human predicament”--as the interpersonal relation and as one’s finitude of death--be thought together? One’s relation to the other person which enables the sovereign self to escape from its own (self) presence and its own (present) time, can be shown to have yet another significance. As *The Wings of the Dove* illustrates, the ethical-temporal relation to the alterity of the other also implies a “substitution” for the other’s death. This substitution, by which the self finds itself responsible for, even guilty of another’s mortality, completes the notion of the “human predicament” by making mortality constitutional of the relation with the other. What precisely is the connection between the temporal structure of interpersonal relations, and one’s own mortality? *The Wings of the Dove* finally links these two aspects of the “human predicament”--sociality and death--and in their very connectedness the book’s extraordinary ethics reaches completion.

Life may be thought, under the thumb of death, to be enhanced by the very nothingness that engulfs it. The sudden realization of the proximity of death, it is argued, accentuates one’s sense of life. *The Wings of the Dove*, however, tells a slightly different story. Milly does not achieve a clear perception of her own finitude which then heightens her sense of life. She does not receive the gift of death, but the gift of time from Sir Luke, a gift whose message is significantly that of “life.” In *The Wings of the Dove*, then, life does not crumble in the face of death, nor move bravely towards it as in the Heideggerian being-towards-death. Through the ethical-temporal relation with the other person, life is

posited against death, as its moment-by-moment defiance.¹³

“Surgeons” wrote Gillian Rose in *Love’s Work*,

are not qualified for the one thing with which they deal: life. For they do not understand, as part of their profession, “death,” in the non-medical sense, nor therefore “life,” in the meaningful sense, inclusive of death. When they fail to “cure,” according to their own light, they deal out death. (73)

Does not the resourcefulness of Sir Luke refute the glum impotence of doctors in Rose’s description? This unconventional physician demonstrates the novel’s surpassing of the psychology and physiology of death. Beyond the service of diagnosis and cure in *The Wings of the Dove*, then, “[t]he doctor is an a priori principle of human mortality” (TI 234). In this ontological capacity, Sir Luke is not a medicine man in the practical sense, but he is a friend.¹⁴ Against the absolute singularity inscribed in the “human condition”

¹³ For a straight forward application of Heidegger to *The Wings of the Dove* see Gary Kuchar’s “Henry James and the Phenomenal Reader: Consciousness and the Variation of Style in *The Wings of the Dove*” (*Henry James Review* 21 [2000]: 170-185). Kuchar reads Milly’s transformation throughout the novel as her successful confrontation with death and the subsequent amplification of life it brings her. Kuchar speaks of “the manner in which she [Milly] comes to possess her own awareness of death as an enabling existential limit” (181), or of Milly’s “deepening awareness of death and the intensified vision of life it leads to” (181). Milly’s “mode of being [...] by Book Five might be characterized in terms of Heidegger’s notion of an authentic being-towards-death” (178). By showing Milly’s transformation to be conditional not on her own lucidity of vision but on the “bizarre” relation she establishes with Sir Luke, I wish to challenge such a Heideggerian reading. For Heidegger, the visionary moment in which one faces one’s own death is a profoundly private affair which precisely excludes others. In *The Wings of the Dove*, however, Milly’s transformation consists in engaging with others. She therefore cannot be said to pursue an authentic understanding of death in its solitary Heideggerian sense. I propose that it is not a matter of death, but the matter of time--of being *against* death--which is the central quest in this novel.

¹⁴ Friendship in *The Wings of the Dove* denotes an obligation and responsibility between persons older than psychology. This mode of friendship does not reflect people’s mutual liking. The doctor as “friend” is to be read as prior to any idea of sympathy and choice. It is not, then, a question of Sir Luke “liking” Milly, or vice versa. This is why Milly is so concerned about the doctor “*irrelevantly* liking her”: [t]his was the damning little fact--if she could talk of damnation: that she could believe herself to have caught him in the act of irrelevantly liking her. She hadn’t gone to him to be liked, she had gone to him to be judged; and he was quite a great enough man to be in the habit, as a rule, of observing the difference. (WD 216).

In the essay “The Politics of Friendship” (*Journal of Philosophy* 11 [1988]: 632-644), Derrida discusses

(my death is exactly mine and mine alone. No one can die in my place), the figure of the doctor emerges as he who in imposing on me the recognition of my solitary existence also relieves me of the burden of that solitude.

Here death is double edged. Initially, death would mark Milly's solitude of being. James indeed places his heroine in isolation from the very start: "I'm all that's left," says Milly to Sir Luke, "they died [...] of different things" (210). "'Do you mean,' he [Sir Luke] asked, 'that you've no *relations* at all?--not a parent, not a sister, not even a cousin or an aunt?'" (210 emphasis added). Milly has no blood relations, but her arrival in London marks the beginning of a multiplicity of social relations which would offer her a kind of salvation, and which would also kill her. It is here that death assumes its additional signification, not strictly as one's solitude of being, but as what enables one to transcend it. Mortality encloses one in their being, but it also makes possible a relation to an outside, through which this being and death are transcended.

In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida points out that death, in its non-exchangeability is also the condition of possibility for exchange as such. The possibility of exchange, manifested through the social practices of economy and commerce, Derrida argues, stems not from an originally communal instinct to share and exchange, not from any commonness or togetherness of existence. Rather, the possibility for economy and exchange comes from the absolute non-interchangeability of individual life. This non-interchangeability is the fact of mortality. Directly echoing Heidegger, Derrida explains: "[b]ecause I cannot take death away from the other who can no more take it from me in return, it remains for everyone to take his own death *upon himself*. Everyone must assume

his own death, that is to say the one thing in the world that no one else can *either give or take*” (44). But, continues Derrida, as what cannot itself be exchanged, mortality opens up the possibility of exchange proper:

[d]eath would be this possibility of giving and taking that actually exempts itself from the same realm of possibility that it institutes, namely, from giving and taking. But to say this is far from contradicting the fact that it is only on the basis of death, and in its name, that *giving and taking* become possible. (44)

For Heidegger, death marks the utter privacy of Dasein’s Being as its being-towards-death. When one faces one’s death, “all its [Dasein’s] relations to any other Dasein have been undone. This ownmost *non-relational* possibility is at the same time the uttermost one” (*Being and Time* II, 294 emphasis added).

Like Derrida and in contradistinction to Heidegger, Levinas sees death as the possibility for interpersonal exchange. But Levinas goes as far as claiming that the otherness of death is so radical that it cannot be assumed even by the one who dies. Milly cannot grasp her own death not because she fails to properly cognize about it, but because death is wholly outside cognition. One’s singularity is not issued, as Heidegger sees it, from one’s possession of one’s own death as the inexchangeable event *par excellence*, but, conversely, from the impossibility to “have” death as “*my* death.” “My” death is, therefore, assumed, as a radical alterity, from outside my ego and my-self. Ruben Berezdivin traces the itinerary taken by Levinas in his critique of Heideggerian egoism:

[c]ontrary to Heidegger’s thesis, it is precisely as myself that I cannot die [...]. The impotence encountered facing death surrenders my virile activism of comprehension and renders me passive and capable of hearing a wholly other voice [...]. (*Re-reading Levinas* 197)

So that death, like the other person, signals a relation beyond what can be known: a relation to alterity. Death does not solicit my solitary recognition of my absolute singularity. Rather, in its radical alienation death evokes for the self the absolute otherness of the other person, and *their* mortality. This conception of death, granting primacy to the other's mortality over my own, does not deprive one of subjectivity or individuation, nor does it negate one's own definite demise. It means, however, that I must assume the other's death before my own, and thus meaningfully displaces the proper source of one's selfhood by locating it in the exteriority of another's dying.

It is in this sense that death is the foundation of sociality. Not issuing a radical separation between people on account of the ultimate "privacy" of death, Levinas constitutes death as always the "property" of the other rather than that of my-self. This means that my relation to death is primarily my relation to the other, and to his or her death. In this type of relation, which substitutes my death with the death of the other, is already expressed my responsibility towards the other, which for Levinas denotes the constitution of the ethical as the very origin of subjectivity and self.

In substitution, individuation proceeds from the other to me, through my response to the other's death. Individuation is this openness and passivity in the face of the other's alterity or death. This positioning, in what Levinas calls "extreme passivity," is substitution. In substitution, the other surprises me in his absolute foreignness and thus finds me in an openness beyond welcome or resistance, a passivity that the other, in his or her death, inspires. I am "me" insofar as I-am-responsible-for this other's death. Thus *I* can be only through this primordial sacrifice and guilt, in which I assume the full weight of

responsibility over the other's death, over their mortality which awakens me into subjectivity. Subjectivity paradoxically begins outside the self-sufficient ego as a response and responsibility for the other.

The clandestine participation of death in the workings of sociality comprises the sacrificial paradigm in *The Wings of the Dove*.¹⁵ The possibility for sacrifice does not, of course, propose that someone other than Milly would literally die in her place. Kate, for example, realizes that "Mildred Theale was not, after all, a person to change places, to change even chances with" (167). And yet, characters are fundamentally affected and overwhelmed by Milly's death. Substitution and sacrifice prevail throughout the novel in the increasing ability of characters to derive their sense of self from their responsibility for Milly's mortality. In Book Fourth Mrs. Stringham goes so far as saying: "I'd die *for* you" (183); the italics are James'. This structure of substitution, by which the other's death is "confused" with one's own, is the novel's last say. As in Kate's assertion to Densher that Milly "died for you then that you might understand her. From that hour you *did*" (508). And in the next sentence: "[s]he did it *for* us" (508). Finally, in the novel's last line, substitution is reinvested with the temporality of the social, in Kate's last words that they shall never be again as they were.¹⁶

¹⁵ Sacrifice as "renunciation" has been the subject of many readings of James, but these regard sacrifice as a wilful abdication of the social relation, and not in the present sense of "substitution." See for example Carren Kaston's *Imagination and Desire in the Novels of Henry James* (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1984).

¹⁶ Another striking instance of sacrifice as substitution is to be found in James' novella "The Bench of Desolation" (1910). This is a strange story of substitution in its most extreme form. Herbert Dodd meets Kate Cookham, years after he refused to marry her as promised and refused also her demand that he pay her for breaking his promise. This past event affected both their lives, and their renewed relation confirms their unbreakable but tragic attachment to one another. When Dodd, a widower whose life, he claims, has been devastated by Kate Cookham's financial persecution, meets her again, she tells him: "I did it *for* you!--I did it *for* you!" (364), and, "[i]t was *for* you!, it was *for* you! [...] and for what or for whom else could it have been?" (365). Sacrifice borders on absurdity when Kate explains that: "using

Personal relations thus fundamentally concern a relation to, and a meddling with, mortality and death. Sociality is never simply a neutral relation, ceremonial, indifferent, or mechanical. It is, as I have earlier maintained, a “critical” relation.¹⁷ Milly’s introduction to the London circle of Lancaster Gate is thus already a dealing with death. In light of this, Mrs. Stringham’s observation concerning the “human predicament” achieves its fullest meaning. The “human predicament” now includes both the human condition of finitude and death, and this finitude as the origin of the interpersonal or social relation. The intertwining of sociality and death was fully contained in Mrs. Stringham’s prophetic recognition. It would appear that for James in *The Wings of the Dove*, death cannot be thought at all except in and as a relation to other people. It is as the event of interpersonality that death receives its significance, for it cannot possess a meaning in any personal or cognitive sense.

it for you and using you yourself for your own future--was my motive. I’ve led my life [...] and, as I’ve told you without your quite seeming to understand, I’ve brought everything five-fold back to you” (370). Substitution here takes the form of one character leading her life for another, even at his expense. This “mad” bond between Herbert Dodd and Kate Cookham has thus determined their personal histories over and above the fact that they have lived apart.

¹⁷ See for example Aunt Maud’s relation to Milly, which, like Sir Luke’s relation to Milly, is defined by the Aunt’s apprehension of Milly’s death. Milly had the most extraordinary sense of interesting her guest [Aunt Maud], in spite of herself, more than she wanted; it was as if her doom so floated on her that she couldn’t stop--by very much the same trick it had played her with her doctor.” (229)

The “trick” alluded to here is Milly’s mortality being her most distinct feature. It is only as the other’s mortality that death figures in *The Wings of the Dove*.

Conclusion: Foreignness and Time

Responsibility for the Other, responding to the Other's death, vows itself to an alterity that is no longer within the province of re-presentation. *This way of being avowed--or this devotion--is time.* (TO 115 emphasis added)

Levinas' religious rhetoric describing the ethical-temporal dimension of the social relation is echoed in Milly's earlier allusion to Sir Luke as a bishop (WD 203). Milly's image of the bishop is not haphazard. She insists to Kate that her relation with Sir Luke is one involving "judgement" and "absolution":

I feel--I can't otherwise describe it--as if I had been on my knees to the priest. I've confessed and I've been absolved. It has been lifted off. (205)¹⁸

In this being "absolved" lies the gift of time and the vanquishing of death through will:

Milly's new chance to live out each moment as in itself a postponement of death. Milly thinks of this correlation between "time" and "will" during her wanderings through the

¹⁸ Compare Milly's religious rhetoric of absolution to Levinas' rhetoric of pardon as the accomplishment of time:

this triumph of the time of fecundity over the becoming of the mortal and ageing being, is *pardon, the very work of time.* (TI 282 emphasis added)

This analysis of time, at once philosophical and religious, risks being cheapened by its own "melodramatic" pathos. Levinas' work, however, intentionally risks this brush with spiritualism, while simultaneously being firmly grounded in traditional philosophy and in the phenomenological method. I note the "pull" of melodrama in Levinas' work because it recurs also in *The Wings of the Dove*. Read as a long-winded elegy, *The Wings of the Dove* may indeed invite charges of romanticism and melodrama. Recognizing the obvious traces of both these sensibilities in the basic structures of *The Wings of the Dove*, my reading of the novel nonetheless seeks to show James' motioning away from them. If the tokens of Milly's transformation were no more than a literary metaphor, a symptom of Milly's imagination, or a poetic hyperbole, this would have made the novel more--not less--difficult to follow. It is not as some fantastic or imaginary encounter that James sets up Milly's encounter with Sir Luke. If the novel's action and conclusion are to remain comprehensible and convincing, this encounter, with its exceptional result, must be believed in their objectivity. Milly's transformation *does* finally determine the lives of Kate and Densher. Milly's mortal adventure thus takes place outside the confines of her mind. Only as actual events, extraneous to the interiority of the characters does the novel transcend the pathetic, the fanciful, or even the hysterical.

“grey immensity of London” (213):

grey immensity was what her distinguished friend had, for the moment, furnished her world with and what the question of “living,” as he put it to her, living by option, by volition, inevitably took on for its immediate face. (213)

This notion of living by volition also appears in Levinas, for whom

[t]he postponement of death in a mortal *will--time--*is the mode of existence [...] of a [...] being that has entered into relation with the Other. (TI 232 emphasis added)

What does this notion of “will” as “time” tell us about Milly’s rapturous readiness to “live” following her meeting with Dr. Strett? After leaving Sir Luke, Milly reflects on the two modes of living in the form of the novel’s famous chiasmus:

[i]t was perhaps superficially more striking that one could live if one would; but it was more appealing, insinuating, irresistible in short, that one would live if one could. (217-218)

The first part of the chiasmus (“one could live if one would”) affirms the virility and happiness of the determined ego. Life is but the effect of one’s decision to live. The capacity for life arises first in the individual will of the being who strives for life. This view is “more striking” in its hailing of the human spirit that wills itself to life in a feat of dignity and might.¹⁹ But as Milly thinks next, this is only “*superficially* more striking.” By making

¹⁹ O. Henry’s short story “The Last Leaf” (1907) is the tale of a sick woman who defeats death by the force of will-power alone. Johnsy is a poor artist dying of pneumonia in a Greenwich Village flat. Johnsy’s doctor announces (in the manner of the first half of the chiasmus), that the girl could live if she would: “[s]he has but one chance in--let us say, ten. [...] And *that chance is for her to want to live*” (Henry 37 emphasis added). Looking out the window from her sick-bed, Johnsy watches as the ivy vine’s leaves fall off one by one. She declares that she shall die when the last leaf falls. The weather is foul, the leaves are falling fast, and Johnsy’s end seems inevitable. In the morning, there is only one leaf left. The wind and rain rage on outside, but still the leaf remains. The following morning, the last leaf is mysteriously on the vine--and Johnsy lives. In this tale, living by volition means living because one *wants* to. Life and death are decided by the personal will, and will, where strong enough, can conquer illness. But “The Last Leaf” does not actually end on this note of the human will begetting life. Once well again, Johnsy discovers that the last leaf had indeed fallen off that fateful night. On the wall outside is but a perfect image of an ivy leaf. Someone had painted it on: “look out the window, dear, at the last ivy leaf on the wall,” says Johnsy’s friend, “[d]idn’t you wonder why it never fluttered or moved when the wind blew?” (41). That day, Johnsy’s neighbour, the unknown painter Mr. Behrman, died of Pneumonia. “Ah,

life itself an effect of human volition, the noble will is attested to in its independence and originality. But such a conception of individual will as the origin of life is forever undermined by the demeaning and mundane fact of ageing and death. If life merely testified to the primacy of the will, why does death betray and degrade the will at every turn? In the second part of the chiasmus (“one would live if one could”), volition does not figure independently as the effort of the living being itself. Will is a possibility, an effect of life, and it continually arises in spite of life’s finitude and death.²⁰ It is, then, the very fact that life may be taken up by the one who is doomed to die, which defines human volition. Furthermore, if the individual will is not its own master, it must reach one from elsewhere. This is Milly’s discovery at the doctor’s. By inspiring Milly to take up life (“isn’t to ‘live’ exactly what I’m trying to persuade you to take the trouble to do?” [WD 213]), Dr. Strett confirms that volition is not the property of the imperial ego, but is bestowed on the subject from the outside, as one’s relation with the other. In this important sense too, the will to live (“the *postponement* of death in mortal will”) is synonymous with the gift of time.

The relation with the other marks a victory over death as a mundane fact. Does not Levinas’ understanding of the pure alterity of the future repeat the Jamesian “lesson” of *The Wings of the Dove* concerning the vanquishing of death and the openness to the future?

Signification comes from an authority that is significant *after and despite my death*, signifying to the finite ego, to the ego doomed to death, a meaningful order significant beyond this death. This

darling, it’s Behrman’s masterpiece--he painted it there the night the last leaf fell” (41). (“The Last Leaf,” *The Gift of the Magi and Other Short Stories*. New York: Dover Publications, 1992. 36-41).

²⁰ Levinas: “[f]reedom is as it were the by-product of life” (TI 165).

is not, to be sure, some promise of [actual] resurrection, but an obligation that death does not absolve and a **future contrasting strongly with the synchronizable time of re-presentation** [...]. (*TO* 114 emphasis added)

Sir Luke cannot take death away from Milly, but he can, and does, grant her a relation which, as Kate and Densher also learn, transcends the empirical fact of death. Milly must die, but the *fact* of her death becomes increasingly less appropriate in explaining the novel's course of events as well as its crucial outcome.

Milly's "condition" allows James to uphold death in its actuality only to thereafter show this actuality retreat in the face of its own concreteness: death is so concrete that it cannot have meaning for the subject who dies. Death could retain no meaning for the one who dies because the very fact of death is the dispersing of the subjectivity which would try to grasp it. Death remains an unfathomable alterity even to its victim. Only as what escapes the understanding of the one who dies can death be revealed as the prime modality of relation between the one and the other. Only as something which is never the subject's own ("*Milly's* death" is, to her, an incomprehensible notion) can death then enter into substitution as what is "exchanged."

Death's alterity denies it the allegorical thrust of a moral. Milly's death is not "exemplary." Milly's fate does not in fact signify the approaching doom of Everyman. Milly's death is not, then, as Frederick C. Crews suggests in *The Tragedy of Manners*, "a powerful symbol for life and loss, for beauty and the annihilation of beauty" (58). There is nothing symbolic about death, so much so, that by the end of the novel, death can scarcely be read as pertaining to Milly herself. "Milly's death" becomes in the course of the narrative superfluous and irrelevant. Death is upheld in its utmost alterity and handed over

to sociality as some invisible cargo, an ethical weight.

When, after seeing the Bronzino painting Milly says “I think I could die without its being noticed” (*WD* 201), she is paradoxically right. For her death is quite immaterial. The event of her death and the welcomed change of circumstances that it brings for Kate and Densher, go all unnoticed: the young couple still cannot marry, as if Milly were still alive. Milly’s earlier declaration that “[s]ince I’ve lived all these years as if I were dead, I shall die, no doubt, as if I were alive” (183) is a promise of an ethereal presence. Aunt Maud speaks with Densher of Milly’s presence after death:

“Our dear dove then, as Kate calls her, has folded her wonderful wings.”

“Yes--folded them.” [...]

“Unless it’s more true,” she accordingly added, “that she has spread them the wider.”

(477)

Milly’s death is not simply an event of spatial distancing. Milly is not “removed” from the scene, and James accordingly refrains from describing the actual circumstances of her death. Death’s significance, which overreaches the fact of death’s occurrence, finally appears as an authentic temporal sensibility to which Kate and Densher are introduced. Milly’s alterity, epitomized in her alienation by death, is received by the living in the form of a new sensation of time.

I have attempted here to unearth this “strange time” in *The Wings of the Dove* and to describe its prodigious operation. The novel’s linear time-scheme in which time trickles away towards death is undercut by the radical notion of time, not measurable as linearity or span. This new time is made possible through sociality as an event of relation between the one and the other person as two wholly discontinuous “moments.” Kate’s final “[w]e

shall never be again as we were!” is not the story’s grave conclusion, but conversely, the story’s ethical premise: a sort of new beginning. The newness implicit in a “never again as before” is not the avenging agency of time, but time as absolution and pardon.

Yet even while being undermined, the narrative’s linear and sequential structure threatens to swallow up that “other” notion of time which is the subject proper of *The Wings of the Dove*. Temporality as alterity is effaced in the very act of representation which makes time accessible. “The unnarratable other loses his face as a neighbour in narration” says Levinas in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (166). In its translation into the narrative form, then, time in its authentic temporality is “overwritten,” and risks being overlooked.²¹ It is this interplay between the two temporal notions of representation and alterity which contributes to the novel’s stylistic complexity. Thus, in discussing James’ late novels, Ruth Bernard Yeazell observes (but this observing already amounts to an “overlooking”) that

we need to [...] remember just how disturbingly *opaque* even the most crucial of facts in James’s late novels may seem. (2 emphasis added)

The Wings of the Dove is, on the contrary, the most transparent of novels. Its misconceived opacity is precisely the effect of concealment that time as what lies (always) before the drama of representation undergoes. But with the repudiation of ordinary time

²¹ In “The Human Experience of Time and Narrative” Paul Ricoeur attests the complicity between the experience of temporality, and narrativity. It is impossible to comprehend time without running up against paradoxes that render this comprehension problematic and incomplete. It is through narrative as a language game that the theoretical aporias of time are partially resolved. Ricoeur’s analysis of temporal structures of narrative is directed against those structuralists who deny the temporal dimensions of narrative. Ricoeur’s point is that dismissing the temporality of narrative overlooks the possible “contribution that the theory of narrative could offer to the phenomenology of time experience” (104). But although he adequately questions the neglecting of temporal aspects of narrativity, Ricoeur’s (Heideggerian) critique remains within the phenomenological domain of experience, and thus of consciousness.

through sociality made to show its face, the reader's task becomes one of articulating the Jamesian project, beyond the time of the present, as ethics. Kate's and Densher's encounter with Milly's alterity is a more profound education (and redemption) than any "moral." Levinas' comment that "[t]he absolutely foreign alone can instruct us" (*TI* 73) seems to strangely resound James' own devotion to all things foreign.

Chapter 2 - *Miracles of Arrangement: Structures of Multiplicity and the Birth of Justice in Henry James' The Golden Bowl.*¹

“Your ‘perversity,’ my dear, is exactly what I don’t understand.” (*The Golden Bowl* 315)

I am definitely not a Freudian. (Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous* 113)

1. The “Logic” of Multiplicity: Polygamy, Perversity, and the Ethical Premise

A difficulty occurs in reading *The Golden Bowl* (1904) with the intention of rethinking the “Jamesian” through the works of the late period. Whereas *The Golden Bowl* stands chronologically as the culmination of the major phase, and whether or not it marks James’ ultimate success (R. B. J. Wilson) or failure (F. R. Leavis), there is a sense in which *The Golden Bowl* remains apart, even outside James’ succession of works comprising the later period (from, say, *The Awkward Age* [1899] onwards) as a work of an incalculable caliber.² Part of the difficulty in approaching *The Golden Bowl* derives from the fact that this work seems at first to defy one’s expectations (or hopes) of reading a novel.³ Book I reads, not unlike the first Division of Heidegger’s monumental *Being and*

¹ I shall be referring to the two volumes of *The Golden Bowl*--The Prince and The Princess--respectively as Books I and II. Each of the two main Books comprises three parts (running from Book First to Book Sixth). In order to avoid confusion between Books I and II, and Books First to Sixth when quoting, I shall refer only to the page number in the Penguin edition. The Penguin edition uses the text of the 1909 New York Edition (Scribner’s, Volumes 23, 24).

² Nicola Bradbury’s makes this point when she says that “*The Golden Bowl*, though written shortly after *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Ambassadors*, differs from them not simply in degree but in kind” (*Henry James: The Later Novels* 123).

³ *The Golden Bowl*’s immensity of scale is experienced firstly, in the negative, as the difficulty in merely getting through the novel. *The Golden Bowl* posits certain genuine reading inhibitions. Some readers have, not uninterestingly, accused the novel of simply being “boring,” a charge which has not been taken up in a “serious” literary debate, perhaps itself having been dismissed as boring. But the charge of “boredom” is not entirely void. As Fanny Assingham puts it to her bemused husband:

Time, as a dense and wholly coherent study of “relations,” as rigorous as Levinas’ metaphysical ethics, *The Golden Bowl*’s closer philosophical companion. That *The Golden Bowl* may be “the last straw” on the back of prose fiction is implicit in critical titles such as R. B. J. Wilson’s *Henry James’s Ultimate Narrative: The Golden Bowl*, and Gabriel Pearson’s “The Novel to End All Novels: *The Golden Bowl*.”

The Golden Bowl’s exceptional place on the limits of fiction is, I argue, a result of the way in which the novel treats the central idea of personal relations. Like its two main predecessors, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Golden Bowl* is fundamentally concerned with the unfolding of personal relations. Relations in the late novels transcend the merely thematic: they are not simply vehicles for exploring a variety of issues but constitute the novels’ major point of interest. And yet, the idea of “relations” in *The Golden Bowl* is devised even more economically than in the previous works.

Most striking is the peculiar relational set-up of the four main characters, Maggie Verver, Adam Verver, Charlotte Stant, and Prince Amerigo. Maggie and Adam continue their intense familial relationship in spite of Maggie’s marriage to the Prince and Adam’s subsequent marriage to Charlotte; and the Prince, while married to Maggie, is romantically involved with Charlotte. The four appear to be hopelessly entangled in each other’s lives,

“[n]othing--in spite of everything--will happen. Nothing *has* happened. Nothing *is* happening” (GB 320). Such a lack of activity is as difficult for readers to comprehend as it is for Colonel Assingham, but it may in fact be a good place to begin thinking about what *does* happen in the novels, and why. Low “action” levels indicate that what is “happening” is happening elsewhere, away from the surface of plot and experience. It also suggests that James may be concerned with a different sort of “action.” This relocation and redefinition of action again brings one to Levinas, for whom the interpersonal relation between the self and the other is characterized by an “extreme passivity” and an absence of active conscious intention. The ethical is thus a relation which does not “take place” in any ordinary sense, and James’ “slowness” of plot may be said to reflect the passivity of the ethical relation.

and in addition to their “party of four” there is also Fanny Assingham who assisted in bringing about both marriages, and who remains as involved in the intimate lives of the four as they themselves are.

This essay attempts to examine the particular “logic” by which personal relationships in *The Golden Bowl* are conceived of and represented. I argue that relationships in *The Golden Bowl* are handled structurally, as arrangements of people in relation. Both the rhetoric and the plot of *The Golden Bowl* are thus devoted to “placing” and “replacing” characters in relation, and to tracing the consequences that such (re)positionings have on the overall structure. *The Golden Bowl* may appear, at first, to be a story of adultery and restitution, and most works of criticism indeed approach it in this manner, as variations on the themes of adultery and the restoring of the marriages. Yet, the novel’s relationships do not proceed from a “monogamous logic” which pairs characters together in couples (familial, marital, or extra-marital). Rather, relationships are conceived, perversely, as fundamentally polygamous. By “polygamy,” I refer to the way in which the four main characters are simultaneously *multiply* attached to one another in a manner that resists the formation of monogamous or exclusive couples.

James’ use of “perversity,” a term which haunts the novel throughout, is not, therefore, a feature that distinguishes Maggie’s close relationship with her father, nor is it a feature of Amerigo’s extra-marital relationship with Charlotte. “Perversity” does not signify either the Oedipal (Maggie’s relationship with Adam) or the adulterous (Charlotte’s relationship with Amerigo). On the contrary, “perversity” renders these models of relation unintelligible. *The Golden Bowl* offers a model of relations whose

“extraordinary perversity” (312) precisely resists the reduction (and regulation) into the categories of the psycho-sexual (the Oedipal) and the socio-political (the adulterous). Instead, “perversity” seems to denote the possibility for personal relations as such. Both James’ use of the “perverse” and my corresponding use of “polygamy” express a particular way of thinking about relationships as fundamentally multiple: as the non-exclusive yet absolute attachment between the self and the other person.

Wilson’s (curiously under-cited) study of *The Golden Bowl* describes the novel’s narrative structures and strategies as “multivalent.” “Multivalence” indicates a multiplicity of vantage points and of values from which the reader views the novel’s events.⁴ James achieves this multiplicity of vantage points through carefully dividing the two Books of *The Golden Bowl* in a way which distributes the reader’s attention between the four main characters. Such a careful distribution of attention prevents the possibility for moral simplifications, based on the privileging of one character (primarily Maggie) over the others:

Among these four figures [Maggie, Adam, Charlotte, the Prince] the reader’s attention is divided in such a way as to make impossible any exclusive identification of sympathy or--and this is more significant--any choice of any one of these four figures as an exclusive vantage point from which to view the unfolding drama. (Wilson 44)

Wilson’s notion of multivalence is extremely helpful because it demonstrates the operation of a rationale of multiplicity at the narrative level. And yet I wish to claim that

⁴ In chemistry, the term “multivalence” is used to describe a substance “having a combining power of more than one atom of hydrogen,” or one which is “efficacious in more than one direction” (*Stedman’s Medical Dictionary*. Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1976. 891). Chemical multivalence seems to perfectly convey the condition of the “human particles” in *The Golden Bowl*. I am grateful to Jeri Johnson for this point.

this multivalence, which illustrates that “the authorial *interest is always apparently in a quartet and never in duets*” (Wilson 45 emphasis added) *already* discloses the multiplicity of personal relations. The multiplicity of relations in fact sets the basis for the kind of narrative multiplicity which Wilson skillfully demonstrates in the text, thereby establishing a priority for the ethical over the “narrative.”⁵

Significantly, Wilson sees narrative multiplicity or multivalence as the novel’s innovative achievement, and consequently as James’ greatest success as a radical writer.

Wilson notes that

despite the critical industry that thrives on his later works, the full extent of James’ radicalism as an experimenter in prose fiction has not been sufficiently recognized. Perhaps it has been overlooked, as Joyce’s for instance could never be, because of those James works immediately preceding it, and it can be mistaken for being merely different in degree from the work of James the First and James the Second rather than different in kind. (6)

Wilson intimates a close relation between Jamesian multivalence and Jamesian radicalism. I shall presently hold that James’ radical experimentation in prose through “multivalence” corresponds to a profound “logic of multiplicities” (*Dialogues* viii) which this multivalent style at all times betrays. The kind of radicalism at work in *The Golden Bowl*, then, transcends the highly innovative style and extends to the ideas informing and supporting James’ multivalent narrative techniques.

Wilson identifies three types of critical approaches to *The Golden Bowl*. The first takes Maggie and Adam Verver as the centre-point of the novel. Many critics have relied

⁵ To be sure, the ethical and the narrative levels of the text cannot be wholly distinguished from one another. However, “narrative” broadly refers to the formal techniques employed by James, whereas “ethics” refers to the central place devoted in the novel to ideas of interpersonality.

on the second half of the novel to justify concentrating on a single vantage point-- Maggie's--from which to explain the novel as a whole. It has been argued, consequently, that Book II "revises," presents a development or a correction of (whether it be a desirable correction from the critic's point of view or not), Book I;⁶ and that because Book II is handed over to the reader predominantly from the point of view of Maggie's newly awakened consciousness, it is Maggie who is finally the novel's central agent whose development (from a daughter into a woman, from a commoner into a Princess) the novel traces. The second type of critical approach centres on Charlotte and the Prince, as does F. R. Leavis, for example, in the course of his rebuking of *The Golden Bowl* in *The Great Tradition* (160). Yet Leavis' (reluctant) sympathy with Charlotte and Amerigo is what remains, so to speak, of his intense dislike of Maggie and her father.

The third critical approach, says Wilson, is a more fruitful one for it complicates matters by identifying in James what has by now become the author's (in)famous "ambiguity."⁷ Wilson's notion of multivalence and my own notion of the multiplicity of relation are, however, quite distinct from "ambiguity." The multiplicity which presides over the narrative need not denote (narrative or authorial) indecision or contradiction. Furthermore, as multivalent, the narrative need not fuse contrasting elements, a fusion which points to some unresolved narrative tension. On the contrary, James' narrative fuses

⁶ This has been argued in a variety of ways by critics like Bersani, Seltzer, Nussbaum, and Walton.

⁷ See for example Dorothea Krook's *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, where Krook devotes several pages to the ambiguity in *The Golden Bowl*. She writes that "[a]mong the many problems presented to the critic of *The Golden Bowl*, one important one (at least) remains to be considered: that of James's particular use of ambiguity [...]" (310). The main ambiguity in *The Golden Bowl* is not, as it is in *The Turn of the Screw*, for example, a question of establishing what really happened. It is, rather, "the question of the Ververs' motive" (314). The possible fusion of good and evil in the Ververs is James' ambiguity of the late style (320). See also Edmund Wilson's essay "The Ambiguity of Henry James" (*The Triple Thinkers: Twelve Essays on Literary Subjects*. London: Penguin, 1962. 102-150).

multiple elements in a manner which allows them to coexist rather than to compete for sovereignty. Moreover, the temptation to resolve the difficulties of *The Golden Bowl* by turning to “Jamesian ambiguity” as a main feature of James’ late style may in fact constitute what Mildred E. Hartsock calls an “unintentional fallacy.” In her article “Unintentional Fallacy: Critics and *The Golden Bowl*,” Hartsock writes:

[t]here are, in fact, three areas of what might be called “unintentional fallacy” in critical writing about *The Golden Bowl*: the common use of invalid criteria; the frequently careless or inattentive reading of the text when that text is perfectly clear; *the attribution of a critic’s own incomprehension to an excessive ambiguity in James.* (273 emphasis added)

As I hope to show, ambiguity does not adequately signify what is happening in *The Golden Bowl*, if by ambiguity one maintains in late James some fundamental incongruity or opacity.⁸

In the sections that will follow, I wish to “translate” Wilson’s claim concerning the multiple authorial stance, from the level of narrative to what I call the ethical level of the multiplicity of personal relations. Such a job of translation is really the unearthing of the ethical premise of James’ text. “Ethics” as it is used here does not indicate a moral maze of social conventions and transgressions in which the characters of *The Golden Bowl* may be said to wander. Ethics is employed in the manner derived from Levinas to designate the way in which the characters remain wholly and intimately open to one another, regardless of their official engagements, in the state which I have defined as “polygamy.” Ethics is that openness and attachment. The events of Book I revolve around this chaotic state of

⁸ See the concluding section of the previous chapter on *The Wings of the Dove* (72-73), in which I argue against Ruth Bernard Yeazell that far from being “opaque,” James’ late style aims for maximum transparency. Both claims, that of James’ transparency and of his likewise coherence, follow directly from the disclosure of an ethical premise in the late novels.

indiscriminate openness. The subsequent separation into pairs which occurs in Book II does not amount to a “correction” of the “errors”--the alleged transgressions--of Book I; rather, it illustrates the birth of social order (of monogamy, of the institution of marriage) out of the polygamous relations of Book I. The emergence in Book II of a social order which breaks up the multiplicity of relationships into organized and proper couples, I call the birth of the order of justice. The order of justice in Book II is derived by necessity from the so-called injustices of Book I. The relation between Books I and II is, therefore, one of continuity, and not, teleologically, one of revision, progression, or regression.

2. “Extraordinary Perversity”

The final chapter of Book I is devoted to the conversation between Fanny Assingham and her husband Colonel Assingham. The conversation follows the couple’s return from Matcham without the Prince and Charlotte, and Fanny’s subsequent meeting with Maggie, during which Fanny feels that Maggie has undergone a mysterious change. Fanny cannot easily articulate what it is about Maggie that strikes her as different, yet she insists that Maggie has made her “think of her differently” (302):

“I can’t say more [...] than that something in her face, her voice and her whole manner acted upon me as nothing in her had ever acted before [...].” (307)

Towards the end of the chapter, Fanny finds the proper term to describe Maggie’s transformation: “‘*now*,’ she said, ‘I see! I mean,’ she added, ‘what you were asking me: how I knew to-day in Eaton Square that Maggie’s **awake**’” (321 emphasis added). Maggie has woken up to a realization (a realization which, however, is not identical with a knowledge of Amerigo’s adultery) concerning her situation. She has, in other words,

woken up to what Fanny a little earlier calls the “tolerably obvious oddity of their [Maggie’s and Adam’s] relation” (319). By the end of Book I, then, it is clear that the situation which involves the four main characters (and Fanny by extension) has reached a limit, and that a change in Book II must follow.

Fanny’s and the Colonel’s exchange prepares the reader for the second part of the novel, and it emphasizes one of the Assinghams’ important roles as the reader’s interpreters. The Assinghams’ explanatory position, simultaneously inside and outside the main foursome, is indispensable to the understanding of the novel’s “logic.” The couple act as an aid to the bewildered reader who, along with the Colonel, stammers and lags behind the novel’s racy logic. By having to stop and explain things to her husband, Fanny allows the reader to “catch up” with the book’s otherwise self-contained and non-explanatory manner. In addition to their explicatory role, the couple’s “analytical sessions” (Krook 310) establish Fanny’s own implication in the polygamous structure. The Assinghams’ conversations thus contrast two models of relation. On Fanny’s part, these conversations clearly illustrate her deep involvement in the lives of the four and position her as a fifth wheel in what Maggie will later call the “family coach.” The Colonel’s voice of simplicity and reason, on the other hand, objects to and resists the complex communal structure of mutual attachments to which his own wife is a party.

The Colonel is described at the Foreign Office ball as “always lonely at great parties” (215). He remains slightly detached from the intertwined social circle of the Ververs, though his uncomplicated and comic isolation appears as a slightly inferior substitute to Fanny’s abyssal personal entanglement. Fanny’s entanglement has been

determined from the start, for it was she who introduced between Maggie and Amerigo in Rome (94). Indeed, the novel's first chapter has the Prince reflecting on the peculiar nature of Fanny's "meddling." This is also the point at which the idea of *perversity* makes its first appearance. Amerigo knows on the eve of his marriage to Maggie Verver that Fanny Assingham

has made his marriage, quite as truly as his papal ancestor had made his family--though he could scarce see what she had made it for unless because she too was *perverse*ly romantic. He had neither bribed nor persuaded her, had given her nothing--scarce even till now articulate thanks; so that her profit--to think it vulgarly--must have all had to come from the Ververs.

Yet he was far, he could still remind himself, from supposing that she had been grossly remunerated. He was wholly sure she hadn't [...]. (55 emphasis added)

Fanny lacks a definite (or vulgar) motive for bringing about Amerigo's marriage. In the absence of a reason for Fanny's actions, the Prince can only think that "she too was" (in addition to whom? himself? Maggie? Adam?) "perversely romantic." What does this perversity mean?

Perversity initially defines the characters' (self-proclaimed) confusion of their official social/sexual roles. Maggie's conversation with Adam in which the possibility of Adam's marriage to Charlotte first arises is one example of such confusion. Following Mrs. Rance's predatory marital manoeuvres, the possibility of Adam's marriage and the effect that Maggie's own marriage to the Prince has on such a possibility can no longer be ignored:

"[w]e must think together--as we've always thought. What I mean," she went on after a moment, "is that it strikes me I ought to at least offer you some alternative. I ought to have worked one out for you."

“An alternative to what?”

“Well, to your simply missing what you’ve lost--without anything being done about it.”

“But what *have* I lost?”

She thought a minute, as if it were difficult to say, yet as if she more and more saw it.

“Well, whatever it was that *before* kept us from thinking, and kept *you*, really, as you might say, in the market. It was as if you couldn’t be in the market when you were married to *me*. Or rather as if I kept people off, innocently, by being married to you. Now that I’m married to some one else you’re, as in consequence, married to nobody. Therefore you may be married to anybody, to everybody. People don’t see why you shouldn’t be married to *them*.” (162)

This remarkable dialogue reveals an unusual relation between father and daughter.

With its seemingly explicit suggestion of incestuous desires, the passage appears to subscribe, all too readily, to an Oedipal structure. Consider, for instance, the description of the two in which Maggie’s behaviour with Adam resembles that either of a lover or of a young child :

she interrupted the process first to give his necktie a slightly smarter twist and then to make up to him for her hidden madness by rubbing her nose into his cheek according to the tradition of their frankest levity. [...] She kissed him, she arranged his cravat, she dropped remarks, she guided him out, she held his arm, not to be led, but to lead him, and taking it to her by much the same intimate pressure she had always used, when a little girl, to mark the inseparability of her doll [...]. (382)

Or consider Fanny’s declaration to her husband that Maggie

“dresses really [...] as much for her father [...] as for her husband or for herself. She has her room in his house very much as she had it before she was married--and just as the boy has quite a second nursery there, [...] if Charlotte, in her own house, so to speak, should wish a friend or two to stay with her, she really would be scarce able to put them up.” (302)

The psychosexual, then, seems to offer a suitable model for interpreting the familial relations in *The Golden Bowl*.⁹

Accordingly, Hugh Stevens begins his article “Sexuality and the Aesthetic in *The Golden Bowl*” by establishing this sexual premise. The institution of marriage, claims Stevens, functions as a regulating and civilizing framework for the containment of lawless sexual desire:

[t]he novel returns again and again to the question of the marriage, which *survives through the renunciation of incest and the denial of adultery. Ubiquitous desire is replaced by an insistence that sexual desire can be channeled solely through the marital bond.* (55 emphasis added)

For Stevens, Maggie’s process of regulation and suppression, her “renunciation of incest for desire within marriage” (67) is not celebratory because it is rooted in the “cultural process of exclusion [of the Jew, of Charlotte]” (67). More important, this is a process which must remain incomplete, or, like the bowl itself, flawed. Stevens’ analysis operates within the limits of the psychosexual and social models which accordingly determine the novel’s themes as “incest” and “adultery.” Yet, the question is not one of evaluating the novel’s teleological logic--positively as Maggie’s successful “acquisition of agency and an adult sexuality” (67), or negatively, as Maggie’s acts of repression and exclusion. It remains irrelevant whether Stevens finally endorses or deplors the novel’s workings of these categories. The question is whether or not *The Golden Bowl* at all subscribes to this type of logic. The failure to contain desire, which results in the reading of the novel’s ending as “flawed,” in effect offers a reworking of the familiar question of Jamesian ambiguity: does the end of the novel betray a failure which leaves the novel open-ended

⁹ See, for example, Beth Sharon Ash’s “Narcissism and the Gilded Image: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *The Golden Bowl*” *Henry James Review* 15 (1994): 55-90.

(Skelnicka 60), undetermined (Craig 136, 143-44), or flawed (Stevens 67)? The difficulty of applying the psychosexual and sociological categories such as the category of the Oedipal, without thereby resorting to different versions of ambiguity, stems from the novel's resistance to these categories and signals back to the novel's particular use of "perversity" as wholly, as utterly, "extraordinary."

"From the moment the dear man married to ease his daughter off," explains Fanny to her husband, "it then happened by an *extraordinary perversity* that the very opposite effect was produced--!" (312 emphasis added). Fanny is referring to Maggie's and Adam's part in bringing together Charlotte and the Prince, but the Colonel does not follow: "Your 'perversity,' my dear, is exactly what I don't understand" (315). Fanny then explains that perversity is precisely a matter of everyone's good will, and of the unique relation between all four. The foursome suffers from being

"too much taken up with considering each other. You may call such a mistake as that by whatever name you please; it at any rate means, all round, their case. It illustrates the misfortune [...] of being too, too charming." (315)

Fanny also asserts everyone's innocence, and this time, it is innocence which is "extraordinary":

"[t]hat they were. Guileless all at first--quite *extraordinarily*. It's what I mean by their failure to see that the more they took for granted they could work together the more they were really working apart." (316 emphasis added)

Perversity and guilelessness miraculously coincide. Both derive from a single set of conditions, that of the multiple structure of relations that ties all four people together, ultimately enabling them to intimately relate outside their designated social roles. Thus

Maggie continues to perversely connect to her father, and Charlotte and the Prince find themselves attached as if neither were married to another. “Perversity,” then, is not a feature of each “anti-social” relation in itself, be it Maggie’s and Adam’s relationship or Charlotte’s and the Prince’s, but a communal feature of the “tolerably obvious oddity of their relation, all round” (319). Perversity does not occur between pairs, but is a result of the multiple relations between all four. The extraordinary quality of perversity in *The Golden Bowl*, can therefore be understood precisely as the transcending by the perverse of any particular type of relation. Perversity does not denote a deviation from social and sexual norms, but is external to the realm of the “natural” altogether, hence its (supernatural) designation as “extra-ordinary.” *The Golden Bowl*, then, dissociates the “perverse” from both the social (adulterous) and the psychological (Oedipal). Instead, perversity appears as a property of the multiple structure of relations, a structure whose every segment-in-relation is minutely traced by Book I.¹⁰

3. Polygamy and Substitution

With Maggie’s declaration to Fanny in Book II that “I live in the midst of miracles of arrangement, half of which I admit are my own” (401), the sense of the importance of structure, of positioning, and of place in conceiving of interpersonal relationships is

¹⁰ Levinas explains that the relation between the one and the other person is a relation which occurs wholly outside consciousness (and therefore, for Levinas, also wholly outside the unconscious, which he sees as an intrinsic albeit deficient mode of consciousness). The relation to the other is therefore a relation to an “exteriority, which is neither objective nor spatial. [...] Irrecoverable in immanence, and thus outside the order (or command) of consciousness, exteriority is obsessional, nonthematizable, and [...] an-archic. *We might go so far as to say ‘extra-ordinary’*” (*Basic Philosophical Writings* 82 emphasis added). It is this sense of the extraordinary that James attributes to the relations between the four characters in *The Golden Bowl*: relations so extraordinarily perverse that their perversity exceeds the perversity contained by the order of the Freudian (un)conscious and thematized as the “Oedipal.”

reissued with vigour. How do these “miracles of arrangement” confirm a multiplicity of interpersonal attachments?

Characters in *The Golden Bowl* are so intricately mutually involved as to be “mixed up” (100) in one another’s “case.” When Colonel Assingham tells Fanny that the others’ “case” has by now “ceased to be yours”(100), this merely allows Fanny to argue more emphatically that her relations with the other four are inescapably her affair, and that she is indeed *essentially bound* by her relations:

“[o]ur relation, all round, exists--it’s a reality, and a very good one; we’re mixed up, so to speak, and it’s too late to change it. We must live *in* it and with it.” (100)

This state of being bound by relation is neither conditional nor circumstantial, but rather, itself forms the basic premise for the events that follow. Thus, James sets up the drama of *The Golden Bowl* first and foremost as the drama of a *milieu*, and not as a drama of solitary consciousnesses which merely interact with one another but which nonetheless remain isolated and autonomous. And if one takes Fanny’s statement concerning the fundamental state of being attached “all round” as an appeal to this primacy of the *milieu*, it becomes increasingly clear why “adultery,” strictly understood as the deviation from an exclusive attachment between *two* individuals, fails to describe the events that follow Charlotte’s marriage to Adam. The reader, of course, learns early on that the Prince is already attached to Charlotte at the time of his acquaintance with Maggie. And although this past relation, as Fanny says, dictates a given premise which may or may not complicate the Prince’s present attachment to Maggie, Fanny’s expectation at first appears to be that the Prince repudiate his old tie with Charlotte in favour of his new tie with Maggie. That such repudiation, or, to anticipate the rhetoric of Book II, separation, fails

initially to take place is neither contingent, incomprehensible, or immoral, but a direct result of the novel's "logic" of polygamous attachments.

"Polygamy" challenges the readings of adultery and betrayal, since these rely on the logic of exclusivity--on the monogamy of personal attachments--for their meaning. But no such monogamous logic operates at the basis of *The Golden Bowl*. The novel's multiple attachments exist simultaneously in a delicate yet vital balance: the novel's famous notion of the "equilibrium." As Maggie suddenly realizes at the end of the second chapter of Book II, before deciding to "extract" herself from the odd social structure in which she has thus far been so placidly positioned:

[o]f course they were arranged--all four arranged; but what had the basis of their life been precisely but that they were arranged together? (356)

The multiple arrangements "all round" of the four main characters lead to a disruption of the logic of causality at the level of plot. What occurs to one of the arranged four is rendered in terms of its effect on the other three. Consequently, characters do not consider their actions as primarily private experiences, but more as "communal happenings." Adam's marriage to Charlotte is one example of such a disruption. Following Adam's conversation with Maggie at Fawns and Charlotte's arrival in England, Maggie and Amerigo depart for Italy, which the Prince, "in a beautiful fit of homesickness" (180) has longed for some time to revisit. They leave Adam and Charlotte, "to whom he [Adam] was by this time conscious of addressing many remarks" (180), on their own, and the two go together to Brighton to visit an antique dealer, Mr. Gutterman-Seuss, as part of Adam Verver's efforts of collecting rare and fine *objets d'art*.

It is in Brighton that Adam proposes to Charlotte: “[w]e’ve had, as it seems to me, such quite beautiful days together that I hope it won’t come to you too much as a shock when I ask if you think you could regard me with any satisfaction as a husband” (193). What follows this formal proposal is a typically Jamesian discussion of the possible implications of marriage for Adam and Charlotte. Charlotte seems vaguely averse to the idea of marriage. She dryly comments that marriage to Adam would better her social and economical situation, but that she does not “see why, for what I speak of [...] for a mere escape from my state--I need do quite so *much*” (194). Adam proceeds to question her more specifically about her objection. He refers to what seems like an obvious obstacle (despite references to Adam’s relative youth, for example, 315), to their difference in age: “[o]f course, yes--that’s my disadvantage: I’m not the natural, I’m so far from being the ideal, match to your youth and your beauty” (195). But Charlotte has something quite different on her mind. She is thinking of some great price that the marriage will exact, and Adam realizes that Charlotte’s reluctance to marry him has nothing to do with “their disparity” (195) of age: “he had already, before she spoke, the dim vision of some objection in her mind beside which the one he had named was light, and which therefore must be strangely deep” (195).

“You don’t understand me. It’s of all that it is for *you* to do--it’s of that I’m thinking.” (195) Charlotte is not thinking of an inestimable price that marrying Adam would oblige her to pay, but rather of what such a commitment would entail for *him*. Charlotte’s objection has everything to do with the implications that this marriage carries with it not only for Charlotte and Adam, but, to a no lesser degree, for Maggie and the Prince. Adam’s and

Charlotte's proposal scene is striking on the grounds that it addresses marriage, polygamously, as an affair between four. Adam explains to Charlotte that Maggie

“feels the [...] [difference] she made herself by her own marriage--made I mean for me. She constantly thinks of it--it allows her no rest. *To put her at peace* is therefore,” he explained, “*what I'm trying, with you, to do*. I can't do it alone, but I can do it with your help. *You can make her,*” he said, “*positively happy about me.*”

“About you?” she thoughtfully echoed. “*But what can I make her about herself?*” (196 emphasis added)

The passage initially exercises a disruption of the logic of cause and effect by disengaging characters' motivation for action from the personal or subjective: characters desire to act *for* other characters. This is not a matter of weighing the possible consequences of one's actions on those to whom one is closest, not a matter of Adam's and Charlotte's kind consideration for Maggie. What *The Golden Bowl* performs is a radical rethinking of the very notion of agency. The passage displays a disparity between motivation and subjectivity: Adam does not derive his motivation to marry Charlotte strictly from his own self, nor does he intend his marriage to satisfy a rigidly personal need. Adam regards his personal needs as synonymous with his daughter's. It is as if Adam's motivation originates *outside* himself, in Maggie.¹¹ Charlotte puts this clearly by asking: “[d]on't you appear rather to put it to me that I may accept your offer *for Maggie's sake?*” (197 emphasis added). But she continues by objecting that “I don't so clearly *see* her quite so much finding reassurance, or even quite so much needing it.” (197). Charlotte's objection does not contest Adam's manner of thinking about his own

¹¹ A similar “substitution” between characters occurs also in *The Wings of the Dove*. See particularly my discussion of the novel's famous chiasmus and the “will” to live as originating outside the subject, in the previous chapter (67-69).

marriage through and for his daughter, but merely suggests that Adam's understanding of Maggie's needs is inaccurate. By now Maggie has, quite literally, replaced Adam and Charlotte as the key to the question of their own marriage. Adam continues to insist that Maggie

“hadn't for a long time been so happy about anything as at your being there with me.”

“I was to be with you,” said Charlotte, “for her security.”

“Well,” Adam Verver rang out, “this *is* her security. You've only, if you can't see it, to ask her.” (198)

The chapter draws to a close with the couple's agreement that Charlotte should wait for Maggie, not only to support the marriage, but possibly, to demand it:

“aren't you promising me to abide by what Maggie says?”

Oh she wanted to be sure she was. “**Do you mean she'll ask it of me?**”

It gave him indeed, as by communication, a sense of the propriety of being himself certain. Yet what *was* he but certain? “She'll speak to you. **She'll speak to you for me.**” (199 emphasis added)

Confirming Adam's earlier conversation with Maggie in which they decided together that Charlotte is the sole possible candidate for Adam's marriage, Adam and Maggie emerge here as operating, the one *for* the other, in complete “concert” (257).

But Adam's and Charlotte's proposal scene ends with the further inclusion of a fourth wheel: the Prince. “Remember,” says Adam to Charlotte of Maggie's anticipated endorsement of the marriage,

“remember that in wiring to you she'll naturally speak even more for her husband than she has done in wiring me.”

It was only at a word that Charlotte had a demur. “‘Naturally' --?”

“Why our marriage puts him for you, you see--or puts you for him--into a new relation, whereas it leaves his relation to me unchanged. It therefore gives him more to say to you about it.” (207)

The question of Adam’s and Charlotte’s marriage is now inclusive of both Maggie and the Prince. It has become a delicate affair of four. The passage reverberates with irony as Adam speaks of Amerigo’s so-called “new relation” to Charlotte. But it is most suggestive, perhaps, in Charlotte’s subtle insinuation of Adam’s perversity, in her laconic repetition of the word “naturally.” At this point in the novel, Charlotte is not yet fully absorbed into the lives of the trio, and she therefore maintains a critical distance from which she regards Adam’s way of thinking about Maggie’s marriage to Amerigo as far from “natural.”

By marrying Adam, then, Charlotte would grant Maggie security, security which, however, is indistinguishable from Adam’s own. Through their all-consuming responsibility for one another, father and daughter have become virtually interchangeable. Charlotte, on her part, would marry Adam in order to “make Maggie right” (199), that is, in order to legitimize Maggie’s own marriage by relieving her from her bad conscience, her sense that by marrying the Prince she had forsaken her father.¹²

As the proposal scene demonstrates, characters in *The Golden Bowl* think themselves through other characters. It is as if consciousness were “located” at the level of relation *between* characters, as that relation itself.¹³ The structure is one of substitution,

¹² More insidiously still, marrying Charlotte would enable Maggie and Adam to remain together. For this reason, no other bride will do.

¹³ Cameron’s *Thinking in Henry James* has been most influential for the development of this point. As I have maintained in my Introduction, Cameron’s book was the first to elaborate on how the notion of “consciousness” or “thought” is disengaged from subjectivity and psychology. Though Cameron’s study is not concerned with the ethical dimensions of late James, Cameron’s treatment of

whereby characters appear and act as interchangeable rather than as independent beings.

This is not because characters are confused about who they are, but because their identities as distinct entities are available to them solely through their relations to one another. There is, then, for Adam, a fundamental difficulty, even an incoherence, in thinking of himself outside of his relation with his daughter:

success would be great [...] if the measure of *relief effected for Maggie* should at all prove to have been given *by his own actual sense of felicity*. He really didn't know when in his life he had thought of anything happier. *To think of it merely for himself would have been, even as he had just lately felt, even doing all justice to that condition--yes, impossible. But there was a grand difference in thinking of it for his child.* (187 emphasis added)

There is nothing sacrificial about Adam's way of thinking. He does not want to "give up" the freedom of his single state in order to spare Maggie the unease about her own marriage. Adam's willingness to marry is the recognition of his fundamental bond with Maggie, of their intertwined happiness, a happiness which exists only in the form of their relation itself.

4. Utility and Objectification

Implicit in this structure of substitution is a sense of the other person's unprecedented instrumentality. The structure of substitution, represented by the preposition "for" of the "one-for-the-other" (a formulation recurrent in James and in Levinas alike), is accompanied by the rhetoric of radical objectification and commodification so familiar in James. Many critics have noted that the language of money

consciousness is crucial to thinking about interpersonal relations as precisely that which exceeds subjectivity or individual consciousness.

and of commodities is regularly applied to people, signifying a powerful subjection of the human to regimes of domination.¹⁴

In the article “The Traces of Capitalist Patriarchy in the Silences of *The Golden Bowl*,” for example, Mimi Kairschner claims that money and financial imagery participate in the novel’s process of the concealment and naturalization of

the culturally idealized patriarchal and bourgeois familial relations of late nineteenth century England [...]. (187)

The Golden Bowl displays the structures of domination which belong to the novel’s particular “historical moment” (188) of late Victorianism. The main target of Kairschner’s critique is Adam, who is “a collector, not only of objects but of people” (189). Both the Prince and even the Principino are part of Adam’s human collection (190), and Charlotte too is assimilated, as an object, into Adam’s world

merely to be “useful” concerning Maggie [whose relation with Adam is “symbiotic”] and to perform “worldly” social functions for the Verver clan. (191)

Adam, the (undoubtedly evil) “family patriarch” (190) exercises a covert regime of capitalist domination over those around him. From Amerigo’s and Charlotte’s visit to Gloucester in the third part of Book I (*GB* 293),

the remainder of the book is an attempt to right this probable violation [the possibility that Charlotte might have the Prince’s baby!] and to alter the relations among the characters so that another possible future illicit union can never occur. [...] [Maggie] must not at all costs name her

¹⁴ For an early discussion of money imagery, see Gale (202-205). Leavis sees the “objectification” and appropriation of Charlotte and the Prince by the Ververs as the amorality of *The Golden Bowl*: “James clearly counts on our taking towards his main persons attitudes that we cannot take without forgetting our finer moral sense--our finer discriminative feeling for life and personality” (*The Great Tradition* 159). Later commentary on the subject includes works by Torsney, Allen, and Chernaik to name but a few. In addition, the *Henry James Review* is devoting a special issue (Fall 2000) to the subject of “material James.”

fears to Adam, her father, the patriarch. To do so would be to explode these unspoken fictions by which they all lived. The “unthinkable” price for her--that of separation from her father--is preferable to an utterance that would name their real situation, and it must be paid in order to retain the structure of familial relations appropriate to the socio-economic order [...]. (Kairschner 192)

Kairschner's Marxist analysis of covert capitalist/patriarchal domination bears some resemblance to Stevens' reading of the novel's repression of desire. For like Stevens, Kairschner sees the novel's aesthetic strategy as repressive (or concealing), and thus as exercising those same structures of domination which the novel thematizes.

And yet, far from concealing it, *The Golden Bowl* seems to flaunt the rhetoric of commodification in a provocatively explicit manner. Take for example Amerigo's anxious musings on the state of his attachments:

[h]e met the decent family eyes across the table [...] only to read in them [...] a kind of apprehension in which the terms and conditions were finally fixed and absolute. This directed regard [...] was, to the Prince's fancy, much of the same order as any glance directed [...] to the figure of a cheque received in the course of business and about to be enclosed to a banker. It made sure of the amount--and just so, from time to time, the amount of the Prince was certified. He was being thus, in renewed instalments, perpetually paid in; he already reposed in the bank as a value, but subject, in this comfortable way, to repeated, to infinite endorsement. The net result of all of which moreover was that the young man had no wish to see his value diminish. He himself decidedly hadn't fixed it--the 'figure' was a conception all of Mr. Verver's own. Certainly however everything must be kept up to it [...]. (268)

The exceptionally overt and excessive nature of James' financial language in fact complicates Kairschner's reading of a covert capitalist regime. The language is emphatically and unsettlingly financial. It disturbs, however, not because it dehumanizes

the Prince (who remains at all times a conscious and fully articulate subject) or because it portrays Adam as a ruthless capitalist, but because it describes a determined structure of relations in which Amerigo remains valuable yet perpetually fixed. The Prince is caught in an ongoing process which reinforces his involvement, his value, and his fixity. Financial rhetoric contributes to the novel's rhetoric of fixity, arrangement, and place. Exemplifying the novel's "miracles of arrangement," the passage is not concerned with the supposed reduction of the Prince into an object of economic exchange, but rather with the determinist implications that a perpetual process of installment and endorsement entails. To treat people as placed objects is to draw attention to the way in which people--like things--are organized, and organized in relation to one another. The rhetoric of objectification is characteristically administrative in accordance with the novel's dynamics of placing, arranging people together and later rearranging them.

More important, as the passage insists, the Prince may be a deposited cheque, but he is not, vulgarly or violently, "cashed in." His value is maintained without ever being utilized for a specific purpose. Characters-in-relation can, therefore, be thought of in terms of this excessive utility. They are perceived as utterly useful, but their utility is one which exceeds any actual use.¹⁵ The other person is no ordinary "tool," and does not therefore suffer the degradation to the practical or the economic. The objectification of persons announces the possibility of exchange without, however, exercising economic exchange. The structure of substitution thus begins with the event of relations as the very possibility

¹⁵ This notion of pure or excessive utility beyond any particular use corresponds to the Derridian notion of the "gift." The transcendental gift indicates the *possibility* of giving which (infinitely) precedes any act of giving. See Derrida's *The Gift of Death*, in which Derrida also briefly introduces Levinasian ethics. (Trans. David Wills. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995).

of exchange (and of commerce) without any specific event of exchange taking place.

“Relation” accordingly indicates the basic response-ability between people as the condition for communication and commerce. The objectification of persons can therefore be understood, initially, not in the locus of power relations as the possession and domination of the other person (an object) by the empowered self (the subject), but as the very condition for subject/object relations as such.

Finally, the radical objectification of persons may also signify a particular way of thinking about others as wholly “other.” The other person remains closed-up, hermetically sealed to one’s cognition, an object so concrete that it cannot be penetrated and therefore cannot be dominated. This being closed-up does not, then, denote one’s ability to approach the other as an object whose concrete bounds are marked. On the contrary, one cannot estimate the other’s borders and thus cannot approach the other to unseal him.¹⁶ It is precisely through the language of radical objectification and commodification that the other person is at once in relation with the self, and outside the self’s powerful grasp. As a radical object, the other is utterly separate from the self which nevertheless stands in relation to it. This is the paradox of the other, that one relates to it without being able to grab or grasp it, without being able to place the other in one’s field of consciousness or vision, without being able to touch it. The other, whilst in relation to me, remains inaccessible. Unease with the novel’s financial language derives from the so-called reduction of the human to the material. Such unease is founded on the humanist presupposition of the priority of the universal category of the “human.” But *The Golden*

¹⁶ The notion of the transcendental gift returns here. The other is like a gift which the self can never unwrap, and with which it can never “play.” Thus, the other does not present the self with any-thing in particular. The other’s gift is the gift of alterity. The other is not simply bountiful, it is bounty itself.

Bowl turns its back on such unifying categories. Characters in *The Golden Bowl* are not treated as individuals belonging to the single universal order of “humanity,” but as wholly unique (extraordinary) “cases” which precisely do not constitute a class or a genus. *The Golden Bowl*’s ongoing efforts are directed elsewhere, away from ideas of common humanity towards the “extraordinary” and the “perverse.” Part of the novel’s “extraordinary perversity,” then, lies in its excessive materialism, whereby persons are elevated rather than degraded to the status of objects.¹⁷

5. The Structure of the “Selfish Mass”

As objects prized and placed, characters in *The Golden Bowl* repeatedly contemplate their position in relation to one another. With Maggie’s notion of “miracles of arrangement” (401), this sense of the importance of structure, of positioning, and of place is powerfully reiterated. Relationships in *The Golden Bowl* are held fast in the position of “fatal safety” (280), to which the Prince’s image of himself as an infinitely endorsed

¹⁷ For a very different take on the way in which relations operate in *The Golden Bowl*, see Mark Seltzer’s *Henry James and the Art of Power*. In the chapter “The Vigilance of ‘Care’: Love and Power in *The Golden Bowl*,” Seltzer deconstructs the opposition between “love” and “power” to show how in the novel the two become interchangeable (65).

The Golden Bowl is a novel about power--conjugal, commercial, and imperial--but throughout the novel power is represented in terms of “mildness,” “harmony,” and “calm.” More precisely, the name that James gives to the exercising of power in *The Golden Bowl* is love. (62)

Seltzer is close to Kairschner in identifying a (mostly covert) repressive regime of domination, supported by what he calls “‘shameful’ networks of surveillance” (63). These latter mainly refer to the policing role of the Assinghams as the novel’s disciplinary squad. But, like Kairschner, Seltzer fails to engage with the text of *The Golden Bowl* in a sufficiently attentive manner. He applies to *The Golden Bowl* the sophisticated Foucauldian genealogy whilst positively ignoring the text’s peculiarly Jamesian apparatus (such as the precisely exaggerated and overt language of money). Seltzer’s reading of the Assinghams as “supervisors,” for instance, overwrites the text’s insistence throughout on Fanny’s essential “mix-up” in the lives of the other four. Consequently, Seltzer overlooks the unique predicament in *The Golden Bowl* of the multiplicity of relations, a predicament which breaks down any notions of regulation by replacing the idea of socially respectable (i.e. properly married) couples with an “all round” polygamous intimacy. To put this differently, if there are no monogamous couples (and thus also no transgressors) to begin with, what is there for the Assinghams to supervise?

cheque alludes. The novel's "arrangements" do not, then, disclose an ordering and policing structure as Mark Seltzer reads it.¹⁸ Conceiving of arrangements, perversely, even supernaturally, as "miracles," removes relations from participation in all natural or naturalized orders.¹⁹

Fanny invokes the idea of position to account for Charlotte's and the Prince's affair. She believes that Charlotte and Amerigo are in danger. "That danger being their blindness?" tries the Colonel, but Fanny corrects him:

"[t]hat danger being their *position*." (299 emphasis added).

For, "what is their whole so extraordinary situation, their extraordinary relation, but an opportunity?" (300) Fanny rhetorically asks. She means the opportunity for Charlotte and Amerigo to be perversely positioned together without limits and restrictions. Charlotte and the Prince are the first to apprehend their unusual position as exonerating their motives and justifying their affair. Like Fanny Assingham, they too realize that their relationship was produced, in some ways inevitably, out of the foursome's strange positioning in relation to one another. In this positioning itself, which holds all four together in magic-like tranquillity and stasis, lies the "opportunity" for Charlotte and the Prince. Their affair is not so much a result of their uncontrollable passion for each other, as the result of their being accidentally caught, along with Maggie and Adam, in a four-way crossfire of love. Thus it can be justly said of Amerigo and Charlotte that

¹⁸ I outline Seltzer's reading of *The Golden Bowl* in the previous footnote.

¹⁹ The objectification of persons is, of course, part of James' formalist thinking. Yet, as I shall claim in the next chapter on *The American Scene*, James uses this formalism to amplify, not eliminate, otherness. Levinas too conceives of the other person as an object more objectal than any ordinary object. The other's extreme concreteness makes him/her less, not more, assimilable.

[n]othing stranger surely had ever happened to a conscientious, a well-meaning, a perfectly passive pair: no more extraordinary decree had ever been launched against such victims than this of forcing them against their will into a relation of mutual close contact that they had done everything to avoid. (244)

Charlotte's relationship with the Prince is inseparable from Maggie's relationship with Adam, so that all four are practically "stuck" together in a passive equilibrium, what the Prince thinks of as the "consensus" (275). To Amerigo's mind, he has been "thrust, systematically, with another woman" (275) as a result of Maggie's spending so much of her time with her father, leaving, even encouraging Charlotte and the Prince to spend their time with one another.

Their being thus caught up together paradoxically allows them all the kind of freedom which clashes with or transcends their marital obligations. If acknowledged, these obligations would at once divide them into mutually exclusive pairs. Under such odd circumstances, Maggie and Adam can blissfully continue their relationship as if neither had ever married, and Amerigo and Charlotte can safely renew their intimate affair as if they too were not exclusively attached to others. This predicament allows Charlotte and Amerigo to turn down Fanny's offer that they return from Matcham with the Assinghams. The Prince can therefore think that

[i]t was impossible, for reasons, that he should travel to town with the Assinghams; it was impossible for the same reasons that he should travel to town save in the conditions that he had for the last twenty-four hours been privately, and it might have been said profoundly, thinking out. The result of his thought was already precious to him, and this put at his service, he sufficiently believed, the right tone for disposing of his elder friend's suggestion [...] that he and

Charlotte would conveniently take the same train and occupy the same compartment as the Colonel and herself. (281)

What enables the Prince to so easily and comfortably refuse Fanny's offer to travel back together for the sake of propriety in favour of staying behind with Charlotte? It is Charlotte who has the answer when she points out to Amerigo that the two of them are

“fatally, as it were--*safe*. Pardon the low expression--since it's what we happen to be. **We're so because *they* are.** And they're so because they can't be anything else from the moment that, having originally intervened for them, she [Fanny] wouldn't now be able to bear herself if she didn't keep them so. That's the way **she's inevitably *with us*.** [...] **We hang essentially together.**”

“Well,” the Prince candidly allowed she did bring it home to him. **Every way it worked out.** “Yes, I see. **We hang essentially together.**” (280-281 emphasis added)

“We hang essentially together” is not simply a cynical calculation on the lovers' part, their realization that Fanny's hands are tied and that she could not report back to Maggie and Adam because of her own involvement in their unusual predicament. The question is not one of Fanny's attitude towards Charlotte's and the Prince's affair, nor is it a question of what, given that attitude, Fanny might wish to do. The point is, conversely, that like Charlotte and Amerigo (indeed, like Maggie and Adam as well), Fanny too is

fixed, that she must stand exactly where everything has, by her own act, placed her. (279)

Fanny is reduced to passivity, paralyzed by her position, her place, in the situation she assisted in creating.

Significantly, it is to this same fixity that Charlotte appeals earlier at the Foreign Office ball in order to defend her public appearance with the Prince in the absence of her husband. Charlotte and Amerigo appear together at the ball, having left Adam and Maggie

behind at Eaton Square. Fanny is aware she might upset Charlotte if she openly criticizes her conduct, but Charlotte coolly dismisses Fanny's worries. "You can," she says to Fanny, "ask me anything under the sun you like, because, don't you see? you can't upset me." And she continues to ponder aloud on this state of immunity:

"[i]ndeed, love, you simply *couldn't* even if you thought it necessary [...]. Nobody could, **for it belongs to my situation that I'm, by no merit of my own, just fixed--fixed as fast as a pin stuck up to its head in a cushion. I'm placed--I can't imagine any one *more* placed. There I *am!*"** (220 emphasis added)

Charlotte knows both she and Fanny are fixed and placed in a manner which determines their situation for better and for worse; it allows for certain possibilities just as it hinders others. In Charlotte's case, her "being placed" excuses her from what appears to Fanny to be her open neglect of her husband, and from her "unlawful" appearance with her son in law, whose own wife, in turn, has stayed at home with Charlotte's husband. Charlotte contends that Maggie

"likes him [Adam] best alone. And it's the way [...] in which he best likes *her*. It's what I mean therefore by being 'placed.' And the great thing is, as they say, to 'know' one's place. **Doesn't it all strike you," she wound up, "as rather placing the Prince too?"** (222 emphasis added)

Fanny does not miss a thing: "[s]he had at this moment the sense as of a large heaped dish presented to her intelligence and inviting it to a feast--so thick were the notes of intention in this remarkable speech" (222).

Fanny fully appreciates Charlotte's insinuations. Appearing at the ball with the Prince does not merely disclose the impropriety between Charlotte and Amerigo, it also reflects the impropriety between Maggie and her father, their preference to remain

together at home. This is a situation to which Maggie and Adam contribute as much as Charlotte and the Prince, and it once again denotes an overall structure of relations in which each character (like a strategically placed piece on a chessboard) is positioned in relation to others. Yet, unlike a game of strategic ploys, what befalls each of these four “players” reflects their common good, what, for the moment, seems best for everyone. The present arrangement, argues Charlotte, does not essentially distinguish between the two households and their respective marriages. It rather insures the opposite.

“The fact of our distinct establishments [...] makes her [Maggie] really see more of him [Adam] than when they had the same house. To make sure she doesn’t fail of it *she’s always arranging for it*--which she didn’t have to do while they lived together. But she likes to arrange, [...] it peculiarly suits her; and the result of our separate households is really, for them, more contact and more intimacy.” (222 emphasis added)²⁰

The Prince too invokes the multiple structure of relations to explain his necessary involvement with Mrs. Verver. He tells Fanny that “there *is* always the fact that we’re of the same connexion, of--what is your word?--the same ‘concern.’ We’re certainly not, with relation to our respective *sposi*, simply formal acquaintances. **We’re in the same boat [...]**” (228 emphasis added). Fanny initially resists Amerigo’s argument by maintaining that Charlotte’s relation with Adam is separate from her relation to the Prince and to Maggie: “I don’t know what you mean by the ‘same’ boat. Charlotte is naturally in Mr. Verver’s boat” (228). But Amerigo promptly replies:

“[a]nd pray am *I* not in Mr. Verver’s boat too?” (228)

²⁰ Charlotte’s statement is later echoed by Maggie’s confession: “I live in the midst of miracles of arrangement, half of which I admit are my own” (401).

With this stated, the polygamy the Prince sees as governing the foursome's relations is confirmed. If Amerigo seemed at first to be arguing that he and Charlotte found themselves excluded, as castaways, from Maggie's and Adam's boat, his response to Fanny's objection makes clear that he is rather arguing the opposite. He considers them all to be in the same boat together. The boat is itself grounded and placed, "a good deal tied up at the dock, or anchored, if you like, out in the stream" (230). In this anchored state, continues the Prince, "I have to jump out from time to time to stretch my legs, and you'll probably perceive, if you give it your attention that Charlotte really can't help occasionally doing the same" (230). The boat stands for the peculiar communal structure that brings together all four people and ignores their separate and official obligations to one another. Seen from inside the boat, the "adulterous" affair is but

"a practical result of our combination--call the whole thing one of the harmless little plunges, off the deck, inevitable for each of us. Why not take them, when they occur, as inevitable--and above all as not endangering life or limb?" (230)

The image of the boat describes a community whose relations are (as of yet) unburdened by offices and titles, a group in which particular familial and marital roles have not yet been dealt out and in which each attachment exists absolutely and uncompromisingly, blind to all other attachments, as if those did not exist in comparison and competition with the rest. In this communal boat, the possibility of the Prince forming an intimate attachment with Charlotte whilst apparently ignoring his exclusive obligation to Maggie ought not to alarm, since, by the very law(lessness) of this communal set-up, the commitments and restrictions implicit in "marriage" (the idea of the exclusivity and monogamy of the "pair") have not been instituted. The metaphor of the boat must then be

thought of in this radical and anarchic fashion, for only then could the Prince's argument to Fanny make sense.

The Prince's involvement with Charlotte is but one possible combination out of the multiple relations of the communal boat. Maggie's relationship with Adam, which wholly exceeds the "familial" (hence exceeds also the psychoanalytically "Oedipal"), is another necessary possibility of the polygamy or multiplicity of relations. "Adultery" and "incest" do not elucidate or describe these two relations. The boat image provides the grounds for understanding the "perverse" relations in *The Golden Bowl*, for it illustrates that relationships are the effect of the characters continually being in the same boat.

Indeed, the foursome's "polygamous paradise" is sharply contrasted to the conventional dinner guests at the Ververs' in the third part of Book I. The company at dinner included

for the most part very bland, though very exalted, immensely announceable and hierarchically placeable couples [...]. (265)²¹

This is not the only remark which compares the (polygamous) world of the four to the (monogamous) world of "pairs." Thinking about their curious predicament Maggie supposes that

they had given their life *this unusual extension and this liberal form, which many families, many couples, and still more many pairs of couples, wouldn't have found workable.* (329 emphasis added)

²¹ The sentences overtly refers to the social status of the guests. But the undercurrent is one which

And the sentence immediately continues to tell how this workable though extraordinary structure tantalizes those bland and proper couples and pairs:

[t]hat last truth had been distinctly brought home to them by the bright testimony, the quite explicit envy, of most of their friends, who had remarked to them again and again that they must, on all the showing, to keep such terms, be people of the highest amiability [...]. (329)²²

²² This passage in the beginning of Book II follows directly Maggie's daydream of the pagoda (327-328). The pagoda image evolves throughout the sequence and its meaning shifts slightly with each new connection. At first, the pagoda seems to offer (as did the Prince's plainer image of the boat), a crystallization and concretion of the four's odd predicament. Indeed, Maggie's "situation so long present to her as practically unattackable [...] had been occupying for months and months the very centre of the garden of her life, but *it had reared itself there like some strange tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful beautiful but outlandish pagoda [...]*" (327 emphasis added). A couple of sentences later Maggie suddenly wants to enter the pagoda, "never quite making out as yet where she might have entered had she wished" (327). On the next page the pagoda becomes a "Mahometan mosque" (328), a strange but holy place which must not be entered unlawfully: "there so hung about it the vision of one's putting off one's shoes to enter and even verily of one's paying with one's life if found there as an interloper" (328). The sequence ends with Maggie knocking on the pagoda and being acknowledged from the inside.

Although she

could scarce have said whether for admission or for what; she had applied her hand to a cool smooth spot and had waited to see what would happen. Something *had* happened; it was as if a sound, at her touch [...] had come back to her from within; a sound sufficiently suggesting that her approach had been noted. (328)

Who could it be inside the pagoda if not Maggie herself? The pagoda is thus a dual image, for it simultaneously designates what is most central and integral to Maggie's existence, and what is unfamiliar and alien to it. The changing significations of this solid image contribute to the dreaminess of the scene: the shifts within the associative streak whose stabilizing feature is the pagoda are like the whimsical rhythms of thought. In the next long paragraph James intervenes with a commentary on the duality of the pagoda:

[i]f this image, however, may represent our young woman's consciousness of a recent change in her life [...] it must *at the same time* be observed that she both sought and found in renewed circulation, as I have called it, a measure of *relief from the idea of having perhaps to answer for what she had done*. (328 emphasis added)

And James continues with what seems like an unveiling of the pagoda's meaning.

The pagoda in her blooming garden figured *the arrangement--how otherwise was it to be named?*--by which, so strikingly, she had been able to marry without breaking, as she liked to put it, with her past. She had surrendered herself to her husband without the shadow of a reserve or a condition and yet hadn't all the while given up her father by the least little inch. She had compassed the high felicity of seeing the two men beautifully take to each other, and nothing in her marriage had marked it as more happy than this fact of its having practically given the elder [...] a new friend. What had moreover all the while enriched the whole aspect of success was that the latter's marriage had been no more measurably paid for than hers. [...] That it was remarkable they should have been able at once so to separate and so to keep together had never for a moment, from however far back, been equivocal to her. (328 emphasis added)

Maggie's toying with the gilded image of the pagoda is at once an affirmation of change, and a distraction from it. The pagoda itself inhabits this duality or contradiction. For just as the pagoda's blissful tranquillity must be disrupted by Maggie's sobering knock, so the "arrangement" which the pagoda represents must be disrupted and disturbed. The pagoda scene is, then, essentially a dream about the end

If the Prince's earlier justification to Fanny of his relationship with Charlotte in his metaphor of the boat remains suspect because it is uttered by the Prince himself, and because it is meant, at least partly, as self-defense; it is Maggie who later corroborates Amerigo's argument by a reworking of his metaphor. Maggie does not resort to the image of the vessel. She turns to the mechanical and more elaborate metaphor of a coach, whose four wheels move in unison, so that Maggie's individual movement is cancelled out by the motion of the other three wheels. In the image of the moving wheels, Maggie imagines Charlotte and the Prince to be mechanically positioned together, but she further acknowledges her own place in the overall structure. I quote here at length because of the passage's exceptional manner of treating the various themes of polygamy, objectification and instrumentality, and structure. Maggie is trying to make sense of the events that followed her father's marriage to Charlotte. As she thinks of her stepmother it occurs to Maggie that the former

had been "had in," as the servants always said of extra help, because they had thus suffered it to be pointed out to them that if their family coach lumbered and stuck the fault was in its lacking its complement of wheels. **Having but three, as they might say, they wanted another, and what had Charlotte from the first but begin to act, on the spot, and ever so smoothly and beautifully, as a fourth?** Nothing had been immediately more manifest than the greater grace of the movement of the vehicle--as to which, for the completeness of her image, Maggie was now supremely to feel how **every strain had been lightened for herself. So far as *she* was one of the wheels she had but to keep in her place, since the work was done for her she felt no weight, and it wasn't too much to acknowledge that she had scarce to turn round.** She had a long pause before the fire during which she might have been fixing with intensity her projected

of dreaming (or of waking up), of interrupting the extraordinary with the ordinary: a dream of profanation.

vision, have been conscious even of its taking an absurd, a fantastic shape. She might have been watching the family coach pass and noting that somehow **Amerigo and Charlotte were pulling it while she and her father were not so much as pushing**. They were seated inside together, dandling the Principino and holding him up to the windows to see and be seen like an infant positively royal; so that **the exertion was all with the others**. Maggie found in this image a repeated challenge; [...] She had seen herself at last, in the picture she was studying, suddenly jump from the coach [...]. (341-342 emphasis added)

Maggie's "projected vision" of the coach matches the Prince's image of the boat.

Both vehicle and vessel do not merely carry all four people as incidental passengers on a journey, they epitomize the four's adhesive "togetherness," as if the four passengers were themselves the very objects that carry them along. As part of the vehicle itself, Maggie imagines herself to be one of the coach's four spinning wheels. But, as one wheel caught up in the ongoing motion of four, Maggie is, in effect, reduced to passivity, turning on the energy of the other wheels rather than her own. Further, the image evolves, from Maggie thinking herself a passive and inanimate object in oblivious motion, to her image of herself as a parasitic passenger letting Charlotte and Amerigo pull the carriage, only to facilitate her journey with her father.²³ The latter part of the passage confirms Fanny's prophetic words to her husband on her return from Matcham that Maggie will assume the blame for the whole affair and "take it all herself" (307). Indeed, the metaphor of the family coach defines for Maggie her unconditional responsibility for the others by illustrating how, by being positioned as one among four, she has in fact helped to create and prolong their

²³ As part of the novel's crisscrossing of images, Maggie's vision of Charlotte pulling the carriage is anticipated earlier in Fanny's likening Charlotte to a workhorse: "if Maggie [...] makes it seem to him [Adam] all so flourishingly to fit, Charlotte does her part not less. And her part is very large. Charlotte,' Fanny declared, 'works like a horse'" (319).

situation. The end of the passage introduces a further development in the coach image as Maggie sees herself jumping off the coach, and separating herself from the other three wheels. Maggie's transforming image of the moving family coach, with its references to the extended structure of four, the simultaneity of movement and passivity, and the upcoming challenge of separation, encapsulates the entire proceedings of the novel from beginning to end.

Maggie can now view the problem as essentially logistical, as derived purely from the problematic way in which the four are arranged together. The prospect of separation visualized as Maggie's jumping off the coach, accordingly entails a job of re-arrangement. Charlotte and Amerigo themselves show no intentions of shaking the foundations of their mutual arrangement. But Maggie can no longer continue to be a passive part of this strange community.

It all came back in consequence to some required process of their own, a process operating quite positively as a precaution and a policy. They had got her into the bath and, for consistency with themselves--which was with each other--must keep her there. In that condition she wouldn't interfere with the policy, which was established, which was **arranged**. Her thought over this arrived at a great intensity [...] Policy or no policy, **it was they themselves** [Charlotte and Amerigo] **who were arranged**. **She must be kept in position so as not to disarrange them**. It fitted immensely together, the whole thing, as soon as she could give them a motive; for, strangely as it had by this time begun to appear to herself, **she hadn't hitherto imagined them sustained by an ideal distinguishably different from her own**. **Of course they were arranged--all four of arranged; but what had the basis of their life been precisely but that they were**

arranged together? Ah! Amerigo and Charlotte were arranged together, but she--to confine the matter only to herself--was arranged apart. (355-356 emphasis added)²⁴

Maggie's (cinematic) image of the coach pulled forth by Charlotte and the Prince while Maggie and Adam ride in it holding Maggie's and the Prince's child is supremely decadent. But whereas the coach image was thought by Maggie to be "absurd" and "fantastic," it is Adam who offers the most radical reworking of the idea of the foursome's polygamous relations. Unlike Amerigo's colloquial image of the boat and Maggie's mechanical image of the coach, Adam's image is highly abstract:

"we're selfish together--we move as a **selfish mass**. You see we want always the same thing," he had gone on--"and that holds us, that binds us, together. **We want each other,**" he had further explained; "**only wanting it, each time, for each other.** That's what I call **the happy spell**; but it's also a little--possibly--the **immorality.**" (388)

Adam's notion of the "selfish mass" offers a radical abstraction of the more conventional images of the boat and the coach: not only does "mass" denote a quantity and a multiplicity of people, it also recalls "mass" as inanimate "matter." The "selfish mass" is therefore a wholly impersonal gathering of individuals into a most peculiar, most outrageous, type of community. For if selfishness is by definition the quality of individual persons, the notion of a "selfish mass" would have to refer to a community in which persons, psychologically and ontologically, no longer exist. Indeed, Marcia Ian described

²⁴ Maggie plainly understands that in wanting Charlotte and the Prince to split, she is also demanding her separation from her father. "Separate, my dear? Do you want them to separate? Then you want *us* to--you and me? For how can one separation take place without the other?" That was the question that in spirit she had heard him ask [...]" (376).

the “selfish mass” as an “ontological absurdity” (28). The notion of the selfish mass may be said to epitomize the structure of relations in Book I and throughout most of Book II.²⁵

I have demonstrated in detail how both Amerigo and Maggie conceive of their situation in almost identical terms, in spite of the very different ways in which each of them invariably experiences it. Fanny too returns to the Prince’s image of the boat when she tells the Colonel “I *see* the boat they’re in, but I’m not, thank God, in it myself” (300). The fixity, passivity, and instrumentality asserted in Maggie’s “family coach” is separately acknowledged by Charlotte in her conversation with Fanny (220-225) as well as in the conversation between Charlotte and the Prince (279-281). Adam’s “concept” of the “selfish mass” supplants these various images of the polygamous community by stretching them to their visual and conceptual limit.

That different characters conceive of their situation in similar ways, that they can view themselves in relation to the others--*for* others--does not indicate a coincidence of knowledge or the peace achieved by reasonable agreement. Their extraordinary concurrence with one another is fantastic, occult, “a bit uncanny” (388). The relation to others as both mystified and mystifying best delivers the novel’s exceptional idea of

²⁵ The image of the “selfish mass” is comically menacing. It is undoubtedly difficult to imagine what a “selfish mass” might look like. Attempts at visualizing a “selfish mass” may recall the image from *The Blob*, the sci-fi B movie with Steve McQueen in which a devouring mass from outer space insatiably consumes all that stands in its way (*The Blob*. Dir. Irvin S. Yeaworth Jr. Perf. Steve McQueen, Aneta Corseaut, and Earl Rowe. Paramount Films, 1958). Ian’s understanding of the “selfish mass” differs from my own in that it *opposes* the “selfish mass” to separation. Separation, for Ian, signifies the “overwhelming desire for self-possession--and therefore for self” (27). *The Golden Bowl* contrasts these two modes of being: a mode of *subsumption* in the “selfish mass” and an essentially solipsistic desire for *separation* of the self. Towards the end of the novel, Maggie’s mind “becomes increasingly available to her as a source of pleasure and authority, all the while becoming proportionally inscrutable to others” (31). My point has been, conversely, that rather than being at odds with the “selfish mass,” separation is inextricably linked to it. The logic of separation, and of solipsism, is to be understood through this prior subsumption in the relation with the other.

community. This extraordinary community whose “labyrinthine” interiors (454) *The Golden Bowl* painstakingly charts is not one where matters are discussed and knowledge shared. Knowledge is not communicated, and the raw truth of facts is shunned. Yet, knowledge is menacing not because it will wake the characters up from their dream-like state and force them to confront unpleasant realities. Knowledge belongs to a subordinate and secondary order which has no part in determining the community’s relations. Thus, knowledge is referred to, epidemically, as “the *outbreak* of the definite” (441 emphasis added). Knowledge is threatening precisely because to resort to the fact or the truth (of “adultery”) would distort, even falsify, the true significance of the foursome’s existence. Efforts to read the novel as exercising the repression of “truth,” and its replacing with the “lie” of the equilibrium, run counter to the extraordinary rationale that governs James’ representation of personal relations.

Yet, in what way does the “happy spell” of the “selfish mass” reflect an “immorality,” and how, moreover, does the “job of separation” (Nussbaum 128) which takes place in Book II nonetheless remain conditional on the “immoral” polygamy of the “selfish mass,” an “immorality” which one may otherwise call “ethics”?

6. Separation, or the Birth of Justice

“There seems a kind of charm, doesn’t there? on our life [...] A kind of wicked selfish prosperity perhaps, as if we had grabbed everything, fixed everything, down to the last lovely object for the last glass case of the last corner, left over, of my old show. That’s the only take-off, that it has made us perhaps lazy, a wee bit languid--*lying like gods together, all careless of mankind.*” (GB 387 emphasis added)

The peculiar structure of the “selfish mass” does not denote an abandonment of responsibility. As both Fanny and Adam point out, the fact that the four are “too much taken up with considering each other,” their good will “all round,” that they are “selfish together,” is what inevitably also brings about the Prince’s infidelity, and enables Maggie to continue her intense relationship with her father. How, then, can the multiplicity of relations at once denote care and responsibility for others and a blatant disregard for their official attachments?

The “extraordinary perversity” of the “selfish mass” consists in the fact that in this communal structure particular relations exist simultaneously as parallels that never touch. Thus, the characters are involved in multiple relations in a chaotic and undifferentiated way, that is, without comparing or organizing these relations systematically. In such a “bundle of relations,” the Prince is able to be simultaneously (that is, polygamously) attached to both Maggie and Charlotte, and Maggie can remain wholly attached to her father and the Prince. Only when a sort of “clash” occurs between different relationships, a

clash which makes Maggie weigh the (absolute) demands of two such parallel relations one against the other, does the possibility of separation from the “selfish mass” occur.

“[O]ur first choice as adults,” writes Martha Nussbaum in “James’s *The Golden Bowl*: Literature as Moral Philosophy,” “is the choice to pursue our personal goals at the expense of a separation from and a break with the parent. And we cannot ever count on the fact that our love of a husband will not require the spiritual death of a best friend and mentor, that fidelity to a wife will not require cruelty to a former lover” (133). But, the complex set-up of relations in Book I, complicates Nussbaum’s reading of *The Golden Bowl* as a novel “about the development of a woman” (133). As I have already suggested, the novel refrains from focusing on Maggie alone, and thus also on what would be her independent development. For Maggie’s consciousness constantly operates through the relationships in which she is entangled, never in isolation. And only as so entangled are her actions at all sensible. The question of the relation between Books I and II ought, then, to refer to the communal structure of the “selfish mass,” and not to Maggie alone. What breaks the “happy spell” of polygamy? What is the nature of the change that leads Maggie away from the “selfish mass” towards its separation into couples?

Colonel Assingham puts this question to Fanny:

“But what then has happened, from one day to the other, to *her*? What has opened her eyes?”

“They were never really shut. She misses him.”

“Then why hasn’t she missed him before?”

Well, facing him there, among their domestic glooms and glints, Fanny worked it out.

“She did--but she wouldn’t let herself know it. She had her reason--she wore a blind. Now at

least her situation has come to her head. To-day she does know it. And that's illuminating. It has been," Mrs. Assingham wound up, "illuminating to *me*." (308-309)

To Fanny, it is less significant to figure out *why* Maggie has suddenly realized that she misses the Prince and that she now desires to "possess" him (339). Still, Fanny finds the matter "illuminating. It has been [...] illuminating to *me*." Fanny's interest is not strictly in Maggie's state of mind. Unlike the Colonel, Fanny is unconcerned with Maggie's psychological disposition. When the Colonel exclaims of Maggie, "[p]oor little girl!" Fanny swiftly returns

"Ah no--don't pity her!"

This nevertheless pulled him up. "We mayn't even be sorry for her?"

"Not now [...]. We might have pitied her before--for all the good it would then have done her; we might have begun some time ago. **Now however she has begun to live.** And the way it comes to me, the way it comes to me--" [...].

"The way it comes to you can scarcely be that she'll like it!"

"The way it comes to me is that she *will* live." (309 emphasis added)

To "live" does not signify here, as Nussbaum implies, the end of a process of (sexual) development by which Maggie understands that life is necessarily flawed, and that she will therefore have to sacrifice her father in order to keep her husband. To "live" is directly opposed to Adam's conception of the "selfish mass" as "lying like gods together, all careless of mankind." The earthly life of "mankind" comes into being on Amerigo's and Charlotte's return from Matcham, when Maggie is forced to think about her relationship with Adam, Adam's relation with Charlotte, and her own relation with the Prince, as relations which must be *reckoned with equally*, and which therefore can no longer exist oblivious of each other. At this moment of intrusion, the "selfish mass" compromises (and

profanes) its chaotic divinity, and becomes an ordered society. This moment marks the birth of the order of justice.²⁶

Book I of *The Golden Bowl* finds the characters multiply yet absolutely attached in an impossible balance. That characters are absolutely attached to one another is evident from the way in which relationships co-exist multiply, indifferent to other relations and the demands that those equally place. Only through the entry and the intrusion of what Levinas called the “third party” do the multiple relations of the “selfish mass” at once require a “leveling.” Maggie’s discovery of the so-called “adultery” forces her to confront Charlotte as the third party who intrudes, yet whose intrusion amounts to nothing short of an appeal for justice.

Maggie’s discovery of the affair does not lead her to denounce Charlotte, but, incredibly, to assume the blame herself. Following Maggie’s and Adam’s discussion of the immorality of the “selfish mass,” Maggie confides in Fanny Assingham: “I’m saying that I’m bewildered and tormented, and that I’ve no one but you to speak to. I’ve thought, I’ve in fact been sure, that you’ve seen for yourself how much this is the case. It’s why I’ve believed you would meet me half way” (405). Fanny *pretends* not to have grasped the true meaning of Maggie’s plea. She thus tests Maggie by cautiously proceeding to defend Charlotte and the Prince:

“[h]alfway to what? To denouncing,” Fanny asked, “two persons, friends of years, whom I’ve always immensely admired and liked, and against whom I haven’t the shadow of a charge to make?”

²⁶ The institution of justice is the “profanation”--the breaking into the shrine of the order of the everyday--to which I alluded in my explication of the pagoda scene (107n). The pagoda is the place where one would find those “gods [...] all careless of mankind.”

Maggie looked at her with wide eyes. “**I had much rather you should denounce *me* than denounce them.** Denounce me, denounce me,” she said, “if you can see your way.” It was exactly what she appeared to have argued out with herself. “If conscientiously you can denounce me; if conscientiously you can revile me; if conscientiously you can put me in my place for a low-minded little pig--!”

“Well?” said Mrs. Assingham consideringly, as she paused for emphasis.

“**I think I shall be saved.**” (405 emphasis added)

Mrs. Assingham can indeed see her way. Having been, as she previously put it, “illuminated,” Fanny sees the sense in Maggie’s desire to be denounced. For rather than becoming conscious of a crime committed against her by Charlotte and the Prince, Maggie suddenly understands something about the conditions which made this “crime” possible. This sudden recognition takes place for Maggie through Charlotte’s intrusive presence.

Levinas writes that

[b]ecoming conscious is motivated by *the presence of the third alongside the neighbour* approached. The third is also approached; and *the relationship between the neighbour and the third cannot be indifferent to me* when I approach. *There must be justice among incomparable ones.* There must then be a comparison between incomparables, and a synopsis, a togetherness and contemporaneousness; there must be thematization, thought [...]. (*Basic Philosophical Writings* 122 emphasis added)

Maggie becomes conscious of the need for separation and change only when she is suddenly aware of the relationship between Charlotte as the “third” party, and the Prince as Maggie’s closer “neighbour.” For Maggie, the result of this recognition is neither the need for triumph nor the need for revenge, but the need for a careful rearrangement of relations which amounts to a separation of the foursome into couples.

Charlotte does not enter Maggie's consciousness as the "other woman" (Stevens 67). She does so, ethically, as the "third party" who defines for Maggie her own moral duty in the form of a silent accusation. Charlotte's affair with the Prince obliges Maggie to acknowledge the "immorality" of the "selfish mass" as that state of radical confusion of roles which defines the relationships in Book I. As the "third party" in Maggie's marriage Charlotte in fact functions not as the mistress who must be removed, but, conversely, as the third person whose interference must be taken into account as a claim for justice and equality. As Levinas writes in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, the "third party"

is of itself the limit of responsibility [between the self and its neighbour] and the birth of the question: What do I have to do with justice? A question of consciousness. (157)

In other words, Charlotte's intrusion in Maggie's marriage marks Maggie's awakening into the consciousness that her attachment to her father cannot remain "careless of mankind," and it calls for limiting and qualifying that relationship in accordance with Charlotte's relation to Adam. Maggie is required to consider her responsibility towards other people in a comparative way and to separate her relations with Adam and Amerigo by "fitting" them into particular and designated roles. Thus, separation, for Maggie is not the necessary outcome of Charlotte's infidelity, but the result of Charlotte's "value":

"[s]he's beautiful, beautiful!" her sensibility reported to her the shade of a new note. It was all she might have wished, for it was, with a kind of speaking competence, the note of possession and control; and yet it conveyed to her as nothing till now had done the reality of their parting. **They were parting, in the light of it, absolutely on Charlotte's value--**the value that was filling the room out of which they had stepped as if to give it play, and with which the Prince on his side was perhaps making larger acquaintance. (577 emphasis added)

Separation amounts to a release from the *fixity* of the “selfish mass,” as opposed to a release from perverse *fixations*. If earlier Maggie felt herself locked in motion as a wheel among four, she now imagines herself free to move along with Amerigo as her husband. “He was with her as if he were hers, hers in a degree and on a scale, with an intensity and an intimacy, that were a new and strange quantity, that were like the irruption of a tide *loosening them where they had stuck and making them feel they floated*” (560 emphasis added). Does not Levinas’ description of the transition from ethics to justice as the sobering rite of betrayal and dissolution evoke *The Golden Bowl* in virtually identical terms?

The society of love is a society of two, a society of solitudes, resisting universality. Its universality can be construed only in time, by *successive infidelities*, by the change of friends. (*Entre Nous* 20 emphasis added)

Separation, therefore, marks the resolution of the radical confusion of relations by a systematic “tagging” of relations into particular types within a universal category. Thus tagged, relations are placed, in the first instant separately, in categories of their own (“marital,” “filial,” etc.) to be subsequently gathered together comprehensively into the larger unity (“the family”), only to be gathered yet again into the single universal category (the “family of man”: “humanity”). The “selfish mass” thus undergoes a separation and a classification, and its originary state of polygamy is succeeded by an order which limits relations and which makes them intelligible.

One may think of Book I as laying bare a “world” which (infinitely) precedes the birth of justice, not because it allows for “deviant” or “immoral” relations to take place, but because it takes as its premise and its theme the undifferentiated relation between self

and other, as the very *condition* of justice. Consequently, the institution of marriage (and that of the family) in *The Golden Bowl* does not function as an institution that regulates or controls relationships. Nor does marriage appear as a basic value which the Prince's adultery threatens to disrupt and which the novel subsequently restores and reinforces. The monogamy of marriage appears *at last* as the product of a chaotic multiplicity of relations. It follows, therefore, that Book II does not offer a correction or a revision of Book I. On the contrary, the two Books are related conditionally.

The idea of justice which the separation of Book II brings into being does not, then, stem from any prior idea of social equality. It comes, perversely, from the radical incompatibility or inequality between different interpersonal relations. So that, as Levinas writes, "justice is not a legality regulating human masses, from which a technique of social equilibrium is drawn, harmonizing antagonistic forces" (*Otherwise* 159). *The Golden Bowl* is not concerned with instituting and affirming marriage; its concern is, radically, with the anarchic and polygamous basis of social order, that is, with the distinctly ethical basis for moral law. *The Golden Bowl* ends with an act of violence. Separation is a harsh tearing apart of loved ones in justice's course. Indeed, as Levinas explains,

[t]here is a certain measure of violence necessary in terms of justice [...] if one speaks of justice, it is necessary to allow for judges [Maggie], it is necessary to allow for institutions [marriage, the family] [...] to live in a world of citizens, and not only in the order of the Face to Face. (*Entre Nous* 105)

I have tried to illustrate the primacy of the multiplicity of personal relations in *The Golden Bowl*. Not requiring resolution, correction, or revision, this structure of multiplicity in fact constitutes the ethical foundation for the establishing of social order in

Book II, an order assumed through the separation into couples. Rather than reading *The Golden Bowl* as a drama of the adulterous and the Oedipal, the novel renders these models of transgression unintelligible. This is because both the institution of marriage and that of the family come into being at the very end of the novel and can only do so on the basis of the polygamous relations of Book I. This kind of polygamous structure grants *The Golden Bowl* its most radical quality and begins to suggest new ways in which James' major phase can be thought as "ethical." Far from merely reflecting late-Victorian values of social propriety, *The Golden Bowl* offers a profound meditation on the precisely improper conditions of social order as such.

Chapter 3 - *Missing Persons: (Im)personality and the Social Relation in The American Scene*

Introduction: Personality and Impersonality

One of the most significant features of *The American Scene* (1906) is the book's apparent absence of persons. There are hardly any people mentioned in the text, and the few who are, like James' occasional travelling companion, a tentative "responsive friend" (137), a "dear little harsh, intelligent, sympathetic American boy" (200), or a "little old lady" (283), all remain anonymous. Their function is either to introduce James to a place with which they are familiar, or, as in the case of the American boy and the little old lady, to serve as the most distinctive features of the place itself. In any case, people are never introduced as individuals, but rather, as instances, as properties of the scene.

The absence of persons may at first be taken simply as another aspect of the general emptiness of the American scene. The hollowness which James associates with the American scene, the way in which the scene stretches and expands without qualifications or enclosures and which finally creates a kind of void at the heart of this scenic vastness, extends also to the social. Social emptiness (like the emptiness of the land) derives from a lack of qualification and differentiation between people, and it reflects what James calls the "gregarious spell" cast upon the American scene at large. The gregarious indicates the American tendency towards generality and typification, a tendency towards the democratic universal entity of "the People." For James, this conception of the undifferentiated and

unindividuated mass creates a kind of social vacuum for it makes particular persons vanish into common anonymity inside a social void.

Such a reading of the absence of persons in *The American Scene*, then, summarizes James' elaborate critique of American ideology with its ruthless commercialism and its preference for the general "type," such as the "ubiquitous commercial traveller" (313), or the equally typical "American girl" (317). Both the commercial and the general are principles that coincide with America's conception as a "commercial democracy." Not only is democratic ideology the driving force behind American society and politics, but it is virtually synonymous with it. James' critique of the kind of commercial democracy of which America is the supreme incarnation is, therefore, based on a rival ideology, roughly "conservative," or "elitist."¹

This social emptiness of *The American Scene* seems strangely discordant with James' profuse "sociability." Leo Bersani's essay, "The Jamesian Lie," begins with the assertion that "Henry James and Stendhal are our two most sociable novelists" (128). James' three last great novels are concerned solely with social relations. As opposed to narratives in which social relations are but a vehicle for dramatizing a variety of themes, it is the social relation itself which is, in these novels, the pure subject of dramatization.

¹ James distinguishes between two kinds of democratic regimes. The kind practiced in England is a "political democracy," while the kind implemented in America is a "personal part of a democracy that, unlike the English, is social as well as political" (185). The difference between these two forms of democracy is important, and is reflected in the difference between England and America on the issue of "class." Whereas the class system in England implicitly maintains that social differences are a vital social principle and that these differences are to be sustained through a system of exclusions, the idea of a single class of the "People," in America's social as well as political democracy, attempts to do away with the differentiation and separation between classes in the name of "equality," at least that of opportunity. The thrust of American democracy is therefore *inclusive* rather than *exclusive*. See, for example, James' discussion of the inclusion in American democracy even of "the ubiquitous children, *most* irrepressible little democrats of the democracy" (186).

What is one to make of the absence of persons in *The American Scene*? Does this absence reveal James' diversion from his otherwise exclusively interpersonal concerns in the late fiction? Is this social emptiness, in turn, but one more aspect of the overall emptiness which James claims dominates the American scene? Or could the absence of persons still hold a special interest for what may be called the "social novels" of the late period?²

For Sharon Cameron in *Thinking in Henry James*, the absence of persons in *The American Scene* transcends James' cultural critique of American emptiness. Cameron sees social emptiness not as a feature of the scene itself, but rather, in the light of the book's process of the empowerment of consciousness. *The American Scene*, claims Cameron in her introductory chapter, is literally filled with only one presence: the presence of consciousness.

In *The American Scene* [...] James empties the landscape, marginalizes the people, so that consciousness, a pure subject, becomes empowered outside the structures of psychological realism whose limits and conditions it is free to disregard. (6-7)

The American Scene serves as Cameron's main example for introducing James' revolutionary reworking of consciousness outside the constraints of psychological realism. If consciousness is realistically conceived as the inwardness of a subject, James' rethinking of consciousness in *The American Scene* lies precisely in his dissociating consciousness from any particular subject, subsequently granting consciousness the power to roam and dominate the scene which it allegedly depicts, crushing, as it were, the objects and people present in the world "out there" to the point of making this world effectively vanish.

² By the "social novels," I refer to the three main novels of the "major phase," *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*, as distinct from *The American Scene* in which interpersonal relations appear to be missing.

Consciousness in *The American Scene*, argues Cameron, is no longer thinkable under the conditions of psychology because it does not “belong” to anyone and is not the expression of an individual ego. This Jamesian redefinition of consciousness as something which “has nothing to do with consciousness as psychologized” (7) is Cameron’s central thesis in *Thinking in Henry James*, and it irreversibly transforms the understanding of one of the most influential concepts in the field of James studies.

The dynamic which Cameron sees as dominating *The American Scene* is a dynamic of power. Depsychologized consciousness literally “takes over” all other elements in the book, such as the authorial voice, and the objects and people that inhabit the scene. Cameron’s account of the operation of consciousness is one in which consciousness presses forth in an all-containing movement and usurps the world under its relentless charge. The dynamic of empowerment in *The American Scene* represents the ultimate triumph of consciousness over its environment, the result of which is the dispensability of both persons and things. Through a powerful act of usurpation, consciousness has done away with everything but itself and it now reigns supreme and solitary, and converses only with itself.

But such an omnipresent consciousness is difficult to identify exactly because it conforms to none of the principles through which consciousness is traditionally understood. Indeed, Cameron acknowledges that “it is as if James were producing a different, *barely recognizable* depiction of consciousness” (10 emphasis added). Cameron’s analysis of the empowering of consciousness in effect pushes “consciousness”

to its utter conceptual limit, to the point that “consciousness” finds itself outside or beyond most familiar and intelligible contexts.

In *The American Scene*, argues Cameron, the culmination of this process of the expansion and empowerment of consciousness is the complete “clearance” of persons (and thus also of plot). Thus, for Cameron, there occurs a significant break between the social novels and *The American Scene* because

[i]n *The American Scene* others are gotten out of the way. That is the book’s enacted, if not stated, premise. James’s novels, on the other hand, are ostensibly about others as actual, in the sense of being about others as discrete characters. (29 emphasis added)

The discontinuity between the social novels and *The American Scene* is based on the absence of persons in the latter as opposed to their concrete presence in the former.

Although all of the late novels are engaged in an empowerment of consciousness, it is only in *The American Scene* that the defeat and removal of what consciousness encounters as other to itself is complete.³

³ The social novels too employ the language of power in the specific context of interpersonality. Expressions of usurpation and defeat, and what James calls “the language of the loom” (*AS* 340) by which people “loom large” over other people, frequent the late social novels. And yet, on close inspection these expressions are seen to belong to the dynamic of sociality, and not to the order of power and consciousness. Consider, for example, the rhetoric of power employed in the first Book of *The Wings of the Dove* to describe Kate Croy’s relation to her Aunt: “[s]itting far downstairs Aunt Maud was yet a presence from which a sensitive niece could feel herself extremely under pressure” (72). And on the next page Kate’s relation to her Aunt raises “the question of a surrender, though she couldn’t yet have said exactly of what: a general surrender of everything--that was at moments the way it presented itself--to Aunt Maud’s looming ‘personality.’ It was by her personality that Aunt Maud was prodigious, and the great mass of it loomed because, in the thick, the foglike air, of her arranged existence, there were parts doubtless magnified and parts certainly vague. They represented at all events alike, the dim and the distinct, a strong will and a high hand. It was perfectly present to Kate that she might be devoured, and she compared herself to a trembling kid, kept apart a day or two till her turn should come, but sure sooner or later to be introduced into the cage of the lioness” (73). The language is emphatically violent and militarist. And yet, *The Wings of the Dove* is not a study in power relations. The language of power signifies one’s relation to the menacing and irresistible otherness of other people. It is this irresistibility of Aunt Maud’s “looming ‘personality’” with which Kate feels she is forced to reckon. But, the relation between the niece and her Aunt is not one of domination and enslavement. The language of power used throughout *The Wings of the Dove* indicates people’s “obsession” with one another rather than their subordination to one another. Levinas uses a similar “language of the loom” to indicate the relation

Yet, James' accounts throughout *The American Scene* suggest a slightly different dynamism from Cameron's dynamic of power. Although it certainly reads as a conscious *tour de force*, *The American Scene* seems less concerned with the triumphant display of consciousness than it does with instituting a *relation* between the traveller and the scene, a relation which precedes and conditions the mind's production of wonderful impressions. I wish to suggest that the book stages a double movement: a movement of *approach* extending from the perceiver towards the scene, and a complementary movement of *protrusion*, issued by the scene and directed specifically at the perceiver. *The American Scene* is concerned with the nature of what James calls "interest" as what reflects a two-way relation between the scene and the traveller. James' professed "interest" in the scene is not merely a narrative or generic device mimicking an exchange where one does not exist. Nor does the confession of "interest" disclose a creative-aggressive stance by which the scene is invested with consciousness' own creations. James is continually seen as subsumed by the scene of his travels. James' presence both enters, and is entered by, the scene. So that the dynamic in the book is one of involvement and engagement rather than a dynamic of power.

With the idea of "relation" thus introduced into *The American Scene*, an initial continuity between the book and the "social novels" is made possible. Yet I want to argue further, that *The American Scene* reveals a particular type of relation between the "restless analyst" and the surrounding scene which is structurally similar to the structure and operation of the interpersonal relation in the late novels. Far from differing from the

between the self and the other as a relation which defines one's infinite responsibility in the face (as under pressure) of the other person. See also the first footnote in the Introduction, on the "loom of alterity."

“social novels” of the late period, *The American Scene* offers an eccentric version of the social relation itself. In *The American Scene*, it is the scene itself which is disclosed as personalized and populated. The scene is not simply personified, but rather, personalized, that is, it is approached in strictly personal terms, and not, figuratively, in the mere likeness of persons. The inanimate scene is repeatedly described as “appealing” to James in the form of a personal address, as if it were a person facing and conversing with James. The scene “absorbs” this personality from the actual persons James meets on his way, persons whose function is, therefore, not as “discrete characters,” as identities, or as individuals, but precisely as aspects of the scene itself.

What is seen to be the absence of persons in *The American Scene* is, then, a matter of the kind of relation practised in the book between the traveller and the scene of his travels. This modality of relation, which treats an impersonal scene in a personal way and persons in an impersonal way, is not qualitatively different from the interpersonal relation practised in the social novels. For, the interpersonal or social relation which is the principal focus of the social novels treats “real” persons in a similarly impersonal fashion, as singularities rather than individualities. As I hope to have already shown in the previous discussions of *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, characters in the social novels neither exist nor function as distinct identities whose individual character can be easily or usefully delineated. The individuality of characters in the novels is subordinate to and occasioned by the characters’ relations with one another. The personality and interiority of characters independently of their connections with other characters has but a small part to play in the Jamesian drama--a drama which is exclusively the drama of

relations. As unique instances of relation, “characters” are in fact approached outside the context of their individual psychology, and are treated impersonally as singular alterities. *The American Scene*, true to the end to the impersonality of the social relation, does away with conventional, “personal” characters altogether.

As distinct from singularity, then, individuality refers to characters in the context of psychological realism, that is, as possessing their own interior make-up which nonetheless corresponds to a larger psychological system. Individuals, while being private and discrete entities, are also particulars of a general kind or genus. It is as individuals within a general type that we can come to “know” others. To perceive, to communicate with, or think about others, is to indulge one’s cognitive faculties, to exercise them in relation to other people who, while different to me, are also potentially knowable. Singularity, on the other hand, corresponds to no such totalizing and demystifying cogitations. As singular, the particular case is one of a kind. Distinct from individuals, then, singularity addresses characters outside the psychological and the cognitive, as unique and unknowable cases. I call this breaching of individuality and the psychological (also a breaching of consciousness) underlying Jamesian sociality, James’ principle of impersonality. As impersonal “moments” of relation, characters in the novels do not engage one another as familiar psychological entities, but, conversely, as alterities whose very unknowability positively conditions their relations. Even in the social novels, therefore, which employ the conventions of characters and plot, sociality is tinted by impersonality and alterity. The late novels read so oddly because of the distinctly impersonal way in which persons relate. Consequently, the kind of personal relations *The American Scene* represents in the

apparent absence of actual persons can be seen to take the impersonal sociality practised in the novels in the apparent presence of persons a step further. The absence of persons in *The American Scene* is indeed most telling. My point shall be that this telling absence in fact instructs us about the way in which sociality operates in the social novels, thereby leaving the primacy of the interpersonal relation intact. In other words, by arguing that the absence of persons in *The American Scene* is in fact typical of the social relation in the novels, the primacy of sociality as the main feature of late James shall be maintained.

What are the specific forms that sociality in *The American Scene* takes in the overt absence of characters? In what sense can *The American Scene* be said to display anything like the social relation if one recognizes the striking social emptiness of the scene? To put the question differently, can the social relation be said to take place in the absence of persons? The task at hand is, therefore, to illustrate a consistency between the model of relation found in *The American Scene* and that of the social relation at work in the novels, and to furthermore demonstrate in what way the model of the social relation in the novels itself performs the absence, or absenting, of persons. I begin by discussing the various ways in which *The American Scene* entertains notions of “personality” at the heart of its seemingly inanimate and impersonal scene. In the concluding section, I will be considering *The Ambassadors* as an example of the workings of impersonality in the social novels.

1. The Personality of the Scene

What occurs to me addresses me. In what occurs to me the world-happening addresses me. Only by sterilizing it, removing the seed of address from it, can I take what occurs to me as a part of the world-happening which does not refer to me. (Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* 28)

The gathering of scenic impressions requires a particular kind of sensibility: the attentiveness, patience and receptivity to look and to listen without imposing, until one's attentiveness is rewarded by the scene. James continually describes the producing of impressions in these terms, as a collaboration between the traveller and the scene, as an almost conversation between two sufficiently intimate parties. Impressions are received before they are created, and this type of collaboration, by which the scene gives and the traveller receives, James describes as meeting his impressions half-way (191). It is not the case that James predetermines what he shall see and so ensures that the scene yield the "correct" impression. On the contrary, James' basic "interestedness" in the scene is defined by a simultaneity of active readiness and passive reception.

The traveller is never neutral. To travel, for James, is not to maintain the rigorous "objectivity" of the scientist or the journalist, but, on the contrary, to position oneself deep within one's subject. Only then could observation proceed freely and take notice of the objects that comprise the scene. To remain aloof and uninvolved means, for James, that one could not have an impression at all, because one is not sufficiently submerged in one's field of interest. Having an "interest" in the Jamesian sense does not, then, denote the preconception or hypothesis that guides the scientist in his inquiry, but rather, the very fact

of one's engagement with the subject or object of interest. This engagement is merely preparatory or positional, for its role is to ensure that one can receive impressions from the outside, without, that is, predetermining their content. Martin Buber describes this peculiar positioning in the absence of content and intention, and his description could fairly serve as a manifesto of Jamesian formalism:

The *onlooker* is not at all intent. He takes up the position which lets him see the object freely, and undisturbed awaits what will be presented to him. Only at the beginning may he be ruled by purpose, everything beyond that is involuntary. He does not go around taking notes indiscriminately, he lets himself go, he is not in the least afraid of forgetting something ("Forgetting is good," he says). He gives his memory no tasks, he trusts its organic work which preserves what is worth preserving. [...] He pays no attention to traits ("Traits lead astray," he says). What stands out for him from the object is what is not "character" and not "expression" ("The interesting is not important," he says). All great artists have been onlookers" (*BMM* 26).

The onlooker is indifferent to systems of knowledge and seeks only to perceive the naked existence of things. The onlooker/traveller is never neutral because he is, at the outset, already in relation with the scene through which he is about to travel. The numerous titles with which James identifies himself throughout the book illustrate what Buber refers to as the onlooker's "taking up a position," and his initial but unspecified sense of "purpose." Thus James becomes the "restless analyst," the "story-seeker," and the "picture-maker." All these titles betray an attitude of involvement with regards to the scene, all are attitudes which are precisely not of the neutral kind and which position James somewhere *within* the scene rather than, as an objective observer, outside it.

Once so positioned, moreover, the act of travelling, and of travel-writing, unfolds as a *return* to a scene in relation to which one has already been purposefully positioned.

The very idea of travelling (and of the genre of the travelogue) discloses a primordial sense of locality and space, of existence-as-placed. Such is the profundity implicit in another of James' manifold titles, the "revisiting spirit" (260). Being in the world, having a world in which one is placed, is, in this sense, already to travel: "the consciousness of a world," writes Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, "is already consciousness *through* that world" (153). For in order to cognize about objects, even, as Cameron would like to suggest, in order to usurp and replace them with the free-flowing content of an empowered consciousness, one has already to be placed among the very objects one usurps. The acrobatics of consciousness which, for Cameron, abolish the very scene over which consciousness reigns and triumphs, at once betray a relation more primary than the workings of consciousness.

This primary relation to a locality, or, as in *The American Scene*, a relation to a "scene," Levinas calls the "dwelling."

To exist henceforth means to dwell. To dwell is not the simple fact of the anonymous reality of a being cast into existence as a stone one casts behind oneself; it is a recollection, a coming to oneself, a retreat home with oneself as in a land of refuge, which answers to a hospitality, an expectancy, a human welcome. (*TI* 156)

For James, the "restored" and "repatriated" "absentee," the scene is, first and foremost, a place which offers such accommodation and welcome. "Accommodation" encompasses the double meaning inherent in the Levinasian "dwelling": simultaneously a "housing," "board" or "lodge," and a gesture of hospitality, of receiving, and of welcome; in short, home. James is continually accommodated by the scene in which he dwells in the sense that he does not merely cross it as a stranger in a strange land. The scene is, even at the

very beginning of one's travels, an intimate space which precisely resists the anonymity of the foreign and unknown land.

The American Scene dramatizes such a return to an old home, to the (pre-originary) place of dwelling, since James is returning to the place that was once his home. Returning to America after a long absence confronts James with new and unfamiliar sights. But the new is never wholly estranging for James precisely because his travels are conceived as a re-turn, a re-visit, a re-patriation, and a re-storing. For all its modern monstrosities as yet un-experienced by James, America is not a place which keeps its visitor at bay. America, as "home," remains all attaching and hospitable.

Thus, in Chapter X, Baltimore surprises James by confronting him with the strange and unexpected, but his reaction to the city's odd facade is one which invokes the domesticity and welcome of a guest comfortably awaiting his host:

[t]hat I could entertain so many incoherent ideas in half-an-hour was in any case a proof that I felt, for the occasion, *left in possession*; quite as the visitor as yet un-introduced may feel during some long preliminary wait in a drawing-room. He looks at the furniture, pictures, books; he studies in these objects the character of the house and of his hosts [...]. (232 emphasis added)

As a guest assured of the hospitality promised by the master of some grand Estate, James feels himself in Boston "in presence of the invitation--even the invitation written on the very face of the place itself, of its actual aspects and appearances--to register my 'impression' of Boston" (168). In Baltimore again James notes "the latent vividness of things" (227) awaiting resurrection by the observer, and remarks on the way in which the city "exhaled on the spot, as the word goes, an atmosphere" (227).

The flow of air and breath does not merely replenish and animate the scene, but establishes a kind of *vital* exchange between James and his environment:

[i]t had doubtless not been merely absurd, as the wild winter proceeded, to find one's self so enamoured of the very name of the South that *one was ready to take it in any small atmospheric instalment* and to feel the echo of its voice in the yell of any engine [...]. (224 emphasis added)

The respiratory gesture is repeated two pages later when James speaks of the “far-exhaled breath of the South” (226). In these images the world appears a living and breathing body, giving and receiving life through its resuscitative exchanges with the visitor. Additionally, the theme of the air may be said to partake in the book's preoccupation with the ghostly, since the circulation of air and the drawing of breath constitute a kind of haunting.⁴

The various tokens of one's intimacy with the scene--the return “home,” the readiness to receive and be received, communication and address, and the exhaling of breath--are neither deployed figuratively (personifying the scene), nor fantastically (attributing to the natural scene supernatural qualities). Without this kind of personal address which James also calls “the appeal of the scene” (211) no subsequent appreciation of the scene would be at all possible. The scene does not comprise the dead weight of objects. Its objectivity and concretion are already invested with the personal, already facing their visitor, as if with a human face.

⁴ The air is the invisible substance which facilitates the communication of the scene: “the air through which everything shows is so transparent [...].” (220). In Chapter XIII, “Charleston,” James devotes elaborate passages to the theme of air and breath.

That desire of the artist to linger where the breath of a “subject,” faintly stirring the air, reaches his vigilant sense [...]. The charm I speak of, the charm to cherish, however, was most exhaled for me in other conditions [...]. (307)

Finally, the air is that curious medium which assists in relating impressions one to the other, for the benefit of the larger picture.

There has to be room for the air to circulate between one's impressions, between the parts of one's knowledge, since it is the air, or call it the intervals on the sea of one's ignorance, of one's indifference, that sets these floating fragments into motion. (168)

Thus, when James asserts that for the onlooker

there will be little [...] in the American scene unless he be ready, anywhere, everywhere, to *read*
“into” it as much as he reads out (215 emphasis added)

he is not, as may at first appear, affirming the omniscience of consciousness over the objects it encounters, but rather, affirming the dynamic of address and response between the scene and the visitor, a dynamic which is vital for the yielding of impressions. Not only does the scene address the traveller, but it also elicits a particular kind of response:

from the moment the North ceases to insist, the South may begin to presume; ever so little, no doubt, at first, yet with *protrusive feelers* that tell how she only wants the right sensibility, the true waiting victim, to play upon. (224 emphasis added)⁵

The striking image of the “protrusive feelers” again likens the scene to a living creature reaching forth and seeking out the appropriate recipient, the one with whom the scene is fundamentally intimate. The motions of protrusion and the complementary motions of approach or response demonstrate the event of relation between James and the scene as one between two intimate parties.

This position of intimacy in relation to the scene enables James to have the encounters he desires. Concord launches a

warm flood of appreciation, of reflection, that Concord revisited could set rolling over **the field of a prepared sensibility** [...]. I should have been at fault perhaps only in speaking of the interest in question as visible, on that large scale, to the “naked eye”; the truth being perhaps that one wouldn’t have been so **met half-way by one’s impression** unless one had rather particularly

⁵ Not only the scenic but also the political informs James’ contrasting the North with the South. The ghost of the Civil War is one apparition which I do not address in this essay, yet whose haunting presence in *The American Scene* at large is most felt.

known, and that knowledge, in such a case, amounts to a pair of magnifying spectacles. (191
emphasis added)

The “field of a prepared sensibility” is James’ “knowledge” of Concord’s literary past, the past of Hawthorne, Emerson, and Thoreau. This personalized past which the onlooker brings with him into the scene as a “pair of magnifying spectacles” announces the readiness to receive impressions. It does not constitute those impressions themselves, does not, that is, have a ready-made content. Most importantly, the past conceived of in the personal form of literary ghosts invades the present scene and gives it meaning.

James emphasizes the fact that the kind of “knowledge” brought into the scene in preparation for the communication of impressions differs from the epistemological or factual. Impressions are not identical with facts and figures, they are not conclusions concerning the scene which one arrives at in the solitary acts of calculation and thought. Impressions mysteriously concern affects and degrees of intensity rather than information, and they are therefore wholly different from what the journalist, as a gatherer of facts, may bring out of the scene. In Baltimore, for instance, James finds himself “committed to the view of Baltimore as quite insidiously ‘sympathetic,’ quite inordinately amiable--which amounted, in other words, to the momentous proposition that she was interesting--and still of wondering, by the same stroke, how I was to make any such statement plausible” (227-28). Albeit interesting, Baltimore (like Salem and Richmond) boasts an apparent absence of details and features. And as “[c]haracter is founded on elements and features, so many particular parts which conduce to an expression” (228), James is unable to support his sense of Baltimore as “sympathetic” and “interesting” with objective evidence. And yet, he insists, Baltimore’s “felicity was certainly not that of a mere blank [...]” (228).

As James contemplates the possibility of an interesting impression arising from such a meagreness of presentation, it

happened then, remarkably [...] that while I mechanically so argued **my impression was fixing itself by a wild logic of its own**, and [...] I was presently to see how it would, when once settled to a certain intensity, snap its fingers at warrants and documents. If it was a question of a slate the slate was used, at school I remembered, for more than one purpose; so that mine, by my walk's end, **instead of a show of neat ciphering, exhibited simply a bold drawn image--**which had the merit moreover of not being in the least a caricature. The moral of this was precious--that of the fine impunity with which, if one but had sensibility, the ciphering could be neglected and in fact almost contemned: always, that is (and only) *with* one's finer wits about one. **It would be "no good" to a journalist--for he is nowhere, ever, without his items; but it would be everything, always, to the mere restless analyst.** [...] That was the real way to work things out [...]. (228 emphasis added)

The "wild logic" by which impressions are worked is not the formal logic applied to the mere observation of objects. Whereas the (resented) journalist is engaged in a hectic collection of data, the restless analyst is open to what lies beyond the objects themselves, beyond, that is, their finite form and concrete utility. James is attuned to the possibility of objects to come into relation with one another, and to then form a "bold drawn image" at once singular and varied. To be "analytically minded" (202) as the restless analyst, is to recognize in things "a mystic meaning proper to themselves" (202), to trace in the "cluster of appearances" (202) the various connections between elements, and, in short, "always to *make* a sense" (202). To make sense of the cluster of appearances is to be able to form a "synthesis" (203) without, however, reducing the variety of the different elements to the common and undifferentiated. The "bold drawn image" is not the sum of objects James

perceives in the scene. The scene offers elements so invested with alterity, that they cannot simply be subjected to formalist objectification. Instead, elements are gathered in their alterity, or singularity, into a grand and equivocal “bold drawn image.”

Such a formation, one that brings into relation a multiplicity of elements without subjecting them to a reduction to a single concept, is what Gilles Deleuze called the “assemblage.” The “assemblage” denotes a multiplicity of relations between various items which precisely do not “add up” to a coherent unity. The “bold drawn image” in James’ description, designates such an assemblage comprising irreducibly different elements. The assemblage of the “bold drawn image” is contrasted to the “show of neat ciphering” which is the journalist’s task, and which treats different elements as representatives of a larger and coherent order. Whereas James promotes a synthesis in which differences are sustained, the journalist’s synthesis entails the destruction of differences.

The American Scene in its entirety may, in fact, be thought in terms of the “bold drawn image” of the assemblage. For what occupies James more than anything in this virtual travelogue is to establish a multiplicity of references and relations between the different unique elements he finds. The “scene” of the book’s title is, then, nothing more than the web of relations, references, and associations, which James “maps out,” a web whose totality of connections exceeds the actuality and finality of the concrete scene. James clearly expresses the idea of the primacy of relations over the actuality of objects and facts when he maintains that

for the restless analyst, **there is no such thing as an unrelated fact, no such thing as a break in the chain of relations.** Many a perceived American aspect, for that matter, would by itself have little to give; the student of manners, in other words, to make it presentable--by which I

understand to make it *sufficiently* interesting--must **first discover connections** for it and then borrow from these, if possible, the elements of a wardrobe. (231 emphasis added)⁶

The assemblage does not denote a relation between a subject (the traveller, the author) and an object (the actual scene). The relation between the “story-seeker” and the scene, defined as “dwelling,” as primary involvement, and represented as the taking up of a position and attending to the scene’s “appeal,” does not describe a subject consciously possessing his objects. The latter is a relation enacted in consciousness, and it remains implicit and intact in Cameron’s analysis of the triumph of an empowered and depsychologized consciousness over objects. The breaching of the subject/object relation, on the other hand, places the “restless analyst” in relation to the objects he encounters not as a conscious subject, an identity, or an individual, but as intimately immersed in the scene itself. James’ choice of titles--all significantly in the third person--stages a distancing from the personal or the private which the use of the first person designates. By referring to himself in the third person, then, James muffles the authorial voice and replaces it with a

⁶ Compare the Jamesian passage above to Deleuze’s passage on the “assemblage” in *Dialogues*: The minimum real unit is not the word, the idea, the concept or the signifier, but the *assemblage*. It is always an assemblage which produces utterances. Utterances do not have as their cause a subject which would act as a subject of enunciation, any more than they are related to subjects as subjects of utterance. **The utterance is a product of an assemblage**--which is always collective, which brings into play within us and outside us populations, multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events. The proper name does not designate a subject, but **something which happens at least between two terms** which are not subjects, but agents, elements. (51 emphasis added)

Deleuze’s description is Jamesian in its insistence on the primacy of “relation”--“something which happens at least between two terms”--as the basic “unit,” what I have referred to as “singularities.” As Deleuze’s understanding of utterance suggests, the narrative of *The American Scene* is a product of James’ relation with the scene. James takes great care to disguise his authorial presence, and to therefore become merely one operative element among many within the scene he describes.

multiplicity of voices, which indicate his changing positions in relation to the changing scene.⁷

Indeed, Cameron identifies a similar obscuring of the authorial presence in *The American Scene*. It is impossible to determine which of the voices is James' because the additional voices (such as the voice of the air in Chapter II) are rendered with an equal force and they eventually undermine the so-called Jamesian stance (Cameron 6). Cameron sees the indeterminacy of the authorial presence in the book as a reflection of the powerful proliferation of consciousness, a proliferation which results in a multiplicity of voices. But Cameron's reading does not recognize the important play of relations that the book dramatizes through the multiplications of titles in the third person which obscure and depersonalize James. By attempting to highlight such a play of relations, I wish to claim that what *The American Scene* advocates is not a multiplication of consciousness, but a multiplication of relations between James and the scene.

It is, perhaps, interesting to note that Cameron's accounts of consciousness as "manifold" (6), of its "ability to shift sides" (6), and of its radical break with the psychological, result in what may be called a "schizophrenic" account of consciousness. What prevents such an account from assuming a properly Deleuzian note is Cameron's insistence on remaining within the given context of "thought" as the primary Jamesian concept. And yet, it is precisely this kind of "schizophrenic" dispersion of thought,

⁷ I have counted at least twenty-two different titles in the book: the "restless analyst"; "hovering kindly critic"; "shuddering pilgrim"; "story-seeker"; repatriated absentee"; "perverted person"; "visionary tourist"; "brooding visitor"; "earnest observer"; "brooding analyst"; "restored absentee"; "rank outsider"; "detached visitor"; "revisiting spirit"; "sincere observer"; "anxious explorer"; "pious pilgrim"; "non-resident"; "musing moralist"; "moralizing visitor"; "picture-maker"; "foredoomed observer."

thought as exploded and externalized, whence the possibility of reading James *beyond* the realm of “consciousness” arises.

Although wanting conventional “characters,” *The American Scene* enacts the return of the personal through the relation between the traveller and the scene itself. By making the scene a personalized and incalculable presence, the alterity of the other is invoked. The book does not, therefore, simply dispose of persons. It does away with characters but maintains the alterity of the other, his address, appeal and inspiration, to which the traveller involuntarily responds. In James’ descriptions of his relation to the scene, consciousness is continually exceeded: it is taken by surprise or finds itself in the presence of already communicated impressions. This type of relation which transcends the regions of thought signals to the interpersonal relation. *The American Scene* reverberates with the ghostly presences of persons. For in the finite objects themselves the alterity of the other quivers.

The world of perception shows a face; things affect us as *possessed* by the other person. (Levinas, *Entre Nous* 17)

2. The Personality of History

It was History in person that hovered, just long enough for me to recognize her and to read, in her strange deep eyes, *her* intelligence at least of everything. It might have been there fairly as reassurance. (AS 229)

A consideration of history, its meaning and its significance, as well as its alleged rejection by America's "benediction of the future" (136) runs throughout *The American Scene*. History, for James, does not simply indicate the accumulation of facts about the past or the availability of information relating to past events. James is concerned with the conditions which determine a genuine understanding of history, and with what constitutes a particular kind of historical sensibility. Instances for the probing of the historical appear in various formulations in every chapter of the book. I wish presently to consider two such instances: the first, in Chapter I, "New England: An Autumn Impression," has James returning to his old University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The second is James' visit to George Washington's famous home in the American capital.

James' visit to Harvard University's Union building has its parallel in the visit to Mount Vernon some two hundred pages later. In Harvard's hall of the Union James comes across John Singer Sargent's portrait of the Union's donator, Major Henry Lee Higginson. Like most of what James finds in the American scene, the Union hall is a symbol of America's "New Harvard," a testimony to America's rigorous productivity, its relentless economic growth. The logic governing America's constant material expansion is a logic of futuricity: James sees America as confidently and hopefully projecting itself into the future,

and it is the development of new architectural forms (most notably the sky scrapers James encounters in New York) which publicly embody America's future-facing disposition. As James observes in his chapter on Boston,

there is everywhere in America [...] that particular look of the clear course and large opportunity ahead, which, when taken in conjunction with all the will to live, all the money to spend, all the knowledge to acquire and apply, seems to marshal the material possibilities in glittering illimitable ranks. (183)

This privileging of the future, however, is achieved at the expense of America's historical consciousness, in the form of a hostility towards history and the past. Thus James initially fears that because the Union hall

was addressed in truth so largely to an enjoying and producing future [...] it might seem to frown on mere commemoration, on the backward vision [...]. (47)

Yet, unlike the New York sky scraper whose very structures and functions signify for James America's aggressive defeat of the past, the Union hall exerts a special appeal, the fruit of its attentiveness to local history. The Union's

very finest meaning might have been that of a liberal monument to those who had come and gone, to the company of the lurking ghosts. The air there was full of them, and this was its service, that it cared for them *all*, and so eased off the intensity of their appeal. (48)

The description, with its assertion of the densely populated air, verges on the fantastic. James' interest is not, however, in the supernatural or occult, but in the way in which the past penetrates the present and contributes to its meaning. Furthermore, the past is not simply the commemoration of past events, but the sustained legacy of particular persons. History appears as "haunted" or personalized. In what follows, James expresses most clearly the meaning of history as consisting primarily of people, not of mere events, dates,

and facts. As he stands before Sargent's portrait of Higginson, described as "a representation of life and character" (48), James realizes that the painting succeeds in making "the human statement with a great effect, to interfuse a group of public acts with the personality" of the actor.

The acts would still have had all their value if the portrait had had less, but they would not assuredly have been able to become so interesting, would not have grown to affect each beneficiary, however obscure, as proceeding, for him, *from a possible relation, a possible intimacy. It is to the question of intimacy with somebody or other that all great practical public recognition is finally carried back--but carried only by the magic carpet, when the magic carpet happens to be there. Mr. Sargent's portrait of Henry Higginson is exactly the magic carpet.* (48 emphasis added)

The passage is complicated for it deals with several inter-dependent ideas. In the context of the question of what makes history most meaningful, however, James attributes the highest importance to the recognition by those of the present of a personal tie, a so-called "intimacy," with the persons of the past. For James, then, the intelligibility of history depends on one's apprehension of the persons involved in history's making, *and* on the fact of their passing away.⁸

⁸ Equally important in this passage is the question of the "magic carpet" of art, and specifically the portrait form, as what makes possible this personal relation between the past and the present. The portrait is the most personal of painterly forms not just because its subjects are persons, but more so, perhaps, because its theme is personality. (This is true, I think, also in cases in which the painted subject is not human, as in George Stubbs' portraits of spaniels and of horses. Even there, the delivery and the appreciation proceed from a logic of the personal: the visibility of the face and its expressiveness. This is precisely not a case of anthropomorphism in which animals are made to "look" human--as in the popular "propping up" of pets with human accessories--but rather, it is the strange way in which animals' faces can become expressive whilst remaining strange). Portraits play an important role in James, and although an in-depth study of the meaning and function of portraits is not possible here, I may begin to suggest that portraits exemplify the type of "personal relation" with alterity with which James is preoccupied in his fiction. The portrait is concrete and finite, and yet it works on its onlooker in a way which exceeds its concrete finality. The representation of persons in painting is often experienced as "uncanny" or "haunting," whereas the representation of objects or landscapes seldom is. Thus the particular expressiveness of portraits does not proceed from an apprehension of the familiar, but rather from the

James' visit to Mount Vernon in Chapter XI reintroduces the understanding of history as a relation to a particular person. James' impression of George Washington's house begins by contrasting two orders. The order of the "hard little facts in themselves" (248), the particular architectural properties of the house and the features of its surrounding grounds, and the order which James' wittily calls the "great soft fact" (248). There is, James proclaims, a gross asymmetry between the many hard facts, and the one soft fact, an asymmetry by which the overall beauty and magic of Mount Vernon transcend the actual features adorning the scene.

How came it that if they [the hard little facts] could throw a spell they were yet so abject and so negligible? How came it that if they had no intrinsic sweetness, no visible dignity, they could yet play their part in so unforgettable an impression? (248)

And James promptly replies:

[t]he answer to this can only be, I think, that we happen here to "strike," as they say, one of the rarest of cases, a spot on which all sorts of sensibilities are touched and on which a lively emotion, and one yet *other than the aesthetic*, makes us its prey. (248 emphasis added)

Mount Vernon is superb in spite of being aesthetically indistinct. Thus, the kind of "sensibility" evoked by the scene cannot be purely aesthetic, and is of a different order. If the hard little facts ("facts of form, of substance, of scale [...] [248]) do not suffice to justify the grand impression stirred by Mount Vernon, it is the force of what James proceeds to call "the rich interference of association" (248) which is responsible for the "unforgettable" impression. "Association" denotes a relation between different elements.

apprehension of otherness. And this otherness is the otherness of those who are dead or dying; for portraits (and perhaps, to a lesser degree, also Still Lives) signal the passing of time, and death. The otherness of portraits as what conditions the portrait's expressiveness, as well as the portrait's communication of mortality, suggests further connections with Levinasian thought. I return to James' specific affinity with the portrait form in the fourth chapter on James' *Autobiography*.

The kind of relation implied by association is not, in this case, either causal or logical, but a relation which is strangely independent of logical links.⁹ Association affirms itself without conforming to the laws of logical inference or even to those of aesthetic judgement. Instead,

[a]ssociation does, at Mount Vernon, simply what it likes with us--it is of so beautiful and noble a sort; and to this end it begins by making us unfit to say whether or no we would in its absence have noticed the house for any material grace at all. (248)

Not only is association portrayed as independent of the logical and the aesthetic, but it appears to condition any aesthetic or architectural appreciation of the house as such. In the following sentences, James explains the kind of relation association establishes, between the house's concrete properties (the hard little facts) and the house's irresistible beauty (the great soft fact). Inexplicably at first, association conflates the dimness of the concrete and the sublimity of the affect produced, so that the asymmetry between the concrete and the incalculable is instantly annulled:

[w]e scarce care more for its being proved picturesque, the house, than for its being proved plain; its *architectural interest and architectural nullity* become one and the same thing for us. (248
emphasis added)

In the next sentences James explains the reason for which, for the purpose of his impression of Mount Vernon, there is no essential difference between the concrete and the affected. And the reason lies precisely in the personal resonance of the place:

⁹ In section V of the same chapter, James again asserts the odd independence of "association." What it comes to--whereby the "pull," in America, is of the greatest--is that association really reigns there, and in the richest, and even again and again in the drollest, forms; it is thick and vivid and almost gross, it assaults the wondering mind. (265)

[i]f asked what we should think of it if it hadn't been, or if we hadn't known it for, Washington's, we retort that the inquiry is inane, since it is not the possessive case, but the straight, serene nominative, that we are dealing with. The whole thing *is* Washington--not his invention and his property, but his presence and his person [...]. (248)

It makes no sense, argues James, to dissociate Mount Vernon from Washington's person. For Mount Vernon, more than anything, denotes the persona of Washington himself, so that the man and the place become one. "Architectural interest," therefore, is recognizable only as the "personal interest" in Washington himself, without whom "Mount Vernon" would not possess its distinct historical meaning. "Architectural nullity," then, is not merely the absence of architectural merit, but the fact that architectural merit alone does not contribute to the meaning of "Mount Vernon," nor to its beauty. Beauty itself is the effect of the "*communicated importance*" (248 James' italics) of the place, and beauty, in turn,

becomes but *the final aspect of the man*; under which everything conduces to *a single great representative image*, under which every feature of the scene, every object in the house, however trivial, borrows from it and profits by it. The image is the largest [...] consciousness of public service consummately rendered. The terms we commonly use for that condition--peace with honour, well-earned repose, enjoyment of homage, recognition of facts--render but dimly the *luminous stillness* in which, on its *commanding eminence*, we see our image bathed. It hangs together with the whole bright immensity of air and view. It becomes truly the great white, decent page on which the whole sense of the place is written. (249 emphasis added)

The kind of sensibility which the passages on Mount Vernon allude to is, as in the case of Sargent's portrait of Higginson, an historical sensibility which depends on the "*communicated importance*" silently passing between the visitor and the visited scene.

This immaculate transmission, moreover, takes the form of a personal address. History (like architecture) can be conceived as “historical-interest,” independent of mere historical facts (in the same way that architectural-interest is not identical with concrete architectural evidence) to the extent that its appeal, what makes it meaningful in the present day, is exercised as a relation between persons. History, in order to yield and to sustain interest, reveals itself in the present more than anything in the form of unique persons, that is, in the form of “proper names.” The past touches the present on the sounding of a proper name, “Washington” or “Higginson,” in a way that differs from the biographical.¹⁰ For although biographical facts are, of course, indispensable to historical thinking, a profound grasp of history is possible only when the past ceases to exist as merely the sum total of facts, and is converted from being informative to being communicative. When such a conversion occurs, the past assumes its historical interest, and enters the present as something both relevant and valuable. Historical discourse, then, is conditioned by a “sense of the past,” the past affected as the radical alterity of persons.

In Mount Vernon, then, the figure of Washington is not a mere historical reference whose appeal is purely cognitive. Washington’s personal appeal distinguishes between a knowledge of history, and what James calls further down the passage the “historic imagination” (249). Washington’s eminent presence

attends us while we move about and goes with us from room to room; mounts with us the narrow stairs, to stand with us in these small chambers and look out of the low windows; takes up for us, to turn them over with spiritual hands, the objects from which we respectfully forbear, and places an accent, in short, through the rambling old phrase, wherever an accent is required. *Thus we*

¹⁰ On this point concerning proper names, see also the section “Spectral Economy: Death Dismissed” in the following chapter on James’ *Autobiography* (208-212).

arrive at the full meaning, as it were--thus we know, at least, why we are moved. (249 emphasis added)

But to what extent can a relation to those who have died be called “personal”? Certainly, the dead cannot be properly encountered, nor could an accumulation of any number of facts about them contribute in any way to the possibility of “knowing” them. Consequently, history is carefully employed by James throughout *The American Scene* as a paramount example of an encounter which is *simultaneously personal and impersonal*: for history necessarily involves an invocation of particular persons at the same time that it asserts their absence. Encounters with the dead or missing are continually personalized throughout *The American Scene* without, that is, being fantastic or occult. Furthermore, this quasi-personal relation, a relation with “missing persons,” appears to be the book’s main paradigm of relations. It is not simply that persons are absent from the book, but that they are, even when “present,” encountered in the form of those who are missing. This type of relation, in which persons are distinctly present *and* absent, is the (im)personal relation, or, James’ principle of (im)personality.

History is at once a personal affair--one’s attentiveness to the address of the past, an attentiveness best served by the invocation of particular persons--and an impersonal relation, that is, significantly, not a relation to individuals. First, both Washington and Higginson are literally absent from the scene, and second, James’ interest in both figures is neither intellectual nor psychological. What most concerns and most affects James in Harvard and Mount Vernon, is the way in which the “persons” of Higginson and Washington signify beyond the private and the psychological to the public and the

historical. Thus, the kind of relation at work in the Jamesian “historical sensibility” treats historical figures not as “individuals,” but rather as “singularities.”

The concept of the individual refers to persons as particulars in a communal totality. Individuals necessarily stand in relation to the community to which they belong (or with which they are at odds). The thought of the individual, or of individuality, thus contains a discrete reference to the group. Individuals’ relations to their communities may, of course, vary; but whatever the particular relation, the individual nonetheless shares with his/her group a common trait by which the particular community is defined. The common denominator on which the notion of “community,” or of “society” ultimately depends is the universality of the “human.” Individuals are part of a community by virtue of their common humanity which they share with other individuals. Singularities, on the other hand, are particulars that do not signal back to a unity. The thought of singularities is monadic to the extreme, as it regards particular “cases” (to use James’ favourite term) as incomparable. Singularities do not “add up” to a general or universal category. Singularities, then, do not hark back to a totality such as the totality of “community” or of “humanity.” To put it somewhat differently, the collection of singularities implies an irreducible multiplicity or variety, whereas the collection of individuals implies the reduction to a single unity.

Distinguishing between the individual and the singular begins to suggest why James’ relation to the figures of Washington and Higginson as singularities rather than individualities is by necessity (im)personal. For James, both men represent unique “cases” within the American scene. James’ interest in both these cases derives precisely from the

way in which the two “stand out” from within the scene as irreducible and exceptional instances. Their status as exceptional is at once designated by their invocation as specific entities, and by the fact that, as specific entities, their function remains a non-personal one. So that what is most distinct about particular persons is precisely what is the least personal about them. In order to fully appreciate what is unique about other people, one must approach them in a semi-personal way.

The model of historical relation, of historical “interest” or “value” (James employs these terms alternately in a near synonymous fashion) is thus always a relation to a specificity. When James asserts that Mount Vernon acquires an “accent,” he means that the place has a note all its own, a distinct significance. And this distinctness is precisely the effect of Washington’s person. For whereas, as dissociated from Washington’s person, Mount Vernon may resemble, or be confused with, other places, its unique meaning rests precisely in its relation to Washington. In Harvard, the specificity of Higginson is assured by slightly different means. The portrait form literally frames its subject, captures and isolates him, and renders him a distinct and concrete entity.

Unlike places whose specificity is not guaranteed, the ghostly presences of persons in *The American Scene* represent specificities which cannot be confused with one another. This type of singularity is not, however, the result of people’s individual character, identity, or their personal history. James is not interested in Washington’s or Higginson’s individual traits, their psyche, their motivation, or their biography. Indeed, as Cameron observes, signs of this type of individuation (the presence and participation of “characters”) is wholly absent from the book. The significance of persons “looms large”

and distinct only in connection with the historical events in which they, consciously or unconsciously, took part. The historical relation in *The American Scene* is therefore emblematic of the (im)personal relation as such. What the recurrent theme of history in *The American Scene* serves to illustrate is that the principle of (im)personality does not denote a relation to the individuality of a person, but a relation to the singularity of an event.

The kind of historical sensibility operating in *The American Scene* is, then, an impersonal relation to particular historical figures. History becomes most crucial and most relevant when it is grasped in the form of a quasi-personal relation, and fills the present with the ghosts of the past. Indeed, in Chapter XIII on Concord and Salem, James refers to the “operative elements of the past” (192) in terms of “historic animation” (192). Emerson, Hawthorne, and Thoreau, whose ghostly presences constitute, for James, the principal source of interest in present-day Concord and Salem, are his ““transcendental’ company”(192) and “dim, shy spectralities” (192). *The American Scene* is ridden with “ghosts” in place of people, and “visitations” in place of visits. Thus, outside the White House, James

circled about the place as for meeting the ghosts, and one paused, under the same impulse, before the high pailings of the White House drive, as if wondering at haunted ground. There the ghosts stood in their public array, spectral enough and clarified [...]. (262)

But, the rhetoric of the ghostly further illustrates the kind of impersonality that the book employs in relation to actual persons. Ghosts are a convenient trope for James to help describe a relation to people which is nonetheless different from a personal relation. Ghosts are not persons nor can they be encountered as persons. Unlike actual persons

who are present, ghosts are encountered as a “haunting,” that which is simultaneously present and absent, and a notion which indicates the transcending of both time and space. This conjuring up of ghosts announces the invading of the present by the past, and consequently, the stretching of the “American scene” beyond the constraints of what is visible and present: the American “scene” is not, to pun the obvious, the American “seen.” The title of the book, it becomes clear through the ongoing historical motion of the “backward reference” (289), transcends the given, actual scene; not because it signals to a proliferation, multiplication, and overwriting of the scene by a consciousness gone wild, but because it regards the scene as meaningful and interest-yielding by virtue of its relations and associations to what is not strictly (or no longer) “in” the scene.¹¹ Having demonstrated James’ idea of history as a relation between past and present evoked through the specificity and alterity of persons, I now turn to James’ counter-stroke in *The American Scene*, motioning away from the actuality of persons to the impersonality of the scene.

¹¹ The proliferation and multiplication Cameron sees as operating in *The American Scene* may again find its interesting counterpart in Deleuze’s notion of schizophrenic flight. Like Deleuze, Cameron sees consciousness as multiplied, rather than split, and as taking on throughout *The American Scene*, the voices of other things (such as the talk of the New York air, 83-84). Unlike Deleuze, however, Cameron is not concerned with relations to things other but, on the contrary, with the alleged defeat of otherness by consciousness. For Cameron, the genre of the travelogue allows James to disguise rather than to reveal the omniscience of consciousness. A Deleuzian reading of *The American Scene* would perhaps proceed along the lines of the multiple relations between the traveller and the scene, through which the traveller becomes other than himself. The absence of a centre of consciousness in the book, which makes it virtually impossible to determine which voice is James’ and which is not, also makes it impossible to determine which *body* is travelling. The idea of a journey without a body further recalls Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notion of the “body without organs” elaborated upon in their *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane. London: Athlone Press, 1984).

3. The Impersonality of Persons

History presents a case for which the use of the ghostly and the haunting are a suitable generic convention. But the theme of ghosts and of the ghostly in *The American Scene* is not restricted to the historical encounter. The “living” people whom James encounters throughout the book appear no different to the “ghosts” of Washington and of Higginson. In Salem, for example, James searches for that elusive “Hawthornesque world” (200) in which his literary forefather was born. But the place, currently in an “untidy industrial quarter” (200), gives very little away, and James embarks on a conscious “bracketing” of those superfluous features in an attempt to arrive at the desired picture with its note of the Hawthornesque. This seeming *epoche*,

kept at a distance, in fact, so far as my perception was concerned, everything but a little boy, a dear little harsh, intelligent, sympathetic American boy, who *dropped straight from the hard sky for my benefit (I hadn't seen him emerge from elsewhere) and turned up at my side* with absolute confidence and with the most knowing tips. He might have been a Weimar tout or a Stratford amateur--only he so beautifully wasn't. [...] the little boy was so completely master of his subject and we formed, on the spot, so close an alliance. [...] he was exactly what I wanted--*a presence (and he was the only thing far or near) old enough, native and intimate enough, to reach back and understand.* (200 emphasis added)

The picture surely is formidable: a small precocious American boy accompanying the elderly gentleman in search of Hawthorne's birthplace. Yet, James purposefully refrains from offering any details that would identify the little boy and dispel his anonymity. And the latter is said to have materialized, ghost-like, as if from thin air. The boy's fantastic appearance was undoubtedly a fortunate accident, but it is depicted, conversely, as

intended for the specific purpose of conveying to James the authentic sense of the place. “I think of him,” says James of the boy,

as the very genius of the place, feeding his small shrillness on the cold scraps of Hawthorne’s leaving and with the making of his acquaintance alone worth the journey. (201)

The American boy differs only slightly or not at all from the presences of Washington and of Higginson in that the reader is told he is “real.” But in the absence of any information, and with James asserting that the boy, somehow, “understood everything” (200), one is encouraged to surmise if the boy might not be a visitation from another world. James’ equivocal reference to the boy’s age as “old enough” may be read in a similar ghostly fashion, suggesting that the boy may indeed be as old as Hawthorne. The passage illustrates James’ wilful depersonalization of the little boy. It matters little who the boy may have been, as his sole function in this chapter, the reason for which he so miraculously appears, is to communicate to James what the hard facts of modern Salem could not. And indeed, the chapter ends with James’ disappointment that the Seven Gables contributes nothing to the understanding of Hawthorne’s genius. This is because the “genius” has already been amply served up by the little boy, “the very genius of the place,” who genuinely embodies the sense of the Hawthornesque. The bracketing manoeuvre James performs (“keeping the [...] smoky modernism, at a distance, keeping everything, in fact, at a distance [...]” [200]) includes a “doing away with” any signs of individuation which would render the boy’s presence a palpable and personalized one. In order to “shut out” those elements in the picture which do not readily conform to the sense of the Hawthornesque, James leaves out any signs of the boy’s actuality. The boy does not function as a “character,” an “identity,” or an “individual.” His sole significance is as a

unique instance in James' relation to the scene. In this impersonal sense alone the American boy "lives" in *The American Scene*, not as a person, but as a singularity.

A similar depersonalization occurs at Richmond's Confederate Museum in Chapter XII. As with Salem's disappointing exterior, so with Richmond, James cannot find any distinctive features with which to capture the particular meaning of the American South. A visit to the local Museum fails initially to yield the desired impression. In the absence of features, James, this time as the "unappeased visitor," "was at his old trick: he had made out, on the spot, [...] that here was a pale page into which he might read what he likes" (283). This, it will be argued, confirms Cameron's claim concerning the hegemonic activity of consciousness. The scene, a blank page, is at the mercy of James' consciousness which is ready to invest it with its own content. But, James continues with a twist:

[h]e had not exchanged ten words of civility with a little old lady, a person soft-voiced, gracious, mellifluous, perfect for her function, who, seated by her fire in a sort of official ante-room, received him as at the gate of some grandly bankrupt plantation--**he had not surrendered to this exquisite contact before he felt himself up to his neck** in a delightful, soothing, tepid medium, the social tone of the South that *had* been. (283 emphasis added)

What begins as a sprightly declaration of activity continues with an admission of passivity in the presence of an *already* communicated impression. James may be actively and intentionally narrating his impressions, but he receives them first and foremost, passively and involuntarily, from what or from whom he meets. This being taken by surprise by a communicated impression intimates James' open stance towards the scene, an openness which renders him always ready to receive impressions and which proclaims him to be in relation with the scene.

Such a relation cannot be defined as a purely cognitive experience, for James describes it as an event preceding contemplation. James' encounter with the scene is, then, prior to consciousness and reflection. Moreover, this encounter occurs in the personal: James' encounter with the old lady *as* the scene. As with the little boy of Salem, it is the meeting with a person which occasions the flow of powerful impressions. But here too, the little old lady is encountered impersonally. She is not a person but a crystalline image of the old South. Once more, then, the particularity of an individual is converted into the particularity of the scene:

nothing in the Museum had beauty; but the little old lady had it, with her thoroughly "sectional" good manners, and that punctuality and felicity, that *inimitability*, *one must again say, of the South in her* [...]. No little old lady of the North could, for the high tone of and the right manner, have touched her, and poor benumbed Richmond might now be as dreary as it liked: with that small observation made my pilgrim couldn't be a failure. (283 emphasis added)

In James' depiction, the little old lady becomes the most precious item of the collected objects in the museum.¹² This "objectification" of the little old lady serves James to produce a singular impression of the South. In spite of the museum's "poverty of the exhibition" (282) the little old lady, as the most expressive of objects, grants the display a special significance and renders the museum the "value" of a singular "case":

¹² James' treating the "little old lady" as a museum piece recalls Adam Verver's "human collections" in *The Golden Bowl*. My point here, as well as in the context of *The Golden Bowl*, is not to argue that James (or Adam) collects people as objects in an act of appropriation and power. Rather, I wish to draw attention to James' frequent and particular use of "objectification" outside the domain of power-relations. James does not exercise any power over the little old lady, and the function of her apparent dehumanization is not immediately synonymous with her disempowerment. I have argued in the previous chapter on *The Golden Bowl* that Adam Verver's "objectification" of persons does not denote their appropriation. In both cases, the issue is not power, but impersonality and singularity. Whereas power-relations entail "managing" the other by reducing his/her otherness to a familiar "thing" one can control, impersonality denotes a relation to people as unique and precisely unusurpable. See the section "Utility and Objectification" in the previous chapter on *The Golden Bowl*.

[t]he sorry objects about were old Confederate documents, already sallow with time, framed letters, orders [...] of all of which she did the honours with a gentle florid reverence that opened wide, for the musing visitor, as he lingered and strolled, the portals, as it were, of *a singularly interesting "case."* (283 emphasis added)

The objectification of the little old lady performs what James early on refers to as the "enclosure of objects":

the formal enclosure of objects at all interesting immediately refines upon their interest, immediately establishes values. The enclosure may be impressive from without, but from within it is sovereign; nothing is more curious than to trace in the aspects so controlled the effect of their established relation to it. (49)

The formalist gesture of "enclosure" subscribes to the logic of singularities. The little old lady is not "reduced" to the state of a "mere" object. She is elevated to an exquisite singularity whose significance is irreducible: the South. For James, singularity depends on a process of "differentiation" and "discrimination," and on the subsequent incompatibility between the different elements sufficiently discriminated. For discrimination entails a separation between the different components of the general picture, the result of which is a multiplicity of wholly separate elements, and the emergence of an irreducible variety. This process of meticulous separation of elements by which singularity, and variety, are guaranteed is the "enclosure of objects." As in the case of Higginson's formal enclosure in Sargent's portrait, the "enclosure" of the little old lady as the museum's prime object, captures the singularity which is "the case of the beautiful, the attaching oddity of the general Southern state of mind" (283).

What James presents in *The American Scene* is this collection of singular impressions, of which the South is but one example. As in History's personal appeal and

the boyish transmission of the Hawthornesque genius, it is as an encounter with a personalized alterity that an impression is made possible. Persons *actually* encountered are not, therefore, encountered as people, but as the distinctive enclosures of the scene itself. By resisting treating actual persons as discrete individuals, James is committing them to the scene, investing it with the alterity of the other.

In what sense, however, can the (im)personal gestures of *The American Scene*--the personalization of the scene and the depersonalization of persons--be taken to reflect the social relation? Could a similar principle of (im)personality be said to operate in the social novels?

Conclusion: Impersonality in *The Ambassadors*

The Ambassadors (1903) is one of the three late major novels to which I have earlier referred as the “social novels.” The novel follows Lambert Strether on his unsuccessful diplomatic mission in Paris to retrieve, in the name of American decency and American productiveness, the straying son of Mrs. Newsome of Woollett, Massachusetts. Strether arrives in Europe with specific orders to locate Chad Newsome, to release him from the grip of an older Parisian Temptress, and to promptly arrange for his return to Woollett, where he will take up the Newsome business of manufacturing an unknown and uninteresting “article.” Strether magnificently fails to properly execute each of these orders. His failure is due to the inappropriate manner in which he addresses the situations he finds himself in following his departure from America to Europe.

As early as in the novel’s second paragraph, Strether is said to be

burdened [...] it had better be confessed at the outset--with the oddity of a double consciousness.

There was detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference. (56 emphasis added)

This “oddity of a double consciousness” is characteristically Jamesian in its chiasmic formulation. “Detachment” is, strangely, a feature of Strether’s interest in things; and “curiosity” is nonetheless present in his absence of interest. This peculiar dual vision is introduced at the very beginning of *The Ambassadors*, and is the key to understanding Strether’s interaction with his surroundings, the nature of his transformative adventure, and his failure to complete his ambassadorial tasks.

Now *The American Scene* is dominated by a similar mode of “detached curiosity.” Not only is one of James’ many self-appointed titles in the book, “the detached visitor” (251), James also identifies himself as the “participant at once so interested and so detached” (202). *The Ambassadors* shares with *The American Scene* the “detached curiosity” of the books’ respective observers. The tendency in some critical writings about James to read James into Lambert Strether is, therefore, not without foundation, for the two seem to share not only the status of the visitor or the tourist, but also the particular brand of tourism that both import into the scenes of their visit. More so than in the case of the other two novels of the major phase, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, *The Ambassadors* proposes an interesting continuity with *The American Scene* based on the particular “logic” of detached curiosity. Yet, what is the meaning of this seemingly contradictory combination of detachment and involvement, and how does it manifest itself in *The Ambassadors*?

It is customary to read *The Ambassadors* as a novel which ends with the affirmation of solitude. Strether remains alone having resisted, or rejected, Maria

Gostrey's offer of love as well as Mme. de Vionnet's invitation to stay in Paris. Across the water too, it is clear that Strether's failure to carry out his mission as Mrs. Newsome intended it, seals the fate on any future union between them. Lambert Strether is to remain alone, and so, for that matter, are Maria Gostrey and Marie de Vionnet. But the thought of solitude does not adequately express the final outcome of *The Ambassadors*. For along with the affirmation of the protagonists' loneliness, what the novel seems to affirm is a *multiplicity* of impressions. These crowd the pages of the novel and their presence, in clusters and hordes, overrides the characters' romantic blunders.

The Ambassadors does not draw to a close with Strether's single and solitary presence. The novel performs a "clearance" of persons leaving the scene "unpeopled," save for Strether and what Maria Gostrey calls his "wonderful impressions" (512). It is not, then, the solitude of individuals which *The Ambassadors* ends up highlighting, but their final dispensability: the conversion of individual persons into impersonal, singular impressions. And it is this impersonal vision of singularities which the notion of Strether's detached curiosity initially expresses, and which finally remains as Strether's only way of seeing. Through Strether's impersonal gaze, the populated scene appears drained of its individuals. Actual persons become unique instances of relation in the formation of "wonderful impressions," but they do not engage Strether as actual beings, as psychologically (even biologically) "real." From discrete and concrete psychological entities, persons become impersonal singularities.

The first chapter of Michael Levenson's *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* is entitled "Two Cultures and an

individual: *Heart of Darkness* and *The Ambassadors*.” The chapter contains a detailed comparative analysis between *The Ambassadors* and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as two novels whose central concern is the conflict between the individual and his community. Levenson’s analysis is most revealing (most so, I think, in relation to Jamesian metaphor [18-22] and to James’ use of “indexicals” [70-72] in what Levenson classifies as “Jamesian dialogue” [67-70]).¹³ However, Levenson’s reading of a struggle between an individual and his community seems to work better in Conrad’s case than it does in James’. Levenson sees the main conflict in *The Ambassadors* as Strether’s struggle to protect and maintain his sense of individuality in the face of the two communities (Woollett and Paris) that threaten its independence. This tension between types and particulars, argues Levenson, represents a prime concern in modernist literature in general. For Levenson, then, *The Ambassadors* exemplifies this modernist problematic of the one versus the many.

But, rather than asserting Strether’s evolving sense of individualism, *The Ambassadors* seems to finally assert Strether’s *surpassing* of individual desires, attachments, or concerns--not because pursuing them entails compromising his individuality and conforming to communal expectations, but because “individualism” does not properly describe Strether’s interactions with the society he encounters in Paris (nor his interactions with the society he leaves behind, whose second wave of ambassadors--the dreaded Sarah Pocock and her entourage--is eventually sent forth to Paris). *The Ambassadors* does not tell the story of Strether’s struggle to uphold his autonomy as an

¹³ The peculiarity of the Jamesian dialogue, says Levenson, is in the “subject of conversation so often becoming the conversation itself” (67). I make a similar point in the next chapter concerning conversations in late James lacking an object or a content.

individual against the pressures of the communal. The novel tells the story of Strether's relinquishing of a personal appreciation of people in favour of an impersonal mode of appreciation. Thus, in place of concrete individuals, Strether senses only their flickering alterity. Thus unexpectedly finding Mme. de Vionnet in a church, Strether

was struck with the tact, the taste of her vagueness, which simply took for granted in him a sense of beautiful things. He was conscious of how much it was affected, this sense, by something subdued and discreet in the way she had arranged herself for her special object and her morning walk [...] the way her slightly thicker veil was drawn--a mere touch, but everything [...] the charming discretion of her small compact head; the quiet note, as she sat, of her folded, grey-gloved hands. (275)

Singularity consists in precisely overcoming individuality, since as singular, things do not hark back to a system of knowledge and their alterity is neither removed nor reduced. In his fascination with his new environment, Strether regards the people he meets with the cool detachment of a disinterested observer. But it is precisely this detachment which is the highest expression of Strether's "zeal" for new relations. In his thirst for maximum variety, and in the wake of his belated but irrepressible interest in life, Strether regards the people he meets as numerous and unique cases. People are no longer thought of as persons who belong to a single universal category. For Strether, people become infinitely different and incomparable, each representing a unique possibility, an occasion for a new class of relation. People are not "known" or "found out," they are rather related to in their very alterity.¹⁴ Thus for Strether, persons take on an impersonal significance, a

¹⁴ Strether's sense of the radical variety--or radical inequality--among different people is contrasted throughout to Waymarsh's refusal to acknowledge (and enjoy) differences. Waymarsh is explicitly uninterested in the world around him. The fact Waymarsh remains (resentfully) oblivious to the Paris circle is characterized as his "social sightlessness" (154). Indeed, the allegory of blindness and sight

significance which the novel repeatedly expresses through Miss Barrace's sweeping ecstatic superlatives. Her recurring comic and incoherent exclamation that people and things are simply "wonderful!" best conveys the kind of impersonal and disinterested joy Strether derives from his new Parisian attachments.¹⁵

Following Strether's belated realization in the countryside of the true nature of the attachment between Chad and Mme. de Vionnet, Maria Gostrey expresses her surprise at Strether's continued ignorance. With the truth having been all along so thinly disguised, Maria can hardly believe Strether's apparent reluctance to "see": "[t]here were moments," Miss Gostrey says, "when you struck me as grandly cynical; there were others when you struck me as grandly vague"(493). To have thus far assumed that the attachment between Chad and Marie de Vionnet was indeed "virtuous" seems, on Strether's part, like overlooking some of the most basic facts of the situation, and, says Maria, "things must have a basis" (493). To which Strether, echoing Miss Barrace, replies:

recurs throughout *The Ambassadors* as a paradigm of engagement and interest, or its withholding. For instance, on Sarah Pocock's arrival to Paris, it is said that,

since she wanted so much to see, let her see then and welcome. She had come out in the pride of her competence, yet it hummed in Strether's inner sense that *she practically would n't see*. (317 emphasis added).

Or consider Strether's anxious lamentation a little later on, that Sarah's

bridling brightness [...] was merely general and *noticed nothing* [...]. (327-328 emphasis added)

And Strether continues that the Pococks

would bridle and be bright; they would make the best of what was before them, but *their observation would fail*; it would be beyond them; they simply would n't understand. (328 emphasis added)

That Waymarsh is a lawyer by profession is related to the fact of his virtual blindness. For justice, or the law, is famously blind. The law depends for its proper operation on this principle of "social sightlessness," as it treats all people as equals in the face of the law. Without such a notion of blindness, no system of "justice for all" could operate. Maud Ellmann discusses the play of vision in *The Ambassadors* in the essay "The Intimate Difference': Power and Representation in *The Ambassadors*" (*Henry James: Fiction as History*. Ed. Ian F. A. Bell. London: Vision Press, 1984. 98-113). I return to the allegory of blindness and sight in my Conclusion.

¹⁵ James devotes a section to the "picturesque and original" (250) Miss Barrace (250-255). Her more memorable exclamation is "Oh, oh, oh!" (250, 255), but she also concludes her discussions with such convictions as: "he's wonderful," or "[w]e're wonderful" (254).

“[a] basis seemed to me just what her [Mme. de Vionnet] beauty supplied.”

“Her beauty of person?”

“Well, *her beauty of everything. The impression she makes.* She has such variety and yet such harmony.” (493 emphasis added)¹⁶

Strether is not referring to Mme. de Vionnet’s personality. He is talking about her, not as a person, but as a “case,” an impression. Miss Gostrey finds this difficult to understand. For her, to think of Mme. de Vionnet in the terms Strether uses is precisely to sexualize her, and this alone should have sufficed for Strether to “see” the situation with due realism:

“[i]f you mean,” she went on, “that she was from the first for you the most charming woman in the world, nothing’s more simple. Only that was the odd foundation.”

“For what I reared on it?”

“For what you did n’t!” (493-494)

But Miss Gostrey here still misapprehends the nature of Strether’s appreciation of Mme. de Vionnet, an appreciation which exceeds both the carnal and the psychological. It is an impression which, therefore, exceeds the notion of the personal altogether. What Mme. de Vionnet signifies for Strether is an unrivalled, unparalleled impression. While it is Mme. de Vionnet alone who is the occasion for Strether’s impression, the impression itself exceeds her individual person. So that, ultimately, Strether is less interested in Mme. de Vionnet either psychologically or sexually. His fascination transcends both these aspects, and it constitutes Mme. de Vionnet as a singular and impersonal impression.¹⁷

¹⁶ Maria Gostrey responds to this lovingly by telling Strether: “[y]ou’re complete.” Yet Strether fends her off with a: “[y]ou’re always too personal” (493).

¹⁷ Some James critics are as surprised as Maria Gostrey to find Strether so indifferent to Mme. de Vionnet’s sexual appeal. The characteristic move to explain such indifference is to argue that Strether is repressing his own (complexed? conflicted?) sexual desires. But, as Leo Bersani notes in “The Jamesian Lie,” there is little room in James for the hidden depths of repression. The Jamesian structure is precisely

Mme. de Vionnet is not the only character in *The Ambassadors* whose individuality is breached by Strether's active preference for singularities. Maria Gostrey is Strether's most likely romantic partner, but she too is resisted as an individual and transformed in Strether's vision into an impersonal "event." As such, Maria becomes but one of Strether's many priceless impressions. *The Ambassadors* articulates the precise moment in which Strether recognizes that his relation with Maria has been converted from the personal or individual to the singular and impersonal. It remains clear, moreover, that Miss Gostrey is wholly aware of this conversion. Strether's

relation with Maria [...] was, strangely enough, no longer quite the same; this truth--though not too disconcertingly--had come up between them on the renewal of their meetings. It was all contained in what she had then almost immediately said to him; it was represented by the remark she had needed but ten minutes to make and that he hadn't been disposed to gainsay. He could toddle alone, and the difference that showed was extraordinary. [...] the time seemed already far off when he had held out his small thirsty cup to the spout of her pail. Her pail was scarce touched now, and other fountains had flowed for him; she fell into her place as but one of his tributaries; and there was a strange sweetness--a melancholy mildness that touched him--in her acceptance of the altered order. (303-304)

Strether first meets Maria Gostrey in England, before his departure to France. Miss Gostrey's is Strether's special initiator into the beguiling "continental climate." In the beginning of the book, Miss Gostrey's relationship with Strether takes on the apparent exclusivity of a romantic attachment. But her subsequent prolonged absence from the

that of superficial expansion and composition--a horizontal and panoramic structure, as opposed to the verticality implied by repression. Attempts to attribute to Strether wayward sexual desires ("homosexual panic"?) overlook the way in which the text of *The Ambassadors* continually (and teasingly) toys with the sexual, only to then dismiss it altogether. For a modified approach to the question of Strether's dubious sexual identity, see Eric Haralson's "Lambert Strether's Excellent Adventure" (*The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*. Ed. Jonathan Freedman. New York: Cambridge UP, 1998. 169-186).

scene of the action allows James to gracefully side-step this romantic possibility, and to later re-establish Strether's relation with Maria on a slightly different basis. On their reuniting, Strether and Maria are no longer a "couple," and their relation shifts from the exclusive to the inclusive. Maria is now but one unique relation among others: she is certainly indispensable to Strether's overall adventure, but she is not this adventure itself.

At the very moment in which Maria appears in Strether's mind, a romantic and wholly personalized image, he is already in the process of committing her to a larger and impersonal order:

[s]he had been wonderful to him at first, with the memory of her little *entresole*, the image to which, on most mornings at that time, his eyes directly opened; but now she mainly figured for him as but part of the bristling total--though of course always as a person to whom he should never cease to be indebted. It would never be given to him certainly to inspire a greater kindness. She had decked him out for others, and he saw at this point at least nothing she would ever ask for. She only wondered and questioned and listened, rendering him the homage of a wistful speculation. She expressed it repeatedly; **he was already far beyond her, and she must prepare herself to lose him.** (304 emphasis added)

It is important to note that James continually emphasizes Maria's complicity with Strether's impersonal view (impersonal because it ultimately refers to the "bristling total" of Strether's adventure without taking account of the actual persons involved in its making). Maria's complicity in this view is crucial. James does not allow Maria Gostrey to bitterly sacrifice herself for Strether, to renounce him in spite of her love for him. Miss Gostrey must be able to understand Strether's position, not only in order that their separation avoid the overtly melodramatic, but more so because her understanding of Strether's mode of impersonal appreciation is precisely the reason for which she loves

him. Thus, Strether recognizes that Maria would “understand--she always understood” (512). *The Ambassadors* ends on the note of this delicate and bitter-sweet balance: the sustained tension between Maria’s desire for Strether to stay with her, and her nonetheless being able to recognize the value inherent in Strether’s impersonal vision, his refusal to claim anything more for himself than the sum of his “impressions.”

“That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself.”

She thought. “But with your wonderful impressions you’ll have got a great deal.”

“A great deal”--he agreed. “But nothing like *you*. It’s you who would make me wrong!”

Honest and fine, **she couldn’t greatly pretend she did n’t see it**. Still she could pretend just a little. “But why should you be so dreadfully right?”

“That’s the way that--if I must go--**you yourself would be the first to want me**. And I can’t do anything else.”

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

“Oh but you’re just as bad yourself. You can’t resist me when I point that out.”

She sighed it at last all comically, all tragically, away. “I can’t indeed resist you.”

“Then there we are!” said Strether. (512 emphasis added)

I have quoted the final passage of *The Ambassadors* in its entirety because it so clearly illustrates the balancing in the book as a whole of the two modes of relation: the personal (and romantic) relation to individualities, and the impersonal relation to singularities.

These two visions are held in a perfect balance throughout the Jamesian dialogue by the thoughtful distributing of speech between Maria and Strether, a fact ensuring that Strether’s leaving is not perceived as arbitrary or as avoidable. Strether does not simply announce his leaving. The inevitability of his departure is substantiated through Maria’s

contribution to the dialogue. It is Maria's complicity to the end with Strether's choice of "impressions" over persons, which reinforces the novel's impersonal tone, a tone which significantly characterizes the practice of sociality in the novel.¹⁸

In his book published in 1913, *Henry James: A Critical Study*, Ford Madox Ford makes the following claim:¹⁹

[c]ompassion or any trace of a desire to be helpful are in fact almost entirely wanting in the works of this *impersonal writer*. They are absent in a way that characterises no other author known to me. (22 emphasis added)

The Ambassadors entertains precisely this kind of impersonality at the heart of the novel's social and romantic scene. Ford's emphasis on James' "impersonality" assumes an additional rigour in light of its striking affinity with an unlikely partner for whom too the notion of "impersonality" is of paramount importance. Consider the following passage on love from Deleuze's snappily-titled essay "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature":

[m]aking an event--however small--is the most delicate thing in the world: the opposite of making a drama or a story. Loving those who are like this: when they enter a room *they are not persons, characters or subjects, but an atmospheric variation, a change of hue, an imperceptible molecule, a discrete population, a fog or a cloud of droplets. Everything has really changed.* (*Dialogues* 66 emphasis added)

¹⁸ Unlike *The Golden Bowl*, *The Ambassadors* ends with a warding off of "profanation": Strether resists the "temptations" of this world (Maria) and rejects the order of equality and justice which the characters of *The Golden Bowl* finally embrace. Strether chooses to remain "all careless of mankind" in the world of incomparable impressions. He thus chooses Maggie's heavenly pagoda over Waymarsh's court of law. See my discussion of Maggie's pagoda in a footnote to Chapter 2 on *The Golden Bowl* (107n).

¹⁹ The book was published before Ford changed his name from Ford Madox Hueffer to Ford Madox Ford. I refer to him as the latter.

What lover would wish this as their Valentine's Day inscription? And yet James' characters are often loved in this way, as non-persons, as singularities rather than individualities. What Ford sees (and celebrates) as James' lack of compassion, is dramatized in *The Ambassadors* through Strether's impersonal relation to the people he meets and loves, a relation echoed in Deleuze's passage from *Dialogues*. For Strether has changed utterly following his encounters in Paris. He returns to America, in the words of Maria Gostrey, "[t]o a great *difference*" (511 emphasis added) having adopted the kind of impersonal vision which recognizes the multiplicity and variety of singularities. Strether shall never be again as he was. "Everything has really changed."

Rather than reading *The Ambassadors* in the context of Levenson's modernist problematic of individualism, it is possible to see James as effecting what Daniel B. Smith calls a "nonpersonal mode of individuation" (*Essays Critical and Clinical* xx); a mode whose identification as a distinct Jamesian feature is, perhaps, the most suggestive point made in Ford's study. When reading James, one rarely feels for, identifies with, or sides against, particular characters. James makes sure that an interest in characters as individuals is almost impossible. By focusing on relationships between characters rather than on individuals themselves, James does not simply ensure his famous multiplicity of point of view, but he also prevents the possibility of considering characters independently, outside of the relations of which they are part.

Through an allusion to the principle of impersonality at work in *The Ambassadors*, a possible continuity with *The American Scene* has emerged. If *The Ambassadors* can be said to end in a virtual "clearance" of persons, *The American Scene* presents a world

already emptied. *The American Scene* “picks up,” as it were, where *The Ambassadors* left off. If the absence of persons in *The American Scene* leads Cameron to observe that in this book other people are initially “gotten out of the way,” and to continue that “James’s novels, on the other hand, are ostensibly about others as actual, in the sense of being about others as discrete characters” (Cameron 29); the particular way in which Strether relates to the people he meets reveals an absence of persons operating *within* the social relation itself, an absence which Cameron misreads as unique to *The American Scene*. If, at the end of *The Ambassadors* Strether does away with Maria Gostrey as a distinct person, in *The American Scene* James does away with the realist convention of “characters.” So that relations are carried out with no recourse to psychologically realistic characters. By highlighting Strether’s process of radical depersonalization at the heart of the social scene in *The Ambassadors*, impersonality in *The American Scene* becomes a continuation and an acceleration of the impersonality of the social relation itself.

Postscript: The Singularity of “America”

Variety and value are the products of the processes of “enclosure,” since by separating elements from one another, by framing them in isolation, and by establishing differences between them, the “general” picture is revealed in its utter diversity (as an assemblage). The question of “differences” versus “sameness” permeates *The American Scene*. James regards the question of the production or suppression of differences in America as crucial, and the question is returned to again and again in different contexts. Enclosure is the gesture of singularities. I have explained that in relating to persons as

singularities, the notion of individuality, of a distinct psychological subject, is breached. As singular, persons do not refer back to the psychological category of the “subject,” or even to the universal category of the “human.” The absence of persons in *The American Scene* reflects such a treatment of persons as non-persons, as singular alterities. In the examples discussed, (missing) persons were the instances which embodied singular impressions: “Washington,” “Higginson,” as well as the “American boy” and the “little old lady” all denote a relation to a singularity, not a relation to an individual. Consequently, *The American Scene* consists of an abundance of singular impressions, impressions assumed through “enclosures,” and the creation of difference.

But the enclosure of objects and the ceaseless production of differences which James so emphatically endorses seem directly opposed to the American tendency towards sameness and identity. The issue of “differences,” then, is paramount, not only to the understanding of the Jamesian narrative, but also, culturally, as the main aspect of James’ analysis of the American predicament.²⁰

²⁰ The question of differences and sameness also underlies recent debates over James’ (particularly in *The American Scene*) measure of “political correctness.” Although I do not directly address this important issue here, introducing Levinas into my discussion serves as a suggestive theoretical framework with which to read James’ cultural commentary in *The American Scene*. Levinas (whose use of the “feminine” has come under fire in much the same way as James’ use of the “alien” in *The American Scene*) entertains notions of alterity outside the more familiar context of power-politics. For both James and Levinas, the “other” conditions rather than is conditioned by the discourses of power. For a comprehensive survey of the cultural debates around *The American Scene*, and a favourable reading of James which avoids recourse to the categories utilized by James’ attackers, see two articles by Gert Buelens: “Possessing The American Scene: Race, Vulgarity, Seduction and Judgment,” and “James’ ‘Aliens’: Consuming, Performing, and Judging the American Scene.” For critiques of Levinas’ use of the “feminine” see the following: Luce Irigaray’s “The Fecundity of the Caress” (*Face to Face with Levinas*. Richard A. Cohen Ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986). Irigaray’s essay is a detailed response to the section in *Totality and Infinity* entitled “Phenomenology of Eros” (TI 256-266). See also, Stella Sanford’s “Writing as a Man: Levinas and the Phenomenology of Eros” (*Radical Philosophy* 87 [1998]: 6-17).

The main context for the consideration of the problem of “discrimination” and “difference” in *The American Scene* is the “social scene” (292). The question of differences has some vital implications for the fast-changing face of American society, with the huge waves of immigrants arriving to settle in it from around the world, the population of blacks, and the growth of major cities like New York or Chicago. On the one hand, then, James witnessed the American scene being rapidly and diversely populated by groups of different ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, a process which introduced radical variety into the so-called unity of the States. On the other hand, James observes, America is engaged in a harmonizing process which encourages sameness at the expense of differences, so that differences are gradually claimed and absorbed by the grand totality called “America.” Thus, America is referred to by James as the “great assimilative organism” (97), and the “terrible tank” (98) responsible for the “extinction of qualities” (99).

This tension, between the multiplicity and the uniformity of the American scene, touches on the very heart of the question which *The American Scene* implicitly if not explicitly raises: What does “America” mean? And it is essential to recognize in *The American Scene* the resounding echoes of this question. For at the same time that James asserts in the very heart of the American scene a social and cultural void, it is the sheer energy raging in the vacuum which positively constitutes the meaning of “America.” To qualify this somewhat: if America lacks in substantial content, it would appear that this lack has no bearings on the rigorous workings of what James calls the “hungry machine” (220). James is most attentive to the sheer forward thrust of the American machine, and to

the fact that this mechanism seems to work, as of itself, devoid of any carefully thought out social and cultural objectives. This situation differs greatly from the way in which European societies operate:

in the United States everyone is, for the lubrication of *the general machinery*, practically in everything, whereas in Europe, mostly, it is only certain people who are in anything; so that *the machinery, so much less generalized, works in a smaller, stiffer way.* (79 emphasis added)

Both Europe and America are approached here mechanistically. But unlike its American counterpart, the European machine is operated by the few, and it therefore reflects their particular interests. In America, conversely, the machine does not reflect the exclusive interest of a particular group or class, because no such interest exists. The overriding and common interest, socially inclusive rather than exclusive, is the making of money. With the primary interest in economic production and growth, and in the absence of rival interests, the American machine, by the very rigour of its motion, exercises a kind of social harmonizing and a suppression of differences.

Thus, in America, a possible variety of social questions deriving from the co-existence of conflicting social interests

insisted on yielding [...] to **the mere eloquence of the general truth**. Here was a social order in positively stable equilibrium. Here was a world whose relation to its form and medium was practically imperturbable; here was a conception of publicity *as* the vital medium organized with the authority with which the American genius for organization, put on its mettle, alone could organize it. (81)

The issue at hand is not the accuracy of what appears to be James' analysis of the structures of capitalism, but the way in which these structures serve to explain what James sees as the absence of differences in America. The "mere eloquence of the general truth"

wonderfully invokes the hypnotic pull of sameness which constitutes the appeal of the American scene. “Eloquence” is not used here in the rhetorical sense to denote an American talent for clearly expressing the logic of its mechanism. On the contrary, “eloquence” is precisely not applied in any discursive sense. It is applied mechanistically. Thus, the meaning of “eloquence” in this passage indicates the effect produced by the uninterrupted movement of the machine itself. So that, oddly, it is the machine which is “eloquent,” the machine which is articulate and expressive. There is no need for explanations, for a theory or a rationale to support the workings of the machine. The machine is self-explanatory. The monotonous grace produced by perpetual movement thus becomes its own justification. The continuity and fluency of mere motion take the place of the continuity of thought and the fluency of speech.²¹

In *The American Scene*, James is not supplying a sustained critique of Americanism. Although large parts of James’ elaborate cultural analysis overtly condemn the way in which America operates, James’ main concern, and the book’s main concern at that, is to illustrate with immense precision the way in which the (criticized and condemned) mechanism *successfully* produces interest. And, as “interest” is a relation to

²¹ The kind of non-discursive eloquence James attributes here to the general American mechanism bears a strange resemblance to Jean Baudrillard’s notion of America’s “lyrical nature of pure circulation” (*America* 27). The “lyricism” in Baudrillard’s description functions in the same way as the “eloquence” in James’. This idea of a machine whose very movement constitutes its own expression, logic, or truth, is reiterated throughout Baudrillard’s *America*, for example, in relation to cars: “[t]he point is not to write a sociology or psychology of the car, the point is to drive” (54). Baudrillard’s book contains many illuminating parallels with James; for instance, James’ humorous discussion of the “dental question” (*AS* 135-36) and his mentioning of “le sourire Californien” (136), and Baudrillard’s entertaining comment on the American smile: “Americans may have no identity, but they do have wonderful teeth” (*America* 34). Baudrillard also returns continually to the issue of the elimination of differences in America (16). Both James and Baudrillard seem to share a tone of fascination and interest in the American predicament which surpasses mere judgment or critique.

variety and singularity, the fact that the American scene with its uniformity, openness, and sameness is so very interesting, itself becomes the main source of interest.

The exhibition is wonderful for that, for the suggested sense of a promiscuity which manages to be at the same time an inordinate untempered monotony; manages to be so, on such ground as this, by an extraordinary trick of its own, wherever one finds it. The combination forms, I think, largely, the very interest, such as it is, of these phases of the human scene in the United States--if only for the pleasant puzzle of our wondering how, when types, aspects, conditions, have so much in common, they should seem at all to make up a conscious miscellany. That question, however, the question of the play and range, the practical elasticity, of the social sameness, in America, will meet us elsewhere on our path. (80)

In this sense of a “promiscuity” which is also a “monotony” lies the crux of the American condition. James describes this condition as an elasticity of sameness, by which he means the way in which American indiscrimination still achieves a range of differences. James is touching here on a major difficulty facing commercial democracies like America: the difficulty of enabling a range of differences to operate within a general system of sameness. For, as James explains throughout *The American Scene*, American democracy founds itself on the inclusive category of the “People,” and on the (humanist) category of “humanity.” Yet it is precisely at the moment in which democracy most emphatically asserts the universal freedom of all its people, that it finds itself at odds with the diversity it has set out to allow.²²

²² One of the reasons for which *The American Scene* maintains its contemporary edge is its ongoing interrogation of democracy’s ability to sustain differences. Debates over “diversity” and “multi-culturalism” have currently assumed a note of urgency, especially in the context of university curriculums. It is interesting that James should find himself at the centre of such debates over canonicity. In many respects, recent attempts to reshape the western canon and its content reflect the problem of democracy to reconcile itself with differences. For to *legislate* diversity (by actively introducing “minor” works into the canon) merely repeats the gesture of unification and sameness initially contested. For a discussion of the problem of revising the canon, see Lori Schroeder Haslem’s article “Is Teaching the Literature of Western

The American Scene is therefore partly devoted to establishing the singularity of the American scene at the same time that it asserts the scene's sameness and emptiness. Moreover, it is the elements of emptiness and sameness themselves which, although at odds with the very notion of the singular as enclosed, shall themselves constitute the singularity of the American scene. America will have to be thought through its emptiness, as a unique instance in which the absence of substance itself constitutes a unique predicament. If earlier, James asserted the primacy of the mechanistic over and above the substantial, it is the very hollowness inherent in the purely mechanical which makes the American predicament a unique one:

I felt myself catch in the very act one of the great ingurgitations of the hungry machine, and recognize as well how perfect were all the conditions for *making it a case*. What could have testified less, on the face of it, than the candour of the street's insignificance?--a pair of huge parted lips protesting almost to pathos their *innocence of anything to say: which was exactly, none the less, where appetite had broken out and was feeding itself to satiety.* (220 emphasis added)

By speaking of the motion of the American machine as a "case," James attests the distinctness he finds in the American scene. The distinctness proceeding, paradoxically, from the "hunger" for content, the hunger for having something "to say."²³ Mechanical

Culture Inconsistent with Valuing Diversity?" (*Profession* 1998. 117-130). Evidently, the question of diversity versus uniformity transcends the merely academic. "Political correctness," for example, presses this problem: can diversity at all be legislated? For one attempt to reclaim American liberalism without recourse to universals, see Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1989.

²³ James' view of America's "innocence of anything to say" is slightly modified, or qualified, in Chapter XI on the city of Washington which James calls "the City of Conversation" (252). But even in conversational Washington, talk is strained for it continually brushes against the eloquently mechanical: [i]t is in positive quest of an identity, much rather--**an identity other than merely functional and technical**--that Washington goes forth, encumbered with no ideal of avoidance or escape: it is about herself *as* the City of Conversation precisely that she incessantly converses (253 emphasis added)

movement inspires a desire or an “appetite” which cannot be satisfied, and this, in turn, keeps the machine in perpetual motion, in a gesture of perpetual feeding. The final picture is one of constant “grabbing,” by which the machine thrusts itself hungrily forward in a movement without end.

One idea which most forcefully conveys the singularity of the American void is the idea of the hotel.²⁴ For James, it is the hotel more than any other establishment in America which embodies the vision of a futuristic society, and which combines all the major American trends: gregariousness, emptiness, and commercialism. The different phrases James deploys in his analyses of the hotel are some of the most memorable ones in the book: “hotel-spirit” (79) “hotel-civilization” (323) and “hotel-world” (324). As James puts it,

one is verily tempted to ask if the hotel-spirit may not just *be* the American spirit most seeking and most finding itself. (79)²⁵

What Washington shares with other major cities such as London, Paris, Berlin, and Rome, is a preoccupation with its own identity as a major city. The difference is, however, that, whereas London, for instance, “talks about everything in the world without thereby for a moment, as it were, ceasing to be egotistical” (253), a similar kind of self-consciousness in America is at odds with the workings of the general mechanism. So that instead of conversing about “everything in the world,” Washington speaks only of its attempt at self-definition:

[t]he spectacle...was that of a numerous community in ardent pursuit of some workable conception of its social self, and trying meanwhile intelligently to talk itself, and even this very embarrassment, into a *subject* for conversation. (253)

Perhaps this kind of observation concerning Washington’s failed attempts to simultaneously forget and remember itself corresponds to Baudrillard’s assertion that the eccentricity of American society, “no one is capable of analysing [...] least of all the American intellectuals shut away on their campuses, dramatically cut off from the fabulous concrete mythology developing all around them” (*America* 23).

²⁴ James’ analysis of the “hotel-world” anticipates Fredric Jameson’s famous analysis of postmodernism in the specific locality of the Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles. (“Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism” *NLR* 146 [1984]: 53-92).

²⁵ The hotel as the ultimate American setting may bring to mind Saul Bellow’s *Seize the Day*, which, in spite of its obvious and countless differences from James, takes place almost exclusively inside a hotel. The only alternative setting for this other American masterpiece, is, significantly, the brokerage shop. Bellow can write about money with unprecedented sublimity.

The hotel is America's finest concrete enclosure. In its enclosed state, the hotel symbolizes the growing self-sufficiency of American culture. And as enclosed and self-sufficient, the hotel offers James a laboratory-like setting for examining the possibilities of American society. For inside the totality of the hotel-world, America appears in its near unadulterated and most advanced form. James begins his discussion of the hotel in Chapter II, "New York Revisited," at the Waldorf-Astoria, and he returns to the hotel in Florida, in the last chapter of the book. What is most significant about the "hotel-world" is precisely its totality which allows it to function independently as a kind of virtual society, a "synonym for civilization" (79). For James, then, the meaning of the hotel is bound with its experimental (albeit provisional) inventions (or simulations) of social forms and practices, of the kind the "real" world has not yet discovered. The hotel,

struck me in general as educative, distinctly, in respect to the society it deals with, keeping for the most part well in advance of it, and leading it on to a larger view of the social interest and opportunity than might otherwise accrue [...] its general pretension not only of meeting all American ideals, but of creating (the Waldorf-Astoria being in this sense, for example, a perfect riot of creation) new and superior ones. Its basis, in those high developments, is not that it merely gratifies them as soon as they peep out, but that it lies in wait for them, anticipates and plucks them forth even before they dawn, setting them up almost prematurely and turning their face in the right direction. (324)

"America" is not only like a hotel in the sense of being provisional, entertaining, moneyed, and public. Like the hotel, America remains increasingly cut-off from any "outside" to which it may refer to gain self-understanding. The hotel has no need for references beyond what it generates itself and offers its boarders. In Florida, James finds himself on "a wondrous floating tea-house or restaurant, inflated again with the hotel-spirit and exhaling

modernity at every pore” (339). Subsequently, James is impressed by the beauty of the scene, but attempts to think of his impressions by way of analogy and reference lead him to inquire:

[t]he shore of the sunset and the palms, what was that, meanwhile, like, and yet with what did it, at the moment one asked the question, refuse to have anything to do? (340)

The Florida scene must remain cut off from all outside references and resist analogies.

Indeed,

the whole impression, for simply sitting there in the softest lap the whole South had to offer, seemed to me to dispense with any aid but that of its own absolute felicity. (339)

The commercial Florida scene of the hotels in Palm Beach has come to resemble nothing but itself. And as what has “become the all in all and made and imposed its law” (324), the hotel transcends other American establishments such as the equally gregarious and commercially oriented sky scraper (61, 139) or the blank and bourgeois institution of the Country Club (239). The hotel caters for crowds and represents the “all-gregarious and generalized life” (325). And James comments, somewhat acidically:

I by no means say that it is not touching, the so largely witless confidence with which the universal impulse hurls its victims into the abyss of the hotel-spirit [...]. (325)

Perhaps America itself is the world’s largest hotel.

The singularity of the American scene is one which combines at a single stroke the highest level of abstraction with an excess of the material and mundane. But this seemingly impossible combination, a combination such as the “hotel-spirit,” is not strictly an American predicament. It is also a characteristically Jamesian one. Thus, the American scene offers itself to James as an ideal locality for literary composition, not because it is

empty and can be worked on freely, but precisely because it requires a close attention to the utterly mundane, and an equal ability to abstract. Consequently, *The American Scene* assembles some of the most unlikely elements into the smallest units of singularity: from the “religion of the Elevator” (139-40) through to the “solicitation of sugar” (147) the “mechanic bribes” (149) or the “implication of the tiara” (124). These singular impressions, at once abstract and wholly concrete, appear consistently throughout the book, and they offer intelligibility in tiny instalments. Perhaps this is what Ford Madox Ford meant when he wrote in praise of *The American Scene* that

when the reader embarks upon that magnificent book [...] he reads for many pages with a sense of deep, of complete, and finally of utter non-comprehension. (19)

The American Scene is not comprehensively configured, it is painstakingly composed.

Chapter 4 - Economies and Panorama in *Henry James: Autobiography*

1. Autobiographical Economy: Selflifewriting

This in particular was of the perfect felicity, that while the fact of difference all round me was immense the embarrassment of it was nil--as if the getting into relation with the least waste had been prepared from so far back that *a sort of divine economy now fairly ruled*. (AUB 550 emphasis added)

I remember myself as no further critical than to feel, not without zest, that, since one was all eyes and the world decidedly, at such a pace, all images, it *ministered to the panoramic*. (AUB 166 emphasis added)

It is then the panoramic vision of the real which is the truth and which gives all its satisfaction to the mind. (*Ethics and Infinity* 76)

Like *The American Scene* which (loosely) alludes to the genre of the travelogue merely to open up a horizon of travel beyond any given or concrete scene, so the memoirs of Henry James (loosely) refer to the genre of autobiography only to thereby introduce a field far beyond that of the genre's traditional range. The *Autobiography* reintroduces many of James' familiar themes: the intriguing relation to material objects or "things," the thought of death beyond the dialectic of being and nothingness, and the relation to other people as an other-worldly experience of transcendence. The *Autobiography* combines all

these in an intricate scheme which does not readily fit into the traditionally autobiographical.

What is this “other” field opened up by the *Autobiography* and outreaching the given scope of autobiography? James refers to it simply, if cryptically, as the field of the “literary.” So the *Autobiography* provides, not so much the history of James’ initiation into literature, nor the nurturing of his literary talent, as its extraordinary grammar, its unique components and complex anatomy: the “personal history, as it were, of an imagination” (454), not of its possessor. In a way, this was already partially attempted in *The American Scene*, but James thought the autobiographical, more than the novel or the travelogue, best suited this type of exposition (455). To put it differently, if for James, literature was life, and life literature, what better way to embrace the immensity of the field than through autobiography, in which “life” is a master theme? *The American Scene* is immense in its own way, as is *The Golden Bowl*, but both these works revolve around a more or less defined centre, and have a fairly given scope. The *Autobiography*, on the other hand, abandons all centres on its very first page, and gives itself over to the literary-life pure and simple.¹

¹ As well as boasting a similarity with *The American Scene*, then, the *Autobiography*’s second close relatives are the Prefaces to the New York Edition collected in *The Art of the Novel*. It is the latter similarity which concerns me here. Frederick W. Dupee notes the *Autobiography*’s double bind to *The American Scene* and *The Art of the Novel*, yet I do not strictly agree with him on the nature of the relation between the *Autobiography* and *The Art of the Novel*. Dupee claims that while *The Art of the Novel* expresses James’ “critical justification of his practice as a novelist; the autobiography is his revelation of the man within the novelist” (xi). I cannot find any such personal revelation in the *Autobiography*, because, I believe, neither could James. For him, the “man of imagination” (AUB 455) was inseparable from the man of actual experience (AUB 494).

Autobiography is literally defined as the narrative of “life-writing” (Olney 46), or, as in James Goodwin’s book, “the self made text.”² This basic understanding of the autobiographical act as recording the development or cementing of a “self-in-progress” has come under criticism in a variety of ways. Chapter 5 of Robert Smith’s *Derrida and Autobiography* provides a good overview of contemporary autobiographical theories, and demonstrates the division in the field between a more humanistic/psychologicistic understanding of the genre which takes the self as its proper subject, and a postfoundationalist approach which contests the givenness of this self. Smith employs the familiar Derridian manoeuvres to rattle the alleged naiveté of essentialist conceptions of the autobiographical as the written history of the self.³ To write one’s life, the argument goes, presupposes the concretion and continuity of the “self” in question. As recent theory has persistently tried to show, such a Transcendental Self is nowhere to be found. If the subject of autobiography is merely hallucinatory, then autobiography can no longer simply be defined as the narrative or history of that subject.

One of the best discussions of James’ *Autobiography* is found in Ross Posnock’s *The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Challenge of Modernity*

² Goodwin, James. *Autobiography: The Self Made Text*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993. See also James Olney’s *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³ Smith describes this approach as follows: “[i]t takes autobiography above all as a document of personal history, or ‘history of personality,’ and so places autobiography fairly within an ideology of individualism. Both one’s history and one’s personality are exactly that--one’s own--and one nurtures them like a sublime commodity with all the narcissistic gratification that implies. As such, this [...] category provides a soft target for more politically and deconstructively sophisticated critics” (56). Smith continues: “[i]n general, the bone of contention is the subject or self and whether it is whole, or fragmented; self-determining, or wrought with political and conceptual barbs. It is the subject not as ‘he’ or ‘she’ which is at stake, but as the ‘I’ which takes itself to be its own object or subject, univocal and present to itself” (57). My point here shall be that James is altogether oblivious to such questions of identity.

(167-192). Posnock's approach clearly falls into the second, postfoundationalist camp.

Posnock sets out to demonstrate the way in which James' *Autobiography* enacts the dissolution of the subject. The narrative, Posnock claims, boasts an affinity with Adorno's post-foundationalist theory, as well as an unlikely affinity with Whitman's poetics of the self. According to Posnock, James both avoids and evades substantive constructions of identity, and he continuously handles his own self as a fluid and inauthentic process of becoming, not as given or fixed. Rather than depicting the adventures of the authentic self, James deploys a strategy of mimesis to imitate his environment, thereby granting priority to the inauthentic and re-presented over the supposedly authentic and ever-present self. Posnock reads the *Autobiography* as a narrative in which the artist's identity, conceived as a substantive and coherent inwardness, breaks down rather than consolidates. And he pushes for a positive understanding of such a process in which James' self is imitative and unstable rather than original and secure. Furthermore, Posnock's reading takes place in the rich cultural context of radical American (and European) thought. By thus contextualizing James within the continuum of American thought from Whitman to Santayana, Posnock wishes to "repatriate" James among some of his most brilliant countrymen.⁴

Indeed, the *Autobiography* almost immediately belies any attempt to read it as a conventional narrative of the emergence and development of an artistic self. The book performs a sort of vanishing of its subject (similar to the vanishing of persons in *The American Scene*). Yet, for all its impressiveness, Posnock's analysis remains firmly within

⁴ Most acute in this context is Posnock's attempt to undo the traditional antithesis between Whitman (virile, vibrant, self-centred, and sexual) and James (effeminate, passive, abstract, and repressed). The contrast between Whitman and James is clearly expressed in Philip Rahv's essays "Paleface and Redskin," "The Cult of Experience in American Writing," and "Attitudes Toward Henry James," collected in *Literature and the Sixth Sense*.

the context of the theory and politics of identity (or identity-crisis).⁵ Posnock outlines some fascinating intellectual trajectories, yet by remaining focused on the problems of identity, his reading neglects certain key elements of James' text which seem to me both central and crucial. These elements principally include: the presence of a concrete, sensual, and phenomenal world (a world which is experienced directly rather than mimetically, and whose directness and authenticity precisely contribute to the formation of a unique Jamesian vision), the dismissal of death, and the relation between persons as the experience of transcendence.

This essay proposes to explore these themes through the *Autobiography's* overarching idea of "economy." Economy represents James' fascination with questions of the possibilities of "usage" and "waste" of life's materials, and with the way in which these materials can be incorporated into the literary text which tells this life. The *Autobiography* strives to use and re-use (recycle) as much material as possible, an ambition which has some significant structural consequences. In order to avoid what James repeatedly refers to as "waste," his narrative adheres to a "panoramic" or scenic structure. Panorama, then, describes the expansive laying out of the narrative in a "scenic-strain" (446) of successive episodes. This panoramic structure, in turn, renders the *Autobiography* at once vast and extensive, and discontinuous and fragmentary. If James desires to incorporate "everything" into the narrative and waste "nothing," a panoramic vision of life is his way of both expressing and realizing this desire.

⁵ Posnock ends *The Trial Of Curiosity* with a section accordingly entitled "Coda: The Politics of Nonidentity" (285-293).

An insatiable appetite for material, however, poses a problem for narrative coherence: how might James use up everything and waste nothing, while at the same time avoid the effects of randomness and incoherence? Whereas the *Autobiography* is not incoherent as such, it does initially seem to fall prey to a pervasive “vagueness.”⁶ Vagueness is, however, a feature with which the *Autobiography* is as fascinated as it is inflicted. What appears to be a “price” exacted in terms of thematic, chronological, and even aesthetic cohesion, is, then, the principle which positively underlies the Jamesian economy of expansion and assimilation: vagueness is not strictly a shortcoming, it is also an “ideal” (412). Vagueness is James’ narrative balm, preserving the inherent “strangeness” of the objects he represents. Vagueness is not, therefore, to be understood as the antithesis of the coherent and the intelligible, but, paradoxically, as that which protects the specificity of the text’s elements from the destructive harshness of crude definitions.⁷

By concentrating on the notions of “economy” and “panorama” rather than on the traditional components of the autobiographical (“self,” “life,” “writing”), I wish to distance myself from both quarrelsome camps: the humanist, providing psychological accounts of the “self” that writes its life on the one hand, and the deconstructionist on the other, endlessly chanting the dissolution of the Transcendental Subject. I argue that the proper “subject” of James’ *Autobiography* is neither the upright nor the fragile self, but the

⁶ When Dupee writes that James’ “command of the rhythm of a sentence and the structure of a paragraph had failed a little by 1911” (xiv), I take him to be referring to the pervasive “vagueness” I speak of.

⁷ The paradox of vagueness should become clearer later on. Suffice it now to say that for James to withhold explanations and definitions (to keep things vague) protects the specific content of things, and saves this content from going to “waste.” The vaguer something remains, the more unique, hence less wasted, it is.

movements of economy and vision: the panoramic gaze of an invisible cosmic “eye,” and the anatomy of its vision that sweeps subjects and objects alike. In his autobiography James illustrates one last time and in the radical manner of the late style just how far afield his writing can stretch both language and ideas, and to what ends. The *Autobiography*'s subject is, then, life lived under the prodigious law of the “divine economy” which, as James attests, “fairly ruled.” This, in short, is the story of the literature of life, or the life of literature: the “auto,” “bio,” and “graphy” melted into one, solid, vague, translucent whole.

Rival economies continually compete against the Jamesian economy, but are triumphantly defeated by it. James' chief competitors are the American economy, which, in its rigorous professionalism and emphasis on “success” and on money, James regards as exceedingly wasteful. A second rival model is the scientific economy, which, in its natural economy of life and death is, to James, equally limiting.⁸ Finally, there is the celestial economy of Henry James Sr., inspired by the writing of Emanuel Swedenborg, and in James' opinion, simultaneously too abstract and too concrete. In place of these models, James develops his own literary economy or vision. Under its rule, the *Autobiography* reads as an exhaustive exercising of the Jamesian vision. To disentangle some of the complexities of this extraordinary vision is the main objective of what will follow.

⁸ Natural economy is represented through repeated allusions to science in William James' youthful scientific experiments, and later in his training at Harvard in the natural sciences and Medicine. Even Charles Darwin gets a brief mention, as does his opponent, the naturalist (and William James' teacher) Professor Agassiz (Kaplan 84). The economy of the American mind is contrasted throughout to the so-called un-Americanism of the James family (see especially *AUB* 109, 267-68, 278-79, 301-302, 305).

In keeping with the *Autobiography*'s episodic nature, I have tried to include in the discussion a wide range of scenes. I hope the relation between the parts and the whole of my argument will nonetheless remain consistently in sight. Partly as a result of Leon Edel's influential biographies of James, readers of the *Autobiography* tend to focus on particular portions of the three volumes, primarily James' "obscure hurt" (*AUB* 415), the nightmare harking back to the Gallery D'Apollon (*AUB* 196-197), and the passages declaring the *Autobiography* to be "the personal history [...] of an imagination" (*AUB* 454).⁹ Repeated focus on these particular scenes has given rise to certain common assumptions about James and his *Autobiography*, at the expense of others. Such a narrowing down of the critical focal points is regrettable since it misses the many highly convoluted paths James has painstakingly mapped out for his readers. Comparatively less has been written about the *Autobiography* than of the other works of the major phase, which leaves the *Autobiography* a relatively fresh terrain for the adventure of reading.

⁹ Edel outlines his approach to the task of biography in his article tellingly titled "The Figure Under the Carpet" (emphasis added). While Edel peers under the carpet, I am interested in the carpet itself as a significant surface. (*Biography as High Adventure: Life-Writers Speak on Their Art*. Ed. Stephen B. Oats. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986. 18-31).

2. The Spectral Economy: Death Dismissed

All the uncles, of whichever kindred, were to come to seem sooner or later to be dying, more or less before our eyes, of melancholy matters; and yet their general story, so far as one could read it, appeared the story of life. (*AUB* 76)

“There’s ever so much here than you and I. We’re in fact just three!”

“Oh if you count the ghosts--!”

“Of course I count the ghosts, confound you! *It seems to me ghosts count double--for what they were and for what they are.*” (*The Spoils of Poynton* 203 emphasis added)

Death drags behind life, hampering life’s easy stride and infecting the narrative with human finitude. Yet, is not this the full power of the autobiographic, the fatality and fragility which one is compelled to read between the lines of the story of life? Perhaps, but James’ *Autobiography* subverts this natural economy of birth and death, following a peculiarly unnatural cycle. For rather than impoverishing the narrative, the many deaths that befall the *Autobiography*’s “characters” perversely enrich it, adding substance and weight to the events described. Like the ghosts alluded to by Fleda Vetch at the end of *The Spoils of Poynton*, so the dead of the *Autobiography* “count double”: they do not drop out of the narrative, but return to it with the contagious vigour of ghosts. Through this haunting effect, by which the dead reappear in the narrative unextinguished, the *Autobiography* performs a kind of undermining of death. How, then, does death figure in the *Autobiography*? Is death at all possible?

In addition to the play of ghosts, the narrative introduces the theme of the “happy orphans,” the echoing of proper names, and the resurrective treatment of Minny Temple’s letters at the end of *Notes of a Son and Brother*.¹⁰ All these amount to a dismissal of death. The (im)possibility of death is also the question posed in James’ 1910 essay “Is There a Life After Death?” The essay compares death with consciousness, and wonders whether the overwhelming affluence of consciousness cannot survive even the demolition of death. I shall return to this essay at the end of this section.

Early on, the *Autobiography* introduces the morbid consequences of the multiple deaths of uncles and aunts. The James family suffered recurring calamities which left many of James’ young cousins without one parent, and sometimes without both. Yet compared to his own parent-fitted household, James’ orphaned cousins seemed to him as

much more privileged [...] in every stroke of fortune; or at least much more interesting, though it might be wicked to call them more happy, through those numberless bereavements that had so enriched their existence. (99)

James is not seriously concerned about seeming “wicked,” his half-hearted apology is a thin foil for the happiness he shamelessly attributes to his bereft cousins. Of another orphaned cousin James later confesses:

I thought of her, with a revival of the old yearning envy, as now quite transcendently orphaned [...]. (264)

Happy orphans, then, crowd the pages of *A Small Boy and Others*, making a mockery of death, and setting into motion the intricate circuits of the extended family. No longer tied to their parents, the “outstanding ones” (108) as James calls them, move from

¹⁰ Another occasion for the undermining of death is James’ father’s death, which is described (like Milly’s death in *The Wings of the Dove*), as an act of the will (*AUB* 343).

relative to relative, from domestic field to “alternative domestic field” (70), and in their dislocatedness they possess a nomadic or cosmopolitan charm. Young James is captivated, and he sees the orphans as somehow privileged and blest. Nor does the James of later years regret his giddy elevation of orphanhood. For James, young and old, children without parents are children raised in exotic locations, at times under the guardianship of vague relations, they seem to come and go incessantly, contributing to the buzz of life’s “beautifully mixed adventure” (207). To be orphaned is synonymous with achieving what James refers to as an optimal freedom of range (323).

James’ cousin Robert (Bob) Temple serves as the main example of such freedom, and the language James uses to convey Temple’s quirky allure is a lexicon of orphan sorcery: Temple is remote, vague, and incalculable. In James’ special economy, these “deficits” of character can only figure positively. Temple’s

fitful hovering presence, repeatedly vivid and repeatedly obscured, so considerably “counted” for us, pointing the sharpest moral, pointing fifty morals, and adorning a perpetual tale. (322)

James seems to comfortably alternate here between the definite and the dim, the coherent and the fuzzy. On closer look, however, there is no real duality in James’ description, but rather a simultaneity: the “sharpest moral,” (“sharpest” emphasizing that the “moral” is in the singular) is in fact not one but “fifty morals,” each being the “sharpest” of the lot. Temple’s “fitful” presence is “repeatedly vivid and repeatedly obscured,” implying that the vivid, for James, is none other than the obscure. What is hovering and indistinct is also that which, by virtue of its indistinctness, is most vivid. Orphanhood is a circumstance particularly favourable to such fluctuations between the palpable and the nebulous. The impact of Bob’s orphaned life on the story-teller’s mind is profound.

If to be orphaned and **free of range** had affected my young fancy as the happy, that is the romantic, lot, no member of the whole cousinship, favoured in that sense as so many of them were, enjoyed so, by my making out, the highest privilege of the case. Nothing, I could afterwards easily see, had been less inevitable and of a greater awkwardness of accident than his being, soon after the death of his parents, shipped off from Albany, in pursuit of an education, to an unheard-of school in a remote corner of Scotland; which fact it was, however, that played for me exactly the bright part of preparing to show with particular intensity what Europe again, with the opportunity so given, was going to proceed to. It thus shone out when after the lapse of several years he recurred to our more competent view that, quite richly erratic creature as he might appear, and to whatever degree of wonder and suspense, of amusement and amazement, he might wind us up, **the rich alien influence, full of special queerness and mysteries** in this special connection, had complacently turned him out for us and had ever so irretrievably and ineffaceably stamped him. He rose before us, tall and goodlooking and easy, as a figure of an oddly *civilised* perversity; his irreverent challenging humour, playing at once, without mercy, over American aspects, seemed somehow not less cultivated than profane--**just which note in itself caused the plot beautifully to thicken** [...]. (323 emphasis added)

A little like Dickens' famous orphans (whose parentlessness sets the story in motion), James too imagines the hero of his tale as categorically improved by the instability of his situation. Bob's orphanhood marks the beginning of some "perpetual tale," and causes its "plot beautifully to thicken." Temple, "the figure bristling most with every irregular accent that we were to find ourselves in any closeness of relation with" (323), is thus considered by James "a pure gift of free-handed chance to the grateful imagination" (323). The passage contains virtually all of the principles of the Jamesian economy, and it reads more like a literary manifesto than as an auto-, or bio-graphical account. It deals with the

demands of plot, and with the conditions for artistic appreciation. It yields the general apparatus of a proper literary “case.”

The relatively restricted in range parental unit is, in fact, all but absent throughout the *Autobiography*, especially in the first volume. In its place, a (pre-modern) extended family represents not only the shifting settings in which the orphaned offshoots of the Jameses move, but also the movement of the narrative itself as a movement of extension. With each death, another familial reshuffling ensues, and the dead map out new trajectories for the living to travel. This, for James, is a superb predicament. Of cousin Guss Barker’s sister and their brother Bob, for example, James yet again maintains that

[t]his genial girl, like her brother, was in the grand situation of having no home and of carrying on life, such a splendid kind of life, by successive visits to relations; though neither she nor Gussy quite achieved the range of their elder brother, “Bob” of that ilk, a handsome young man, a just blurred, attractive, illusive presence, who hovered a bit beyond our real reach and apparently displayed the undomesticated character at its highest. (108)

Expressions such as “the cousinship and the uncleship, the kinship generally” (81), “the Albany kinship” and the “incoherent Albany uncles” (103), “our family group” (158), all insist on the important role played in the *Autobiography* by the extended family, a family so stretched that its borders are difficult to define. The extended family signals collectively to the “larger life” (104), the life lived within an enlarged and active “scene” made up of a multiplicity of elements and of persons. The frequency and intensity with which James refers to the extended family suggest how strategically important this idea is to him. For the extended family allows the drama to reach farther, alternating between different family branches, locations, and periods. Moreover, the specific idea of “family

relations” overlaps with the Jamesian idea of “relations” in general: “relations” is what holds together a “scene,” and the extended family is one fine example of such a holding together. The notions of the happy orphans and the extended family are, then, an important narrative and structural device.

The extended James family stretched beyond blood relatives to include what James calls “quasi-relatives” who were nonetheless an integral part of the greater family scene. The magic web of real and quasi-relatives spreads to form a rich and tapestried scene. I quote here at length to give the full and dazzlingly incoherent breadth of the embroidery:

Mary Temple the elder had, early in our Fourteenth Street period, married Edmund Tweedy, a haunter of that neighbourhood and of our house in it from the first, but never more than during a winter spent with us there by that **quasi-relative**, who, by an extension of interest and admiration--she was in those years quite exceedingly handsome--ranked for us with the Albany aunts, adding so a twist, as it were, to our tie with the Temple cousins, her own close kin. This couple must have been, putting **real relatives aside**, my parents’ best friends in Europe, **twitching thereby hardest the fine firm thread** attached at one end to our general desire and at the other to their supposed felicity. The real relatives, those planted out in the same countries, are a chapter by themselves, whose effect on us, whose place in our vision, I should like to trace: that of the Kings, for instance, of my mother’s kin, that of the Masons, of my father’s--the Kings who cultivated, for years, the highest instructional, social and moral possibilities at Geneva, the Masons, above all, less strenuous but more sympathetic, who reported themselves to us hauntingly, during a considerable period, as enjoying every conceivable *agrément* at Tours and at the then undeveloped Trouville [...]. Fain would I, as for the “mere pleasure” of it, **under the temptation to delineate, gather into my loose net** the singularly sharp and rounded image of our cousin Charlotte of the former name, who figured for us, on the field of Europe, wherever we looked, and all the rest of time, as a character of characters and a marvel of placid consistency;

through my vague remembrance of her return from China after the arrest of a commercial career there by her husband's death in the Red Sea--which somehow sounded like a dreadful form of death, and my scarce less faint recovery of some Christmas treat of our childhood under her roof in Gramercy Park, amid dim chinoiserie and, in that twilight of time, dimmer offspring, Vernon, Anne, Arthur, marked to us always, in the distincter years, as of all our young relatives the most intensely educated and most pointedly proper--an occasion followed by her permanent and invidious withdrawal from her own country. (155-56 emphasis added)

These passages perform the movements of both extension and mapping, "under the temptation to delineate," weaving the "real" and "quasi-relatives" with a "fine firm thread" into the vast "loose net" that joins present and past, and reaches all the way from America through Europe to China and back. This expansive exposition runs on marriage and death, and the effect achieved in the passage, narratively, spatially and temporally, is of exceptionally large proportions.

The extended family and the happy orphans motifs also take the *Autobiography* a long way away from the models of the Freudian nuclear family with its fairly claustrophobic atmosphere of a pressured family cell.¹¹ This is not to say that the James children could not have been subject to family pressure, or that they did not find their family situation fraught with difficulty.¹² Yet the *Autobiography* is not engaged in

¹¹ The 1975 French film *Cousin, Cousine* is a small jolly epic of similar temperament to that of *A Small Boy and Others*. The film centres on a love affair between two members of an extended family, but it is the extended family backdrop which is the film's real "hero." Life and death are celebrated through a series of family weddings and funerals, creating an overall sense of a pre-modern, semi-tribal community. Unlike more recent and less effective explorations of community, set against similar momentous occasions (I am thinking particularly about *Four Wedding and a Funeral*), *Cousin, Cousine*, with its joyous (Gallic) appetite for life, delivers a view of the extended family as community which is rare in contemporary culture. (Dir. Jean-Charles Tacchella. Perf. Marie-Christine Barrault, Victor Lanoux, and Guy Marchand. Gaumont International: 1975).

¹² The misadventures of Wilky and Robertson (Bob) James, especially Bob's alcoholism, Wilky's financial flops for which his father disinherited him, their failed marriages in Milwaukee, and Bob's sense of being rejected by his parents, have now been documented. See Jane Maher's *Biography of Broken Fortunes: Wilkie and Bob, Brothers of William, Henry, and Alice James* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1986).

analyzing the James family dynamics, but in articulating the uncanny suitability between this extraordinary household, and James' literary vision. What the *Autobiography* seems to persistently return to is this compatibility between the Jamesian vision and the conditions of James' upbringing, conditions which William James, for example, did not find as favourable (170-171).

I have said that the notion of the happy orphans and the structure of the extended family express the *Autobiography*'s narrative economy as that of expansion and assimilation. Materials drawn from the past are assimilated into the text in a "scenic-strain," that is, as separate episodes which are nonetheless linked. James liberally skips or snips, then reties the narrative knot, and, as in the long citation above, the activity of weaving serves as the metaphorical equivalent of James' story-telling techniques.¹³ By not pursuing memories in a strict chronological order, James can incorporate a large amount of material into his narrative with relatively few structural or thematic restrictions, and, most importantly, with a minimal amount of material *waste*.

Besides being a narrative and structural device, the dismissal of death through the figures of the happy orphans and the extended family reveals a particular attitude towards the thought of death (most poignantly, in the context of a literary work whose central theme is life, the *bio* of autobiography). Like James' orphaned cousins who, rather than losing by the deaths of their loved ones, strangely gain from it (gain, literally, further

A concise overview of the lives of the two younger James brothers is found in Carol Holly's review of Maher's book: "Understanding the Family: Jane Maher's *Biography of Broken Fortunes*" (*Henry James Review* 8[3] 1987. 209-220). On Alice James, see *The Death and Letters of Alice James: Selected Correspondence*, edited by Ruth Bernard Yeazell (Berkeley: U of California P, 1981), and Jean Strouse's *Alice James: A Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999). Howard Feinstein's *Becoming William James* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) also comments on the James sibling difficulties.

¹³ See also the opening sentence of chapter XIII of *A Small Boy and Others*: "[l]et me hurry, however, to catch again that thread I left dangling from my glance [...]" (99).

“relations”), so death in general adds rather than detracts textual substance and weight. One of the most significant figures such an “addition-by-death” can take is the figure of the ghostly. As undead, ghosts are the anti-natural tropes of what refuses to, or cannot, die. Ghost stories, then, may be said to dramatize the struggle for the reinstatement of the natural law, against the supernatural aberration of the impossibility of death. Consequently, the fear associated with ghost narratives may be said to proceed, paradoxically, from the circumvention of death, not from its inevitability. Paradoxically, from a Heideggerian point of view, since for Heidegger, it is the complete annihilation of death which is the source and root of anxiety. Yet, as my comparison between Heidegger’s existential and Levinas’ ethical understanding of death in the chapter on *The Wings of the Dove* has already shown, for Levinas, it is not the nothingness implied by death which is terrifying, but (as in the ghost story) its impossibility. Levinas calls the indestructibility of being in death, “Il y a,” (sometimes appearing in translation as “there is”). What is the “Il y a,” and how might it illuminate James’ memoirs?

In *Existence and Existents*¹⁴ Levinas explains that “there is” refers to a permanent but impersonal presence, the presence of no-thing in particular which is at the same time not exactly absent: being before it has been sliced into subjects and objects, a kind of raw

¹⁴ *Existence and Existents* is Levinas’ least discussed work in literary circles, and possibly his best (Jonathan Rée suggests as much in his article “Selflessness,” *London Review of Books* 8 May [1997]: 17). This is partly because *Existence and Existents* is a preliminary groundwork for the kind of “ethics” Levinas develops later, from *Time and the Other* onwards. The recent interest in ethical approaches to literature seems to follow a somewhat set path (largely determined by Derrida) to Levinas’ more familiar works such as *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. *Existence and Existents*, while not offering an out-and-out ethical analysis, contains ordinary themes extraordinarily discussed, themes like insomnia, fatigue, effort, food, light, and vision (as well as an important discussion of time, and the relation to the other). In its unusual treatment of these usual events, *Existence and Existents* seems especially relevant to the themes presented in the *Autobiography*, as well as to the manner in which James represents them.

undifferentiated being, hard to grasp precisely because it defies objectivity and escapes thought. But although the “there is” cannot be cognitively grasped, there are “clues” which nonetheless attest to its significant part in the ontological adventure and beyond.

Levinas proposes a small exercise:

[l]et us imagine all beings, things and persons, reverting to nothingness. One cannot put this return to nothingness outside of all events. But what of this nothingness itself? **Something would happen, if only night and the silence of nothingness.** The indeterminateness of this “something is happening” is not the indeterminateness of a subject and does not refer to a substantive. Like the third person pronoun in the impersonal form of a verb [it is raining], it designates not the uncertainly known author of the action, but the characteristic of this action itself which somehow has no author. This impersonal, anonymous, yet inexhaustible “consummation” of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *there is*. The there is, inasmuch as it resists a personal form, is “being in general.” (EE 57 emphasis added)

When Levinas suggests we imagine the extinction of all persons and things, he wants to illustrate the impossibility of a complete annihilation of being. To explain what this impossibility is like, Levinas offers the phenomenon of the night, in which one cannot see any objects, but in which one nonetheless retains a sense of indeterminate presence. The night is like the “there is” because, while not strictly “nothing,” it offers no objects to one’s intelligibility and leaves one in a state of an impersonal vigil. Cognition is futile: we cannot see in the dark, but something there persists beyond our grasp, rendering our subjectivity useless. In complete darkness I am not merely unable to relate to external objects, I also lose the sense of self which the relation to objects in the daytime reinforces through the regular recourse to my inwardness in the act of cognition. Fear of the dark is, for Levinas, illustrative of the fear of death, not as the fear of nothingness, but as the fear

of the impossibility of nothingness. Death does not reduce one into nothingness, but dissolves one into the undifferentiated “being in general,” the “there is.” The impossibility of death is Levinas’ radical revision of Heidegger and of existentialism. Instead of a dialectic of being and nothingness, Levinas speaks about an ontological plenitude which cannot be overcome even by death. The *Il y a* is terrible, not because it conceals things in the dark, but because it imposes a lack of perspective and an extreme insecurity:

night is [not] the absence of day. The absence of perspective is not something purely negative. It becomes an insecurity. Not because things covered by darkness elude our foresight and that it becomes impossible to measure their approach in advance. For the insecurity does not come from the things of the day world which the night conceals; it is due just to the fact that nothing approaches, nothing comes, nothing threatens; this silence, this tranquillity, this void of sensations constitutes a mute, absolutely indeterminate menace. (59)

The horror of the *Il y a* (“[t]he rustling of the *there is*...is horror” [EE 60]), points to the genres of horror and gothic as the obvious vehicles for representing the inescapability of existence.¹⁵ Simon Critchley’s *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* provides an excellent discussion of Levinas’ idea of the indestructibility of being in death and its relation to the genre of horror. Critchley explains how

¹⁵ The *Il y a* works extremely well in the case of the much talked about fear-of-the-dark flick *The Blair Witch Project*. The film’s effect depends on the indeterminacy and loss of perspective which occurs in the dark. The situation of absolute night, which Levinas claims discloses the horror of the *Il y a*, can hardly be encountered under normal conditions. Complete darkness is virtually impossible in or outside the home, where electricity or natural light illuminate the darkness and allow for objects to take shape. *The Blair Witch Project* capitalizes on the possibility of total darkness in the woods. Nocturnal indeterminacy is communicated mainly through sound, which comes from nowhere and in no particular pattern, and which is horrific precisely because of it. Levinas too attributes sound to nightly silence when he says that at night “[t]here is no discourse. Nothing responds to us, but this silence: *the voice of this silence is understood and frightens* [...]” (EE 58 emphasis added).

[t]he world of horror is that of existence beyond death, of awakening underground in a coffin with nobody to hear your sobbing or your fingers scratching on the wood. Horror is possession by that which will not die and which cannot be killed--something beautifully exploited in Maupassant in "The Horla" and "The Hand." *Such is the spectral logic of ghosts and phantoms, the world of the undead [...].* (60 emphasis added)¹⁶

The problem is, however, that the ghosts in the *Autobiography* are not horrific. They are, on the contrary, presences which plead peacefully for attention, and their unnatural plea is never in the form of a menace. Nor does the ghostly in the *Autobiography* possess any of the fantastic ambiguity characteristic of horror fiction. The *Autobiography* is "stuffed" with ghosts without being properly gothic. What, then, is the purpose of the spectral economy in a work which is not a conventional ghost story and does not seek to dramatize the horror of being?

Critchley's link between the *Ily a* and the genre of horror is most illuminating but does not seem to capture the logic of James' spectral economy in the *Autobiography*. Is not the meaning of the super-natural in James most acutely expressed precisely outside the generic confines of the ghost tale? In spite of James' impressive dabbles with horror, ghosts figure differently in the later novels from *The Spoils of Poynton* through *The American Scene* to the *Autobiography*, where they do not possess the dimension of horror. Ghost stories like *The Turn of the Screw*, have indeed become classic examples of

¹⁶ Critchley's definition of horror fiction comes straight from the mouth of Maupassant's first person narrator in "The Horla," who tries to comprehend his possession by an invisible force:
[i]t is as if ever since man has been capable of thought he had a fearful presentiment of some new being, more powerful than himself, his successor in this world, and, feeling the proximity of this master, but unable to guess at its nature, he has created in his terror the whole fantastic host of occult beings, vague phantoms born of fear.
(Guy De Maupassant. *Selected Short Stories*. Trans. Roger Colet. London: Penguin, 1971. 335)

gothic perversity and fantastic ambiguity.¹⁷ However, James' spectral economy finds its most powerful articulation elsewhere, outside the well-trodden terrain of the Jamesian ghost tale, where it is detached from the conventions of genre, and released from the bear-hug of critical expertise. Even more supernatural, uncanny, and perverse than Peter Quint and Miss Jessel are the ghosts found lurking at the heart of the *Autobiography*, because in the ghostly tales their presence has been (generically) naturalized.

Explicit references to the ghostly are generously scattered about the narrative of the *Autobiography*. Perusing his father's correspondence with their friend Jane Norton, for example, James confesses that "there rise for me beckoning ghosts; against whose deep appeal to me to let them lead me on I have absolutely to steel myself--so far, for the interest of it, I feel that they might take me" (393). When recalling the favourite anecdote of his father's visit to his Irish relatives when Henry Sr. was just nineteen, James remarks:¹⁸

I set the scene forth [...] to see "Billy Taylor," the negro servant accompanying him from Albany, altogether rule from the point of view of effect. The dignity of this apparition indeed, I must parenthesis, would have yielded in general to the source of a glamour still more marked--the very air in which the young emissary would have moved as the son of his father and the representative of an American connection prodigious surely in its power to dazzle. (396)

The grand "American connection" is, of course, William James of Albany (1771-1832) who alone made the fortune and the name of the James family, a fortune whose mysterious

¹⁷ These stories have also contributed to the emergence of "queer James" through the interpretation of the spectral as a trope of the return of the repressed in Freudian or post-Freudian terms. For an all-rounded survey of James's ghost stories in the specific context of gothic fiction and "queer theory," see John Fletcher's article "The Haunted Closet: Henry James' Queer Spectrality" *Textual Practice* 14 (1) 2000: 53-80.

¹⁸ Dupee notes that James Sr. was in fact twenty-six when he went to Ireland in 1837 (*AUB* 608n).

disappearance (or reckless squandering) James subsequently contemplates (396-397). The reference to the “prodigious” William of Albany is significantly parenthetical; the ghost of the slave returns to the fore soon after in “the almost epic shape of black Billy Taylor” (398), as if to confirm its dignity as a vital part in this great family’s history, and taunt the slightly ominous forefather.

Similarly, in remembering the “Cambridge scene,” James’ year of actively *not* studying Law at Harvard, James wonders: “I scarce know whether my impulse to lead forth these most shrinking of my apparitions be *more perverse or more natural* [...]” (438 emphasis added). James is unable to decide which is for him the more real: the tangible “natural” order, or the “perverse” and intangible literary one. For if ghosts defy nature, they seem to effortlessly adhere to a literary economy by which they can, and do, leave their mark after death. Yet, the “perversity” of James’ ghosts most consists in their dissociation from horror (and horror fiction): though undead, they fail to exert the terror their condition conventionally implies.

The ghostly tempts James because of its ability to be both present and absent. Thus James extends the use of this trope to describe those whom, whilst living, possess the indefinite quality of the (un)dead. “[A]s a very small boy indeed” (24) James was present at a dance held at the house of Robert and Catherine (Kitty) Emmet.¹⁹ Recalling this lively scene, it is “cousin Robert” (1821-1875), Henry Sr.’s eldest nephew, whose skeletal demeanour steals the show and provides James with a lasting recollection:

¹⁹ Catherine James, Henry James Sr.’s niece (and daughter of young Henry James’ uncle Augustus) married Robert Emmet, a marriage which was followed by more marriages between the Jameses and the Emmets (*AUB* 25).

distinct to me still being the image of that phenomenally lean and nimble choreographic hero, “Bob” James to us always, who, almost ghost-fashion, led the cotillion on from generation to generation, his skull-like smile, with its accent from the stiff points of his long moustache and the brightly hollow orbits of his eyes, helping to make of him an immemorial elegant skeleton. (26)

Chapter X of *A Small Boy and Others* introduces cousin Helen’s anonymous husband, known as “Mr.” even to his own wife (78). James’ complicatedly droll explication of Mr.’s case restates the sort of spectral logic at work in the *Autobiography* at large. The ghostly’s is a dim but significant presence, significant by virtue of being almost entirely null. “If there are persons,” James begins, “as to whom the ‘Mr.’ never comes up at all, so there are those as to whom it never subsides; but some of them all keep it by the greatness and others, oddly enough, by the smallness of their importance” (78).

Helen’s unnameable husband was of the smaller variety:

[t]he subject of my present reference, as I think of him, nevertheless--by which I mean in spite of his place in the latter group [of diminished importance]--greatly helps my documentation; he must have been of so excellent and consistent a shade of nullity. To that value, if value it be, there almost always attaches some question of the degree and the position: with adjuncts, with a relation, the zero may figure as a numeral--and the neglected zero is mostly, for that matter, endowed with a consciousness and subject to irritation. For this dim little gentleman, no appeal and no redress, from the beginning to the end of his career, were made or entertained or projected; no question of how to treat him, or of how *he* might see it or feel it, could ever possibly rise; he was blank from whatever view, remaining so under application of whatever acid or exposure to whatever heat; the one identity he could have was to be part of the consensus.

Such a case is rare--that of being no case at all, that of not having even the interest of the grievance of not being one [...]. (78)

Mr.'s neutral hovering presence is essential to the family portrait James is painting, coloured by Helen's noble silence in relation to her loveless husband. In spite of being "a person about whom you knew everything" (79), Helen remained "genially inscrutable" with regards to her marital lot:

[l]et me not dream of attempting to say for what cousin Helen took her *spectral spouse*, though I think it the most marked touch in her portrait that she kept us from ever knowing. (79 emphasis added)

The mood darkens, but James insists that

if any light of the lurid played in for me just a little it was but under much later information. What my childish vision was really most possessed of, I think, was the figure of the spectral spouse, the dim little gentleman, as I have called him, pacing the whole length of the two big parlours [...] much as if they had been the deck of one of those ships anciently haunted by him, as "supercargo" or whatever, in strange far seas--according to the only legend connected with him save that of his early presumption in having approached, such as he was, so fine a young woman, and his remarkable luck in having approached her successfully; a luck surprisingly renewed for him, since it was also part of the legend that he had previously married and lost a bride beyond his deserts. (79-80)

The "spectral spouse" remains shrouded in mystery, but his initial nullity is here superseded by the mythic past of a perilous life at sea, and a dead bride. The watery image of the haunted ship with its invisible "supercargo" eventually gives way to the deathly dryness of deserts, cryptically designated as "*his* deserts," thus adding to Mr.'s legendary unknowability.

Orphans and ghosts signify the *Autobiography's* undermining of death. For both the orphans and their dead parents seem to gain rather than lose by death. The orphans

gain a much desired freedom of range, and the ghosts secure a respectable narrative slot, a kind of afterlife. Yet nowhere is the sense of the clinging and persistence of the dead more emphatically expressed than in James' near compulsory provision of proper names. Names flood the pages of the *Autobiography*, sometimes alone and sometimes in succession. The efficacy of the name in instituting a kind of narrative haunting is fully exploited by James, who tends to name even the most incidental of people.²⁰ When persons are named they at once become more dead and more alive. This is the uncanny effect produced by the proper name itself, which is simultaneously that of someone or something present and real, and absent or dead. Names are, in this respect, synonymous with ghosts: naming is an act of ghosting, ghosting that of naming.

To the extent that a name can always do without its bearer, the bearer's death is inscribed within it, and every name is a name of death.

So Robert Smith in *Derrida and Autobiography* (72). Smith (via Derrida) is thinking primarily of the author's name--the quasi-present "auto" of autobiography. Whereas theories of autobiography tend to either consecrate or obliterate the authorial "I," Smith's deconstructive approach sees the self as both present and absent. This quasi-transcendental twist modifies the rigid binarism governing the field of autobiography.

The sheer number of names in the *Autobiography*, however, points away from the author's own identity (not altogether the concern of this most peculiar of autobiographies) to the identities, lost and found, of those "others" who have gone. As one of the most

²⁰ In connection with the elder James' aforementioned trip to Ireland, for instance, James laments the loss of the surname of "a certain beautiful Barbara, otherwise anonymous, who was not of the kin but on a visit from a distance at one of the genial houses. We liked to hear about Barbara, liked *the sound of her still richer rarer surname*; which in spite of the fine Irish harmony it even then struck me as making I have frivolously forgotten" (397-398 emphasis added).

conspicuous features of the *Autobiography*, at least on first reading, the proliferation of names may seem baffling. A disconcerted reader may wonder whether he or she ought to memorize the names (a little like the frustration on first reading a Russian novel); if not, what could this explosion of names possibly mean? But for James, names are instant communicators.²¹ He may not recall the facts of a past event, but the names remain, and they deliver the past with an immediacy that far transcends the factual:

I am vague about the occasion, *but the names, as for fine old confused reasons, plead alike to my pen--and paid a homage quite other than critical, I dare say, to the then slightly worn Henrietta Sontag, Countess Rossi, who struck us as supremely elegant in pink silk and white lace flounces and with whom there had been for certain members of our circle some contact or intercourse that I have wonderingly lost.* (AUB 66)

I note the similarity between the “pleading,” elsewhere associated with ghosts (54, 393), and pleading on behalf of the name. As seen in the citation above, the names James provides may be colourful. Some belong to exotic actors and actresses, others to friends, neighbours, even, as in the aforementioned tale of Billy Taylor, to black family slaves.

Not only does James name virtually all of his teachers in the successive schools he and his brothers attended, but he frequently stops to name his fellow students, with most of whom James did not maintain particularly close friendships. In 1854, school-hopping as part of his parents’ educational experiment, James briefly attends the school of accountants Forest and Quackenboss:

²¹ See the previous chapter on *The American Scene* for the discussion of James’ personalized sense of history.

at Forest's the prolonged roll-call in the morning, as I sit in the vast bright crowded smelly smoky room, in which rusty black stove-shafts were the nearest hint of architecture, bristles with names, Hoes and Havemeyers, Stokeses, Phelpses, Colgates and others [...]. (127)

Chapter XVIII of *A Small Boy and Others* is devoted to the lively New York street in which the James children played and explored along with a variety of playmates from the neighbouring houses. Originally from Connecticut, the Ward children, were "[t]hree in number, Johnny and Charley and Freddy" (139), and despite these names being rather indistinct, James does not regard them as superfluous. In proximity to the Wards lived the Norcoms, Ogdens, Van Winkles and Costers. Together they represented the variety of "shades [...] in our democratic order" (146). The Norcoms, for example, "who had lately arrived *en masse* from Louisville and had improvised a fine old Kentucky home in the last house of our row" (141),

provided by their presence [...] as happy a foil as we could have wished to the plainness and dryness of the Wards; their homely grace was all their own and was also embodied in three brothers, Eugene, Reginald, Albert, whose ages would have corresponded, I surmise, with those of Johnny, Charley and Freddy [...]. (141)

While the Wards carried the somewhat hardened puritanical "New England stamp" (139), the Norcoms invested the scene with an earthly Southern charm. Yet the latter also introduced the James children to that "great Kentucky error" (142)--slavery--by bringing along their two black slaves, who later on, and much to James' excitement, fled to freedom:

Davy and Aunt Sylvia (pronounced An'Silvy,) a light-brown lad with extraordinarily shining eyes and his straight, grave, deeper-coloured mother, not radiant as to anything but her vivid turban. had been born and kept in slavery of the most approved pattern and such as this intensity

of their condition made them a joy, a joy to the curious mind, to consort with. Davy mingled in our sports and talk, he enriched, he adorned them with a personal, a pictorial lustre that none of us could emulate [...]. What was not our dismay therefore when we suddenly learnt--it must have blown right up and down the street--that mother and son had fled, in the dead of night, from bondage? [...]. They had never been for us so beautifully slaves as in this achievement of their freedom; for they did brilliantly achieve it--they escaped, on northern soil, beyond recall or recovery. I think we had already then, on the spot, the sense of some degree of presence at the making of history [...]. (142-143)

James, a little gossipy, fusses over the nickname of the eldest of the Norcoms' sons, 'Stiffy,' [...] whom we supposed gorgeous, who affected us as sublime and unapproachable and to whom we thus applied the term in use among us before we had acquired for reference to such types the notion of the *nuance*, the dandy, the dude, the masher. (141).

Slang functions in much the same way as does the proper name, and re-enacts the past instantaneously. The old names, like James' childish vocabulary, are near hypnotic in their ability to reactivate the past. Both the proper name and slang resound as sharp as ever, undimmed by so many decades of disuse.

Of their corporeal bearers, then, there now remain only the names' disembodied syllables and vowels--sounds which alone do not grow old. Names are conjured up as sharp as at the moment of their denomination, while their bearers themselves undergo ageing and death. The name ironically survives the death of its bearer, for death leaves no trace on the name itself. The name does just as well without its subject, and this redundancy of the person in relation to his own name is what gives the name its hallucinatory independence. This capacity of the name to communicate the death of its bearer is what Smith means when he says that "every name is a name of death." Thus

names, divorced from the persons whom they properly designate, are disembodied presences: ghosts.

The variety and frequency of the arrivals and departures of [...] ladies [the James children's French governesses]--whose *ghostly names*, again, so far as I recall them, *I like piously to preserve, Augustine Danse, Amelie Fortin, Marie Guyard, Marie Bonningue, Felicie Bonningue, Clarisse Bader* [...]. (173 emphasis added)

Perhaps it is no accident that this pious recital of “ghostly names” follows the memory of a visit to Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors. James had been frightened by the uncanny waxed figures whom he “half expected, when alone, to meet quite dreadfully on the staircase or on opening a door” (173). Dead names, like waxed statues, cast the shadow of death over the narrative, and people it with replicas.²²

Elsewhere, with the names “Jean Nadali” and “Annette Godefroi” suddenly in mind, James is compelled to admit that

I enjoy the echo of their very names, *neither unprecedented nor irreproducible*, yet which melt together for me, to intensification [...]. (160 emphasis added)

Names are never as unique as the people who bear them (a fact not only exemplified by the prosaic sounding “Henry James,” but also by the fact that this name was doubled, reproduced successively from father to son).²³ Like ghosts, names foster a permanent alterity which they magically transport into the narrative which they inhabit.

²² This is as close as James gets to acknowledging the horror of the spectral.

²³ Edel makes an issue of this doubling of the name and suggests that James painfully struggled to distinguish himself from Henry James Sr., with whom he was often confused. Given James' profound fascination with the proper name as what is simultaneously intensely personal, and not at all, Edel's diagnosis of James' nominal trauma may be a little exaggerated (*Henry James: A Life*. London: Flamingo, 1996. 16-17).

Orphans, spectres, and the hollow echoing of proper names, all signify James' dismissal of death through the lingering presences of absentees. But *Notes of a Son and Brother* ends with another dismissal of death which transcends the mere negation of death, and amounts to its active reversal.²⁴ James devotes some forty pages to the letters of his cousin Minny Temple (1845-1870), dead at twenty-four from tuberculosis. The similarity between Minny Temple's virtual resurrection at the end of *Notes of a Son and Brother*, and Milly Theale's virtual survival at the end of *The Wings of the Dove* is by now a thoroughly noted affair. But the bond between the two books does not merely rest on the overt similarity between the two sick heroines. I have previously discussed the highly significant role in *The Wings of the Dove* of the unprofessional intervention of Milly's doctor Sir Luke Strett.²⁵ Reading Minny Temple's reproduced letters at the end of *Notes of a Son and Brother* yields a thrilling revelation: the crucial withholding of medical information in *The Wings of the Dove* appears to be a direct *reversal* of the expert medical opinion forced on Minny Temple, against which her letters so emphatically protest. Granting the fictional Milly the kind of care that the real Minny herself prescribed--the unconventional method of treatment she craved but was denied--sheds a new light on James' fictionalizing process, and on the importance to his imagination of the idea of the dismissal of death. The Milly/Minny exchange exemplifies the dismissal of death as an integral part of the Jamesian literary economy, an economy in which the dead are not laid to waste, but are retrieved from within the fathomless resource of the *Il y a*.

²⁴ Death as "reversed" is discussed in *Thinking in Henry James* (122-168), in the chapter on *The Wings of the Dove* in which Cameron also discusses the passages from *Notes of a Son and Brother* to which I shall presently refer.

²⁵ See Chapter 1, "The Religion of Foreign Things: Time, Death, and Sociality in *The Wings of the Dove*." The *Autobiography*, I believe, provides further evidence in support of that chapter's argument.

If the names “Minny” and “Milly” resemble one another, so do the physicians’ names of “Bassett” and “Strett.” But it is the stark *dissimilarity* between the methods of these two which is truly telling. Despite her illness and the ongoing physical and emotional suffering which it caused her, Minny Temple thought of life as rewardingly intense and worth while. “I would much rather stay up here on the solid earth,” she writes,

in the air and sunshine, with an occasional sympathetic glimpse of another person’s soul, than to be put down underground and say good-bye for ever to humanity, with all its laughter and its sadness. (510)

Minny Temple was strictly ordered by her doctor to stay in warm climates, and to abstain from social activities and emotional strain. She could see no sense in these orders because they deprived her of what she felt was the ultimately vital provision of human company.

Ordered from city to city and from country to country in pursuit of the warm weather, Minny knows she is bound to miss out on the occasional but life-giving contact with others’ soul. Her letters cry out against what she believes is the medical profession’s misunderstanding of her needs:

[t]his climate is trying, to be sure, but such as it is I’ve got to take my chance in it, as there is no one I care enough for, or who cares enough for me, to take charge of me to Italy, or to the south anywhere. *I don’t believe any climate, however good, would be of the least use to me with people I don’t care for.* (511-512 emphasis added)

This letter is followed by another in which Minny complains of the medical advice she has been given. She had been looking forward to attending the Opera *Faust*, but once discovered there by her doctor, she was ordered to leave at once. This time her physician is named:

Dr. Bassett arrived, who is the medical man that I had meant to consult during my stay *incidentally* and between the pauses in the music. The first thing he said was: "What are you doing here? Go directly back to the place you came from and don't come again till the warm weather. As for music, you mustn't hear of it or even think of it for two months." (512)

Unable to resist this expert pressure, Minny has once again to accept a "plan of life somewhat limited" (512). If she desired to limit medical consultation to the mere "incidental," this is precisely what James achieves for her in *The Wings of the Dove*, in which medical attention is limited to the point of seeming altogether useless. What Dr. Strett, as opposed to Dr. Bassett, prescribes for Milly are such "forbidden" visits to the Opera, and a rich social life with all the emotional agitation it brings. Minny's strict medical regime is replaced by James with the multifold excitations and risks of interpersonal entanglement. This reversal is based exactly on Minny Temple's plight:

So he [Dr. Bassett] gave me to understand that I have as sound a pair of lungs at present as the next person [...]. At the same time he sent me flying back to the country, with orders not to get excited, nor to listen to music, nor to speak with anybody I care for, nor to do anything in short that the unregenerate nature longs for. This struck my untutored mind as somewhat inconsistent, and I ventured a gentle remonstrance, which however was not even listened to, and I was ignominiously thrust into a car and borne back to Pelham. (513)²⁶

Medical terrorism returns several pages later in another of Minny's letters: "[m]y doctor told me that Boston would kill me in six months--though he is possibly mistaken" (516). Dr. Strett, in direct reversal, simply encourages Milly "not to worry about anything in the world" (*WD* 203). The character of Luke Strett in fact alludes to several of Minny Temple's physicians. A Dr. Taylor numbers Minny's days as a remaining "[t]wo or three

²⁶ The implication is that Dr. Bassett is lying to Minny, another contrast with Dr. Strett who, as I contend in the first chapter, does not conceal from Milly the gravity of her physical condition.

years” (*AUB* 543). Eventually, there is a slight improvement in the form of Dr. Metcalfe (542-543), of whom Minny approves because, like Sir Luke, “he’s a gentleman, as well as an excellent physician, and [...] he takes a sort of paternal interest in me” (543). *The Wings of the Dove*, in an act of economic genius, conflates Minny’s medical requirements with her burning desire for personal companionship: the doctor becomes the friend. In Sir Luke Strett medical and personal care unite.

To round off the discussion of James’ undermining of death in the *Autobiography*, I wish to turn to James’ essay “Is There a Life After Death?”²⁷ The essay is divided into two parts. Part 1 poses the question of the possibility of an afterlife, and offers the logical objections to the thought of the self surviving without its body. In Part 2, James attempts to redefine the question in a more conceivable form. He does so by asserting the expansive powers of what he calls “consciousness.” This part reads, however, less as a metaphysical than as a literary exposition. James indeed considers the possibility of the duration of “consciousness” beyond the physical realm, but, given the objections raised in Part 1, the “consciousness” James speaks of no longer resembles conventional consciousness, and is divorced from ideas of personality and interiority. Consciousness re-emerges as significantly “enlarged” and impersonal, hence hardly as consciousness at all. The relevance of “Is There a Life After Death?” to the present discussion lies in the essay’s extension and enlargement of “consciousness,” a process conceived primarily in literary terms.

Ordinary observation confirms that death is absolute:

²⁷ The essay first appeared in Harper’s Magazine in 1910. The text I am using here is taken from the collection *The James Family*, cited as *JF* (Ed. F. O. Matthiessen. New York: Knopf, 1947. 602-614).

the appearances, as I have called them--and as they make, in "science" particularly, the most assured show--imposed themselves; the universe [...] kept proclaiming in a myriad voices that I and my poor form of consciousness were a quantity it could at any moment perfectly do without [...]. (JF 609)

But this empirical evidence does not suffice for James, and he proclaims that the question of the finality of death continued "facing me with a 'mild but firm' refusal to regard itself as settled" (609). The reply as to why this question "should be thus obstinate" (609),

was that all the while I had been practically, though however dimly, trying to take the measure of my consciousness--on this appropriate and prescribed basis of its being so finite--I had learned, as I may say, to live in it more, and with the consequence of thereby not a little undermining the conclusion most unfavourable to it. I had doubtless taken thus to *increased living* in it by reaction against so grossly finite a world [...]. (609 emphasis added)

So James regards consciousness as something "increased," and it leads him to a "felt connection between this enlarged impression of its quality and *portée* and the improved discussibility of a life hereafter" (610). The "felt connection" between the stamina of consciousness and the possibility of its survival posthumously consists in the fact that consciousness can extend its modes of relation to the universe inestimably. Accordingly, James is unclear about the lengths to which these complex relations can go. He sees them as

relations still vague, no doubt, as undefined as they are uplifting, as they are inspiring, to think of, and on a scale beyond our actual use or application, yet filling us (through the "law" in question, the law that consciousness gives us immensities and imaginabilities wherever we direct it) with *the unlimited vision of being*. (610 emphasis added)

Having begun with a well defined and finite concept of individual consciousness James now extends the term until it is no longer identifiable. It becomes “vague,” “immense,” and “unlimited,” not like consciousness at all.²⁸

The essay wilfully risks several brushes with spiritualism (a movement to which James objected) and with religion (to which James did not, in principle, object), but it breaks away from both by being a meditation on art rather than a meditation on immortality:

it is above all as an artist that I appreciate this beautiful and enjoyable independence of thought and more especially this assault of the boundlessly multiplied personal relation (my own), which carries me beyond even any “*profoundest*” observation of this world whatever, and any mortal adventure [...]. His [the artist’s] case, as I see it, is easily such as to make him declare that if he were not constantly, in his commonest processes, *carrying the field of consciousness further and further, making it lose itself in the ineffable*, he shouldn’t in the least feel himself an artist. (611 emphasis added)

The most common artistic activity is, for James, a stretching of consciousness until consciousness “loses itself in the ineffable.” Artistic creation, then, consists in “converting” (to apply Henry Sr.’s own term [*AUB* 123]) consciousness into something inexpressible in terms of consciousness. The “ineffable” resembles the consciousness whence it derived, but it is not consciousness. In other words, James believes that literature can render in terms of consciousness something other than consciousness. “Consciousness,” he concludes a little later on,

²⁸ This exactly is the ground first broken in Cameron’s *Thinking in Henry James*. The present study is, in many ways, an attempt to take James’ work beyond the threshold marked by Cameron. In this sense, I am simply picking up where Cameron has left off. Levinas’ “ethics” encompasses precisely these “relations still vague [...] as undefined as they are uplifting.” Ethics is thus the word I use to designate the Jamesian beyond the aforementioned threshold.

has thus arrived at interesting me too much and *on too great a scale*--that is all my revelation or my secret [...]. (613 emphasis added)

My readings of James' later texts have thus far been an attempt to highlight the ways in which a finite narrative opens up a horizon beyond its own finitude. The quest in James' various texts is not, as critics time and time again insist, a quest for knowledge, power, and other versions of conscious activity. The later James moves beyond the varieties of conscious experience to what is precisely "on too great a scale" for consciousness, the place where consciousness is no longer, is other to, itself. This *other* realm is not the ethereal possibility of an afterlife, but the realm of literary possibility.²⁹ The *Autobiography* is a demonstration of the capacities of consciousness to reach those regions where the literary sets its own visionary laws.

The (un)dead repeatedly whisper at the back of the narrative and hang to it like silhouettes. They constitute what Levinas calls the "background of existence" (*EE* 60) against whose restlessness James' ordinary world takes shape. The autobiographical act is here directed not against death (as the promise of immortality through the endurance of the written word), but against the impossibility of death of all of those who in death are caught up, so to speak, in the disquietude of being. Memory does not pretend to heal the author's dispersed, time-sick spirit. It responds to the murmur of the apparitional other:

[t]o look back at all is *to meet the apparitional and to find in its ghostly face the silent stare of an appeal*. When I fix it, the hovering shade, whether of person or place, it fixes me back and

²⁹ Martha Banta observes that the idea of "the great extension" (*JF* 610), James' phrase which supplied the subtitle to Banta's remarkable *Henry James and the Occult: The Great Extension*, is "in its way, a partial fulfillment of the manifesto James had made public [...] in 'The Art of Fiction.'" (63). "The Art of Fiction" dates back to 1884, which suggests that James was feeling his way into the major phase and out of consciousness as early as that.

seems the less lost--*not to my consciousness, for that is nothing, but to its own--*by my stopping however idly for it. (*AUB 54 emphasis added*)

The autobiographical shudders at the author's strange dismissal of his own consciousness, "for that is nothing." Memory remembers not for its own sake, but for the sake of others.

3. Jamesian Economy: Vague Vision

a person so haunted, even from an early age, with *visions of life*, that aridities, for him, were half a terror and half an impossibility, and that the said substitutes, *the economies and ingenuities that protested, in their dumb vague way, against weakness of situation or of direct and applied faculty*, were in themselves really a revel of spirit and thought. (*AUB 171 emphasis added*)

When James met Charles Dickens in a doorway in 1867, Dickens did not shake his hand or exchange any words of greeting with the twenty-four year old fan.³⁰ "The confrontation was but of a moment," says James, and "nothing followed, as it were, or happened (what *might* have happened it remained in fact impossible to conceive) [...]." (389). James considered the meeting a great success.

Dickens' "inscrutable mask" (389), and his "merciless *military* eye, I might have pronounced it, an automatic hardness, in fine" (389),

at once indicated to me [James], and in the most interesting way in the world, a kind of *economy of apprehension*. (389 emphasis added)

³⁰ Here is James on Dickens a little earlier in the passage: [t]here has been since his [Dickens'] extinction no corresponding case--as to the relation between benefactor and beneficiary, or debtor and creditor; no other debt in our time has been piled so high, for those carrying it, as the long, the purely "Victorian" pressure of that obligation. (388)

One might have suspected James of underplaying his own hurtful feelings at being snubbed by his Victorian master, if the language James uses to describe the event were not so charged as to communicate a complex enough attitude towards Dickens. The use of the combative “confrontation” to describe the encounter fits in neatly with the earlier references to Dickens’ hardness, and especially to his “merciless *military eye*” (James’ italics). Something of a struggle ensues, not a struggle between individuals, but a struggle between two types of economies, or visions.

James sees Dickens as a man exercising a somewhat stingy “economy of apprehension.” Dickens seems “committed to his monstrous readings” (390) with the “trained eye” of meticulous observation. Dickens is literally offensive, using a strategy of “penetration” to crack open his objects of observation while himself remaining closed and unapproachable. But Dickens’ quiet perusal, his inaccessibility, is precisely what provides James with a way into the Dickensian territory. James (a kind of Trojan horse) uses Dickens’ guardedness to draw out of it his much desired impression. Instead of withholding information, then, Dickens’ inscrutability is revealing:

there was an immensity more left to understand--for the long aftersense, I mean; and one, or the chief, of these later things was that if our hero neither shook hands nor spoke, only meeting us by the barest act, so to say, of the trained eye, *the penetration of which, to my sense, revealed again a world [...]*. (389 emphasis added)

The meeting is far from futile because James leaves it in full possession of the Dickensian loot:

[i]t was as if I had carried off my strange treasure just exactly from under the merciless military eye--placed there on guard of the secret. (390)

The “treasure” is not the revelation of personality, but a revelation of a “world.” What interests James is the Dickensian vision: how does it work? How does it handle its subject? What are its operative and productive principles? These are questions of economy.

If James is critical of Dickens, then, his criticism lies in the sense of Dickens’ faulty economy. The trouble with Dickens is that

[h]e couldn’t loosely spend for grace what he had to keep for life--which was the awful nightly, or all but nightly, exhibition: *such the economy, as I have called it, in which I was afterwards to feel sure he had been locked up [...].* (390 emphasis added)³¹

Dickens appears to James a prisoner of his own watchful economy. The tightly focused Dickensian economy is one of contraction, and it is therefore opposed to the Jamesian economy whose governing principles are those of openness and expansion. Dickensian vision, with its fixed and penetrative insights, falls short of the panoramic vision James embraces throughout the *Autobiography*. The sharpness James attributes to the Dickensian vision is also its limitation, since what this vision gains in focus and precision, it loses in range and breadth.³²

³¹ James goes on to say that his impression of Dickens as someone tight of vision, comes “in spite of the appearance, in the passage from my father’s letter, of the opened gates of the hour or two before” (390). Just preceding the encounter with Dickens is an excerpt from the letter in question. Henry James Sr.’s meeting with Dickens produced a very different impression of the great author. James Sr. is gushing: [w]hat a charming impression of Dickens the other night at the Nortons’ dinner! How innocent and honest and sweet he is maugre his fame! Fields was merely superb on the occasion, but Dickens was saintly.” (388)

This is significant because in these passages, in which the Jamesian vision explicitly rivals the Dickensian one, there is also a covert criticism of Henry Sr.’s economy of vision.

³² Although James’ “psychic economy” (Posnock 179) is of no particular interest to me, I think it worth noting how confident James remains during and after his brief brush with Dickens. Throughout the *Autobiography* as a whole, James appears at ease with his own vision and vocation, undisturbed by the occasional raised eyebrow of others.

As against the protective economy of Dickens, Jane Norton embodies the “mere uneconomised and selfless spread” (392). The passages devoted to the Nortons, in whose house James’ meeting with Dickens took place, directly follow that meeting. The Nortons’ house was a social focal point for the cultured Cambridge circle, and the friendship between the Jameses and the Nortons intensified once the former moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1866.³³ Jane Norton

distilled civility and sympathy and charm, she exhaled humanity and invitation to friendship, which latter she went through the world leaving at mortal doors as in effect the revelation of a new amenity altogether [...].” (392)

But James admits that

it takes the full list of her fond acclaimers, the shyest with the clearest, those who most waited or most followed, not to think almost more of the *way her blest influence went to waste as by its mere uneconomised and selfless spread*. (392 emphasis added)

The three principal components I have been talking about are here found in close succession: waste, economy, and spread. Jane Norton offers James an example of an economy so rigorously panoramic that it finds itself dangerously jettisoned. With the description of Jane Norton following closely that of Dickens, it is easy to outline the two contrasting personal economies at work. Whereas Dickens is admirably if tightly self-possessed, with his resources carefully allocated, as it were, and contained, Norton is wasteful and allows her resources to overflow, gushing forth towards others.

All of which is like evidence accumulating to support James in delineating his own vision or economy. For James neither peruses the world with anything like a “merciless

³³ Dupee’s note to page 388 reads: “The Norton who figures in this and subsequent pages was of course Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908), editor from 1864 to 1868 of the *North American Review*, who lived at ‘Shady Hill’ in Cambridge with his wife (died 1872) and sisters Jane and Grace” (608).

military eye,” nor allows his vision to flow uncontainedly and tumble overboard into undifferentiated waste. The Jamesian vision, and this is where the *Autobiography* touches base with the Prefaces that make up *The Art of the Novel*, demands taking expansion and assimilation to the limit, without, however, stretching them to extinction. *The American Scene* managed such a play of elasticity, letting go of the conventional literary devices of “character” and “plot.”³⁴ The *Autobiography* does a similar thing, except that its “theme,” if it can be said to be one, is this feat of vision, its virtuoso performance.

James refers to his imagination as “an imagination to which literally everything obligingly signified” (449). “Everything” here again insists on the assimilative quality of the panoramic vision. This all-inclusive “everything” ensures that a variety of particulars will come into play within the vastness they make up. Most important for my present purpose is that by fitting “everything” into his “vast miscellany” (492), James achieves very little material *waste*.

The brief period of his Harvard education demonstrates the extent to which James could incorporate virtually anything (even as stale a subject as Law) into his expansive vision. “The air of truth,” admits James, “doubtless hangs uneasy [...] over so queer a case as my having [...] found appreciability in life at the Law School [...]” (449). Earlier, in chapter IX of *Notes of a Son and Brother*, James addresses his time at the Harvard Law School as “one of the oddest errands [...] I could have undertaken” (411). By calling it an “errand,” however, James immediately establishes the air of intention. Even if he did not actually study Law, James’ enrolment at the School served a kind of purpose. But what

³⁴ In the previous chapter I suggested that James came to regard the conventional devices of “character” and “plot” as “uneconomic.” *The American Scene* rids itself of any excess baggage of psychological realism, and leaves “relations” in their pure impersonal and depsychologized form.

could be the purpose of enrolling in a subject in which one has no interest, nor a subject one wishes to master for purely pragmatic reasons? The question is settled at the very beginning of the chapter when James says his Harvard exercise was for the sake of “mere culture” (411). One may be reminded here of Matthew Arnold (whose “spirit” makes regular visitations to the *Autobiography*). James is thinking quantitatively: his attention rests not on the word “culture,” but on the designation “mere.” James (like Arnold) believes there is nothing limited or restricted about the idea of culture which would require the modest qualification of “mere.” But others undoubtedly did:

I had somehow [...] to fall back on the *merciful* “mere” for any statement of my pretensions even to myself: so little they seemed to fit into any scheme of the *conventional maximum* as compared with those I saw so variously and strongly asserted about me, especially since the outbreak of the War. (411 emphasis added)

“*Mere* culture” functions as would-be lip service to those for whom “culture” is nothing more than either anecdotal or recreational. The minimal “mereness” of culture is juxtaposed to some “maximum” determined by social convention. Elsewhere in the *Autobiography* that “maximum” is given a specific content: it is the acutely professional ethos of American society in general, and specifically the social and political agenda propagated by the emergency of the War. “Culture” has little to do with either of these; it is (professionally) amorphous at best, and (socially, morally) indulgent at worst. The pursuit of “culture” in time of war was frowned upon by some, and the War was known as the “bigger cause” (456); in the face of all of this, however, James remains unapologetic.

The reason for dwelling on the quantitative play between the “mere” and the “maximum” is to illustrate once more James’ economic thinking: his reluctance to waste

anything, his wish not to let anything fall by the wayside, and his desire to use up as much material as possible.³⁵ James' enrolment at the Law School may even be construed as a kind of joke, played at the expense of decent American folk. If it is taking the Harvard episode too far to read it in the radical light of a provocation, the point nonetheless is that James attended the Law School without studying Law (440). And if waste indeed be the issue, then it is probably true to say that James wasted other people's time, but never his own.

It is, at any rate, in pursuit of that amorphous quality of "general rather than of special culture" (440), and in compliance with the Jamesian principles of vision, that James wastefully (for others) enrolled at the Harvard Law School. There, James was to embark on the realization of an important ideal: the ideal of "vagueness." Here is James stating his mission to pursue vagueness with the utmost rigour:

as I breathe over again at any rate the comparative confidence in which I so moved I feel it as a confidence in the positive saving virtue of vagueness. Could I but work that force as an ideal I felt it must see me through, for the beauty of it in that form was that it should absolutely superabound. (412)

And James hastens to add that "vagueness" is distinct from just being idle:

I wouldn't have allowed, either, that it was vaguer to do nothing; for in the first place just staying at home when everyone was on the move couldn't in any degree show the right mark; to be properly and perfectly vague one had to be vague *about* something; mere inaction quite lacked the note--it was nothing but definite and dull. (412)

³⁵ I would argue that, for James (and Arnold), the essential process of "culture" consists in incorporating everything that *cannot* be conventionally decided. Nothing should be categorically excluded from cultural formation. The sole requirement for James, as I see it, is that material be treated according to the particular principles of vision which I am trying here to elucidate.

The provocative note faintly sounds again. For the passage does not assert, as may first seem, going to Harvard in order to appease his family. With everyone else “on the move” (Bob and Wilky in the army and William at Harvard), James wants to make the “right mark”--not a show of diligence and zeal, however, but the “right mark” of vagueness. Going along to College (not Henry Sr.’s preferred destination) would provide James with the kind of pale backdrop against which his vagueness could really shine. Then there is the necessity of being “actively” vague, that is, vague in relation to something. In order to give vagueness a positive rather than negative turn, James requires a specific object of vagueness. Vagueness is graceful, virtuous, beautiful, and superabounding. It is an affluence to revel in, not a deficit to fill.

So James swaps “Law” for “life,” and miraculously, legal studies are transformed from a potentially agonizing routine into an experiment in vision:

I thought of the Law School experiment, I remember, in all sorts of conceivable connections, but in the connection of dulness surely never for an hour. I thought of it under the head of “life”--by which term at the same time, I blush to confess, I didn’t in the least mean free evening access to Boston in a jangling horse-car [...]. (412)

A little later on “life” characteristically becomes the “*literary*” (413). What this experiment in the literary vision of life consists of is revealed in the following chapter.

Looking back, in chapter X of *Notes of a Son and Brother*, at what he calls “the visionary liberties I constantly took” (434), an older James rejoices in the guiding principles of his extraordinary vision.

That the sense in question did manage beautifully, when at last so hard pressed, **and that the plasticity and variety of my vision draw from me now this murmur of elation, are truths**

constituting together for me the perhaps even overloaded moral of my tale. With which I scarce need note that so elastic a fancy, so perverse a little passion for finding good in everything--good for what I thought of as history, which was the consideration of life, while the given thing, whatever it was, had only to be before me--was inevitably to work a storage of other material for memory close-packed enough to make such disengagement as I thus attempt at the end of time almost an act of violence. **I couldn't do without the scene, as I have elsewhere had occasion to hint, whether actually or but possibly peopled (the people always calling for the background and the background insisting on the people) [...].** (433-434 emphasis added)

The principles I have thus far delineated are all here: the expansion or “elasticity” of vision, the variety, inclusiveness, and the “overload” of material. Towards the end of the passage, James turns his attention to the relatedness between the scene, and the persons of vision.

Chapter X of *Notes of a Son and Brother* finds James attending classes with religious consistency, yet his knowledge remains strictly extra-curricular. As in his attendance years before of the various schools, of which James declared, “I sat out lecture after lecture as I might have sat out drama, alternate tragedy and comedy, beautifully performed--the professor in each case was the hero” (245), and his attendance in Newport of William Morris Hunt’s studio, attending Harvard was not aimed at the proper subject of study, but at the persons teaching it.³⁶

³⁶ The “Cambridge scene” included those sharing room and board with William and Henry James at the house of Miss Upham. One of these was Professor F. J. Child, the “head of the ‘English Department’ at Harvard” (427). *The New Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*’ “Ballad” entry notes Child for his famous compiling of the “definitive thesaurus of British popular ballads (1882-98), printing 305 ballads, some in as many as 25 versions” (23). The passages devoted to F. J. Child (*AUB* 427-428) again demonstrate James’ gift for unusual portraiture: “what I still most retain of him is the very flush and mobility, the living expansion and contraction, the bright comedy and almost lunar eclipse, of his cherubic face [...].” (428).

The forenoon lectures at Dane Hall I never in all my time missed, that I can recollect, and I look back on it now as quite prodigious that I should have been so systematically faithful to them without my understanding the first word of what they were about. (440-441)

In the very next sentence, the subject-swap occurs, and “Law” becomes “life”:

They [the lectures] contrived--or at least my attendance at them did, inimitably--to be “life” [...].
(441)

But if James did not bother understanding what his lecturers actually said, he tirelessly bothered about who or what they *were*.

that I could be to the very end more or less thrilled by simply sitting, all stupid and sentient, in the thick company of my merely nominal associates and under the strange ministrations of Dr. Theophilus Parsons, “Governor” Washburn and Professor Joel Parker [those ubiquitous proper names again], would have appeared to defy explanation only for those by whom the phenomena of certain kinds of living and working sensibility are unsuspected. (441)

Harvard education for James was all about the provision and revelation of “character.”

[c]haracter thus was all over the place, as it could scarce fail to be when the general subject, the one gone in for, had become identical with the persons of all its votaries. Such was the interest of the source of edification just named, not one ray of whose merely professed value so much as entered my mind. (442)

Of the three instructors, Joel Parker was the least endowed with “character.” While Theophilus Parsons seemed to James an “*illustrative figure*” (442 James’ italics), Parker “represented dryness and hardness, prose unrelieved, at their deadliest--partly perhaps *because he was most master of his subject*” (443 emphasis added). The last of these remarks is particularly interesting since it traces Parker’s flatness of character to his being the most professional of the three. Parker was, perhaps, what one would today call a “professional academic.” In keeping with the vague ideal, James recoils from the obviously

professional, and he elsewhere refers to himself by contrast as an “amateur” (245).³⁷

Nonetheless, Joel Parker’s deficiency itself entices James to an ingenious remark, characteristic of the sort of detail James likes to include in his “portraits vivants”: Parker possessed “a chin [...] indifferent to the duty, or at least to the opportunity, of chins” (443).³⁸

The expansive literary vision of life as both strategy and vocation, is inextricably linked to the “vague” vision. By distinguishing itself from the merely topical, by being unprofessional or amateurish in the literal sense derived from love, and by regarding persons as the most engaging objects of vision, James rejects the analytically narrow and classifying vision, of which the subject of Law may be the supreme example. By setting his literary mind up against the “legal mind,” James can more clearly (that is more vaguely) see his own vision emerge and take shape.³⁹

With the Civil War over and several of his tales published, James, “more personally speaking,” was beginning to see his vague vision pay off. Chapter XII of *Notes of a Son and Brother* addresses James’ initial literary success. James acknowledged that

fortune had in store some response to my deeply reserved but quite unabashed design of becoming as “literary” as might be. It was as if, our whole new medium of existence aiding, I had

³⁷ The reference to being an amateur appears in a very similar connection. James is speaking of his erratic education, this time at the Academy in Geneva, where “[t]he academic authorities, good-natured in the extreme and accustomed to the alien *amateur*, appear to have been [...] content, and I was but too delighted, on such lines, to attend anything or everything” (244-245 emphasis added). The antipathy between the “professional” and the “amateurish” rests on a conflict of motivation: a professional treats his task instrumentally, an amateur as an act of love. The root of the word “amateur” is, of course, the French word for love.

³⁸ Attention to this particular gem was previously drawn by Tony Tanner in *Henry James and the Art of Nonfiction* (64-65).

³⁹ Minny Temple wittily spotted the clash between the Jamesian and the legal mind. She writes to her correspondent: “I agree with you perfectly about Uncle Henry--I should think he would be very irritating to the legal mind [...]” (506).

begun to see much further into the question of how that end was gained. The vision, quickened by a wealth, a great mixture, of new appearances, became such a throbbing affair that my memory of the time from the spring of '64 to the autumn of '66 moves as through an apartment hung with garlands and lights--where I have but to breath for an instant on the flowers again to see them flush with colour, and but tenderly to snuff the candles to see them twinkle afresh.

Things happened, and happened repeatedly, the mere brush or side-wind of which was the stir of life [...]. (475-476)

The chapter goes on to almost drunkenly assert the riotous operation of James' fully-fledged vision.

Seeing further into the figurable world *made company of persons and places, objects and subjects* alike: it gave them all without exception chances to be somehow or other interesting, and the imaginative ply of finding interest once taken (I think I had by that time got much beyond looking for it), **the whole conspiracy of aspects danced round me in a ring**. It formed, by my present vision of it, a shining escort to one's possibly often hampered or mystified, but never long stayed and **absolutely never wasted**, steps; it hung about, after the fashion of winter evening adumbrations just outside the reach of the lamplight, while one sat writing, reading, listening, watching--perhaps even again, incurably, but dawdling and gaping; and most of all doubtless, if it supplied with colour people and things often by themselves, I dare say, neutral enough, how it **painted thick, how it fairly smothered, any surface that did it the turn of showing positive and intrinsic life!** Ah the things and the people, the hours and scenes and circumstances, the *inéarrables* occasions and relations, that I might still present in its light if I would, and with the enormous advantage now (for this I should unblushingly claim), of being able to mark for present irony or pity or wonder, or just for a better intelligence, or again for the high humour or extreme strangeness of the thing, the rare indebtedness, calculated by the long run, in which it could leave particular cases! This necessity I was under that everything should be interesting--for fear of the collapse otherwise of one's sustaining

intention--would have confessed doubtless to a closest connection, of all the connections, with the small inkpot in which I seemed at last definitely destined to dip to the exclusion of any stream more Pactolean: a modest manner of saying that difficulty and slowness of composition were clearly by this time not in the least appointed to blight me, however inveterate they were likely to prove; that production, such as it was, floundered on in spite of them; and that, to put it frankly, if I enjoyed as much company as I have said no small part of it was of my very own earning. The freshness of first creations--since we are exalted, in art, to these arrogant expressions--never fails, I take it, to beguile the creator, in default of any other victim, even to the last extravagance; so that what happened was that one found all the swarm of one's intentions, one's projected images, quite "good enough" to mix with the rest of one's society, setting up with it terms of interpretation, **an admirable commerce of borrowing and lending, taking and giving, not to say stealing and keeping.** (492-493 emphasis added)

By no great stretch of the imagination, these five sentences might read as some wacky speech given by James on receipt of an imaginary award. The multiplication of exclamation marks, the archaic near gasping of "Ah," the authoritarian cry of "absolutely never wasted," the touch of incomprehensibility, and the sheer prose-power of the current, all show the late vision (for it is not, strictly speaking, "style") in all its complex glory. James' ecstatic reaction to the publication of his first productions itself contains the elements, aesthetic and ethical, that his momentous vision encompasses. Hale has described in some detail the tenets of this vision, which she rightly terms as James' "appreciation of alterity."

The passage exercises the apparent dualism Hale identifies in James' literary theory as consolidated mainly in the Prefaces; she calls it the "tension between projection and reception in James' account of novelistic point of view" (Freedman 85). On the one hand,

it is the writer's mind or imagination which actively "*made* company of persons and place, objects and subjects alike." On the other, the literary mind is depicted as responding to "any surface that did it the turn of showing positive and intrinsic life" (493). I have already dwelled on the complicity between James and his environment reflected in the recurrent idea of "being met half-way by one's impressions" (*AS* 191).⁴⁰ Hale too invokes the economic to explain this creative logic:

[a]rtistic wonder, as James [...] describes it, establishes *an economy of relation between viewer and viewed* that is the basis for what I am calling the appreciation of alterity. The greater the artist's capacity for appreciation, the more capable he is of representation; to know the "thing" is irresistibly to reproduce it. In this economy, the greatest subjective investment results in a representation so objective (because so completely other) as to seem an actual object; the palpability of the artist's point of view--his interestedness--is imagined by James as a power to make palpable, not just to vivify but to instantiate the authentic identity of the thing that interests him [...]. (Freedman 86-87 emphasis added)

In James' own concise formulation in *The Ambassadors* and *The American Scene*, this is the economy of "detached curiosity" which I have discussed previously.⁴¹

This kind of logic is synonymous with a directness of relation to the world, a relation which, by committing itself to the multiplicity and variety of particular objects, is also committed to a belief in the sincerity of the world, its immediacy and availability to perception, its reality in short. In the next section, then, I attempt to *ground* James' formalist economy in the validity of surfaces and the reality of the world.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 3, "Missing Persons: (Im)personality and the Social Relation in *The American Scene*."

⁴¹ See the Conclusion to Chapter 3, "Impersonality in *The Ambassadors*" (161-173).

4. Superficial Economy: The World and Sincerity

I was at any rate in the midst of sincerities enough, sincerities of emphasis and “composition”; perversities, idiosyncrasies, incalculabilities, delightful all as densities at first insoluble, delightful even indeed as so much mere bewilderment and shock. (AUB 558 emphasis added)

the particular visible, audible, palpable fact, however small and subsidiary, was incomparably absolute, or had, so to speak, such a conscience and a confidence, such an absence of reserve and latent doubts about itself, as was not elsewhere to be found. (AUB 564 emphasis added)

“I am one of those for whom the external world exists” (Theophile Gautier qtd. in EE 37)

Along with *The Spoils of Poynton*, the *Autobiography* may be James’ most “worldly” book. The former can be described, not unkindly, as a book about furniture, and the latter devotes much attention to material objects such as food, and also to the natural elements air and light.⁴² In its “environmental” attention to the sensual and the elemental, the *Autobiography* amplifies the quasi-worldliness of *The American Scene*, and this environmentalism is another important sense in which the two works are linked.⁴³ The immediacy of the concrete world may easily be relegated a secondary role in the negotiation of the “great themes” of existence. And yet, the relation to mere “things”

⁴² The Preface to *Spoils of Poynton* (AN 119-139) consistently asserts the “inner life” of furniture. The furniture *knows* its own value (AN 126, 127), but James needs to invent Fleda Vetch to actively communicate this knowledge. See as well Hale’s discussion of this Preface in *Social Formalism*. Hale observes that James wanted “to write a novel that will provide a portrait not of quarreling son and mother but of the furniture itself” (39). In contrast, Ezra Pound calls this preoccupation with “things,” James’ “damn’d fuss about furniture” (*Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* 308).

⁴³ There is a felt “environmentalism” in James’ treatment of his surroundings. The vague vision, which conserves rather than works on or processes the objects of vision, along with the attention paid to the natural elements, express a relation to the world whose logic is one of preservation.

characterizes our being-in-the-world in the most basic way. This is a relation effected in consciousness and intentionality, and it is a type of relation which, precisely by being given (the world is there when we open our eyes in the morning, and appears in our dreams when we sleep), is at once ordinary and extraordinary. The recent James Bond motto “the world is not enough” is a humorous absurdity precisely because the world in its sheer plenitude offers inexhaustible occupations.

The *Autobiography* remains true to this sense of worldly plenty, and expresses it by depicting the relationship between James and his world as relation in which the author’s mind, consciousness, and imagination reach out to the worldly objects, which, in turn, impatiently await him to receive them.⁴⁴ The exchanges of hospitality and greeting between the intelligible mind and the objectal world (already noted in *The American Scene*) reflect the happy synchrony and simultaneity between the subject and objects of consciousness. The *Autobiography* achieves this effect of relation by concentrating on the smallest, most insignificant of objects while both insisting on, and maintaining, their internal integrity.

What can be said of the relation to the world? Levinas makes the seemingly mundane comment that “[t]o be in the world is to be attached to things.”

⁴⁴ James describes objects as actively urging the onlooker to perceive them: “[t]his makes now for a general air on the part of all the objects of vision that I recover, and almost as much in those of accidental encounter as in the breathlessly invoked, of being looked at for the last time and giving out their message and story as with the still, collected passion of an only chance. This feeling about them, not to say, as I might have imputed it, *in* them, wonderfully helped, as may be believed, the extraction of quintessences--which sprang at me of themselves, for that matter, out of any appearance that confessed to the least value in the compound, the least office in the harmony” (570-571). This description of the tendency which one might call the “urgency of objects” is one of the most detailed and unequivocal explications in the *Autobiography* of the relation between James and the world. “That [...] was the way all values came out: they were charged somehow with a usability the most immediate, *the most urgent*, and which, I seemed to see, would keep me restless till I should have done something of my very own with them” (571 emphasis added).

Theophile Gautier's line "I am one of those for whom the external world exists" expresses that joyous appetite for things which constitutes being in the world. (*EE* 37).

The *Autobiography* dwells, both on this simple attachment to things, and on the expressed joy of this attachment. Attachment to objects is enacted through the senses, primarily, as we shall soon see, through vision. And James is particularly joyous when the senses are concerned. Thanks to the "love of *exhibition*" (134), James says,

figures, faces, furniture, sounds, smells and colours became for me, wherever enjoyed, and enjoyed most where most collected, a positive little *orgy of the senses* and riot of the mind. (134 emphasis added)

Parisian streets, for example, offer inexhaustible stimulus for the hungry mind:

the closed windows, which but scantily distinguished between our own *sounds* and those of the sociable, and yet the terrible, street of records and memories, seemed to maintain an *air and a light* thick with a mixture of every sort of queer old Parisian amenity and reference: as if *to look or to listen or to touch* were somehow at the same time to probe, to recover and communicate, *to behold, to taste and even to smell*--to one's greater assault by suggestion, no doubt, but also to the effect of some sweet and strange *repletion*, as from *the continued consumption, say, out of flounced and puckered boxes, of serried rows of chocolate and other bonbons*. (214 emphasis added)

The imagery is all sense: sound, sight, touch, taste, and smell come together in a single festive moment of experience. The general picture is one of worldly, street-wise commotion. The closed windows can barely filter the happy onslaught of sensations from the street outside. The particular simile of nourishment (dubious, to be sure) of "chocolate and other bonbons" notwithstanding, James likens this experience of the senses to

“repletion,” as if one’s basic contact with the world through the senses were in itself a health-giving act.

Carried away unto European bliss by the sound of the French language, James says:

I sniffed it up aromatically, the superior language, in passage and parlour--it took the form of some **strong savoury soup**, an educational *potage Réchard* that must excellently have formed the **taste**: that was again, I felt as I came away, a part of the rich experience of **being thrown in tender juvenile form upon the world**. (108 emphasis added)

Food imagery also appears in the hearty description of one of James’ early teachers, Mrs. Daly. This “stout red-faced lady with grey hair and a large apron,”

viewed her little pupils as so many small slices cut from the loaf of life and on which she was to dab the butter of arithmetic and spelling, accompanied by way of jam with a light application of the practice of prize-giving. (12)

On other occasions, references to food are literal, as in the lengthy passage devoted to the “consumption of hot waffles retailed by a benevolent black ‘auntie,’” one of the few, if not the only, perks of attending the school of Forest and Quackenboss. The “auntie,”

who presided, with her husband’s aid as I remember, at a portable stove set up in a passage or recess opening from the court; to which we flocked and pushed, in a merciless squeeze, with all our coppers, and the products of which, the oblong farinaceous compound, faintly yet richly brown, stamped and smoking, not crisp nor brittle, but softly absorbent of the syrup dabbed upon it for a finish, revealed to me I for a long time, even for a very long time supposed, *the highest pleasure of sense*. We stamped about, we freely conversed, we ate sticky waffles by the hundred-- I recall no worse acts of violence unless I count as such our intermissional rushes to Pynsent’s of the Avenue, a few doors off, in the particular interest of a confection that ran the waffle close, as the phrase is, for popularity, while even surpassing it for stickiness. Pynsent’s was higher up in

the row in which Forest's had its front--other and dearer names have dropped for me, but Pynsent's adheres with all the force of the strong saccharine principle. This principle, at its highest, we conceived, was embodied in small amber-coloured mounds of chopped cocoanut or whatever other substance, if a finer there be; profusely, lusciously endued and distributed on small tin trays in the manner of haycocks in a field. *We acquired, we appropriated, we transported, we enjoyed them, they fairly formed perhaps, after all, our highest enjoyment; but with consequences to our pockets--and I speak of those other than financial, with an intimacy, a reciprocity of contact at any, or at every, personal point, that I lose myself in the thought of.* (130-131 emphasis added)

Why such an intricate emphasis on food as “the highest pleasure of sense” and the “highest enjoyment”?

The description of children shooting ahead towards the desired waffles is, in fact, illustrative of the way in which intentional consciousness works in general.⁴⁵ Levinas explains that the desirable object (in this case waffles and sticky coconut) “is a terminus, an end” (*EE* 37) to one's intentions. Intentions are not neutral, but animated “with the sting of desire” (*EE* 37). Thus in consciousness, desire fuels the intention which reaches out to the object in which, as the event of consciousness, desire is fulfilled and extinguished. Such a finite economy--the desirous intention finding satisfaction in the desired object of consciousness--is what for Levinas, and, I argue, also for James, constitutes being-in-the-world. The relation to the world enacted in consciousness is a “good” relation because it is based on the attained fulfilment of desire through intentions:

⁴⁵ Underlying the discussion of intentions and consciousness is, of course, Edmund Husserl's concept of “intentionality.” Consciousness, Husserl pointed out, is always a consciousness *about* something. This relation between consciousness and its object is what the term “intentionality” reflects.

“[t]he world offers the bountifulness of terrestrial nourishment to our intentions [...]” (*EE* 39).

For Levinas, then, the relation to objects has nothing to do with a clandestine existential or ontological dimension, *à la* Heidegger, nor with the murky realm of the Freudian unconscious. Life in the world is undeceptively simple. In the world, a cigar is--not sometimes but always--a cigar.⁴⁶ Desire is not inscribed with anything more profound than the object to which it relates intentionally.

This structure, where an object concords fully with a desire, is characteristic of the whole of our being-in-the-world. Nowhere in the phenomenal order does the object of an action refer to the concern for existing; it itself makes up our existence. We breathe for the sake of breathing, eat and drink for the sake of eating and drinking, we take shelter for the sake of taking shelter, we study to satisfy our curiosity, we take a walk for the walk. All that is not for the sake of living; it is living. Life is sincerity. (*EE* 44)

Food is a good example of such an existentially oblivious simplicity. In eating, there is no consideration of anything other than the desire for food, such as the struggle for life.

Eating, in spite of being necessary for life, is not motivated each time by the thought of survival:

⁴⁶ “Since the *discovery of the unconscious*--and this contradiction in terms is evidence of a considerable intellectual upheaval--philosophy has been conceiving of the unconscious as another consciousness, failing to recognize the ontological function of the unconscious and its specific relationship with conscious clarity, with sincerity, which separates itself from the obscurity, depth, and ambiguity of the unconscious. The unconscious is interpreted in terms of consciousness, or the reverse. The unconscious appears as a possible, a germ, or as something repressed. In fact, the implicitness referred to in speaking of implicit cognition no longer presents the structure of cognition; the essential event of the world, which is intention and light, no longer means anything here. **Consciousness is precisely sincerity. In taking being-in-the-world as an intention one is above all affirming--and the history of our civilization and our philosophy confirms this--that the world is the field of consciousness [...]** It is ‘before’ the world comes about that the unconscious [i.e. what is *wholly* outside consciousness--alterity] plays its role” (38 emphasis added).

[o]f course we do not live in order to eat, but it is not really true to say that we eat in order to live; we eat because we are hungry. Desire has no further intentions behind it, which would be like thoughts; it is a good will; all the rest belongs to the level of biology. The desirable is a terminus, an end. (37)

The children who “flocked and pushed” their way to the desired waffles, illustrate, by way of a phenomenological parable, the function of intentionality: intentions (the children) consume their object (waffles) in a frenzy of unadulterated appetite. The pleasure of eating is, then, exemplary of the pleasure of the worldly relation in general. As Levinas proposes,

[l]et us take some time to look at the example of food; it is significant for us because of the place it occupies in everyday life, but especially because of the relationship between desire and its satisfaction which it represents, and which constitutes what is typical of life in the world. What characterizes this relationship is a complete correspondence between desire and its satisfaction. Desire knows perfectly well what it wants. And food makes possible the full realization of its intention. At some moment everything is consummated. (43)⁴⁷

This movement of intentions and the quenching of desire Levinas simply designates as “health.” The direct and uncomplicated relation to objects which comes into being in the event of consciousness in the world, is precisely what makes the world benevolent and sincere. “Health” is therefore defined as

the *sincere* movement of the desiring toward the desirable, that good will that knows exactly what it wants, [and which] gauges the reality and the concreteness of a human being. (EE 41 emphasis added)

⁴⁷ The relation to other people is unlike the worldly relation to objects: “[c]ompare eating with loving, which occurs *beyond economic activity and the world*. For what characterizes love is an essential and insatiable hunger. To shake hands with a friend is to express one’s friendship for him, but it is to convey that friendship as something inexpressible, and indeed as something unfulfilled, a permanent desire (EE 43 emphasis added).

James understands this, for he too chooses the notion of “sincerity” to convey his relationship to the external world.

Speaking of the singularity of London then and now, in chapter II of *The Middle Years*, James laments the modern city’s lack of sincerity:

[t]he mid-Victorian London was sincere--that was a vast virtue and a vast appeal; the contemporary is sceptical, and most so when most plausible; the turn of the tide could verily be fixed to an hour--the hour at which the new plausibility began to exceed the old sincerities [...].
(557-558)

James’ use of “sincerity” is not simply metaphorical. Earlier in the chapter, James describes the singularity of the “London world” (556) in terms which begin to suggest what is implied by “sincerity” as opposed to “scepticism,” and how this sincerity refers to objects and appearances. The thoroughly Victorian London was a collection of contradictory appearances, tendencies, manifestations, which nonetheless collaborated to form the singularity of the British capital. That each element in the picture was unlike the others, that elements borrowed nothing from one another and yet remained a miscellaneous whole, is a sign of the intrinsic integrity of each part in the whole. London was a collection of contradictions held together by a strange kind of “logic,”

thanks to it [this logic] the whole picture, every element, objects and figures [...] hung together, appealing **in their own light and under their own law**--interesting ever in every case by instituting comparisons, **sticking on the contrary to their own true instinct** and suggesting only contrast. They were the *opposite*, the assured, the absolute, the unashamed, in respect to whatever might be of a generally similar intention elsewhere: this was their dignity, their beauty and their strength [...]. (555-556 emphasis added)

Sincerity is, then, that inner confidence of objects and appearances to show what they are without concealing meaning. Sincerity denotes the internal processes in objects which determine what they, in themselves, are: sincerity is, then, a form of objectal simplicity. By virtue of their sincerity, objects have the power to compel the spectator to view them on their own terms. This authenticity of the varied appearances finally creates the awesome exhibition of Victorian London. The array of elements that made up this great Victorian facade, each of which was “true to itself,” obliged James to “like them just as they were” (556). This is because, James continues,

it somehow glimmered upon me that if they had lacked their oddity, their monstrosity, as it even might be, their *unabashed insular conformity*, other things that belong to them, as they belong to these, might have loomed less large and massed less thick, which effect was wholly to be deprecated. (556 emphasis added)

Sincerity is the intrinsic dynamic of objects, or in James’ sophisticated formulation, their “unabashed insular conformity.” So that the value of objects as tools (Heidegger) or as signifiers and symbols (Freud) has little to do with the kind of value James places on them. The latter resides in the very specificity and concreteness of ordinary objects:

[p]henomena may be interesting, thank goodness, without being phenomena of elegant expression or of any other form of *restless smartness*, and when one type is strong, when once it plays up from deep sources, *every show of its sincerity delivers us a message and we hang, to real suspense, on its continuance of energy, on its again and yet again consistently acquitting itself.* (557 emphasis added)

The passage takes up a “healthy” or redemptive position in defence of the everyday. The material world has always been subject to much religious, philosophical, and psychological

suspicion.⁴⁸ These discourses condemn the world as inauthentic or deceiving. Given the traditionally ambiguous status of the ordinary world, to speak of the “show of its sincerity” is both unusual and unexpected. The statement ends with the idea of phenomena positively “acquitting itself,” simply by being itself, and by not succumbing to the “restless smartness” (the equivocal elegance of Idealism?) which, as mere ornament, unnecessarily complicates the characteristic simplicity of the world by seeking meaning beyond the apparent and the superficial. Rather than unravelling the world as a set of logical truths, “restless *smartness*” (in the double meaning of the word “smart”) masks the sincerity of the world. This is the logic behind James’ peculiar statement a little earlier that he “knew what everything meant [...] and was to know less only with the increase of knowledge” (550). Contrary to much conventional and philosophical wisdom, then, appearances are simple, symbols and Ideas superfluous and misleading.

The senses recognize the world directly. Yet of all the senses alluded to in the *Autobiography*, a special place is reserved for the visual sense. Assurance about the

⁴⁸ Levinas writes:

[w]hat characterizes, then, being in the world is the sincerity of intentions--the self sufficiency of the world and contentment. *The world is profane and secular*. Since Aristotle we conceive of the world as a phenomenon of form cloaking a content completely. The points of an object which make up the illuminated surface are laid out in ordered perspectives and open up for us the way to the object, putting a limit to the risks and fancies. *All the unfathomable mystery of a thing shows itself to us and is open to our grasp*. By virtue of its forms the world is stable and made up of solids. Objects can be defined by their finitude: form is just this way of coming to an end where the finite is the definite and is already exposed to being apprehended.

There is then a regrettable confusion in contemporary philosophy when it situated within the world the events which it has the incontestable merit of having discovered and designated by the *purely negative term of unconscious, and when it denounced as a hypocrisy, a fall, as “bourgeois,” and evasion of the essential behavior in the world, whose secular nature and contentment are simply counterparts of the very destiny of the world*. It is one thing to ask what the place of the world in the ontological adventure is, and another thing to look for that adventure within the world itself. (*EE* 41-42 emphasis added)

The world is not a “cloak” disingeniously covering up ontological profundities, it is, by definition, benevolently *superficial*.

sincerity of objects, and by extension the sincerity of the world, derives from the eyes: seeing is believing. Vision, claims Levinas, characterizes being-in-the-world in the most general way,

[f]or we can speak of vision and light wherever there is sensible or intellectual apprehension: we see the hardness of an object, the taste of a dish, the smell of a perfume, the sound of an instrument, the truth of a theorem. Light, whether it emanates from the sensible or the intelligible sun, is since Plato said to be a condition for all beings. Thought, volition and sentiment, however far they may be from intellection, are first experience, intuition, clear vision or clarity seeking to come about. (*EE* 47)

Towards the end of the Harvard episode in chapter X of *Notes of a Son and Brother*, James described his extra-curricular fascination with his teachers as a fascination with their appearance: “[t]he question of how people looked, and of how their look counted for a thousand relations, had risen before me too early and kept me company too long for me not to have made a fight over it [...]” (443). Appearances, James continues with determination,

would do, I was already sure, half the work of carrying me through life, and where was better proof of all it would have to give than just in the fact of what it was then and there doing? It worked for appreciation--not one of the uses of which a an act of intelligence had, all round, finer connections; and on the day, in short, when one should cease to live in large measure by one's eyes [...] one would have taken the longest step towards not living at all. (443)

During the War, however, in which James did not participate due to a physical ailment, it so happened that James' two enlisted brothers had access to the sort of “living” realities the eager visionary could only dream of.⁴⁹ Wilky's and Bob's letters were the

⁴⁹ An “obscure hurt” (415) was responsible for James failing to join the military. I choose to ignore this issue, safe in the knowledge that it has been amply covered elsewhere.

closest James could get to the battle field, and they related appearances both “portentous and prodigious” (460). A touch envious of Bob’s and Wilky’s privileged perspective on the formidable reality of War, James again asserts the crucial role of vision in the overall adventure. In characteristic detachment, James praises the brothers’ letters as revealing a

wondrous opportunity of vision, that is *appreciation of the thing seen*--there being clearly such a lot of this, and all of it, by my conviction, portentous and prodigious. The key to which assurance was that **I longed to live by my eyes**, in the midst of such far-spreading chances, in greater measure than I then had help to, and that the measure in which *they* had it gloriously overflowed. This capacity in them to deal with such an **affluence of life** stood out from every line, and images sprung up about them at every turn of the story. (460 emphasis added)

In living “by my eyes” amidst the “affluence of life” resides the acquittal of the world as a place of genuine contentment. Like consuming “waffles by the hundred,” James feasts his eyes on the wealth of meaningful appearances “in so significant a world” (*AUB* 231).

Rather than being portrayed as obscure, then, the world is precisely a region of revelation and clarity. Mystery belongs to that other realm, the realm of the ghostly, which is precisely not of this world. At this point vision, as both actual sight and as literary point of view, come together. For James had all along been observing and absorbing his environment, casting his broad gaze, then attending to singular images from within the “vast miscellany” of his gathered surfaces. The Jamesian economy of vision is therefore partly rooted in the readiness of the actual world to be seen and grasped. As James looks at the objects of his world he tries again and again to render the intrinsic dynamic governing these objects themselves,

so absolutely appointed and obliged did I feel to make out, so far as I could, what, in so significant a world, **they on their part represented**. (231 emphasis added)

This manner of looking, and of writing, leads to some very interesting literary accounts.

In London, the James children found themselves under the tutelage of Robert Thompson.⁵⁰ Thompson “had followed us in our move, occupying quarters, not far off, above a baker’s shop” (172) in St. John’s Wood. The children occasionally attended classes at the tutor’s home,

where not the least of our inspirations was the confidence, again and again justified, that our mid-morning “break” would determine the appearance of *a self-conscious stale cake*, straight from below, received by us all each time as if it had been a sudden happy thought, and ushered in by a little girl who might have been a Dickens foundling or “orfling.” (172 emphasis added)

A “self-conscious stale cake”? This is another Jamesian gem (a lot like the unusual combinations listed at the end of my chapter on *The American Scene*). A seemingly absurd combination of the living and the lifeless, the inward and the objective, a phrase which defies not only biology and psychology but, perhaps, also poetry, in its choice of an unworthy object (not only is this object a cake, it is a stale one). This is Jamesian “fun,” of course, but it also says something about how “seriously” James took simple objects to be. That self-consciousness can be attributed to a slice of cake indicates first, that James takes objects to be inherently coherent, as if possessing an inwardness of their own, and second, that James recognizes a complicity between himself and the worldly goods, baked and all, he sees and consumes. Feeling himself “absolutely appointed and obliged” (231) creates a relationship, a mutual commitment, between James and his objects of vision. Objects are not just “out there,” “[o]bjects are destined for me; they are for me” (*EE* 39). The everyday world, for James, represents an ordinary miracle.

⁵⁰ Thompson was Scottish, and James later found out that he went on to teach young Robert Louis Stevenson (*AUB* 169-170).

Scott S. Derrick's article "A Small Boy and the Ease of Others: The Structure of Masculinity and the Autobiography of Henry James" acknowledges the importance of the world of everyday objects in the *Autobiography*. Derrick also notes the connection between ordinary objects and the desire which underlies the relation to objects. But for Derrick, this desire is defined as a sickly lack incapable of being satisfied. "A host of writings," Derrick begins,

from *Ecclesiastes* to *Ecrits*, argue that an absolute ease, characterized by completely fulfilled desire, is largely beyond us. In Lacan's aphorism, desire is a structurally produced "lack" which cannot be eliminated by the experiences or objects of the everyday world. [...] As a consequence, a chain of unsatisfactory objects [...] stretches into our past like the shells of abandoned cars. (26)

Thus, food, to which Derrick devotes a considerable slice of his discussion, "seems to be a kind of greedy reaction formation, in which he [the young James] chases ease to overstuffed gluttony" (30). And a little later on:

appetite is fueled by famine, the imagery of which dominates the scenes of plenty in *A Small Boy and Others*. James repeatedly remembers hungering for a food of experience to fill the felt vacuity of his infant self [...]. (31)

Derrick finally relates insatiable appetite to James' problematic masculinity. The critic's task accordingly becomes one of undoing the "difficult knot in the *Autobiography*, of food, eating, ease, and masculinity, [which] requires considerable unravelling" (28).

Derrick's article is one example of the way in which everyday objects in the *Autobiography* are taken as superficial substitutes for deep inner struggles. Derrick backs his reading with Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theory. Like Edel's technique of sniffing out biographical truth from under James' carpet, Klein's method is to look "behind" the

superficiality of objects to a more fundamental realm of meaning. Klein seeks a primary object which was lost in childhood, yet whose hold on the adult individual is maintained through unconscious activities and in fantasy. This significant object is, famously, the mother's breast. The loss of the breast as the primary object is subsequented by a "fall" into the world of everyday objects, objects which fail to make up for the "primordial loss" of the breast (Derrick 34), hence only live up to expectation through indirect processes of "compensation" and "reparation" (Derrick 35). In the Kleinian universe, then, "the world is not enough" is no joke. Rather than providing the affluence and wealth James continually speaks of, the world is a negative place in which deprivation and dissatisfaction rule. As Derrick clearly puts it:

Klein begins with *primordial loss, the "fall"* which occurs when the child is severed from the breast, and which makes aggression, longing, and hunger characteristic of *post-lapsarian* relations between the self and the world. Klein claims that the subject responds to its privation by attempting to possess the object of desire in fantasy, to introject it, but that this introjection may be marred, again in fantasy, by *violence associated with all oral processes*, by the destructive nature of biting, chewing, and even sucking. The necessity of introjection is a response to the intractability of the object world. (34 emphasis added)

The "oral processes" Derrick alludes to are those of eating and "gaping," the latter a persistent gesture of wonder with which James greets the world around him. But whereas my readings so far have shown James to be gaping in disbelief at the show of the world's sincerity, Derrick takes both eating and gaping as modes of the aggressive attachment to objects, modes which inflict damage upon the world. Of the "gape" Derrick says that it is "to stand with open mouth and passively, or aggressively, 'take in'" (30). And eating is

similarly negative: “eating is the best model we have for ‘taking in,’ and eating so thoroughly implicates the process of existing in the infliction of damage on the world [...]”

(34). Millicent Bell is closer to the truth when she points out that

[t]he small boy and the young man “gape” at everything they see; it is a word James uses continuously throughout the *Autobiography*. It is a word, of course, with distinctly oral connotations; it is not just the eye that stares wide open but the mouth that opens in astonishment and seems to yearn to “take in” the otherness into the inmost recesses of self. One might, possibly, relate this insistent oral image to a psychological diagnosis of arrested development at the oral stage or regression in James’ “case” [...]. But *James’ orality has a positive gusto*; a relish marks his constant recall of gustatory sensation itself as well as his use of the metaphor of eating and drinking. (473 emphasis added)

It is interesting to note Derrick’s recourse to religious (particularly Christian) rhetoric. The “fall” from the Eden/breast to the “postlapsarian” world is so harsh that it infects virtually all of the life-giving activities of the world (such as eating) as either passive or aggressive.⁵¹ That “the world is profane and secular” is precisely Levinas’ point in *Existence and Existents*, but not because the world embodies an unhealthy (or sinful) descent from the Eden that preceded it, but because it belongs to the field of the consciously knowable and not to the field of mystery.

Derrick interprets James’ desire for worldly objects as “the demand of an unbridled appetite for satiation, regardless of the cost” (31). How does such a reading measure up against the text of the *Autobiography*? It seems to me as if there is very little in Derrick’s

⁵¹ The recourse here is not merely to the common religious condemnation of the everyday world, but also to the not uncommon condemnation of James’ fiction as passive, or as passive-aggressive. Maud Ellmann explores the complex figurations of food (or its withholding in starvation) within the discourses of culture and politics. I do not deny that food or eating may become symbolic, representative, or performative, but that is not the function of food in James’ *Autobiography*. (*The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment*. London: Virago, 1993).

discussion that engages with James' text itself, while substantial attention is paid to Klein's. Derrick's view of James' relation to objects is therefore problematic on two related counts. First, it *mistrusts* the explicitly positive language used by James to convey the joyous relation to objects and to the world in general. Second, such mistrust is inscribed in the very nature of the Kleinian (one might generalize the psychoanalytical) procedure. In other words, Derrick presupposes the very derivativeness and inauthenticity of objects which he then uncovers in James' text. Most important, I argue, is Derrick's overlooking the recommendation implicit in the idea of worldly sincerity: in treating ordinary objects as significant *in themselves* without relating them to external systems of meaning ("restless smartness") James seems to be providing a method for approaching the "world" of his narrative. If the sincerity of objects is precisely what James insists on and strives to retain even in the act of representation, then the responsibility in relation to objects must be shared by the reader as the recipient of James' preservative efforts. James' text seems to inscribe its own method of reading: reminding the reader that, as in the world, the elements of the text should be approached directly, and with a concern for preserving their intrinsic integrity. The *sincerity* of the text corresponds to the reader's *trust* in the text, and trust in the text indeed seems the most productive (and exciting) way in which to read late James. This method of reading, in correspondence with James' method of writing, is at odds with the supplementary aggression which Derrick attributes to James' relation to objects. Ironically, it is James' text itself which is subjected throughout to the latent aggression of psychoanalytical deciphering.

The superficial relation to objects which I argue is James' professed worldly relation in the *Autobiography*, is fundamentally different from the psychoanalytical understanding of desire as displaced (Freud), lacking (Lacan), and dishonest (dishonest because it relates to substitutes in place of the "real" thing: the mother's breast, the originary lack, the penis, the Father, the Mother, and so on). While James' fiction may indeed be subjected to the most thorough-going and well-informed psychological analyses, the texts under analysis remain indifferent to the psychological in all its guises. This point was brilliantly made by Sharon Cameron with regard to the ever-prospering psychological critiques of "consciousness." Prosper as these may, James' texts remain almost infuriatingly oblivious to them:

[w]hat is to be remarked on about the existing critiques of Jamesian consciousness--that it is solipsistic, that it is unrealistic, that it is unsocial or amoral--is that these characterizations seem entirely accurate, even completely devastating, while simultaneously not appearing to touch (not seeming to engage with) the novels themselves. The novels remain essentially impervious to such criticism, for James never endorses the values he is accused of abandoning. (191)

Cameron's remark (casually slipped in as a note to Chapter 4 of *Thinking in Henry James*) is one of the most succinctly perceptive observations on the state of Jamesian scholarship ever made. It is most suggestive too in beginning to clear a space for a different sort of criticism, one that (like Cameron's exemplary study) attempts to draw out the principal "values" that arise directly out of James' texts themselves.

In this section I endorsed a Jamesian world-view which is undeniably and purposefully, as well as literally, superficial. It is the superficial which is, paradoxically, the elusive figure in James' magic carpet. James does not seek to "penetrate" (as Dickens

does) the objects he sees. His vision is panoramic, one which lightly brushes over the rich and varied surface of things, and which takes this surface as unequivocally significant. Subsequently, there is no place in James' vision for the symbolic reading of objects proposed by psychoanalysis: objects do not stand for anything other than themselves, they do not conceal hidden depths. The phenomenal world is completely revealing, that is, sincere. Vision is not merely an appropriate vehicle with which to appreciate the world in this way, it is the perfect embodiment of that appreciation itself. Vision grazes contours and yields forms; it does not venture beyond what is readily given because, in the Jamesian conception of the world, "what you see is what you get."

The dimension of mystery in James, then, is incompatible with the superficial economy of everyday life. The world is by definition a knowable field of consciousness (*EE* 38). The unknowable in James therefore has no place in the world and belongs to a different order altogether, not the order of the unconscious, but the realm of alterity: the literally other-worldly, or wholly "other."⁵² The mysterious realm of alterity which does not belong to the phenomenal world nor to the world of the psyche, has been glimpsed in James' spectral economy. With the palpable world of objects placed alongside the impalpable world of the ghostly, the *Autobiography* manages an incomparably broad literary range. As the closing sentence of "Is There a Life After Death?" declares, James "reach[es] beyond the laboratory-brain" (*JF* 614). Armed with his spectral sensibility, yet

⁵² Here I diverge a little, at least semantically, from Dorothy Hale's valuable notion of James' "appreciation of alterity." This is in the sense that I withhold the use of "alterity" to persons rather than to things. For Levinas, the relation to external objects (which in Hale falls under the "appreciation of alterity"), is unlike the relation to the exteriority of persons. Levinas sees the two as essentially different modes of relation. Objects are related to in consciousness, while the relation to alterity is precisely a relation beyond being or consciousness. I understand Hale to be arguing that James' literary philosophy is based on the preservation of the so-called "interiority" of objects, which Hale designates as their "alterity."

remaining faithful to the validity and dignity of the empirical world, James' literary vision finally embraces regions transcending both consciousness and death.

An additional obstacle to the psychoanalytical reading of the *Autobiography* is the absence of a discernible pattern of development from infancy to maturity. The narrative of the *Autobiography* avoids such a pattern due to its scenic and discontinuous structure. To speak of development in the *Autobiography* would require a rearranging of the text in a coherent chronological order. Only then could a developmental pattern properly emerge.⁵³ Rather than dramatizing the emergence and growth of its subject, then, the *Autobiography* surprisingly presents him as virtually complete: like Athena springing armed and ready from Zeus' head, James appears in the *Autobiography* in full possession of his imaginative and visionary faculties. The small boy is presented to the reader as a more or less accomplished being (a little like young Maisie in *What Maisie Knew*). The ubiquitous "gape" is not, therefore, a childish gesture which James later fails to outgrow. It is a positive and permanent sign of James' relation to his world, in both childhood and beyond. Moreover, the absence of a teleological scheme allows James to address time as a radical discontinuity: if time is discontinuous, then each moment infinitely counts. Each segment of time potentially supplies James with an occasion for development and renewal. In place

⁵³ When David Ellis compares the *Autobiography* to Wordsworth's *The Prelude* he claims that the former is "predominantly a portrait of the artist," and continues that

[l]ike *The Prelude*, James's *Autobiography* traces the growth of a mind [...]. The chief agency of development--of education, is not therefore "Nature," [...] but "human appearances in endless variety...the social scene" (105)

he is extracting from the text a pattern of development which it does not readily yield. See also Carol Holly's psychoanalytically-inspired "A Drama of Intention in Henry James' *Autobiography*." Holly makes some interesting connections, primarily between James' memory of the Harvard mock trial (*AUB* 438), and his later ordeal of *Guy Domville*. Holly argues the former serves as a kind of "screen-memory" for the latter. She thus interprets the *Autobiography* as "in part [...] an act of suppression" (29).

of a slow crystallization and maturation of the artist's self, each instant stands alone as a unique moment of initiation: a new birth.⁵⁴

5. The Other Economy, Economy of the Other

If the world is superficial and finite, there are also relations or events that “break with the world” (*EE* 39) and which do not belong to what James calls “the more convenient sphere of the objective” (*AUB* 455). One such event is the relation to ghosts which introduces into the narrative a realm beyond the finite economy of life and death. Another, is the encounter with others, the ultimate event with which this thesis is primarily concerned, and which signals a breaking away from the finite relation to objects.

His interest in the unique event of interpersonality, James feels, decisively sets him apart from that other Henry James, the one for whom truth and respite are neatly packaged into the heavy volumes of Swedenborgian philosophy. A comparison between the respective visions of father and son is the subject of chapter VI of *Notes of a Son and Brother*. The difference between their two visions is encapsulated in one particular episode which tells the story of Henry James Sr.'s initiation into the works of Swedenborg, an event which was to save the elder James from a life of fear and disaffection.

Henry James Sr.'s conversion took place in England around 1844 (*AUB* 340). Swedenborg came recommended by “Mrs. Chichester, a gentle lady of his acquaintance” (340). Mrs. Chichester kindly

⁵⁴ Here I look back to the discussion of authentic time in the first chapter on *The Wings of the Dove*.

brought to his knowledge, by a wondrous chance, the possibility that the great Swedenborg, from whom she had drawn much light, might have something to say to his case; so that *under the impression of his talk with her* he posted at once up to London from the neighbourhood of Windsor, where he was staying, possessed himself of certain volumes of the writings of the eminent mystic (so-called I mean, for to my father this description of him was grotesque), and passed rapidly into that grateful infinitude of recognition and application which he was to inhabit for the rest of his days. (340 emphasis added)

The episode (recounted from *The Literary Remains of Henry James*, compiled by William James in 1885) contains an important subtext, albeit one which Henry Sr., in his bookish zeal, seems to have missed. The official version of the tale credits Swedenborg with the remedial powers which transformed James Sr.'s life for good. The younger James, however, subtly points to a different source responsible for helping his father, a source which takes precedence over his father's fortunate discovery of Swedenborgian philosophy. This secret source is glimpsed in James' brief qualification, "under the impression of his talk with her." In this lies the crux of James' distinctive philosophy. He is proposing that his father would not have read Swedenborg at all if Mrs. Chichester had not first succeeded in working her own personal magic on him. "[U]nder the impression," as under a spell, James Sr. was ready to receive advice, to listen, to be impressed. In this scheme, Swedenborg's philosophy comes second, while Mrs. Chichester's charmed influence comes first as the foundation of the life-changing experience. Despite living in the midst of his father's Swedenborgian bliss, and witnessing his father "move about there after the fashion of the oldest and easiest native" (340), young James still had his doubts:

yet I felt how **the real right thing** for me would have been the hurrying drama of **the original rush, the interview with the admirable Mrs. Chichester**, the sweet legend of his and my

mother's **charmed impression** of whom had lingered with us--I admired her very name, there seeming none other among us at all like it [...]. (340 emphasis added)

The subtext becomes the text. What really matters to James is not Swedenborg's books. For James, his father's transformation occurred imperceptibly and miraculously *before* the latter had opportunity to study the writings of the Swedish theologian. James is certain that his father is missing the "original rush," the rush being Mrs. Chichester herself (coming alive yet again by the recital of her proper name). A redemption of a sort is indeed possible, but for James it cannot arise strictly from the principles of a philosophy. Redemption is rooted first and foremost in the interpersonal encounter which opens up the way to new horizons. Only in the form of a personal encounter can reading become fully transformative.⁵⁵

As if to gently mock his father's rigidity of thought in missing the "*real* right thing" of the tale, James goes on to speak of Swedenborg's books, not for what they contain, but for the way they looked:

that majestic array of volumes which were to form afterward the purplest rim of his [James Sr.'s] library's horizon and which I was thus capable, for my poor part, of finding valuable, in default of other values, as coloured properties in a fine fifth act. (340-341)

Books are just books, and as such may be appreciated for their simple (if majestic) materiality. It is the transcendence of Mrs. Chichester that delivered James Sr. beyond the

⁵⁵ This priority of the personal encounter over the contemplatively philosophical is designated by Levinas' familiar expression "ethics as first philosophy." Tony Tanner discusses James Sr.'s Swedenborgian encounter in remarkably similar terms to mine: "[w]hat preceded this [conversion]--an acquaintance, a conversation, a journey--was entirely incidental. But for son Henry, it is precisely these 'incidentals' that would have seemed of the essence [...]" (*Henry James and the Art of Nonfiction* 62). For Tanner, however, it is not the interpersonal component which makes the "incidental" the centre of attention. It is the "dramatic" component of the scene: "the 'original rush' was *more* interesting to James, because it was more 'dramatic'" (62).

finite and the material, and not the transcendental principles of Swedenborg's philosophy. For James, then, not Swedenborg but the obscure Mrs. Chichester is his father's true saviour, an idea made all the more poignant in light of his father's indifference. James Sr. was addicted to abstract meanderings, which made him "somehow too philosophical for life, and at the same time too living [...] for thought" (344).

While father was busy with books and "papers" (342), son was "[f]eeling myself 'after' persons so much more than after anything else" (338). The "great relations" propagated by Swedenborg's philosophy, relations pertaining to the Spiritual and the Cosmic, failed to interest (or entertain) young James. The "personal" (of equally large proportions but in appearance so much smaller than the Philosophical) was what occupied James, and the boundary between father and son seems to be drawn along this very line:

*[t]here was the dim dissociation, there my comparative poverty, or call it even frivolity, of instinct: I gaped imaginatively, as it were, to such a different set of relations. I couldn't have framed stories that would have succeeded in involving the least of the relations that seemed most present to *him*; while those most present to myself, that is more complementary to whatever it was I thought of as humanly most interesting, attaching, inviting, were the ones his schemes of importances seemed virtually to do without. (339)*

The initiation into the work of Swedenborg was the defining moment in James' Sr.'s adult life. His son, on the contrary, enjoyed transformative bliss on more than one occasion. In fact, the *Autobiography* can in part be read as an episodic catalogue of such initiatory events. James frequently speaks of his initiations (into Europe, art, literature, critical thinking, style, etc.). Yet these multiple initiations into the varied aspects of life and art share a common factor. Unlike his father who was transformed "by the book,"

James is continuously transformed through encounters with other people. These take precedence over all other types of initiation: the relation to other people is, for James, the most powerful relation possible because the most transformative. A good example of the primacy of persons in moments of initiation is found in the passages dealing with James' relationship to painting.

Painting was clearly an important influence on James, and yet the *Autobiography*, while devoting much space to certain influential paintings, also repeatedly underscores their initiatory credibility by introducing an influence as powerful as the art piece itself: the figure of the artist.⁵⁶ Nowhere is the initiative force of the personal encounter more apparent than in James' casual flirtation with the art of the portrait at the Newport studio of Thomas Couture's former student, the American painter William Morris Hunt (*AUB* 286). James' self-proclaimed "failure" to take up painting is sometimes associated with an earlier remark made in chapter XIX of *A Small Boy and Others*, that William

drew because he could, while I did so in the main only because he did [...]. (150)

For James, then, painting was an imitative pursuit, and one might take such brotherly mimicry as a sign of James' inferiority and belatedness in relation to his big brother. But,

⁵⁶ In *A Small Boy and Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol*, Michael Moon discusses at length James' initiation into "style" through his encounter with painting, particularly paintings by the French painter Thomas Couture (*AUB* 192-194). In his second chapter, Moon examines James' preference of Couture's *The Falconer* (1844-45) to his *The Romans of the Decadence* (1847), both of which make use of homoerotic images and themes, albeit in significantly different ways. Moon is pursuing the "Jamesian" through the idea of "queerness." While I do not share Moon's focus on the specifically homoerotic content of "queer" (I prefer the less critically-exploited and sexually neutral "vague"), Moon's intention is clearly to open up, rather than narrow down, the Jamesian horizon. His readings of queer initiations thus willfully avoid reading Jamesian sexuality as repressive, tormented, or neurotic.

as Posnock (and Feinstein) has persuasively argued, the dynamic between Henry and William James was one in which Henry, not William, had the upper hand.⁵⁷

Following the return of the Jameses from Europe at the end of 1860, Henry followed William to Hunt's studio where William embarked on a short-lived painting career under the instruction of the American artist. Unlike William, however, Henry's attraction to painting was of a convoluted sort. The path to artistic appreciation passed for James through the living figure of the artist himself. Hunt must have realized that James was not destined for the palette, but his attitude towards the young James--civil, gallant, and non-committal--left an impression on James which was as significant to him as the art that surrounded him in the hushed splendour of Hunt's studio. The studio provided James with "Art, art definitely named, looking me full in the face and accepting my stare in return--no longer a tacit implication or a shy subterfuge, but a flagrant unattenuated aim. I had somehow come into the temple by the back door, the *porte d'honneur* opened on another side, and I could never have believed much at best in the length of my stay; but I was there, day by day, as much as any one had ever been, and with a sense of what it 'meant' to be there that the most accredited of pupils couldn't have surpassed [...] in the studio I was at a threshold of a world" (285). This world, it then transpires, is not simply the inanimate world of art, but that of the living artist:

[i]nto the world so beautifully valid the master would occasionally walk, inquiring as to what I had done or would do, but bearing on the question with an easy lightness, a friendliness of tact, a neglect of conclusion, which it touches me still to remember. It was impossible to me at the time not so to admire him that his just being to such an extent, as from top to toe and in every accent

⁵⁷ See especially Posnock (174-177).

and motion, *the living and communicating Artist*, made the issue, *with his presence*, quite cease to be of how one got on or fell short, and become instead a mere self-sacrificing vision of the picturesque itself, the constituted picturesque or treated “subject,” in efficient figure, *personal form, vivid human style*. (286 emphasis added)

The art of the portrait is encapsulated and embodied in the “living and communicating Artist,” himself a kind of “portrait vivant”:

William Hunt, all muscular spareness and brownness and absence of waste, all flagrant physiognomy, brave bony arch of handsome nose, upwardness of strong eyebrow and glare, almost, of eyes that both recognised and wondered, strained eyes that played over questions as if they were objects and objects as if they were questions, might have stood, to the life, for Don Quixote, if we could associate with that hero a far-spreading beard already a little grizzled, a manner and range of gesture and broken form of discourse that was like a restless reference to a palette and that seemed to take for granted, all about, canvases and models and charming, amusing things, the “tremendously interesting” in the seen bit or caught moment, and the general unsayability, in comparison, of anything else. (286)

Michael Moon singles out a particular moment in which James decided to abdicate painting for literature. This occurs a little later on, when John La Farge and William James attempt to draw cousin Gus Barker. “I well recall,” says James, “the crash, at the sight, of all my inward emulation--so forced was I to recognise on the spot that I might niggle for months over plaster casts and not come within miles of any such point of attack” (*AUB* 293). In light of Henry’s failure, William’s success

dazzled me out of every presumption; since nothing less than that meant drawing (they were not using colour) and since our genial kinsman’s perfect gymnastic figure meant living truth, I should certainly best testify to the whole mystery by pocketing my pencil. (293)

In spite of this seemingly decisive moment of disillusion, the scenes at Hunt's studio illustrate the relative weightlessness of any one moment in determining James' vocation. The decision to become a writer seems to have always been there for James. A variety of moments merely corroborate and reaffirm an immemorial inclination towards the "literary." Not a decision to take up the literary life, but the active *living of the literary* is the type of "initiation" the *Autobiography* ultimately unfolds.

I have previously dwelt on the difference between father and son with respect to transformative experiences: James believes his father is unaware of Mrs. Chichester's role in the parent's conversion. Yet, in spite of James Sr.'s commitment to abstract knowledge, it was he who introduced his children to the vital importance of the social relation. The crucial passages dealing with James' parents' (numerous and contradictory) ideas regarding their children's moral education (*AUB* 122-127) nonetheless amount to a single dictum. According to James Sr.,

we need never fear not to be good enough if we were only social enough: a splendid meaning indeed being attached to the latter term. (124)

At times, this social imperative led James and his father very far indeed.

In chapter VIII of *A Small Boy and Others*, young Henry James is taken by his father to visit the strange "establishment" of Mrs. Cannon. James does not explain who Mrs. Cannon is or how his father came to be associated with her, nor does he explain what Henry Sr. had in mind in introducing his young son to Mrs. Cannon. James remains reticent, and instead of spelling out the true nature of the establishment, he sprinkles clues which the reader might pick up along the way. The playful incoherence of the scene works

to reproduce the original mood of the past experience, hence James' insistence that the "wonder was the experience" (54), and that wonder "was everywhere" (54).

The first of these "clues" is the ambiguous location of Mrs. Cannon's establishment. It

lurked near Fourth Street [...] not more definitely placing her than in what seemed to me a labyrinth of grave bye-streets westwardly "back of" Broadway, yet at no great distance from it, where she must have occupied a house at a corner, since we reached her not by steps that went up to a front door but by others that went slightly down and formed clearly an independent side access, a feature that affected me as rich and strange. (54)

Mrs. Cannon "lurked" close behind Broadway, never far from the city's centre of activity, yet in a back-street. James stresses that the steps to the establishment led down, not up, and formed a separate entrance from the rest of the building. All this was, for the small boy, "rich and strange." If James' narrative seems to conceal more than it shows, this clearly coincides with the memory itself, in which even the arrival to Mrs. Cannon remained mysterious and elusive. Leading the reader down the steps and into the establishment, James recalls the front interior as merely one "brave mystification, amid other mystifications" (54). At the front of the establishment was a designated "area" (James' quotation marks),

at once a parlour and a shop, a shop *in particular for the relief of gentlemen in want of* pocket-handkerchiefs, neckties, collars, umbrellas and straw covered bottles of the essence known in Old New York as "Cullone"--with *a very long and big O*. (54 emphasis added)

The "area" in question is part shop part parlour, a fact implying that clients (all male, as it happens) are received at the front, but serviced at the back. James' description of the shop as catering "in particular for the relief of gentlemen in want," immediately resonates with

possibilities far exceeding the relief obtained from the subsequently listed articles. It would not, I think, be stretching the innuendo too far to suggest that the mispronunciation of “Cullone” by resident New Yorkers, “with a very long and big O” may stand for the gentlemen’s attained “relief.” On first reading, it may be possible to miss the bawdy duplicity of James’ description (also the duplicity of Mrs. Cannon’s “shop”). The hilarious description of a shop for relieving men in which transactions end in a big long “O,” is indeed played by James for all it is worth:

Mrs. Cannon was always seated at some delicate white or other needlework, as if she herself made the collars and the neckties and hemmed the pocket-handkerchiefs, though the air of this conflicts with the sense of importation from **remoter centres of fashion** breathed by some of the more thrilling of the remarks I heard exchanged, at the same time that it **quickened the oddity of the place**. For the oddity was in many things--above all perhaps in **there being no counter, no rows of shelves and no vulgar till for Mrs. Cannon’s commerce; the parlour clearly dissimulated the shop--and positively to that extent that I might have uncannily wondered what the shop dissimulated**. It represented, honestly, I made out in the course of visits that seem to me to have been delightfully repeated, the more informal of the approaches to our friend’s brave background or hinterland, the realm of her main industry, the array of the furnished apartments for gentlemen--gentlemen largely for whom she imported the Eau de Cologne and the neckties and who struck me as principally consisting of the ever remarkable Uncles, **desirous at times**, on their restless returns from Albany or wherever, of an intimacy of comfort that the New York Hotel couldn’t yield. Fascinating thus the implications of Mrs. Cannon’s establishment, where the talk took the turn, in particular, of Mr. John and Mr. Edward and Mr. Howard, and where Miss Maggie or Miss Susie, who were on the spot in other rocking chairs and with other poised needles, made their points as well as the rest of us. The interest of the place was that the uncles were somehow always under discussion--as to where they at the moment might be, or as to

when they were expected, or above all as to how (the “how” was the great matter and the fine emphasis) they had last appeared and might be conceived as carrying themselves; and that their consumption of neckties and Eau de Cologne was somehow inordinate: **I might have been judging it in my innocence as their only *consommation*.** (54-55 emphasis added)

Several details are worth attending to here. Because the establishment fronts as a shop selling fashion accessories such as neckties and perfume, the other “commodity” sold at the back of the establishment is referred to, in the spirit of accessories, as but belonging to “remoter centres of fashion.” Another deviation from the conventional shop was the absence of the essential counter, shelves, and till. The commodity Mrs. Cannon sells must therefore be of an invisible sort whisked off absent shelves and sold to gentlemen over a non-existing counter, or else it is one which Miss Maggie and Miss Susie personally impart.⁵⁸ Instead of exposing the “vulgar” trade taking place at the back, James refers “vulgarity,” on the contrary, to the exposure of tills in actual shops. If Mrs. Cannon’s shop had a till--if it were a “proper” shop--it would have been vulgar. The absence of the “vulgar till,” then, while revealing the bogus front for what it really is, also saves the shop from real vulgarity as the vulgarity of commerce carried out in public. For James, the absent till and the fact that monetary exchange takes place out of sight is precisely a sign of propriety: it is money, not sex, which would make Mrs. Cannon’s establishment vulgar. The grand finale arrives in the form of a pun on the similarity between “consuming” and “consuming.” The true nature of Mrs. Cannon’s establishment must now be clear even to those slowest to catch up with the narrative game.

The significance of the visit to Mrs. Cannon is multifold. “Mrs. Cannon” is another proper name in that endless list of personal names the *Autobiography* provides. More important in the immediate context is James’ exaltation in the face of the ambiguity and mysteriousness of “Mrs. Cannon’s scene” (56):

I refer to those sources, I say, the charm of the scene, the finer part of which must yet have been that it didn’t, as it regularly lapsed, dispose of *all* mystifications. If I didn’t understand, however, the beauty was that Mrs. Cannon understood (that was what she did most of all, even more than hem pockethandkerchiefs and collars) and my father understood, and each understood that the other did, Miss Maggie and Miss Susie being no whit behind. It was only I who didn’t understand--save in so far as I understood *that*, which was a kind of pale joy; and meanwhile there would be more to come from uncles so attachingly, so almost portentously, discussable. (55)

To *preserve* mystifications is the great virtue of Mrs. Cannon, and the miscommunication of facts regarding her establishment is what positively constitutes the charm of the place. There is here the usual Jamesian set-up in which people observe and are observed, some possessing more facts than others, without this epistemological impasse being a disadvantage to any of them. The scene enacts what in the Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton* James called “the fatal futility of Fact” (AN 122), “fatal” because the facts about Mrs. Cannon’s profession would have dissipated the interest James finds in the scene, which is exactly the persistence of mystery and wonder, the presence of vague insinuations, and the oddity of the personal encounter that more than prevails in the absence of knowledge. Not sex, but facts, are repressed here.⁵⁹ The unlawful sexual

⁵⁹ Shoshana Felman makes this connection between the “vulgar” and the definite (or the “literal”) in James in her essay “Turning the Screw of Interpretation” (*Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading Otherwise*. Ed. Shoshana Felman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982. 107).

commodity serves James as an excuse for withholding information, and as an instance in which experience derives its validity from the shortage of facts.

This scene, in which the young James is taken to a brothel by his father to socialize with two prostitutes and a madam is enacted with splendid ease. James ironically chooses a brothel to illustrate the grace and charm he associates with the social manner of Old New York. The interpersonal relation is here brightly and legitimately exercised, even in a context which, for some, is both dismal and illicit. James is not just tactful to avoid the “moral baggage” associated with the subject of prostitution--he repays the old courtesies shown him by Mrs. Cannon by commemorating her in her own, provocative, setting. James is clearly not concerned here with prostitution at all. His theme is the superfluity of facts in the event of the personal encounter, a theme particularly well served by the discretion Mrs. Cannon’s forbidden trade imposes.

The suppression of facts is otherwise explored in *The Middle Years* (559-560) when James once more finds himself in the company of those who know more about a subject than he himself does. This takes place at an English breakfast table during James’ stay in London many years and pages after his visit to Mrs. Cannon. The American visitor, a curiosity to his table-fellows, is questioned by them about American politics. James is embarrassed because he is unable to respond adequately to their queries. Unlike the wise Mrs. Cannon, the English breakfasters depend on the exchanging of facts for their encounter with James to be a success. These are reasonable requirements of social interaction, and it is indeed only in childhood (or at a brothel, where knowledge is purposefully concealed) that communication can prosper by means other than the

exchange of information. The discussion of a “topic,” the common theme, the third term around which people commune are the necessary components of social contact. But for James, the gathering around a third term also has the disadvantage of overshadowing that more fundamental aspect of sociality: the responding to others outside of the communicative marketplace in which words are exchanged and ideas debated.⁶⁰ “I should have been myself, to repay these attentions,” James laments, “quite *forward and informing and affirmative*” (559 emphasis added). But the requirements to be communicative and well-informed in contemporary American politics did not merely test James’ ignorance (an ignorance he most probably wilfully exaggerates), it bored him:

nothing of the smallest interest, by any perception of mine, as I suppose I should still blush to recall, had taken place in America since the War. How *could* anything, I really wanted to ask-- anything comparable, that is, to what was taking place under my eyes [...]. (559-560)

James thus had no option but to quietly resign himself to “rather an abject acceptance of the air of imbecility” (559). But as always, James’ self-deprecation is no sincere show of conformity and compromise. James’ vision has the last look into the matter, and compromise has never really been one of its options:

yet at the same time [...] I asked myself if it was to such *cold communities*, such *flat frustrations* as were so proposed, that I had sought to lift my head again in European air [...]. (560 emphasis added)

Meeting the distinguished guests “from the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the House of Commons, from goodness knew what other scarce discernible Olympian altitudes” (560),

⁶⁰ The encounter between people always also possesses a dimension of risk, even in the safety of the mediation of a third term. This dimension of risk is the proper subject of James’ fiction, and the reason for which conversations in the late novels often lack a clear “object” or theme. In the absence of a topic, there remains only the event of conversation itself: pure dialogue without content.

James can hardly expect anything other than the “flat frustrations” of current affairs, the events on “which the light of the newspaper happened then to beat” (560). If James was previously “irritating to the legal mind,” he is no less of a strain on the political one.

As my discussion so far has indicated, many of the people James remembers are incidental and unknown.⁶¹ These “incidentals” are precisely those for whom proper biographical research has little time. They are the “others” alluded to in the title of the first volume, and their role in James’ life does not obviously fit into the narrative in a biographically significant way. In this respect, the incidentals affect the narrative with their inalienable otherness. They (a coachman, a landlord, teachers and tutors, a madam and her “girls,” dance hall employees, students, neighbours, actors, vendors, governesses, etc.) seem to thrive in the book over and above those “great figures” of James’ past and present (William James of Albany, Thackeray, Washington Irving, Margaret Fuller, Emerson, La Farge, Charles Eliot Norton, Tennyson, Dickens, Darwin, George Eliot, G. H. Lewes, etc.). The incidentals are, in fact, the *Autobiography*’s mysterious driving force.

The Middle Years, for example, dwells on the touching portrait of the kind and silly Mrs. Greville, “friend to the super-eminent” (585). Not eminent in her own right, Mrs. Greville is placed by James in the company of the great Tennyson and George Eliot, but she is deliberately made to outshine both these *literati*. Recalling a gathering at Tennyson’s, James confesses that

⁶¹ Carl Solomon, the schizophrenic muse of Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl,” wrote: [a] generation, one should realize, does not merely include its most colourful, notorious or illustrious members. It also includes the non-flamboyant ones who have lived their lives in relative obscurity. (qtd. in Cambell 279)

latest book (*AUB* 583-584). “I had been served right enough in all conscience” says James of the incident,

but the pity was that Mrs. Greville had been. This I never wanted for her; and I may add, in the connection, that I discover now no grain of false humility in my having enjoyed in my own person adorning such a tale. (584)

In other words, James had got his story, and that in itself to him was worth the unpleasantness of hearing George Lewes vehemently cry “Ah those books--take them away, please, away, away!” (583). The book incident was nothing less than “sublime--was the only rightness of our visit” (583). Placing Mrs. Greville in the light, James wishes to somehow redeem her, and to show her the kindness which was denied to her; the result being that Mrs. Greville makes one of the most attaching portraits in the book.

At the very end of *The Middle Years*, the eccentric Mrs. Greville is superseded by another “specimen” of the good life. “[L]ike Mrs. Greville herself, yet in a still higher degree,” Louisa Lady Waterford

bore witness to the fine old felicity of the fortunate and the “great” under the “old” order which would have made it so good then to live could one but have been in their shoes. (597)

Lady Waterford was one of the remaining few specimens of this “old order” whose surviving figures [...] were still here and there to be met; my sense being that the last of them, at least for any vision of mine, has now quite gone and that illustration--not to let that term slip--accordingly fails. *We all now illustrate together, in higgledy-piggledy fashion, or as a vast monotonous mob, our own wonderful period and order, and nothing else*; whereby the historic imagination, under its acuter need of facing backward, gropes before it with a vain gesture, missing, or all but missing, *the concrete other, always other*, specimen which has volumes to give where hearsay has only snippets. (597-598 emphasis added)

The *Autobiography* thus draws to a close a little prophetically, announcing the inevitable decline, as times change, of Lady Waterford's and Mrs. Greville's kind. A dying species, these relics of the leisured classes, of whom "one doubted whether in the whole course of [their] career [they] had ever once been brought up, as it were, against a recognised reality" (579), will not survive the increasingly democratic social climate. Death to the *ancien régime*, then, in the name of equality, the mass, the "vast monotonous mob."

Now James does not sing these ladies' swan song in defence of their class. Nor, on the other hand, is James particularly attentive to questions of social or political integrity. He is, in turn, self-consciously and relentlessly devoted to scrutinizing the conditions under which particulars ("the concrete other") rather than generalities can emerge. The old order, James believes, is one instance embodying the prosperity and legitimacy of "otherness," whereas the present order is committed to producing groups and generalities at the expense of particulars.⁶³

Under Mrs. Greville's spell at the candle-lit Milford Cottage in Surrey, James is subject to melancholy musings. In the gradual disappearance of distinct social groups which do not merely fragment but also positively colour the social scene, James reads a loss for literary interest. Increased social and political equality is emblematic for James of the rejection of otherness in favour of sameness and uniformity.

That society would lack the highest finish without some such distributed clusters of the thoroughly gentle, the mildly presumptuous and the inveterately mistaken, was brought home to me there, in fine, to a tune with which I had no quarrel, perverse enough as I had been from an

⁶³ Although James does not explicitly mention democracy here, both the phrasing and the argument in these passages from *The Middle Years* directly recall the elaborate discussion of democracy in *The American Scene*.

early time to know but the impulse to egg on society to the fullest discharge of any material stirring within its breast and not making for cruelty or brutality, mere baseness or mere stupidity, that would fall into a picture or a scene. (581)

James is not so much defending a class as defending a vision. If in *Notes of a Son and Brother* James embraced what he called the “total otherness of contemplation” (335), at the end of *The Middle Years*--poignantly also the end of the *Autobiography*--James witnesses the conditions for this contemplative otherness considerably diminish. Perhaps what this amounts to is James’ questioning of the efficacy of democracy as a literary technique. Literature does not deal with the familiar but with the strange, the “other.” The value of oddballs to the literary eye is immense. In James’ own recurring term, this eye must (undemocratically) *discriminate*. This makes the idea of democracy incompatible with the basic tenets of James’ literary philosophy. Democracy is not workable in literary terms, because literature is, by definition, occupied with the exception, not the rule.⁶⁴ James fears, (and whether he does so unduly or not is the subject for a separate inquiry), that his “total otherness of contemplation” will be superseded by something like a “total familiarity of contemplation,” thereby neglecting the principal object of the literary which is the representation and preservation of exteriority. For James, then, the notion of literary democracy, or of democratic literature, is not merely illogical, but also threatens the specificity of literature with the insipid and conventional: corroding the concrete otherness

⁶⁴ I borrow this phrasing from Isaac Bashevis Singer’s “Author’s Note” to his controversial *Enemies: A Love Story*. Singer unapologetically cautions: “this novel is by no means the story of a typical refugee, his life, his struggles. Like most of my fictional works, this book presents *an exceptional case with unique heroes and a unique combination of events*. The characters are not only Nazi victims but victims of their own personalities and fates. If they fit into the general picture, it is because the exception is rooted in the rule. *As a matter of fact, in literature the exception is the rule*” (London: Penguin: 1997, emphasis added). This idea is reiterated in slightly different terms in Deleuze’s *Dialogues*. For Deleuze literature is essentially concerned with “minorities,” which is another way of saying that literature deals with the “other,” with alterity.

of the literary object, and rendering literature indistinguishable from the universal discourses of sociology and politics.⁶⁵

Typically for James, the perilousness of the situation, the fact that the old order is on the brink of extinction, only heightens the dramatic effect, not least because the blue-blooded gatherers at this longest of parties remain blissfully ignorant of what is soon to befall them. Oblivious and carefree,

[t]hey placed *themselves* in the right perspective for appreciation, and did it quite without knowing, which was half the interest; did it simply by showing themselves with all the right grace and the right assurance. It was as if they had come up to the very edge of the ground that was going to begin to fail them; yet looking over it, looking on and on always, with a confidence still unalarmed. One would have turned away certainly from the sight of any actual catastrophe, wouldn't have watched the ground nearly fail, in a particular case, without a sense of gross indelicacy. I can scarcely say how vivid I felt the drama so preparing might become--that of the lapse of immemorial protection, that of the finally complete exposure of the immemorially protected. It might take place rather more intensely before the footlights of one's inner vision [...] but it corresponds none the less to realities all the while in course of enactment and which only wanted the attentive enough spectator. (598-599)

It is difficult to ascertain which is more endangered, the realities that so willingly collaborate with the Jamesian economy of vision, or that vision itself. To be sure, the two are inextricably linked. The end of otherness is also the end of vision. For the time being, however, James is content with his imminent "impression of a climax that could only

⁶⁵ One might think of the pressures of "political correctness," (which have in part replaced the seemingly antiquated laws of censorship) as examples of the blurring of borders between the political and the literary.

decline” (599). The autobiographical fade-out, in the form of the text’s final ellipses, is preceded by one last burst of “coloured designs from [Lady Waterford’s] brush...” (599).

Conclusion: Planet James¹

Did he not feel, did he not perceive that he was drifting very far from the world of “reality,” from the common earth to which, to renew his strength, the artist like Antaeus, must ever return? (Van Wyck Brooks, *The Pilgrimage of Henry James*, 124)

Blindness and Sight

Strether’s cheerful defenselessness in the face of Parisian alterity is frequently represented through the image of Strether’s open eyes, his surrender to sights, his adventure of vision in short. Waymarsh’s eyes, on the other hand, are tightly shut. He repeatedly refuses to look and is described, along with Sarah Pocock, as “sightless.”² But Strether’s wide open eyes do not indicate the lucidity of comprehension or the affluence of knowledge. Not awareness but openness is at the centre of the metaphor of sight. If seeing as understanding was what James was after in this image of the eye, then Strether would have early on been able to “see” that Chad is in fact Madame de Vionnet’s lover. But Strether, with his wide open eyes, is thickly in the dark until the much later boat scene, and Maria Gostrey cannot believe just how thickly. Sight in *The Ambassadors*, as in the *Autobiography*, does not yield understanding, but vagueness. Hence my claim that what is at stake in the metaphor of vision is openness and exposure, not clarity and comprehension. It is as if by opening his eyes, Strether lets Paris see *him*. Waymarsh the

¹ The idea of the planet was partly inspired by Tatyana Tolstaya’s breathtaking Introduction to the reissued short stories of Andrei Platonov (*The Fierce and Beautiful World*. Trans. Joseph Barnes. New York: New York Review of Books. 2000). Tolstaya’s essay likens Platonov to a creature looking down at the earth from somewhere in space.

² See Chapter 3 on *The American Scene*, on the significance of Waymarsh’s sightlessness in the context of justice and the law (165n-166).

sightless lawyer resembles the fool who in covering his eyes thinks the world cannot see him, only because he cannot see the world. But even Waymarsh is caught out with his hands on his eyes by Miss Barrace, that fabulous Fellini character.³ The open eye denotes Strether's own exposure to his environment, not his mastery over it. This blurred vision which implies the absence of knowledge in fact facilitates Strether's encounter with the Parisian "others" he meets, and ensures its success. It is precisely *not* knowing which allows Strether belatedly to "live." Strether's relation with Maria Gostrey too remains vague, yet in spite of apparently leading nowhere at the end of the novel, it is a relation of love.

In one's relation to the alterity of another nothing in particular is known. This is why the fact of Strether's "not knowing" about Chad's and Mme de Vionnet's affair makes consistent and economic story-telling. The revelation in the boat scene of Chad's and Marie de Vionnet's true involvement with each other serves to hammer home the superfluity of knowledge: look how well Strether, and the novel, have been doing without this piece of information. As a dramatic ploy, the revelation of the affair helps James to bring the tale towards closure, for every affair, it seems, must come to an end (except that between Strether and Maria, which never began). James' "seeing-blind" men and women (as opposed to the "blind-seers" of western mythology, whose gift is precisely the gift of wisdom) do not gain privileged access to knowledge. Their story is not the story of those who seek to know, but that of those who momentarily abdicate the safety of knowledge, and find out where it takes them. James' characters let go of what they know, and look to what they do not yet and never shall know. And what they cannot properly know but

towards which they nonetheless turn is the other person, the single entity whose relation to the self cannot be reduced to finite knowledge.

Levinas explains that the nature of cognition is finite. Consciousness “sees” totalities in the finite economy of being. Consciousness perceives substances, essences, beings, objects, forms, and things: all which is a finite totality. Alterity is conceived otherwise: it is not finite, has no substance or contours, hence is not an object, and cannot be conceived as *a being* of any kind. How can we “see” that which has no beginning and no end? The relation to alterity cannot therefore be thought as possessing any of the traits of conscious experience (such as constituting some-thing to think about, feel, conceptualize, and so on). The relation to the other is categorically foreign to cognition. The self cannot recall this relation, understand, describe, or attend to it mentally in any way. As far as the conscious mind is concerned, this is a relation that never happened.⁴ Yet, this is not because the relation to alterity has been psychologically suppressed, repressed, or otherwise forgotten. Consciousness in all its forms (whether partial or complete) has never been invited to partake in it. And the incompatibility between alterity and consciousness derives from the irreducibility of otherness to a finitude with which thought is equipped to grapple.

⁴ As was argued in Chapter 1, the relation between the one and the other does not take place in ordinary time, but in what Levinas designates as “diachrony.” Diachrony indicates a pure conception of time beyond the chronology of the present. In other words, diachrony refers to a time which does not succumb to the pull of the present: a past before any past that can be re-called into the present as memory, and a future which is beyond any notion of anticipation or expectation. The common perception of time subjects time to the present order: the past is what *was* present, the future is what *will be* present. Consciousness can reach back and forth and bring the past and the future into its present, into thought. But the ethical relation is “located” outside consciousness, hence also outside the common perception of time. This sense of time, outside consciousness (beyond the synchrony of memory and expectation), Levinas calls diachrony. Because ethics is thought as diachrony (pure time), it offers no material for memory or consciousness. By analyzing the social and conscious domains, however, Levinas arrives at the ethical relation of the I-thou as an irreducible structure.

Although not a finite being, alterity is not simply “nothing.” Levinas wants to conceive of that which is not an essence, but which is neither the annihilation of essence. “Alterity” is the fruit of such a thinking beyond the dialectic of being and nothingness. Rather than subscribing to the idea of being as either a totality (a substance) or its negation (nothingness), alterity is the idea that lies beyond the thought of being as such: otherwise than being or beyond essence, the idea of infinity.

James’ allegory of blindness and sight is not the allegory of knowing too much or too little. To read late James as dramas of epistemology, where blindness and sight denote ignorance and knowledge, is to miss the vague visions of alterity which James so deliberately provides. In James, then, sight is not consciousness but openness, blindness not ignorance but contraction. To read James’ later novels is to look beyond the rigidities of plot (scant as they admittedly are), and, like James’ characters, to “see” what is not strictly an object of knowledge.

For this reason, as I have suggested throughout, James’ narratives tend to play up rather than play down their idiosyncrasies: their indifference to psychology, the objectification of persons, the fact of adultery, etc. To “discover” in James these elements amounts to faintly resounding what the texts themselves have already clearly announced. James’ texts are revealing and unabashed precisely so that the reader be free to move on from the questions of consciousness (epistemology and psychology) to the other narrative plateau of personal relations as the drama of openness in the face of alterity.

The Devil in Mr. James

The questions asked in this thesis partly arose from a wonder about the literary status of Henry James. Philip Rahv's opening remark to his "Attitudes Toward Henry James" (1943) sums up this peculiar status accurately:

Henry James is at once the most and least appreciated figure in American writing. (Rahv 95)

Although Rahv was referring primarily to James' standing among American readers, his comment rings universally true.

Critical appreciation of Henry James traditionally corresponds to Rahv's description, albeit in several unexpected ways. While it is true, I think, that readers of James (like most readers of great writers) generally fall into one of the two camps to which Rahv alludes--those who revere, and those who despise James--it is not always the case that the truth about James comes strictly from James' devotees. Questions as seemingly simplistic as "why do people love or hate James?" become particularly pertinent once one notices that important points made by James' sworn enemies are instantly echoed by the texts themselves, whereas those made by some of James' most ardent supporters, or (as Rahv calls them) cultists, fall flat, and remain aloof and disengaged from the works in question. Though the former are intended for blame, the others for praise, thought and intuition attach themselves without prejudice to, as it were, the "wrong" camp. Some harsh criticisms, particularly of James' moral listlessness, seemed to me to point in the right direction, while enthusiastic attestations of James' degree of psychological subtlety and his acute sense of social comedy seemed out of sync with what I was reading. What I was reading was as unfamiliar and strange as it was refined and genteel, and it is to James' mysterious quality that I wanted to address myself.

As unkind a critic as Van Wyck Brooks, for example, describes James' enterprise as:

[m]agnificent pretensions, petty performances!--the fruits of an irresponsible imagination, of a deranged sense of values, of *a mind working in a void*, uncorrected by any clear consciousness of human cause and effect. (qtd. in Rahv 97 emphasis added)

Rahv responds appropriately to these censoring remarks from *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (1925) by recognizing their underlying moralistic "Boston prejudice" (Rahv 97).

Yet, with their Puritanical note conveniently stifled, Brooks' remarks are most telling. An imagination whose operation is extracted from the familiar social and moral spheres is indeed a "mind working in a void," or at least a mind working from somewhere other than this terrestrial plane. And the indifference to "human cause and effect" seems equally evocative, since in late James events take place as if regardless of basic logical and psychological necessity.⁵ Brooks' observations are valuable because they touch on the degree of James' alterity, even if it is in the form of indignation.⁶

Alongside Brooks' New England patriotism, one might place the moralism of F. R. Leavis. Leavis could not comprehend what appeared to be James' later descent into moral and formal chaos. From the relatively contained and controlled altitudes of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) James shifted to the informal vastness of *The Ambassadors*. And *The*

⁵ Adam's marriage to Charlotte in *The Golden Bowl* is a good example of James' indifference to causal logic. Strether's transformation in *The Ambassadors* is another. Finally, the common reproach that nothing much at all happens in James, is, perhaps, the most acute form that the disruption of the logic of cause and effect can take, for relatively little is generally *effected* in James.

⁶ Indignation does not really convey Brooks' complicated attitude towards James. The sheer poetry and passion of Brooks' address in *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* in fact makes up for the book's misguided content. Edith Wharton is less forgiving when she namelessly but unmistakably refers to Brooks' thesis as "the nonsense talked by critics of a later generation, who never knew James, much less the world he grew up in, about his having thwarted his genius by living in Europe, and having understood his mistake too late [...]" (*A Backward Glance* 175).

Golden Bowl in particular seemed to promote a distinction between moral and aesthetic judgment. Even Rahv struggles with *The Golden Bowl*'s supposed decadence.⁷ According to Rahv, then, if one praises the novel, one has to be doing so on aesthetic rather than on moral grounds, a distinction Leavis (rightly) would not tolerate. Subsequently, the major phase is either, aesthetically, a novel but ironic recourse to those "loose baggy monsters" of the nineteenth-century; or morally, the depraved work of an over-specialized mind.⁸

Nor is it true to argue that more recent criticism has overcome the distinction between moral and aesthetic judgment. Prudishness comes in many forms, and Rahv's comments are far from obsolete. Today's readers are likely to find *The Golden Bowl*, more than anything, conservative; does not James assert marriage and penalize desire? And yet, the shocked readers of the early twentieth-century and today's conscientious ones are not wholly dissimilar. For both are troubled by the prohibitions of social and sexual morality, and both assume *The Golden Bowl* to be negotiating the range between freedom and obligation that makes up civilized society. It may seem silly to note that "adultery" is never mentioned in *The Golden Bowl*, but then again, the emphatic pan-generational response to the novel has to do precisely with this strange omission. Never before or since *The Golden Bowl* has adultery been treated so peculiarly. Readers may be divided with regards to the issue of adultery, but this leaves the basic understanding of *The Golden Bowl*, whether as outrageous or as conservative, historically unchanged.

⁷ "To say that *The Golden Bowl* is morally decadent is one thing, but to claim that for this reason it is empty of life and, by implication, an inferior work of art is something else again. To my mind, this is an example of moral overreaction at the expense of literary judgment. I can think of novels, say Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, which are thoroughly distorted from the standpoint of any radical social morality but which are nonetheless supreme works of fiction" (Rahv 99).

⁸ "It is as if his interest in his material had been so specialized, too much concentrated on certain limited kinds of possible development, and as if in the technical elaboration expressing this specialized interest he had lost his full sense of life and let his moral taste slip into abeyance" (Leavis 161).

Like Van Wyck Brooks, André Gide's complaints capture the very essence of James' fiction. Gide grudges that James' characters do not engage with one another plausibly or realistically, and that they just about evaporate in a metaphysical haze of mere "relations" without context, without substance, without reason.⁹ This too, once relieved of its negative sting, is an enlightening comment. Accordingly, James' "well-nigh metaphysical probing of personal relations" (Rahv 102) is the proper subject of this thesis. That James' characters exist and relate--and exist precisely in the form of their mutual relations (to Gide, an unacceptable form of existence)--in the Brooksonian void, provided the premise for my readings of James.¹⁰

The other person, which as I have explained, is not altogether classifiable as an object, signifies an utterly different mode of relation, the relation between the self and alterity. By being a relation wholly outside consciousness, the relation to alterity does not belong to the world. The relation to alterity is thus literally a meta-physical relation, because it does not describe the mode of relation in the actual, physical realm. Of the relation to alterity too it is therefore possible to say that it occurs in a kind of void. And, like James' fiction, which Brooks complained displays "a mind working in a void," so

⁹ Gide observed that James' characters "never live except in relation to each other, in the functioning of these relations [...]" (Dupee 258).

¹⁰ Perfectly recognizing the Jamesian void, Wharton was curious about the late novels "lacking in atmosphere, more and more severed from that thick nourishing human air [...]" (*A Backward Glance* 190). "What," she put it to James, "was your idea in suspending the four principal characters in 'The Golden Bowl' in the void? [...] Why have you stripped them of all *human fringes* we necessarily trail after us through life?" (191). The anecdote famously concludes with James' (not entirely convincing) "[my dear--I didn't know I had!]" (191). If by the "void" one means nowhere in particular, then the name "utopia" is also suitable for rendering the void. Indeed, James and Levinas alike invite the discussion of utopia as a reply to the (void) question (posed by Brooks in relation to James) of *where* do their respective dramas take place?

Levinas' own work can be conceived as taking place in a similar void. To this void Levinas has, problematically enough, given the name of "ethics."

A mind working in a void is a mind yielding creations of planetary proportions. For such creations are not mere possibles of a more general case, but creations of worlds, whose governing principles the general case will not impart. That James' work is a law unto itself is the essential point made by James' harshest critics. What does the self-sufficiency of the Jamesian world consist in and why are valid questions, and ones which I hope have bubbled up to the surface of this piece, at least in the form of plausible conjectures.¹¹

Ethics and Society

To retrieve ethics from within the "void" and to contemplate alterity would, by Levinas' own account, be a contradiction in terms.¹² This difficulty is inherent in any discussion of metaphysics, but it need not pose a serious impasse once James' and Levinas' overall project is clearer. Neither Levinas nor James strive to render alterity in terms of consciousness. Both signify towards the role of alterity in conditioning and

¹¹ The title of this section is not, then, for the sake of cheekiness alone. "The Devil in Mr. James" alludes to two seemingly different yet reciprocal critical tendencies. The first is the morally sensitive reaction to life on Planet James. The second is the desire to capture in James the physicality his fiction dodges. Both these tendencies are earth-bound: the former demands from literature a realistic morality, well-grounded in principles and systems and corresponding to a concrete social reality; the latter demands from fiction a degree of corporeality and regards the author himself as a sexual being.

¹² There are numerous critiques of Levinas' insistence on the purity of separation between the realm of "ethics," and those of philosophy or discourse. See, for instance, Derrida's essays "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" (*Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 1995. 79-153). "The Politics of Friendship," and Derrida's speech at Levinas' funeral in 1995 published as *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999). See also Simon Critchley's *Very Little Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*. A host of articles states the necessary pollution of the "naked" face by the specificity of features and the contexts of power. Most critiques of Levinas, then, address the threat of infection and implication of ethics by politics.

instituting literary, philosophical, and rational discourse: love itself ever before the “love-of-wisdom,” or, as Levinas would have it: “ethics as first philosophy.” If otherness did not leave traces in our world, any discussion of it would be impossible. In spite of being wholly other to this world, the ethical leaves its footprints in the sand, albeit in a modest and mundane fashion. Levinas’ favourite example is the expression “after you, sir,” which, in inexplicably granting precedence to another before myself, serves as a telling anecdote. This unjustifiable precedence granted to the other over the selfishness of my own desires and needs is the flash of the ethical in egotistic consciousness.¹³

Less anecdotally, Levinas may be said to reach the idea of ethics as first philosophy by “thinking backward,” from existing social forms and institutions to their inception: justice, the law, the State. What are the conditions which render these practices and institutions possible? Levinas argues that only on the basis of the relation to the other person as a radical alterity, can the practical relations between persons become coherent. And in spite of being something like a philosophy of love, it is important to recognize that Levinas begins with the notion of difference and antithesis between persons. He rejects the presupposition of mutual sympathy and natural affinity between persons as similar beings which characterizes humanist conceptions of community. Humanism catches in the idea of community the reflection of a fundamental if fragile kinship between people as fellow beings, a camaraderie based on our natural solidarity, our common destiny in death. Thus perceived, community is the realization of a universal predicament shared equally by all.

¹³ The ethical mastery of the Other and his poverty, with my submission and my wealth, is primary. It is the presupposed in all human relationships. If it were not that, we would not even say, before an open door, “After you, sir!” It is an original “After you, sir!” that I have tried to describe. (*Ethics and Infinity* 89)

For Levinas, conversely, community ultimately signifies the essential “antipathy” between persons. The evolution and development of community and its institutions is to be thought first through the anti-social relation between the one and the other person. Their relation, it should by now be clear, is possible solely as a relation between those who have nothing in common. The third person who disrupts this all-consuming relation between two thereby introduces a different sort of relation, a conscious and communal relation with demands of an explicitly social nature.¹⁴ These demands include those of justice, the law, and the various social institutions, but primarily this is the demand for “society” itself. The entry of the third in effect invents society, for it intervenes to make personal relations a social matter. Justice, then, is not a matter of ethics, since it is encompassed in the advent and intrusion of the third on the perfect felicity of the two. Only once the third has entered into a relation with both the one and the other (so that both have to now consider a second neighbour or interlocutor) is it possible to speak of morality and justice. Thus the arrival of a third party delivers the personal relation from the infinite realm of alterity to the finite realm of consciousness, and the everyday toil of communication and cooperation. A community of people no longer relate to one another as unknowable others, but seeks a common ground on which all can meaningfully communicate.

¹⁴ The self meeting its complete other is also the idea behind bringing James and Levinas together. Their unlikely pairing--James, the gentile and genteel writer of fiction, and Levinas, the East European Jew and phenomenologist--makes the encounter between them all the more effective, since they seem to meet one another, in spite of themselves, outside the common zone of cultural and historical circumstance. James and Levinas are thus absent friends, by which I mean that their relation is a companionship between those who have never actually met. The entry of the “third,” the intervention in this crazy relation between two of the rationalizing and mediating third, seems to accurately allude to the role of the reader-critic. For, as a third, the critic brings the undefined relation of the face-to-face into the light of the intelligible and discursive.

The Golden Bowl is the most exquisite illustration in fiction of this transition from a state of antithetical attachments to the system of social justice. James allocates the role of the intrusive third to Charlotte, and that of the executioner of social justice to Maggie. As the third party, Charlotte is not the double-crosser or the betrayer of trust, but the second neighbour whose own rights have been ignored and betrayed by the exclusive utopia of two (Maggie and Adam). Yes, Charlotte's intrusion takes the form of adultery, but it is wrong to say that this makes adultery the proper subject of the novel. Read as a book about adultery and not as a book about justice *The Golden Bowl* makes very little sense, for its idiosyncrasies and eccentricities serve no perceptible purpose.

The Ethics of Literature

Implicit in my explorations of "ethics" in this thesis is the insistence that the kind of alterity glimpsed in James' work and which comprises the ethical event of interpersonality does not constitute the basis for a workable "politics of alterity." Alterity, or to borrow Hale's phrase the "appreciation of alterity," is not a prescription or a principle, and does not in itself contain the "germ" of moral action. The ethics of alterity is, as *The Golden Bowl* demonstrates, the condition for legislation and justice without, however, constituting the judicial itself. This primordial conception of ethics makes the ethical irrevocable and determined at the same time that it makes it inapplicable and elusive.

By attempting to highlight in late James the ethical relation between persons as a fundamental structure which is both within and without the fictional narrative fabric, I wanted also to demonstrate the *separateness* of ethics from any discernible social and

moral narrative. If there is anything “instructive” about the “hovering presence” (*AUB* 322) of the ethical in James’ work, it is precisely the cautionary note of this separateness. James’ writings make plain the priority of the ethical over the conscious public realms of psychology and knowledge. This priority suggests that the ethical event does not prescribe an ethics in the applied moral sense, nor that it is adaptable to the social and political domains as a policy or a principle. Moral and social action themselves originate in the ethical rupture of the self meeting its complete other. No system of thought produces ethics, since thought itself is the product of the ethical relation to the other.

The “ethics of literature” is not, then, to be confused with the groundwork for social or moral reform. Ethics resists affiliation to any particular ideology, movement, or school; that is exactly what makes it, in James’ and Levinas’ eyes, a non-derivative event and a “first philosophy.” Such a conception of ethics does not endow literature (or, more importantly, criticism) with the revolutionary impetus of social or political change. Literature’s efficacy, as far as social initiatives are concerned, is never guaranteed. So that by saying that James’ later project is primarily ethical, I do not intend to attribute to James’ work any self-evident subversive or transformative potential. Attempts to make Jamesian ethics “work,” to suggest that one can extract from James some coherent, deducible moral principles, and to further assume that these are somehow equivalent to social or moral change, is to misunderstand the radical separation between ethics and the field of consciousness which James’ writings powerfully display. Reading and writing in a particular way neither constitutes nor secures moral action. As Hale puts it at the end of “Henry James and the Invention of Novel Theory,” the

valorization of the novel by theory is predicated on an enduring literary formalism that *makes the appreciation of alterity a virtue only in theory*. (Freedman 100 emphasis added)

Perhaps this is all that the literary makes morally explicit: that the ethical is never ensured, that it is neither the property nor the effect of a logic or a critique. “I have made the fatal mistake,” writes Buber, “of giving *instruction* in ethics, and what I said is accepted as current coin of knowledge; nothing of it is transformed into character-building substance” (*Between Man and Man* 133). The immunity of ethics to this type of classroom (or campus) edification is also what makes the ethical always possible, even in the most unlikely circumstances. The insinuation in James and Levinas is, finally, that it is not the evil in our world which should require explaining, but the occasional, miraculous, revelation of the good in the presence of evil.¹⁵

Literature’s transformative potential materializes in the wake of the realization of the absence of dogma and the elusiveness of the ethical. An encounter with a literary work may indeed be transformative, but its impact resides precisely in the withholding of moral conviction, and by making the ethical an obligation without real content or authority.

The ethical relation to the alterity of another thus runs counter to the lawful and the normative. James’ fiction, more than any other’s perhaps, makes this alterity of the ethical palpably felt while insisting that ethics is both chaotic and anarchic. Indeed, the interpersonal relation as the prime event of James’ later fiction is construed as a relation

¹⁵ Here one can trace Levinas’ thought to the Holocaust, and specifically to his reaction to Heidegger after 1933. Levinas’ work may be most comprehensive read alongside, and away from, Heidegger. Perhaps the Holocaust in particular illustrates that it is not the catastrophic reality of its occurrence which is beyond belief, but the fact that even during such a time, as if against all odds, ethics here and there prevailed in unlikely acts of charity and good will. In James too, “evil” is never in need of explanation: the outraged cry of “how *could* Kate and Densher...?!” is irrelevant to the story James is telling. The “unbelievable” and “inconceivable” is not the presence of evil, but the operation of the good.

that knows no bounds. It is a relation which, only in consciousness, is superseded by the lawful and the just. *The Golden Bowl* patiently dramatizes this passage from a literally “inconsiderate” multiplicity of relations to coherent and systematized thought. The novel applies what the Preface to *Roderick Hudson* theoretically states as the principle of artistic organization:

really, universally, **relations stop nowhere**, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally
but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so.
(AN 5 emphasis mine)

The secret formula, so to speak, of *The Golden Bowl* is here fully disclosed. The novel’s ultimate structuring and limiting of the relations which would otherwise “stop nowhere” is a mirage. Separation (the end of the so-called adultery and incest) has no validity beyond the *appearance* of order. With the two marriages restored, the boundless relations are visibly (physically and geographically) confined, and achieve the geometric order James speaks of in the Preface. The institution of order through separation, I argued in Chapter 2, is the securing of the order of justice. But one should not forget that beneath the finite, orderly relations of Book II still lurks the anarchy of love.

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