

LATE HENRY JAMES: MONEY, WAR AND THE END OF WRITING

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Late Henry James: Money, War and the End of Writing

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My dissertation, *Late Henry James: Money, War and the End of Writing*, revises the dominant account of Henry James's late work by reading it as an urgent response to its contemporary history. I hope to show that the impenetrability of James's late work articulated his increasing perplexity before alien and intractable historical developments. In my account, James's notoriously dense and elusive late style is in fact a plastic, encompassing, indeed lucid effort to understand certain social and political transformations.

James's late writings might be described as evolving toward a Conradian view of history, a sense that the modern social order is inherently rapacious and violent. For instance, *The Golden Bowl*, James's last major completed novel, is a fiction of moral, historical, and epistemological crises, intertwined in the form of an all-encompassing, tortuously convoluted late style. His old themes and their moral orders have evolved into

their own exaggerated convolutions, indeed have developed into irresolvable moral contradictions. Money, ascendant and aggressive, seems increasingly to define and control the moral realm. The American girl (a perennial James type) has become almost monstrous; self-consciously wielding her money, she imposes an American innocence that now appears as a moral deformation, as a moral darkness.

The argument of my dissertation, as I have just described it, is embodied as well in its method, a way of thinking, of reading, of writing, and of teaching literature. This method arises from the principle that literary objects are instruments of knowledge. Attending to the formal development of James's late work reveals a rich epistemological horizon that encompasses nothing less than the historico-political world.

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Preface

This dissertation shifted in a radical way in the process of writing and researching. I take this shift as evidence that my work has been a success.

I began my dissertation with a proposal whose premise is that the notoriously knotty and elusive quality of Henry James's late writing was an instrument of investigation. Critics often interpret this complexity as a retreat from the world; I proposed essentially the contrary, that their rebarbative density was a means of apprehending that world. I wanted to argue for James's writing, and by implication the activity of literary writing as such, as an epistemological process rather than as an ideological means of suppressing latent political and historical content, as a decorative deployment of the play of language, or as the abstract articulation of certain philosophical systems. Literature does not invent arbitrarily, its formal unfolding an invention that also discovers. Following Myra Jehlen's work I define the term form as the discontinuous apprehension of content (the continuous discontinuity of a work's incarnation) across a temporal duration, a version, therefore, of time, time materialized in self-consciously shaped language. By forming, or through the exercise of form, a writer grasps more thoroughly the complexity that inheres in a given content, the content becoming what it is within its formal incarnation and nowhere else. Form is a continual doing, an ongoing revision, clarification, addition, correction—the evolution of knowledge.

Thus, I suggested the notorious difficulty of James's late prose, with its long, long conversations in which characters do not seem to conclude but to undergo a process of apprehension, its deixis, obliquity and ellipsis, its profusion of metaphors, its semi-colons and dashes, its subjunctive mood and ventriloquized speech, its dependent clauses and its

constant circling of its subject without ever seeming to arrive at a final formulation, were all ways of finding out about its subject.

I began my proposal with a passage from James's 1907 introduction to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* where he writes of Shakespeare's writing that, "It is by his expression of it exactly as the expression stands that the particular thing is created, created as interesting, as beautiful, as strange, droll or terrible—as related, in short, to our understanding or our sensibility; in consequence of which we reduce it to naught when we begin to talk of either of its presented parts as matters by themselves" (*American Writers* 1212). The form of Shakespeare's writing was one and one with its content, the form a realization of the content's limits and possibilities.

My proposal held off from establishing a definitive argument because I believe that writing, including academic writing, is a process of discovery. I suggested as much in that document, insisting that I could only outline a method: "I am certain only that as I proceed this method will produce results." The results came, and they came in the way discoveries often do, as a shock and a disorienting departure, but not as a rejection of the original route of my curiosity. I wrote a first chapter that described the anti-conclusive form of James's late writing, the way, for instance, his novels end without resolutions because only by refusing conclusions could he leave his subject open. My dissertation radically changed after I wrote that initial, but now excised, chapter: if James wrote in an underdetermined way, I now realized, in the expectation of new evidence, these late writings tend toward closure, obliquity resolving into transparency (the ending of *The Golden Bowl* (1904), I came to see, was a moral crisis that emerges in tandem with a formal crisis of what one might describe as Maggie Verver's morally ambiguous over-

resolution). My dissertation developed toward a concern with the breakdown of James's late style of writing as it encountered a modern world that was the dissolution of the Nineteenth Century world he cherished.

James was amazed Shakespeare had stopped writing with *The Tempest*, what he claimed was his greatest play. Later I came to think about how James's own work would come to an abrupt end when, with the crash of Europe in the First World War, he would break off work on *The Ivory Tower* (written 1914, publ. posthumously 1917), never returning to fiction and despairing in his letters for the remaining year and a half of his life that he had lived to see the catastrophe of the war. James wrote in 1915 to Hugh Walpole that, "Reality is a world that was to be capable of *this*—and how represent that horrific capability, *historically* latent, historically ahead of it? How on the other hand *not* represent it either—without putting into play mere fiddlesticks?" (*LHJ* 2: 446). The quandary of the contradiction is irreducible: the war demanded an account and it remained unaccountable. That James's writing collapsed in the context of the war, I thought, might suggest something that had been overlooked about the trajectory of his late writing. My dissertation argues this is the case, that James's late writings themselves constitute an ongoing tragedy of four acts that includes *The Ivory Tower*. These writings understand the modern world as a tragedy and they themselves are a tragic formal reduction, the latter but one particular demonstration of the former. James's culmination was also a crisis, and then a catastrophe.

My four chapters take up in succession *The Ambassadors* (written 1900-01, publ. 1903), *The Golden Bowl* (1904), *The American Scene* (1907) and, last, *The Ivory Tower* and James's war essays. In *The Ambassadors* James returned to the subject of America

after twenty years. Nothing in those two decades of writing—three naturalist-like novels, five years of failed plays and a handful of novels about English social life—suggests this event. James's return to America is so obvious, so much a part of the narrative of his achievement, that we need to recall Ludwig Wittgenstein and take that obviousness as itself an object of investigation.

The Ambassadors, a major part of my first chapter, suggests that in James's return he began to understand his native country as forecasting the moral and economic darkness of modernity. America became for James a dark continent made dark by modern economic forces. I argue that *Heart of Darkness* and *The Ambassadors* might be read alongside one another, that they tell one another's stories. Later, Colonel Bob Assingham in *The Golden Bowl*, who seems to be James's response to Conrad, suggests the way in which money, war, and cruelty and license demarcate for James's writing the limits of knowledge. One might say Conrad was a Jamesian writer in that his fictions, like James's, dwell in the moment of understanding, the disjunctures of knowledge. But I would like to suggest the reverse: if Conrad became a Jamesian writer, James also became a Conradian writer—in his most formidable fictions, when his characters see farthest, they see into an oncoming moral and economic darkness. Conrad figures into only my first and second chapters because my dissertation was under development and took a turn in including him. In a revised draft, Conrad would have an ongoing presence in all of the chapters, if only as a Jamesian interlocutor to James. Conrad entered my dissertation because it was only by way of examining his writings in relation to Conrad that James's sense of the modern world, and of America as an embodiment of that modernity, became visible to me.

I would never have brought Conrad together with James if history had not done so. Conrad himself chose James as his “master,” as he addressed him, praise he paid to no other writer. Conrad proved essential to the development and the whole argument of my dissertation, bringing to the fore three central claims I hope to make (a way of examining the center by looking to the side). First, Conrad and James taken together make visible how major genres and writers often arise from the margins of nations, social circles, and geographies as well as at the cusp of historical transformation and catastrophe. Major literary works more often than not emerge between the plates of history, to account for the transition or the break. The novel genre itself is an instance. Conrad and James were both from the edges of the European world. They met within England as outsiders to England. They cherished inherited European values, ranks, customs, and social structures but watched the modern world arise as their loss. Second, it was in relation to and because of the pressure and dislocation of that sense of loss that James and Conrad became great writers. James became Henry James when he had evolved toward a Conradian sense of the modern world as devolving into violence and atomism and as ruled by unrestrained pecuniary forces. Third, James and Conrad tell the story of this sense of loss and dislocation with characters who are moral gallants, epic wanderers carrying a torch of moral probity through the darkness of the modern world. Conrad’s Marlow is forever faithful to Kurtz for Kurtz’s own gallant recognition of the truth of his own moral horror.

James’s moral gallant Lewis Lambert Strether, I think, is akin to Marlow in witnessing what was for James the moral horror of modern life. The tide of modernity renders Marlow and Strether’s gallantry futile. James and Conrad wrote with prescience

about the Twentieth Century world because they looked at that world with despair, outrage, and horror, insisting on what had now emerged as an archaic moral sensibility in the wake of modern economic forces—imperial conquest and corporate capitalism. James and Conrad cherished the high culture of Nineteenth Century Europe and their great writings were about the disappearance of that Europe.

My dissertation evolved toward a concern with the way in which James's late form broke down in the very process of its achievement. I argue that the rise of the US as the new financial and imperial power was James's subject in his late writings but that, paradoxically, James's writing became impossible in relation to that subject. James's late writings demonstrate how, in their unfolding, major literary works posit understandings of moments of historical crisis and catastrophe.

A Note on Method

I

This dissertation concerns the writings of Henry James and Joseph Conrad and the history of Europe and America from the turn of the Nineteenth Century to the outbreak of the First World War. Throughout, I engage very little with the secondary literature, so I am here explaining how I see my project in relation to the critical conversation and, I hope, in relation to developments in epistemology and the philosophy of art.

James and Conrad cherished the high culture of Nineteenth Century Europe and their great writings were about the disappearance of that Europe. It seems to me that we should read them as figures from an alien historical moment, that their interest in fact inheres in their historical difference. Thus, I have no interest in partaking in the wearying but all too familiar exercise of celebrating or denouncing their politics. It is ahistorical to look in the past for either negative or positive reflections of our own values.¹ But much of James criticism boils down to the following question: are his writings normative or are they anti-normative? Questions one asks dictate the limits and possibilities of the answers one can provide. This freedom-constraint divide can be seen in the critical history of *The Golden Bowl*, which centers on the issue of how we are to understand Maggie Verver, the innocent American girl whose moral status seems as well uncertain and choppy. I will focus on this novel here both because it is the central text in my dissertation and because it seems to gather the most differing and contentious arguments.

¹ A historical mode of analysis, Myra Jehlen has pointed out in *American Incarnation*, must retain an understanding of the past as alien or risk positing a transcendent viewpoint: "Finding a usable past entails reclaiming the bits of history that are most like the present; this assumes universality and even implies the possibility of historical transcendence" (234). Assuming the past to be at variance with the present recommends a method of reading "aided by a separation that forces us to seek the other's different principles of coherence, which thus stand out *as* principles" (234). The principles of James and Conrad's world-view are alien to ours.

Criticism construes Maggie as being either monstrous or moral. Leo Bersani found in the novel a willingness to “diversify desires and break up rigid structures of character...a struggle against a crippling notion of truth” (130). This initial movement is, however, followed by a unified resolution as Maggie’s impinging fiction (like James’s art) absorbs wayward and inessential passions, establishing the lie of her marriage as a truth, in this way rejecting an initial liberation from the “superstition of truth” (155). Bersani’s reading recapitulates his larger concerns with the way in which the realist novel contains non-normative desires in organizing structures of intelligibility. Bersani has suggested that, “*The Golden Bowl* affirms the triumph of fictional composition over a powerfully resistant reality, but Maggie Verver’s fictions have the irresistibly coercive shape of an art which uncompromisingly rejects any attempt to tamper with its forms” (146). Bersani’s suggestion that Maggie is akin to, analogous with, James is not altogether accurate. James discovers a moral monstrousness in Maggie—his own art uncovers her art of managing appearances as moral choppiness. Bersani’s conclusion is not convincing: “it’s impossible to locate an original design, that is, an absolute fact or motive which could not be recomposed, whose nature would not be changed by changes in its relations” (148). Sharon Cameron has followed Bersani in arguing that Maggie’s consciousness stifles and represses the world in James, just as the consciousness of the restless analyst in *The American Scene* usurps the actual. Martha Nussbaum wants to suggest the opposite in claiming that “Maggie persistently permits discovery and surprise,” and that she and her father’s assimilation of people as objects partakes of a moral striving for perfection and harmony (91). Maggie comes to understand, in sacrificing Charlotte, that “commitment to a love in the world can require the sacrifice of

one's own moral purity" (134). But Nussbaum has smoothed over an unbearable contradiction: Maggie does not understand herself to have sacrificed her moral purity—purity James described in a rather dismissive fashion as a “small still passion for order and symmetry” that might find its origin in “New England grandmothers,” the New England of Woollett and the a priori, reductive Sarah Pocock (430).

The stark opposition in this critical debate resolves in both cases what is in the novel irresolvable, that Maggie and Adam's strange American innocence engenders morally ambiguous ends, Maggie's moral passion verging on, or suggesting, the immoral. Adam's name trembles with the weight of a crushing incoherence, the status of the innocence suggested by that name impossible to clarify. The problem emerges in relation to his money: money cancels the possibility of the moral coherence of America in *The Golden Bowl*. In his essay “The False Problem of Ugolino,” Jorge Luis Borges addressed a question much debated by Dante scholars: are we to understand in the fourth canto of the *Inferno* that Ugolino did or did not cannibalize his own children? Dante does not provide a definitive clarification. Borges's answer is to point to the inherent recalcitrance of literature: “In real time, in history, whenever a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates and loses the others. Such is not the case in the ambiguous time of art...In his Tower of Hunger, Ugolino devours and does not devour the beloved children, and this undulating imprecision, this uncertainty, is the strange matter of which he is made” (279). The undulating imprecision of Ugolino is an instance of how art's precision is able to gather in logically incommensurate possibilities, retaining both x and not x, answering at once yes and no to the question.

Borges has provided us with a nuanced and complex response both to Nussbaum's version of Maggie as a paragon of love as well as to Bersani's celebration of "wayward and inessential passions" (130). In the strange time of literature, in the writing of the novel, Maggie's moral stridency emerges into moral monstrosity. This devolution of her moral status emerges almost against the grain of the novel in necessary relation to the money she wields, the "pecuniary arrangements" in which Maggie and her father's money confer power upon them. James discovered in this novel that the meaning of Maggie was not primarily inside in the pause of reflection and the delay of curiosity, but outside, in her relation to her economic and social position: money, not morality, defines Maggie. Money limits the possibilities of Maggie as a moral being. The conjunction of Maggie and her money is the irreducible and precise locale of James's turbulent literary investigation into America.

A similar schism to the one I outlined above divides Conrad criticism. I have no interest in seeing in Conrad's writing an unacceptable support of imperial ideology. Nor do I think we should, or even can, celebrate Conrad because, on the other hand, he critiqued US imperialism. Literature's recalcitrance renders Conrad's writings irreducible to such formulae. Yet recent criticism of *Nostromo*, to take one prominent example, often takes up Conrad's "political critique" of US power, as Anthony Fothergill has described it, thus making him of our moment and therefore better than acceptable (142). J. Hillis Miller, having decided that history can in fact be written, has pointed to specific events he claims make *Nostromo* relevant and important, such as George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq and his support for Aristide's ousters (169, 168). The presentist bias of these comments is troubling.

In the process of making Conrad an honorary member of the twenty-first century, both critics have evacuated history. Conrad was not writing political critique in such a programmatic manner but rather confronting an emergent world distressing precisely because it provided no place for his cherished values of duty, fidelity, and honor. Conrad's biographer and critic Zdzislaw Najder has described with precision Conrad's relation to unsettling modern forces as more akin to "those of the romantic and 'feudal' critics of the capitalist money-grubbers and exploiters who were so vocal at the beginning of the nineteenth century, than of contemporary radical attacks on the prevailing social and economic stratifications" (*Perspective* 151). These celebrations of the novel's forward thinking politics follow on the heels of older criticisms of the novel that claim precisely the opposite. Ironically, those older accounts develop to the same effect of leaving out the history that is the ostensible point of the analysis. So, for instance, Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* claims it is capitalism itself the novel represses (Miller's answer to this dubious argument is limited by the original claim's dictation of the terms of the discussion). *Nostramo* is not compelling to me, as Miller has suggested, because it is palatable to our own political concerns. Conrad's novel is interesting because it insists on a residual moral view of the world it also realizes is no longer available. The rest of this note will concern James criticism and philosophical texts because Conrad figures into my dissertation more as an interlocutor to James, who remains the center of my focus.

II

The central question of my dissertation connects to the issue of Miller's presentist ahistoricism. Namely, how we are to understand James's late writings in relation to his

own moment of economic, imperial and social forces, in a word, in relation to the pressure of material necessity? All of the critics who I discuss assume that this relation is central and is tangible. However, they have divergent takes on what the relation means and how to construe it. I imagine my argument to press back against the critical trend to read James as symptomatic of his moment. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus have discussed a way of reading that assumes “the most interesting aspect of a text is what it represses...as symbolic of something latent or concealed” (3). Best and Marcus, turning away from the paranoid uncovering of ideology, suggest a “Surface reading, which strives to describe texts accurately” (16).

Fredric Jameson famously argued in another part of *The Political Unconscious* that James’s attention to the formal development of what Jameson reductively summarizes as “point of view” was an attempt to contain late nineteenth century reification by developing a sphere of spurious autonomy for the individual subject—the seeming freedom of James’s characters is in fact the ideological work of holding of necessity from sight (231). Jameson follows in a long line of critics who originate at least with Theodore Roosevelt’s suggestion that James’s writings are unacceptable because he wrote about the wrong class of people and in doing so retreated from the real and rough world: “What a miserable little snob Henry James is. His polished, pointless, uninteresting stories about the upper classes of England make one blush to think he was once an American” (92). For Roosevelt, James repressed his Americanness; for Jameson, James repressed history.

Many critics follow in this line of critics in that they continue to understand James as a novelist in opposition to contemporary history. I will again trace the critical history

in readings of *The Golden Bowl*. Three prominent examples that maintain this oppositional relationship would include Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture*; Mark McGurl, *The Novel Art: Elevations of American Fiction after Henry James*; and Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature*. According to Freedman, both James and the British aesthetes “consciously set themselves in opposition to the market economy, and particularly to the commodification of art and literature wrought by such an economy” (xii). It is within this context of reacting to, while also paradoxically participating in, commodity culture that the “social construction of the aesthetic” becomes visible (xxviii). Underlying Freedman’s analysis is a freedom-constraint model, in which the artist’s attempt to subvert the forces of modernity is itself subverted by those same forces. More fundamentally, the context within which Freedman places James—commodity culture as well as the professionalization of knowledge—is both explanatory and determinative of James’s writing. But Freedman has elided the distinction between what are in fact two objects of analysis. James’s works were active responses to any number of contexts, not merely ancillary and necessary outgrowths of them.

For McGurl, the novel aspires to the status and distinction of art at the turn of the century in relation to an emergent managerial middle class now doing “knowledge work” and hungry for reading that would distinguish it from the mass market. The “art novel” provides this class with distinguished reading and thus with the means of distinguishing itself from the masses. According to McGurl, then, *The Golden Bowl* is about mental distinction, figured in and by the novel itself. If the golden bowl is a metaphor for the text, then the text establishes itself as an object of competitive interpretability—like the

character who knows the contents of the story, the reader who properly attends is in an elevated position. Distinctions of knowledge might be able to “reproduce the social distinctions mass culture threatens to dissolve,” so that “Maggie is superior to Charlotte because she is in a position of superior knowledge” (53, 56). But, to begin with, the golden bowl presents a number of possibilities (for Maggie it is a final solution, but not at all for Fanny, who refutes Maggie’s interpretation and does not figure in McGurl’s account because she is not subsumable to his scheme—she is the most intelligent, knowing character in the novel, but she does not win much, if anything, from her knowingness). The bowl is both central and almost irrelevant; the novel does not resolve or conclude with the re-appearance of the bowl, but presents such resolution, the power to so resolve things, as corrupted.

Maggie’s victory is morally ambiguous in a way that McGurl does not address. She knows and she wins because of how she uses that knowledge, but her superiority of knowledge is entirely dependent on her economic superiority—James was far more of a materialist than McGurl himself. The novel sets the limits of morality and knowledge alike squarely within economic circumstances. (Freedman is similarly blithe about the novel’s intense scrutiny of, and discomfort with, both of the Ververs—it examines the brutal power of money but does not pass a judgment, just as it does not pass a judgment on Charlotte and the Prince. Maggie’s power is an issue I will return to at the end of this essay).

Lastly, Brown’s subtler account brings James together with contemporaneous writers such as Frank Norris and Mark Twain in order to argue that all of them, in their representations of objects, were partaking of “the modernist’s effort to arrest commodity-

fetishism-as-usual,” attempting in this way to save the object “from the humiliation of homogeneity; and it is saved from the tyranny of use, from the instrumental, utilitarian reason that has come to seem modernity’s greatest threat to mankind” (8). For Brown, the titular bowl “powerfully demonstrates the extent to which readers of the novel, like Maggie herself, long for there to be some physical object with which, or through which, we can organize and stabilize knowledge and power, human emotion and human history” (171). The meanings that accumulate around the bowl are constitutive for Brown of a desire to rescue objects from their merely utilitarian usage. So, Adam Verver’s collecting of priceless, non-fungible objects is a version of an operation of which the novel itself partakes (seen also in its accumulation of exteriorized, thing-like, objectified thought). But to say that imagining others as objects “is simply the way one imagines others” is to tell only half the novel’s story (160).

Maggie and Adam collect Charlotte and the Prince, but not the reverse. Economic and social position provides the possibility of such collecting. Economic and social positions are constitutive of the limits of knowledge—Charlotte and the Prince know themselves, not Maggie and her father, as objects. (Again, for Fanny, Maggie’s whole idea about the bowl’s return is flawed because it projects a seamless whole where parts in fact exist). Brown’s argument rests upon an assumption of identity—the novel attempts to do what Adam does, the same function the bowl performs within the novel. But the novel disarticulates itself from Adam, his knowledge, his sense of aesthetics, and his understanding of power. The final chapters do not celebrate his museum—American City might be the darkest place in all of James’s fiction. Fanny imagines Charlotte arriving there “as thrown for a grim future beyond the great sea and the great continent” (540).

The novel is in no way at one with Adam Verver. (Aside from McGurl, Freedman, and Brown see also Mark Seltzer, in whose reading, the novel's politics of representation incorporate a policing supervision in Maggie, dissimulated as blandness, love and power continuous and inseparable.

This dissertation attempts to develop another tradition of James criticism that reads him rather as an active respondent to his historical moment. For instance, Ross Posnock in his seminal *The Trial Of Curiosity: William James, Henry James and the Challenge of Modernity* (1991) takes Henry, rather than William, to have been responsive to modernity's challenge. In Posnock's revisionist account James is the "peripatetic cultural critic animated by restless curiosity" in contrast to the more familiar figure of the "master formalist" in flight from history into the realm of an idealized aesthetic (21). This cultural critic takes the contradictions of modernity as his subject. "The Jamesian self finds the space to improvise new forms of identity and pleasure, including those found in exhilarating, isolating experiences of passion and exposure" and it also discovers its own overdetermination, its inescapable embeddedness in the culture, history, and biology it would critique (5). In contrast to his elder brother, Posnock argues, Henry "submitted his own selfhood, and the very concept of selfhood, to an extended ordeal of vulnerability," thus allowing it to be dirtied and permeated with otherness, immersed and suffused with it, curiosity itself a "practice suspicious of any discourse equating the social with fixed and finished forms" (19, 24). Curiosity is for James, Posnock has written, "The engine of his openness, what drives his ordeal of vulnerability...a pragmatic historical practice suspicious of any discourse equating the social with fixed or finished forms" (20, 24). My dissertation charts a negative version of Posnock's account of curiosity as the cardinal

Jamesian virtue, one that examines the limits of curiosity in James's late work, how the flexible and permeable, the open and vague, become their opposite in the wake of James's deepening Conradian despair about the modern world.

Like Posnock, Robert Pippin, in his study *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* (2000), has taken James to be self-consciously responding to the problem that persons in an atomistic, anomic world lack reliable moral categories. America, Pippin has suggested, is the name for James of the vacancy engendered in the new world. Pippin has suggested that in an "increasingly anomic and disunified social world" we do not have a set of inherited moral categories that serve as a background into which we might weave ourselves and derive a code of moral norms (5). This atomistic world lacks a "basis for interpretation and assessment," so that once adequate moral categories no longer obtain: "Types and kinds and classes and social position and 'blood' and family and races and institutions and social forms and even appeals to 'human nature' will no longer function in making possible...mutual understanding" (5). Pippin will define morality as presenting the following quandary: "Why should I ever suspend in some way the pursuit of my own interests...for the sake of another's interests or claims of entitlement?" (24). With "conventions and background assumptions" having been lost such evaluation becomes tenuous at best, the moral status of behavior and intentions remaining inscrutable (5). For James, as for Conrad, "modernization is a kind of...disorienting loss," leaving a moral vacancy in its wake (5).

I want to shift Pippin's account in several ways. First, he does not address how unrestrained modern economic forces are crucial to James's apprehension of the moral crisis of modern life (so that, for instance, the tenuous moral issue of Maggie and the

Prince's inability to understand one another in *The Golden Bowl* hinges upon the money she possesses and he lacks). For James money accumulated on a new scale and in new ways has destroyed the possibility of the mutual entitlement Pippin argues is essential to moral life. In his late works, new economic forces grant an unlimited authority a priori to the atomistic individual's interests and pursuits, engendering the moral abomination of cruelty and violence. Second, Pippin the philosopher elides the contradictoriness of James the novelist's urgent response to this moral crisis developing in relation to new imperial and commercial forces. James clung with tenacity to a stable moral framework and at the same time his late writings apprehended a world on which it no longer had a purchase. Thus, I want to attend to the element of time: America *emerges* in James's late fiction as a problem, just when he returned to America and Americans abroad as the subject of his fiction. Whereas the moral coherence James's early Americans is beyond question or reproach, James's innocent Americans in *The Golden Bowl* emerge as possible moral monsters in the time of the novel's unfolding.

This issue of temporality is central to understanding James's writing as having evolved toward an understanding of his historical moment by discontinuity, interruption, formal dissolution—he did not have a position that he then argued in wholesale terms. In his writing he articulates an understanding that is underdetermined, partial rather than whole, tenuous rather than certain, showing more than can be said. Myra Jehlen and the French scholar of the epic Florence Goyet have demonstrated how the unfolding of form in major works of literature provides knowledge of moments of political and social crisis.

Goyet's recent account of the epic is not a complication, not a worrying, not a revision, but a rejection of Georg Lukacs. Contra Lukacs Goyet has suggested that the

epic was a technology for thinking through moments of historical catastrophe, when no tools of ordering and understanding social and political life were available. As a response to profound disorder, the epic turns back to a historically remote story as an attempt to recover order, settling contemporary chaos by a meaningful and rigid opposition—for instance, between Trojans and Greeks or between Oliver and Roland—that is in fact about re-establishing a contemporary order. Over the course of the cross-linguistic epics Goyet studies, “we see the development of a radically new concept, never imagined by listeners” (16). For instance, the *Iliad* will project a future Athenian democratic conception of political power through Hector, who “will have become a new political possibility,” the loser emerging as the victor (22). The *Iliad* ends somewhere it could only have arrived at by a process Goyet has described as thinking without concepts. The epic begins with an attempt to provide order, but its opposition evolves along the way out of opposition, precisely because Goyet sees the epic not as a static whole, but as discrete aggregations in the development of the thinking. For Goyet, the epic achieves political and historical understanding. This emphasis on parts that accrue in a process—rather than on the unity of glacial wholes—is central to my project to argue against what one might describe as a “formal wholism,” the projection of unity onto what is the developing, contradictory and living process of understanding.

The Golden Bowl, I want to suggest, seems to return to the organizing and clarifying terms of *The American* with Adam the American prelapsarian, so that the novel seems to oppose American good nature to the corrupted Old World. But that clarification proceeds into moral collapse; in this novel Maggie’s limitless wealth compromises her moral integrity. Money recasts the story of Maggie’s discovery of the flaw in the bowl,

the Jamesian development of knowledge, into the story of her ability to control, dominate and impose, granted to her a priori by her money. James's unfolding reflective intelligence had arrived at an impasse in becoming in itself moral darkness.

In arguing "that dissonance *is* the message of *Huckleberry Finn*," Jehlen has made apparent how over the course of Twain's novel irreverent defiance for the distinctions of class and race bring him to the limits of what he can think about those same distinctions (*Readings* 87). The novel's ending, she writes, "presents the ugly truth that to be Huck Finn and stay Huck Finn you have to let Jim be returned to slavery. Mark Twain found this truth as unbearable to acknowledge as anyone, so...he freed Jim anyway" (*Readings* 104). Twain, Jehlen has suggested, wrote his way toward an understanding contradictory to the initial casting of the terms of his novel. Formal attention achieves understanding, is itself a process of understanding. Twain wrote his way toward a crisis one precipitation of which is a drastic, indeed, tragic according to Jehlen, formal transition into bizarre slapstick. This change in the novel is a moment in its overall accumulation of immanent moments of understanding, arrived at in each case by what Jehlen has described as "the formal unfolding of knowledge," an unfolding local and arrived at in the writing as a discrete series of discoveries that rise toward a historico-political horizon (*Readings* 6).

Jehlen closes her essay by writing that "one essential power of a classic is to see in the dark," so that the coincidence of *Huck Finn* and the *Iliad* here is not incidental (*Readings* 105). But where the epic imagines a politically coherent organizing solution beyond disorder and crisis, the novel ends in incoherence. Nevertheless, both Goyet and Jehlen make salient the thinking immanent to formal unfolding in moments of radical historical transformation. In James's late work formal reduction and dissonance are

epistemological records. The terms of his late writing, a lateness that was at once biographical, literary, and historical, I argue, both culminated and broke down in face of the rise of the US as a financial and imperial world power, a transformation that was James and his brother William as well as many in their milieu a tragic betrayal of the American republic.

III

This element of time links Jehlen's essay on Twain with *Five Fictions in Search of Truth* (2008), two chapters of which concern James. Form materializes time, and it is in this temporal materialization that literature's epistemological capacity emerges. Jehlen's argument in the later book is that literature discovers by means of invention: "In literature, invention is discovery... To create is never to invent out of whole cloth using one's imagination or intuition of whatever it is that hovers out of reach of observation" (5). The fictive invention of Jehlen's writers does not proceed arbitrarily, not epiphenomenally, not ornamentally, but necessarily, as the only way to show what they were after—literature in Jehlen's account shows more than can be said about it, is thicker and denser than the accounts we try to fashion. For all three of her writers, "representation emerges as an ambition to take hold of a more encompassing, knowing, disinterested, in a word, truer reality than can be apprehended directly and in the moment with eyes, ears, and hands" (8).

James's sense of Flaubert leads him to invent in a different, unexpected direction, producing another possibility for writing—the very difference embodied in the quality of the writing. Jehlen develops her reading of James in part from James's essays on Flaubert. She reads those essays not as definitive statements about Flaubert, but as

incarnations of James's understanding of fiction. The essays are relative to James's writing, but that writing develops out of an internal necessity. So, James's essays reveal and underline the limits and possibilities of his own writing. The book in this way accrues, gathers, an ongoing density: the book places Flaubert's own wielding of form next to James's, without negating either, showing that both discover by invention, but discover in different, discontinuous ways and to different effects.

In bringing James together with Flaubert and Nabokov, Jehlen makes visible how it would be impossible to understand James solely in the context of American literature or America and the way in which modern writers more often than not inhabit positions of dislocation and social, economic, and national rearrangement and tension.² This element of her book provides an account different from that of Peter Brooks's *Henry James Goes to Paris* (2008). Brooks also thinks James's relation to French writers is crucial to understanding him, and the story he tells is a good one. But his book is marred by a sloppy psychoanalysis: James encountered modernism in Paris, then repressed it, then the repressed returned with his late fiction. By contrast, Jehlen suggests that James had a long engagement with Flaubert, and his understanding of the French novelist changed, developed, thickened, his writing changing in relation to that change. By the end, he came to understand and sympathize with Flaubert a great deal more than he had as a young writer.

Jehlen's discussion of *The Ambassadors* shows the way in which her method

² My dissertation participates in the recent transformation of the study of American literature and thought that is attempting to overcome a certain historical and political provincialism by recognizing that American literature cannot be considered apart from the countries in relation to which its history and culture continuously developed. See, for example, as a small selection of such scholarship, Jehlen, *American Incarnation*; Ross Posnock, *The Trial of Curiosity*; Brad Evans, *Before Cultures*; and Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents*.

makes the novel visible as a continually developing epistemic horizon. It tells the story of Lambert Strether, an older, but extremely penetrating, intelligent, man who goes to Paris to reclaim and bring home Chad Newsome, the scion of a wealthy manufacturing family from the clutches of a French seductress. Strether is set to marry the young man's mother and thus secure his own uncertain future. But when Strether gets to Paris, it turns out that the young man is better than he thought, as is the French woman and in the end is not even worthy of her. The French seductress in fact turns out to be better than the young man. Strether ends up urging Chad to stay, coming to see that that is the moral course. The germ of the novel was an impromptu speech given by a friend of James, the novelist William Dean Howells, in which Howells urged a young man to live all he could in Whistler's garden. (Jehlen's revealing description of the germ of the novel's relation to the whole that emerged out of it is subtle and compelling). But it turns out that the novel's understanding of living is not encompassed by the "Live, live" speech that is its center. As James wrote his novel, he understood the very notion of "living" differently—Strether, as Jehlen claims, chooses knowledge of life. The story about the man giving advice developed past and beyond the organizing germ James began with. It seems to me a major the point of Jehlen's chapter that Strether's choosing to leave is a consummation of living, a transformation in the understanding of what it means to live—the logic of the writing makes leaving the only choice. The terms of the story, and how those terms have been realized, lead him there, and it is a resonant, fully developed choice the character is making and that the writing is achieving.

Strether leaves Paris when he could have stayed, and with a beautiful and intelligent woman worthy of him. Criticism often focuses on Strether's renunciation, on

his rejection of sex. But the choice follows along a formal principle, follows out the form of the writing, an anti-conclusive attempt not to arrest the writing: “Instead of experience, he [Strether] he will pursue a knowledge of experience whose concreteness does not incur the limits that ultimately arrest carnality at a postcoital *tristesse*...In Strether’s refusal, James represented a choice of art over life” (*Five Fictions* 100-101). Because in fact, the choice to stay, as attractive as it is, would overturn the ambition and shape of the writing, an ambition to encompass in an ongoing unfolding that is embodied in Strether’s own omnivorous desire to know. “The knowledge of life he wants is a compendium of possibilities: its objectivity is not bound to a single object” (*Five Fictions* 99). Such a knowledge would be negated by the harmony of staying in Paris, such an ending a deformation of James’s character. The writing is answering to a formal necessity. Against relativism, Jehlen has claimed that works of literature are a process of invention that works to the end of discovery.

Writing, Richard Poirier pointed out long ago, “is a form of energy not accountable to the orderings anyone makes of it and specifically not accountable to the liberal humanitarian values most readers want to find there” (*Performing Self* xv). Faulkner used Christian symbolism, Poirier suggested, “the way a child might use a jungle gym: as a support for exuberant, beautiful, and testing flights” (*Self* xv). Faulkner’s writing was an active reinvention and wielding of possibilities not equivalent to any symbol, the symbol a mere momentary stay against the confusion, in the phrase of one of Poirier’s heroes, Robert Frost. Poirier’s attention to literature as a form of energy, to the way in which writing lives in its emergence and transformations, rather than in a conclusion that can be drawn from them, informs this dissertation throughout. For

Poirier, writing is all in the “pacing, economies, juxtapositions, aggregations of tone, the whole conduct of the shaping presence” as it toils in what Poirier described in the title of another book as the work of knowing (*Self* 86-7). A Faulkner novel is not a mere collection of symbols, Poirier argued, because he wanted to attend to what happens to them in Faulkner’s writing as it investigates, explores and perhaps even contradicts the terms of the symbol.

According to Poirier, literature attains absolute and clear meanings only at the cost of excluding from consideration the efforts of its inventive performances, which consist of remaking and reshaping the available possibilities within language and the forms it takes. In *Poetry and Pragmatism* (1992) Poirier cites Paul de Man as having written that, ‘Literature is the only form of language free from the fallacy of unmediated language’ and then goes on to note that the members of his platoon, when using the phrase “‘you son of a bitch’ would do so on the confident assumption that every one of his associates knew all about the fallacy of unmediated language” (*Poetry* 141). In its sense of play, in its irreverence toward an authority that would fasten literature to an a priori definition, and in its insistence on the unfinished possibilities always available in language, the anecdote enacts the drift of the voice, or what Poirier calls “tonal pitch” (*Poetry* 142). This “tonal pitch” is inherent in the act of using language, but becomes a resource manipulated with sophistication in literature.

Poirier listens for the sounds indicative of the fluxional energy that went into the works of theirs we now wonder at (he made a point of distinguishing text from work, following G.T. Tanselle). The writers who most engaged Poirier exploit “the unrelenting flexibility of language,” a flexibility wherein “meanings are emplaced only to be edged

out by alternative ones, and where the human presence already implicit in the sounds of words can, through the very gestures that dissolve that presence, be refigured and affirmed” (*Poetry* 10-11). This strenuous and never-ending process of engaging language is for Poirier poetry as such.

Thus, when he looks at Wallace Stevens’ poem “The Rock,” he links its “mood” to Emerson’s “Experience” (*Poetry* 162). The emphasis on mood as opposed to theme reads the poem as a working out, an unfolding, of a theme that might in the course of the work done with it come in for revision. Poirier noted in fact that, “in the midst of the poem Stevens is composing he begins to react against the despairing view, though in so agitated a fashion as to suggest no ascertainable hope for recuperation. The past is and was an ‘invention,’ a ‘theorem,’ and his experiences now seem to have been ‘fantastic’ and ‘queer.’ He has at this point begun to talk less about his poems in particular than about the spirit of poetry itself and to envision a creativity in which anyone, poet or not, may participate” (*Poirier* 163). Poirier traces the way Stevens’ poem has drifted out of one mood, out of one possible self-understanding, and into another.

The shift in the poem Poirier brings out is an event of the writing, a discovery Stevens has made along the way. He has been led to thinking about the “spirit of poetry” through the work he has done. He did not set out with this subject in mind but came upon it. Therefore, to back-project a coherent structure on the poem and work from there is already to rise to a level of abstraction the poem itself does not support. Poirier holds in view, takes as the subject of his writing, the messy swervings and indirections entailed in writing. We see then that a literary work is a made thing, an object that had a life of its own and that must be understood as a movement, a process that is a resistance to the

language it also utilizes. Rather than continuing to explicate this approach I would like briefly to consider for a moment, in good pragmatist fashion, what the consequences of Poirier's method might be.

Consider how Bill Brown reads *The Spoils of Poynton*. Brown has decided beforehand that all the literature he considers is going to have an automatic relation to his idea of a cultural shift, in which objects were imbued with a fetishistic essence that was a reaction to problems posed by modernity. *Spoils* is about a feud between a mother and son over a remarkable collection of antiques. The novel thus corroborates Brown's concern with how objects animate and are animated by people. I would like to suggest that if we look at the novel with Poirier's understanding of literature's dynamic unfolding in mind, it becomes apparent that "things" are only central to James's at its beginning. As James wrote, however, he discovered things to have only a secondary importance.

Fleda Vetch's relationship to Owen emerges as the location of energy in the novel. Her loss of Owen registers with more force than does the loss of the things at the novel's end. At that point, Poynton and its things have come to have a peptonized presence. Their dramatic conflagration seems almost rehearsed, but Fleda's formal presence as a central consciousness more emphatic and dynamic. Things are only the occasion of Fleda's presence as a central consciousness and as an agent in a social drama. James found what his subject was, just as Stevens came upon his subject in "The Rock" casually, meaning as he went along. We must attend to the movement of James' prose as it searches and gropes, following it as an event and not as a monument. To do the latter is to foreclose on the possibilities literature can make available to us.

Jehlen and Poirier's attention to form might be understood in the context of recent work in philosophy. I argue in my dissertation that the formal unfolding of fictive invention in James and Conrad developed toward epistemic possibilities. Exploring the knowledge embedded in the formal unfolding of literary texts can, I think, make a significant contribution to the current conversation concerning what the philosopher Paul Boghossian has dubbed a "fear of knowledge." Boghossian articulates a growing dissatisfaction among philosophers and also humanists with relativism and constructivism, meaning the notion that all knowledge is illusory either because it is relative to one's theory or, alternatively, because it is a construction rather than a description. I would like to enter this discussion with the suggestion that the nature of literature, of the works or objects that comprise literature, is relational, but not at all relative. James's *Golden Bowl* emerged in relation to the 1898 Spanish-American War, in relation to industrial and financial expansion in the US, in relation to wealthy Americans buying European antiques and titles. But with relation to these events and conditions, the novel is itself is a dynamic and active discovery of real knowledge by means of novelistic invention.

Boghossian's epistemological argument has a direct bearing on some of the central animating issues in recent work in the philosophy of art, for instance that of Alexander Nehamas and of John Hyman. In the same spirit as Boghossian, Nehamas and Hyman reject the prevalent arguments that beauty and pictorial representation, respectively, are relative to a subjective response or an arbitrary code that decides what is beautiful. Instead, they have developed vocabularies for describing how pictorial representations open onto horizons of real-world density and complexity, thereby

extending, as Hyman puts it, the range of questions it is possible for pictorial depiction to ask of the world. Art emerges in their accounts as an exploration, a set of findings, rather than as a static figuring.

Hyman has, by way of a Wittgensteinian grammatical investigation, rejected prevalent relativist understandings of how visual depictions of the world relate to the objects depicted. Hyman rejects entrenched theories that claim that a work depicts what it does by virtue of the response it elicits, as well as theories that argue depictions are relative to a particular, historically bound codes we do not see because we are seduced by that same code. Hyman finds the terms used in descriptions of realistic art as an inescapable problem. For instance, to describe objects seen at an angle in painting as their “apparent” shape suggests there is something illusory or unreal about them. Not at all, he argues, and so replaces the term “apparent shape” with “occlusion shape,” a way of describing an object as seen in a line of sight. A circular tabletop is a circle, and in a line of sight it is elliptical. But the elliptical shape is not unreal, not “apparent.” The table is really a circle and it is really seen as an ellipsis—both are actual and actualized in depiction. But if you run with the term “apparent” then you are already locked into a relativist understanding of pictorial depiction.

Indeed, I take the term depiction from Hyman, who opts for that word over representation, for he sees the former term escaping the sense that a painting of a man must represent some particular man, whereas depiction implies fidelity by means of an internal coherence. One of the curative benefits of Hyman’s book is that it reveals the form of the words and terms one uses, which suggest and demand certain assumptions that can easily go unnoticed as such. In one of the best moments in the book, in which

Hyman offers a brilliant description of Rene Magritte's *La trahison des images*. The painting depicts a pipe beneath which the phrase "Ceci n'est une pipe," this is not a pipe, is written. The phrase "is true if the pronoun refers to the painting, and false if it refers to the object it depicts. Hence, it is the words, and our grasp of their meaning, that is intended to betray us" (67). The elegance of Hyman's description encompasses the complexity of Magritte's painting, whose paradox is irreducibly complex, and which turns itself inside out.

Hyman's elegant term modality describes "the extent of the range of questions it is possible to ask about a depicted scene" (200). Modality emerges in Hyman's account as the means and the process of exploiting the possibilities of a particular medium to the effect of discovering the means of making more of the subject-matter available. One draws one's way toward knowledge. Analogously, one writes one's way toward knowledge, the activity of art an activity of knowing.

Hyman's book rejects the overwhelming, normative dominance of subjectivism in art—the relativist notion that pictorial depiction is reducible to a response it elicits—by claiming that depiction in drawing and painting develops out of an attempt to grasp, to encompass, its subject matter. And it does so by exploiting its technical resources. For instance, in Master Bertram's *The Adoration of the Magi* (1383), painted long before perspective, Bertram combined "two profiles or oblique views, so that the composite image divides along a vertical axis" (85). Bertram, in order to render the depth of the pavements of stone, combines the two axes and then covers the awkward line that would have emerged with a drape. Hyman claims that realistic depiction such as that embodied in Bertram's piece always develops by expanding to include new possibilities, while they

“expand in different directions,” Chinese landscape painting and Greek vases using different measures, but still, in both cases, inventing to the effect of discovery. “Hence, there is not single trajectory that realistic traditions in pictorial art are bound to follow and no single destination toward which they must all progress” (206). But to claim that depiction is an illusion, that it is relative to a contingent code, as Nelson Goodman has done (Hyman spends two intricate chapters arguing against Goodman’s own complex arguments) “is a glib reaction to the monism, provincialism, and historicism that art historians in the twentieth century uniformly condemned... The opposite of monism is pluralism, not relativism. We can be pluralists about art without being relativists about realism” (210). Pluralism is a way of accounting for the fact that art takes hold of the world but does so, has done so, in a myriad ways, not in a single direction.

Against accounts that reduce beauty to a dangerous illusion, or to an arbitrary code, Nehamas has in his book developed an account of beauty in visual art that is irreducible to an explanation, but requires just such a descriptive project as Jehlen’s. The point of a critical or philosophical account, Nehamas suggests, is not to determine how good *Hamlet* is but “to grasp what it has to offer us” (43). Beauty is something “that we pursue without knowing what it will yield” (63). It is in a sense uncontainable as art seems always to turn out to be more capacious than our criticism: “The art we love is art we don’t yet fully understand” (76). Beauty, Nehamas suggests, is the name we give to the endlessness of art’s complexity. In an extended discussion of Monet’s *Olympia* and a narrative of his own engagement with the painting, Nehamas has suggested that beauty in art is name we give to the limits and possibilities art offers us to understand: “interpretation, the effort to understand what it promises, is forever work in progress. It is

completed only when beauty has nothing more to offer” (105). Formidable works of art, Nehamas and Jehlen both argue, have the greatest riches. Understanding and judgment proceed hand in hand as we come to grasp beauty: “Interpretation isn’t a geological project. ‘Depth’ is a metaphor, less an indication of the location of what we understand and more of the quality of the understanding we are able, sometimes, to reach: the deeper it is, the more it encompasses” (123). Visual art, in Nehamas’s account, *encompasses* complexity.

“When I find a work of art beautiful I feel that there is more about it that I would like to know” (75), so that the writing of Nehamas’s own book is an effort to glean that knowledge and what it is like to search for it, to be gripped, bewildered, rebuffed by beauty in art. Like Strether seeing and re-seeing, developing a perspicuous view, we are led into the process of understanding embodied in works of art. Nehamas suggests in this regard an analogy with friendship. “It is impossible for us to find our friends ugly: we are always able to find something in them attractive” (58). Nehamas wants to say that we are led on into a process of understanding, of apprehending, our friends that is akin to our engagement with art. But here I think Jehlen has made a further point that does not contradict Nehamas but does add to his account. She describes the way in which literary works are “peculiarly unteleological, preserving the knowledge lost to choice or happenstance, and in that way soothing the nostalgia of unused opportunities, of paths not taken. In the last paragraph to the preface of *The Golden Bowl*...James wrote that ‘our literary deeds enjoy this marked advantage over many of our acts, that, though, they go forth into the world and stray even in the desert, they don’t to the same extent lose themselves’” (10). In this way, literature, and art in general, emerges as the opposite of

life: its preserver and knower. The beauty of art can contain, encompass, the beauty of my friends, thereby working against the rush of time, whereas the beauty of friends slides away like all else in life. Literary deeds, artistic deeds, are, as Jehlen, Goyet, Poirier, Hyman, and Nehamas have made evident, a process and record of discovery.

I believe my work to be part of this discussion whose understanding of the nature of art it engages. Thus the argument of my dissertation, as I have just described it, is embodied as well in its method, a way of thinking, of reading, of writing, and of teaching literature. This method arises from the principle that literary objects are instruments of knowledge. Attending to the formal unfolding of James's late work reveals a rich epistemological horizon that encompasses nothing less than the historico-political world.

Introduction

In every epoch the radically new is unthinkable—impossible to imagine ex nihilo.

—Florence Goyet, “The Epic at Work” (26)

Henry James responded to the outbreak of the First World War by abandoning his new novel *The Ivory Tower*. James never returned to that novel and never wrote another fiction. In a 1915 letter to Hugh Walpole he reflected that the war had rendered writing impossible: “The subject-matter of one’s effort had become *itself* utterly treacherous and false—its relation to reality utterly given away and smashed. Reality is a world that was to be capable of *this*—and how represented that horrific capability, *historically* latent, historically ahead of it? How on the other hand *not* represent it either—without putting into play mere fiddlesticks?” (*LHJ* 2: 446). In his criticism, James had often addressed the writing of fiction as a treacherous enterprise, how it is so easy to betray one’s subject. Now, the subject itself was treacherous by opening a gap unbridgeable by “one’s effort.” Still, the quandary of the contradiction remains—how to represent the “horrific capability” of the war, but how not address it either, as writing about any other subject would be nothing but irrelevant “fiddlesticks”? The war demanded an account while it also remained unaccountable.

The argument of this dissertation is that James’s inability to write in the context of the war was a tragic conclusion that throws his late writings into salience as an ongoing tragedy of four acts that includes *The Ivory Tower* and its rage against “the black and merciless things that are behind the great possessions” of the enormous fortunes of the new Newport (217).³ James’s late writings have long been cast in a narrative of

³ America, Pippin has suggested, is the name for James of the vacancy engendered in the modern world. In an essay titled “The Manners of American Women,” James worried over the monstrous American lack of limits, calling it “the too national belief in the sweet sanctity of free impulse” (*Culture* 98). Throughout this

culmination that sees his career ending with a series of triumphs, what F.O. Matthiessen described in the title of his study of James as the “major phase.”⁴ Matthiessen’s term was not without justification. Indeed, I believe that *The Golden Bowl* is James’s greatest novel, a book his brother William did not value but described with accuracy as wielding a “method of narration by interminable elaboration of suggestive reference”

(*Correspondence of William James* 3: 301). Yet I argue here that *The Golden Bowl* was a culmination as well as a crisis in James’s understanding of America, a crisis that emerges in tandem with a crisis in his writing. The novel arrives at an impasse, Adam Verver’s vast fortune preempting and diminishing Jamesian elaboration. While Maggie Verver discovers a crack in her golden bowl, a flaw in her life the terms of which she had not grasped, James discovered a crack in his formal project realized in relation to the new riches of a changing America. Money recasts the story of Maggie’s discovery of the flaw, the Jamesian development of knowledge, into the story of her ability to control, dominate and impose, granted to her a priori by her money. The coherence of America as James’s subject and the coherence of his writing were simultaneously beginning to come apart. The moral and formal crisis in *The Golden Bowl* forecasts the ongoing formal reduction of *The American Scene* and *The Ivory Tower*. James had developed his writing as an effort to forestall foreclosure. His novels, famously, end without resolutions because only by refusing conclusions could he leave his subject open. But if James wrote in an

dissertation I will use the term moral as Pippin has defined it. According to Pippin, a moral course of action presents the following quandary: “Why should I ever suspend in some way the pursuit of my own interests...for the sake of another’s interests or claims of entitlement?” (Pippin 24).

⁴ Posnock extended the narrative by describing the prefaces to the New York Edition, *The American Scene*, and James’s memoirs as his second major phase (4).

underdetermined way, in the expectation of new evidence, these late writings tend toward closure, obliquity resolving into transparency.

One explanation for the decline of James's writing would be chronological: an old man, he could no longer carry on as he once did. This thesis is belied by both his immense productivity in the last decade and a half of his life—lateness rather suited James—and also by what seems to me to be another set of James's late writings, so different from the works I consider in this chapter they comprise a second species: his memoirs, the first volume of which, *A Small Boy and Others*, was published in 1913, and his preface to the New York Edition of his novels and tales (1906-09), both monuments of his late work.⁵ But the New York of James's childhood, like the germ of a particular novel and the history of its composition, including such details as the sound of hoofbeats heard in a Paris street as he wrote, proved in the end to be more supple and successful contents as occasions for James's expansive "interminable elaboration," as William described his late writing. In the set of works I consider here, the opposite is the case: the writing contracts. Thus, two divergent roads lead out of the achievement of *The Golden Bowl* into different territories in the writings that follow it, one heading into the bright era of James's and America's past and one into the economic and moral darkness of America's present, which was for James the loss of its, and his, past. Because the prefaces share with the memoirs a common point of origin in a former and now completed history, they are not troubled by the moral and formal contradictions that beset

⁵ The first paragraph of *A Small Boy* records a discovery and is one passage that embodies the process-oriented nature of James's late writing: to take up William's early life, the original intent of the memoir, was of necessity to write about James's own early life: "so inseparably and beautifully they seemed to hang together and the comprehensive case to decline mutilation or refuse to be treated otherwise than handsomely" (2). The past—at once William's and his own—composed itself in its own autonomous terms, the task of the writing to reconstitute them. James responded to the "comprehensive case," led further into the terrain than he had expected, the subject unfolding as he went.

the three works that are my subject here. The degenerating quality of the writing in those works comprises my central subject.⁶ I take that devolution to be an integral component of James's increasing despair at what he understood to be the loss of America. With the Nineteenth Century transfiguration of the rural American republic into a financial, industrial, and imperial power America had become for James a Conradian dark continent made dark by money. In late James as well as in Conrad, intelligence proves itself in despair; to take cognizance is to see the darkness—Adam and Maggie's strained moral status resides in large part in their lack of such cognizance, a lack their money permits.

James's disillusionment with America can be traced to an earlier military conflict, the 1898 Spanish-American War, which announced the arrival of the US as an overseas imperial power. James is famous for not commenting on political events. But in a remarkable letter, he wrote to William that with the war, "we have ceased to be, among the big nations, the one great thing that made up for our so many crudities, & made us above all superior & unique—the only one with clean hands & no record of across-the-seas murder & theft. *Terminato—terminato!*" William concurred: "'Terminata, terminata,' indeed is our national soul" (*CWJ* 3: 63). This sense that William and Henry

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein thought that the complexity and richness of the obvious, of what lies open to view, is in the most urgent need of attention. To that end he wrote in *Philosophical Investigations*, paragraph 109, that, "We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place." I find in Wittgenstein's diffuse, multi-directional and anti-theoretical thinking a useful propaedeutic instruction to re-examine the obvious, the form of literary works. My focus in this chapter is throughout on the form of James's late writings as itself an epistemological index of his developing response to the world historical situation of the US.

shared with others in their milieu that the rise of US imperialism had terminated America's national soul informs all of the works I take up in this chapter.⁷

In the wake of the war James in *The Golden Bowl* and in his two preceding novels *The Ambassadors* and *the Wings of the Dove* had returned to writing about Americans abroad, the international theme of his early fiction. But James's return to America is so obvious it has not been visible as the startling event that it was: his last major novel about Americans in Europe was *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), now 20 years in the past. James's return to America seemed to have a point and even to make an argument. The Americans of James's early fictions are *good* Americans. The moral coherence of Christopher Newman in *The American* (1876) and Isabel Archer in *Portrait* are beyond question or reproach. Newman has accrued a fortune in the clean business of selling washtubs, his possession of money permitting him to leave it behind and take up pursuits of a higher calling grounded in what Ross Posnock in *The Trial Of Curiosity: William James, Henry James and the Challenge of Modernity* (1991) has argued is the cardinal Jamesian virtue, curiosity.⁸ Christopher Newman is the new-world man, the new Columbus traveling in reverse to the Old World. Newman, with his unshakeable moral coherence, is never capable of exacting revenge for being jilted by the Bellegardes after they first accept his marriage proposal. Likewise, Isabel neither tries to attain nor even desires the money she inherits. Her possession of a fortune, like Newman, never compromises her own moral standing.

⁷ Other figures for whom the war was the betrayal of the American republic would include E.L. Godkin, editor of "The Nation," Mark Twain, who satirized the rhetoric of self-determination that surrounded public discourse about the war, as well as James's lifetime friend William Dean Howells (all of whom, along with William James, were part of the Anti-Imperialist League).

⁸ Posnock has written that curiosity is for James "The engine of his openness, what drives his ordeal of vulnerability...a pragmatic historical practice suspicious of any discourse equating the social with fixed or finished forms" (20, 24).

America as a place of self-made individuals had always intrigued James, but in the late work the charming vacancy of America's lack of inherited social and architectural conventions has become an excess—in James's *The American* (1876) the French characters are evil, murderous Ultramontane Catholic aristocrats. Christopher Newman, the New World post-Civil war businessman may not know good art from bad, but his moral coherence is beyond doubt. His American good-nature saves him from cashing in on the revenge he might have carried out for being wronged by the Bellegardes; in fact, he is never at any moment in the novel capable of revenge.

In *The Ambassadors*, the subject of my first chapter, the titled Old World woman, whose house resonates for its hero Lambert Strether with the French Revolution, has become a moral heroine. The American businessman has become a moral monster, Chad Newsome's brutal treatment of Madame de Vionnet proof of the immorality of his taking up advertising at the novel's end. "It's a complex fate, being an American," James wrote in an 1872 letter (*HJL* 1: 273). That complexity evolved into moral evacuation as America and advertising became in this late novel twin moral horrors. James's return to America as a subject was not a mere personal, psychological, or biographical fact. If it was personal, it was also historical. James returned to writing about America in the wake of the rise of the US as a financial, industrial, and overseas imperial power in 1898, an event that was for James, his brother William and many others in their milieu the tragic betrayal of the American republic. America's vacancy and promise had been filled in with an unbounded, unlimited excess, too little having become too much and of the wrong kind. I argue that Chad Newsome was James's version of Joseph Conrad's Kurtz, who culminates Europe as moral abomination. In arguing that this is the case my first

chapter provides a comparative study of *The Ambassadors* and *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *The Golden Bowl* and *Nostramo, Victory: An Island Tale* (1914) and *The Ivory Tower*.

The Golden Bowl, the subject of my second chapter, follows through with James's radical disarticulation from the subject matter of America and in this way is a radical revision of *The American* and *The Portrait of a Lady* in its disaffection from the subject-matter of America. Unlike the fortune that does not morally compromise Newman, Adam and Maggie Verver's seemingly limitless money corrodes their moral coherence, canceling it out as a betrayal might cancel friendship.⁹ James's innocent American type, announced by Adam's name, now becomes a crisis of American innocence.¹⁰ The Verver money begins to corrode as well the formal coherence of James's writing.

This moral and formal incoherence emerges in *The Golden Bowl* in the character of Bob Assingham. Bob's witty wife Fanny is usually taken to be the novel's "ficelle." Ficelles, James wrote in his "Preface" to *The Portrait of a Lady*, are "but wheels to the coach," characters who support the novel's structure without a role in the plot, such as Maria Gostrey in *The Ambassadors*, but who are also, like Maria, central to understanding and explaining what the novel is about (*European Writers* 1082).

⁹ Margery Sabin has hinted at such a way of reading the novel. She has written that Maggie's success might be read through Bob's sense of all things being "pecuniary arrangement," her power "the power of great wealth to keep what it has bought" (214). Sabin is quite right, and I follow her lead in this chapter. I would add, however, that James discovered in the writing of his novel that Maggie's wealth is a moral problem. In addition, I will suggest that Maggie does not simply refuse a "penetrating view of her own experience," as Sabin has suggested, but rather that economic and social positions structures the limits and possibilities of sight, of what it is possible to see.

¹⁰ In his classic study *The American Adam*, R.W.B. Lewis claimed the myth of Adam to be the central component "of a native American mythology... a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" (1). In his early book *Hawthorne* (1879), James wrote that, "it takes such an acquaintance of history and custom, such a complexity of manner and types, to form a fund of suggestion for a novelist" (*AW* 351). Thus, he suggested, Hawthorne's writing was limited by America's lack of history. Adam Verver seems to step out of a Hawthorne story, what James followed Hawthorne in describing as romance. This coincidence of America and romance seems to suggest in *The Golden Bowl* a refusal of knowledge. Romance was for James a negative term that indicated a turning away from reality.

However, Fanny is not the novel's ultimate, or not its sole, explainer. Her husband Bob may see still more clearly with his disillusioned conviction that to know anything about life is to know it in terms of "pecuniary arrangement" (86). Bob is as well the first of James's ficelles who is not an American. Not sharing a common country of origin with Fanny, Adam, Maggie, and Charlotte he provides a perspective that does not accept the terms of the American characters, even the sophisticated Fanny, as though Americans, whom the Prince describes as being "almost incredibly romantic," are blind to the necessary knowledge of the conditions of necessity (48).

Like Charlotte and Adam at the end of *The Golden Bowl*, James himself returned to America after a twenty-year absence immediately upon completing the novel. The book of travel writing he published about his 1904-05 tour of America, *The American Scene*, the main subject of my second chapter, along with related contemporaneous essays, is an unhappy one, describing an America whose promise has been ravaged by money.¹¹ In the final chapter of the book, James described the formal ambition of his

¹¹ To a remarkable degree, the moral problems of money, often in relation to a better, more charming and older American world, dominate almost all of James's late novels, as we will see. It is also a crucial aspect of the tales. In "Crapy Cornelia," the hero foregoes an economically advantageous marriage to spend his days in the company of an old acquaintance who he knew in his youth, who remembers old New York, and who has real antiques, as opposed to the vulgar and ultra-modern imitations of his deposed fiancé. In "A Round of Visits," Mark Monteith comes back to America after learning that the friend to whom he had entrusted his finances has swindled him, though he will come to value along the way "disinterested sympathy" more than his lost resources; in "The Bench of Desolation," Herbert Dodd will be sadistically forced to raise an impossible sum of money to escape legal action from Kate Cookham, whom he had agreed to marry and then broke off from. But it turns out she took the money and shrewdly invested it for him, knowing he would never do so himself. His wife and children die, but in the end he has the woman he had rejected and precisely 1260 pounds, the moral status of the pecuniary exaction deeply ambiguous to the end. Kate's cruelty and her tenderness are one. In "The Jolly Corner" (1908), Spencer Brydon also returns to New York from Europe after a long absence to look into his two properties, one of which he will preserve, the other of which he will develop for money. Like the later Graham Fielder, he lacks "a capacity for business and a sense for construction" (*Collected Tales* 699). But an old friend tells him that if he had stayed in America he might have gained money and therefore power, been consumed with what he calls the "rank money-passion" (*CT* 707). He might, in other words, have been part of the burgeoning financial and industrial class. It's not, he tells her, that that rank passion appeals to him; "it's only a question of what fantastic, yet perfectly possible, development of my own nature I mayn't have missed" (*CT* 707). He is a typically Jamesian character in that his concern is with the possibilities of what he could have done and

writing, whose movements he likened to a “skiff” tied “fast to no conclusion whatever,” the writing proceeding by following the subject’s shifting current (*Collected Travel Writing* 700). Yet it seems to me that James was rather peremptory in treating modern America and that this peremptoriness records his growing pessimism. One of the unhappiest chapters of the book concerns Newport, where James set his next major novel, *The Ivory Tower*, which I return to in chapters 2, 3, and 4 as a peripheral work. Whereas Bob Assingham suggests a radical formal divergence in James’s fiction, in *The Ivory Tower* he attempted to return to an earlier kind of cultured, reflecting consciousness. The attempt, itself a kind of despair, does not work. New American money accumulated on a new scale diminishes and redefines James’s detached but endlessly perceiving spectator’s observations, now without a significant knowledge to unearth. James’s development from *The Golden Bowl* to *The Ivory Tower* charts the declension of America in his writing as well as the declension of his writing itself.

In *The American Scene* and *The Ivory Tower* Europe replaces the America of the early works as the locus of the moral. Europe is in the novel, as William Righter has noted, an “escape from the problems America poses” (198). Whereas in a famous passage in his book *Hawthorne* (1879), James listed all the European things absent from America, in the late work America has been filled in with an excess that is a violation of architectural and social orders, so that too little has become too much and of the wrong kind. James had lost America in *The Golden Bowl* and thus in his next two major works

known, to what degree he presently encompasses and understands the possible arrangements of his life. His financial alter ego becomes a ghostly reality, appearing eventually in one of Brydon’s residences, but “Such an identity fitted his at no point” (*CT* 725). It is the face of “‘A black stranger!’” (*CT* 730), the racial undercurrent marking him as deeply alien. But the irony is that the stranger is in fact Brydon’s own American, money-passionate self, so different and hideous as to be unrecognizable to him. The money passion is never a pretty sight in James’s late fiction. These stories swerve in their interaction with history between a stringent moral and historical evacuation, and a slightly genteel sentimentality. This is the difference between *The Golden Bowl* and *The Ivory Tower*.

he cleaved to Europe as the ground of social and moral order. With the catastrophe of the war, he had lost Europe as well. My dissertation begins with *The Golden Bowl*, James's last great, completed novel and a key text in his dissident disarticulation from America, moves to *The American Scene* and then turns to James's topical essays about the First World War. In those essays, such as "Within the Rim," James sought static harmony and simple truisms, as though to resolve the "horrific capability" of history, as he described the war in the letter to Hugh Walpole I quoted earlier. "Within the Rim" is representative of James's war essays in that sentimentality most characterizes its writing, the sentimentality itself an expression of despair.

II

Colonel Bob Assingham is an unlikely James character. Bob has held an ordinary, middling occupation and is the only James character whose work has educated his understanding. A former army officer and agent of the empire, Bob's experience in the violence of conquest has given him the knowledge that money and violence subtend all of life. Bob has the authority of intelligence, but he sees with a skepticism, irony, and disillusionment other James characters do not share. Bob's wife Fanny worries over the drama of Maggie and Adam's lives; Bob does not accept the complexity she posits, his materialism cutting to the quick of matters with brutal clarity. Bob and Fanny's divergent modes of understanding embody a tension in James's novel between elaboration on the one hand and money and violence on the other. This tension can be heard in Bob's manner of speaking, itself unusual: James's characters often sound alike and all sound like narrator—they speak with interminable elaboration, in William's phrase. The laconic Bob does not elaborate, he states.

In a novel of indirection and long conversations without clear conclusions, Bob makes direct statements. When Fanny tells him that Charlotte and the Prince did not have time to consummate their love he responds by asking: ““Does it take so much time?”” (90). Fanny elaborates the ambiguity of possibility in Charlotte and the Prince’s past. Bob counters with a biting irony that points to final, carnal facts unsusceptible to vagueness. With the same tone, he says Maggie has always struck him “as more than anything else the young woman who has a million a year” (93). In claiming that Maggie is just a rich girl, Bob has relocated the foundation of the novel, which is after all the story of the innocent Maggie encountering adultery. Here Bob defines Maggie in relation to her money rather than her moral status; as we will see, in the end Maggie’s money causes a crisis in her moral status itself.

At the edge of the British Empire Bob encountered the limits of knowledge: “He might in old bewildering climates, in old campaigns of cruelty and license, have had such revelations and known such amazements that he had nothing more to learn” (87). Conrad’s Marlow has in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) been to the ends of the earth on an errand of conquest and, in Kurtz, has witnessed the irredeemable cruelty and license of colonialism. As though he were James’s response to Conrad, Bob also has participated in imperial violence. The bitter fruit of his experience is the realization that beyond “cruelty and license” there is nothing more to know.

Bob’s deflating, disillusioned understanding has evolved from his experience working as well as the nature of that work. But James’s characters do not work or are not represented working because they are creatures of thought: if their energies were diverted away from thinking to work, the novel could not proceed. Newman’s story begins when

he gives up his business; in *The Ambassadors* Strether is on leave from his editorship of a literary magazine. Strether's position is incidental. Bob's whole world-view derives from his immanent occupation in the business of empire. There is a kind of Howellsian ordinariness to "Bob."

A quotidian pessimist, Bob sees the long and short of things and seems a negative version of Strether's omnivorous awareness. "He knew everything that could be known about life, which he regarded as, for far the greater part, a matter of pecuniary arrangement. His wife accused him of a want alike of moral and of intellectual reaction, or rather indeed of a complete incapacity for either" (86). Fanny's ironic tone endorses Bob's understanding while it also accuses him of a moral and intellectual incapacity: there is substance to their disagreement, as though Fanny alone is not capable of serving as the novel's ficelle. She will attempt to present the best possible version of Maggie and the worst possible version of Charlotte. Fanny, with her consummate wit and intelligence, is close to being the narrator of the novel. But all through James has placed at her side a character who casts a shadow on her illuminations in providing a starker, darker understanding. Bob's materialism diminishes the novel's story to the case of four rather horrid persons toward all of whom he is more often than not ironic.

What Fanny describes as Bob's incapacity emerges in the end as the most penetrating vision. *The Golden Bowl* develops toward total agreement with him as it proceeds. But this agreement suggests discord, even self-defeating dissonance, in James's writing. That Bob, of all possible characters, comments on the novel's moral drama suggests the moral crisis at its heart. Bob's presence in *The Golden Bowl* indexes the gravity of that crisis. His presence also suggests that this moral crisis develops in relation

to what is new in James, the crisis of money. For in finding Bob's vision the most accurate James discovered that what William denigrated as the interminable elaboration of his writing is almost beside the point, even trivial, in relation to the bedrock of money. Beyond "pecuniary arrangement" there is nothing for the writing to elaborate: with money the unfolding path of Jamesian elaboration has arrived at an impasse.

Bob's disillusioned materialism suggests that the novel's moral drama unfolds in relation to an exterior that precedes and redefines the interior moral drama—social and economic position, money. For Bob, it's all money. The novel concurs as Maggie's moral stridency emerges into moral monstrosity due to the power her money grants to her *a priori*. Maggie has married an Italian prince, and her fantastically rich father Adam (his allegorical name recalling Christopher Newman but also now calling into question the moral coherence of the new world man's Adamic lack of knowledge) has married an old friend of Maggie's to assure his daughter that he really is alright without her—the daughter and father are peculiarly close.

But Bob's view of life as "pecuniary arrangements" proves a grim truth when, in a crucial passage, Maggie's economic position converts her moral passion never to let her father suspect of the adultery between Charlotte and the Prince into moral darkness. She considers the course she is to take.

What she must do she must do by keeping her hand off him; and nothing, meanwhile, as we see, had less in common with that scruple than such a merciless manipulation of their yielding beneficiaries as her spirit so boldly reveled in. She saw herself in this connexion without detachment, saw others alone with intensity; otherwise she might have been struck, fairly have been amused, by her free

assignment of the pachydermatous [cold-blooded in literal and metaphoric terms] quality. (399)

Maggie's sole purpose is to keep her father off the track of knowledge, to keep Adam away from the tree of knowledge. She wants in this way to stop Adam's Eve from ever causing his exit from Eden. Maggie's moral consciousness is consumed by this goal of maintaining what she hopes to be her father's ignorance. But Maggie's program to keep her father from knowing occurs in the culminating fiction of a writer who valued *knowledge* above all else, who understood writing to be an undertaking whose morality inheres in knowing its subject. Maggie will blockade her father from knowledge and will in addition never view her "merciless manipulation" of Charlotte and the Prince as such.

Here we see James's depiction of Maggie confirming Bob's materialism. Charlotte and the Prince are the "yielding beneficiaries" of Maggie's father's fortune, so that she senses she can secure her father's ignorance by way of the "merciless manipulation" (anything but a moral course) his money grants her: Charlotte and the Prince will yield to her because they are at the mercy of the money into which they have both married. In seeing herself as "without detachment," Maggie shows she is rather detached and pachydermatous toward Charlotte and the Prince. Even as she is full of concern for her father, Maggie revels in her sense that Charlotte and the Prince are at her mercy, the literal beneficiaries of her and her father. In the "pecuniary arrangement" of the quartet, Charlotte and the Prince will yield to Maggie because they depend on the Verver money. In confronting the adultery, Maggie has discovered her capacity to impose her will, seizing a power she has always held but not seen. Maggie's innocence slides

into “merciless manipulation.” James’s Strether develops toward the full elaboration of knowledge. But Strether’s formal coherence as the avatar of the writing as well as his moral coherence alike depend upon his lack of money. In possessing limitless money Maggie’s moral coherence unravels as she exercises a limitless sovereignty granted by her money. Isabel Archer marries a monster of a husband. In Maggie, James imagined an American girl who becomes herself something of a monster.

Maggie’s success in rearranging the quartet hinges on Maggie’s money (in this way confirming Bob’s view). In his essay “The False Problem of Ugolino,” Jorge Luis Borges addressed a question much debated by Dante scholars: are we to understand in the fourth canto of the *Inferno* that Ugolino did or did not cannibalize his own children? Dante does not provide a definitive clarification. Borges’s answer is to point to the inherent recalcitrance of literature: “In real time, in history, whenever a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates and loses the others. Such is not the case in the ambiguous time of art...In his Tower of Hunger, Ugolino devours and does not devour the beloved children, and this undulating imprecision, this uncertainty, is the strange matter of which he is made” (279). The undulating imprecision of Ugolino is an instance of the precision of art, which in this case is able to gather in logically incommensurate possibilities, retaining both x and not x, answering at once yes and no to the question. Maggie’s moral status is the central, and dividing, issue in criticism of *The Golden Bowl*.

But Borges has provided us with a nuanced and complex response both to those critics such as Martha Nussbaum who read Maggie as a paragon of love as well as to those critics who read her as a tyrannical repressor of what Leo Bersani has celebrated as

“wayward and inessential passions” (130). In the strange time of literature, in the writing of the novel, Maggie’s moral stridency emerges into moral monstrosity. This devolution of her moral status emerges almost against the grain of the novel in necessary relation to the money she wields, the “pecuniary arrangements” in which Maggie and her father’s money confer power upon them. James discovered in this novel that the meaning of Maggie was not primarily inside in the pause of reflection and the delay of curiosity, but outside, in her relation to her economic and social position: money, not morality, defines Maggie. The conjunction of Maggie and her money is the irreducible and precise locale of James’s turbulent literary investigation into America.

Wives and husbands, friends and lovers, confidantes and rich fathers, moral daughters and impoverished princes—James in this novel has discovered what Bob Assingham discovered in the violence of imperial conquest, that all arrangements are pecuniary. *The Golden Bowl* closes with Charlotte and Adam departing for America, the return itself engineered by Maggie. Adam goes back to the Eden he has never really left, while Fanny forecasts a defeated Charlotte “thrown for a grim future beyond the great sea and the great continent” (540). In returning to Adam’s paradise in the Midwest, American City, Charlotte is condemned to a dark continent.

III

Posnock has described Jamesian curiosity as a “practice suspicious of any discourse equating the social with fixed and finished forms” (24). The same holds true of the form of James’s writing. Yet *The American Scene* tends in the direction of the fixed and finished as the restless analyst, James’s moral-formal description of himself in the book as one given to endless elaboration, grapples with the never-arriving modern

American scene. In responding to modern America James's writing, with its furious anger, becomes a reduced version of itself, betraying its own project of curiosity.

In the New York chapters of the book the restless analyst returns many times to its skyscrapers as the signal instance of a society in which money has reduced all distinctions to a single economic measure. He begins a key paragraph in a tone of displeasure, like a man awaking from a pleasant dream to realize his house is burning, by noting that "One story is good only till another is told, and sky-scrapers are the last word of economic ingenuity only till another word be written" (*CTW* 432). "Story" is an angry pun, referring at once to the height of the building as well as to the tale it tells. The sentence suggests with hostile irony that the story is the last word only until another word of "economic ingenuity" is written, some still uglier tale that will be even taller, tall here perhaps holding as well the sense of false. The passage continues: "This shall be possibly a word of still uglier meaning, but the vocabulary of thrift at any price shows boundless resources, and the consciousness of the finite, the menaced, the essentially *invented* state, twinkles ever, to my perception, in the thousand glassy eyes of these giants of the mere market. Such a structure as the comparatively windowless bell-tower of Giotto, in Florence, looks supremely serene in its beauty. You don't feel it to have risen by the breath of an interested passion that, restless beyond all passions, is for ever seeking more pliable forms. Beauty has been the object of its creator's idea, and, having found beauty, it has found the form in which it splendidly rests" (*CTW* 420). The "*mere* market," or, later, "the common fund of *mere* economic convenience"—both phrasings suggest paucity, the excess impoverishment (*CTW* 432).¹² The restless analyst approves of

¹² Wendy Graham has remarked that the restless analyst's "reflections, even as a walker in the city, are irresistibly lifted to the emerging towers." See "Notes on a Native Son: Henry James's New York" (246).

Giotto's beautiful and coherent bell-tower, in which he does not find even "the breath of an interested passion." On the other hand, he twists and turns to get a handle on the intractable ugliness of the skyscrapers.

The writing's relation to the two buildings is incommensurate in its categorical refusal or inability to consider the form of the skyscraper. Indeed, the absolute opposition, between the Old World and the new New World, gives one pause: was not Giotto's tower, after all, built as a glorification of God, rather than of the "creator's idea," to say nothing of the political history from which it emerged? The tall buildings are in the restless analyst's account ugly because immoral, their expunging of beauty a moral dissolution. The restless analyst has here encountered the limits of his guiding principle of curiosity, for he can find nothing of value in the energy of metropolitan New York City. Other writers, including James's contemporary and friend William Dean Howells, reacted to modern New York with more tension, more alert to the interest, and even beauty, of New York's dynamism.

Howells in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890) described Mr. March riding the elevated subway: "What suggestion! What drama! What infinite interest!.... The track that found and lost itself a thousand times in the flare and tremor of the innumerable lights; the moony sheen of the electrics mixing with the reddish points and blots of gas far and near; the architectural shapes of houses and churches and towers...formed an

Adeline Tintner has noted James's contradictory reaction to the skyscraper, that he was both "aghast and overpowered" by them, curious and repelled (8). The restless analyst cannot seem to leave behind the skyscrapers, even as he rails against their ugliness. It is important to keep in mind that by "sky-scraper" James would have meant the Flatiron and the Woolworth buildings. Consider the excitement with which a writer James knew and respected, H. G. Wells, responded to the former building in his contemporary account of New York in *The Future of America*: "I found myself agape, admiring a sky-scraper, the prow of the Flat-iron building to be exact, ploughing up through the traffic of Broadway and Fifth Avenue in the afternoon light" (48). Wells has a metaphoric turning of his own, one that captures the magnificent reach of the Flatiron's wedged shape, hanging over the park. Wells is as blithe about the (very specific) Flatiron as James is distraught by the (unspecified) giants of the mere market.

incomparable perspective” (64-65). March responds with palpable excitement here to the moving and suspended view made possible by the subway’s height. The density of perspective provided by the train’s whizzing movement includes various planes of sight, and, similarly, March witnesses the drama of multiple lives even as they remain strangers to him. Placing these passages side by side, it seems March has beaten the restless analyst at his own game, adapting his observations to the city as he goes along, his skiff tied to no conclusion. By comparison, the restless analyst concludes, refusing to find in the tall buildings any interest or merit whatsoever. The restless analyst spends a lot of time denouncing New York. Four of fourteen chapters concern the city, the only place to which more than one is dedicated, so that the book hovers there, as though unable to leave—the “fascination of the abomination,” as Marlow says in *Heart of Darkness* (6). “The Sense of Newport,” *The American Scene*’s sixth chapter, is as disgusted by unrestrained pecuniary forces as are the New York chapters.

The restless analyst responds to New York City as a terrifying expunging of form. In the case of Newport, his sense that money has betrayed what in retrospect now seems to be an idyllic pastoral setting drives the writing both toward a rabid conclusiveness and toward the quaver of nostalgia. The restless analyst describes the mansions of the new rich in Newport as “white elephants” that are a crime against discretion (*CTW* 540). According to the OED, by the 1840’s at least the phrase “white elephant” referred to a gift so expensive to maintain it is a curse, deriving from the story that the kings of Siam would bestow the rare animal with the purpose of impoverishing the recipient. James’s use of the phrase evokes excess luxury—and the spoils of empire. Newport is an index for the restless analyst of how the best of America had been lost. Once upon a time, it had

been a rural retreat from business, and had “simply lain there like a little, white, open hand, with slightly-parted fingers” (CTW 528). The passivity and innocence of the image of the hand verges on the sentimental, and is even a little grotesque in its suggestion of an oncoming corruption that James has depicted in sexual overtones: the open and helpless hand of Newport has been raped by money. Like the tall buildings, the white elephants that replaced the simple cottages desecrate the moral limits of architectural forms. They are a dissonant pile of gold placed in the “pink palm,” “the gold that they have ended by heaping up there to an amount so oddly out of proportion to the scale of nature of space” (CTW 529-30). The despoiling gold is reminiscent of *The Golden Bowl*’s corrupting wealth, and perhaps also of the contemporary debate about currency, in which the gold standard was understood to serve the interests of wealthy plutocrats.¹³ The tone of the chapter as a whole wavers between disgust with money and an almost maudlin lament for the past money has defiled.

The American Scene ends with the restless analyst traveling west from Florida, toward American City. The Pullman train he rides declares itself a genius of the place on the make: “See what I’m making of all this, what I’m making, what I’m making” (CTW 734). The monotony of the unrelenting voice is changing the continent in the process of crossing it. The making is an unmaking, the ravage of America’s poignant promise, a copy-editor’s line of cancellation. The passage might stand for the whole of the book, for *The American Scene*’s descriptions of New York’s “amazing hotel world,” Newport’s “white elephants,” and the “every disfigurement and every violence” with which the

¹³ See Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. New York: NYU Press, 313-87, 1993, for a discussion of the debate over currency.

railroad has “caused the face of the land to bleed” all attest to a dystopic America destroyed by money (*CTW* 440, 540, 734).

IV

James despaired about Newport in *The American Scene*, yet he set his next major novel there. *The Ivory Tower* responds to the declension of America in a stunted writing that has become an unambiguous caricature of a late James novel. Graham Fielder, an American who has lived in Europe, returns to Newport to see his dying, wealthy uncle Mr. Betterman. Gray’s scrupulous lack of any knowledge of the ways and means of acquiring or wielding money is a version of the idea that Giotto’s bell-tower, as the restless analyst described it in the passage I quoted from *The American Scene*, was built for beauty. But Gray enters a world ruled and defined by money. ““Money is their life,”” Betterman tells Gray concerning Newport’s denizens (84), while it is evident to him that Gray is an alien to the world of money, as though it were stamped on his physiognomy: “I mean it has never been near you. That sticks out of you—the way it hasn’t. I knew it couldn’t have been—and then she told me *she* knew. I see you’re a blank and nobody here’s a blank, not a creature I’ve ever touched. That’s what I’ve wanted,’ the old man went on—‘a perfect clean blank’” (85). A perfect clean blank is what James wanted as well as he retreated away from *The Golden Bowl*’s irresolvable complexity.

Bob Assingham knows everything about life, which amounts to a knowledge of pecuniary arrangement and cruelty and license. Gray, on the other hand, knows nothing about any of this. Gray, a strand of light in the dark continent, is foreign to Newport in an absolute manner, as though these were the battle lines of an epic: Achilles facing Hector. Gray, a rather drab and grey character, is transparent to his uncle, through whom James

was keen to underline his pure moral status. This moral clarity is startling when one considers its absolute lack in *The Golden Bowl*, where every character is compromised and opaque to the others and to us. In *The Golden Bowl* James discovered the possibility that Maggie's blameless innocence might be anything but; on the other hand, *The Ivory Tower* staves off such moral ambiguity.

This laboring for clarity on James's part includes as well Betterman's allegorical name, who improves morally on his deathbed, as opposed to the never resolved question of Adam's Adamic status. Demurring that he knows very little, Gray does "allow that there's nothing I understand so little and like so little as the mystery of the 'market' and the hustle of any sort" (85). Whereas the conversation between Fanny and Bob moves the novel into waters murkier still, Betterman instantly grasps Gray, even as Gray's own speech confirms and further clarifies his insight. Because he knows nothing of money, Gray will inherit Betterman's fortune only to be swindled out of it by Haughty Vint and his lover (like Kate Croy and Merton Densher in *The Wings of the Dove*, they do not have enough money to marry). I noted earlier that James's writing developed as an effort to refuse resolutions. But here he is resolving his novel with a ferocity that applies as well to the character Abel Gaw, Betterman's one-time business partner: "He conformed in short to his necessity of absolute interest—interest, that is, in his own private facts, which were facts of numerical calculation altogether: how could it not be so when he had dispossessed himself, if there had been even the slightest selection in the matter, of every faculty except the calculating" (7). This sentence forecloses on the character's possibilities, so that there is nothing more to learn about this shriveled man beyond his

“numerical calculation,” a sarcastic phrase in a deflated novel that begins with two deaths, as though its life were over before it begins.

In *The Ivory Tower*, the endless indirection of *The Golden Bowl* has disappeared, swallowed into a more pessimistic version of Bob’s sense that all arrangements are pecuniary in their nature and into the reduction of James’s writing. Henry’s method, as William described it, was one of “interminable suggestion” because suggestion was a way of maintaining constant contact with the subject in the ongoing activity of the writing—Howells described this quality of James’s writing as an “unarriving language” (Anesko 389). But with Gray the writing arrives. Gray’s moral coherence is as unassailable as Isabel Archer’s—he works as little to inherit his money and is no more compromised by its possession than she is (but with Gray inheritance is also on a grander scale, so that money is more oppressive and exaggerated than it was in the earlier novel). Gray is so unknowing he will ask Haughty, of all people, to help him enjoy and manage his fortune, so that he marches to slaughter like a lamb. He turns to Haughty because back in Europe Haughty once saved his life when he “slid down a scraper of a dizzy ledge, and so hung helpless over the void, unable to get back” (170). A cloying gentility clings to the story of being saved—helpless then, Gray is helpless now, and a little prim in taking it upon himself to recount the tale. It is clear at this early point that Haughty is untrustworthy, even as Gray understands nothing.

The formal disjuncture of Gray’s character is an epistemological realization. Gray is an inadequate James character because there is nothing of any consequence he can learn that would propel the evolution of understanding that was the life of James’s writing. The suspended unfolding of consciousness has no object of knowledge toward

which it might evolve in Newport—where one can hear “the chink of money in the murmur of the breezy little waves” themselves—that the novel itself has not already schematized (20). Despite his European languages and acquaintance with the works of Paul Veronese, Gray cannot see in the American world of money. But Gray lacks awareness of all things connected with money, including Haughty, in a novel that defines its subject as the collapse of America under pecuniary forces. Gray’s unperceptiveness reduces him to being a blank of a character. Here we might recall that it is Strether’s “horrible sharp eye” that Maria Gostrey lands on at the end of *The Ambassadors* (347). In *The Ivory Tower*, on the other hand, James’s pessimism about America becomes, finally, the impossibility of his own writing. The sharp eye and omnivorous understanding of Strether has contracted into the unseeing, soporific Graham Fielder.

Gray enters America from a mythical land known as Europe, which is in this novel the locus of the moral, so that it reverses the terms of what can now be seen as *The American*’s optimism, the immoral Bellegardes supplanted by the morally bankrupt Americans. Gray is a return, or an attempt to return, to Christopher Newman. The earlier novel assumes a moral coherence to the American, the way one assumes the air one breathes. *The Ivory Tower*, on the other hand, cleaves to Europe as the only possible saving grace to what has emerged as the dark continent of America. It follows with the necessity of tragic logic that James broke off work on the novel with the catastrophe of the First World War, which ripped up by its roots the European world of tradition and inherited social forms.

V

The First World War forced an epistemological transformation in relation to an epoch James now understood as having ended.¹⁴ In a 1915 essay, he named the fifty years following the Civil War, also the fifty years of his writing career, the “Age of the Mistake,” a period of deluded optimism that such violence would never again be repeated (*AW* 178). The post-bellum confidence evident in *The American* had been revealed to be a false sense of amelioration. The First World War culminated James’s ongoing disarticulation from the promise of America and the concomitant devolution of his writing in *The Golden Bowl*, *The American Scene*, and *The Ivory Tower*. However, the topical essays James wrote about the First World War are not another stage of that devolution: rather, they refuse writing in any sense of the term that would describe even the reduced works I have considered in this chapter. James yearns in the writing of his war essays for quiescence in a tone best described as sentimentality. This sentimentality indicates that from the outset, and contrary to his description of his writing in *The American Scene*, James in his war essays tied his skiff as fast as he might to conclusions. Thus, the sentimentality of the war essays evinces despair, despair that the writing can achieve anything. James’s letter to Hugh Walpole attested to the relation between “one’s effort” and reality as having “utterly given away and smashed” and the majority of his other letters during the war have the same bleak tone. In one such letter James wrote that it was a mistake to live to see the smashup of Europe “when, like saner and safer persons, I might perfectly have not” (*LHJ* 2: 388). The war writings, on the other hand, cling to the unchanging order of rural England as the ground of permanence. At the same time,

¹⁴ Daniel Aaron has suggested how crucial the Civil War was for James, featuring as a major presence not only in *Hawthorne* but also in works from James’s late retrospective period of review and revision: *The American Scene* and *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), written just before the First World War.

the “horrific capability” of the history they attempt to occult from view haunts their edges.

Sentimentality about rustic England characterizes James’s best-known war essay “Within the Rim.” The essay’s title at once describes the Channel and vaunts England’s inviolable geographical status as an island into mystical significance: “Just over that line unutterable things, massacre and ravage and anguish, all but irresistible assault and cruelty, bewilderment and heroism all but overwhelmed; from the sense of which one had but to turn one’s head to take in something unspeakably different and that yet produced, as by some extraordinary paradox, a pang almost as sharp” (*Henry James on Culture* 180). At the essay’s start, James has turned away from the war, as though to contain its violence. The effect of equating the familiar scene’s “pang” with massacre and ravage is to sound a note at once cloying and desperate. The essay seems intent to flee the scene of anguish as it turns to an unnamed English landscape for balm to the wound: “[T]he mere spread of the great trees, the mere gathers in the bluey-white curtains of the cottage windows, the mere curl of the tinted smoke from the old chimneys matching that note, became a sort of exquisite evidence” (*Culture* 182). All of these details might be a sentimental version of Wordsworth, the non-peopled, rustic landscape minute in the scale of its details. But the concreteness of the trees and the smoke and the curtains lack concrete substance. The repeated “mere” is precious, lending the whole passage a sacrosanct air—James seems to write about these trivia in order not to write about “massacre and ravage and anguish.” The description of the cottage domesticates the war through a quaint image of rural domesticity.¹⁵

¹⁵ Paul Fussell has noted the frequency with which various writers expressed nostalgia for rural England. He writes in his chapter “Arcadian Resources” that, “If the opposite of war is peace, the opposite of

The idyll continues a few paragraphs later:

[T]he blades of grass, the outlines of leaves, the drift of clouds, the streaks of mortar between old bricks, not to speak of the call of child-voices muffled in the comforting air, became, as I have noted, with a hundred other like touches, casually felt, extraordinary admonitions and symbols, close links of a tangible chain. When once the question fairly hung there of the possibility, more showily set forth than it had up to then presumed to be, of a world without use for the tradition so embodied, an order substituting for this, by an unmannerly thrust, quite another and really, it would seem, quite a ridiculous, a crudely and clumsily improvised story, we might all have resembled together a group of children at their nurse's knee disconcerted by some tale that it isn't their habit to hear.

(*Culture* 184)

The passage asserts a continuous chain that remains unbroken in the face of the present catastrophe and overflows with more prosing details that serve the purpose of making that chain tangible. Children's voices, muffled at that, are maudlin and included as though by rote. The old bricks extend into the past, a disembodied embodiment of a notion of old England. The whole scene hovers in stasis. At the same time, the second half of the passage takes a different tone, for the writer of this passage finds himself inhabiting a world that has outstripped the "tradition so embodied." He is hearing a story of an unfamiliar world, one in which the links of the chain are neither tangible nor unbroken. "Within the Rim," for all its sentimentality about England's streaks of mortar, registers against the drift of its own claims how James had lived to see an old order

experiencing moments of war is proposing moments of pastoral" (231). The movement into the cottage is a drastic dramatization of Fussell's description of bucolic arrest as a resource for retreating from historical catastrophe.

disappear. He hoped this was not the case: “We loved the old tale, or at least I did, exactly because I knew it” (*Culture* 184). But the old tale is old when it is incommensurate with an era that has ended, nostalgia being for the unattainable.

VI

In the closing pages of *The Golden Bowl* Maggie and Adam, in their final meeting, stand and look at the seated Charlotte and the Prince: “The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase. There was much indeed in the tone in which Adam Verver spoke again, and who shall say where his thought stopped? ‘*Le compte y est*. You’ve got some good things’” (574). Charlotte and the Prince, after having attempted to establish and live out the possible terms of their own active lives within, but also separate from, their still, silent place in the Verver collection, have now been reduced back to the status of objects. Adam Verver says as much: they’re all here, “and who shall say where his thought stopped?” All along James has held off from Adam’s knowledge, so that no one in the novel nor the novel’s reader ever knows what the enigma Adam does or does not know—Maggie herself will never know because to broach the subject would alert Adam to his own ignorance. But in this sentence, James’s tone is more ironic towards Adam than he has ever been before in the novel.¹⁶ “Who shall say where his thought stopped” deflates Adam, taking him as the butt of the joke as well as cutting him in showing his lack of an

¹⁶ Indeed, compare the tone here with a passage earlier in the novel, in which Mrs. Rance pursues Adam to a room he has fled to in order to escape her. He realizes that he had “definitely established a precedent” in seeing her: “He did her at least that justice—it was a kind of justice he was always doing somebody” (131). The tone here is not ironic about Adam’s “justice,” so that over the course of the novel, one can see the process of James’s disarticulation from Adam and thus from America, insofar as Adam embodies America.

encompassing vision even as “a view more penetrating,” such as the one that James has now provided in his writing, sees that something is awry in the fact that Charlotte and the Prince are in themselves for him “good things” that attest to an immense fortune, and to the power that fortune confers.

Adam Verver is set to return with his collection of fine objects, including his wife, to American City. His journey west follows the movement of financial and imperial power to the US. James’s novel takes as its concern the situation of a wealthy Nineteenth Century American who requires a title for entitlement, an inheritance that will convert his money into wealth, wealth being the social form the brute force of American money takes within European tradition. While that was the story and the set of concerns with which James set off, the novel he wrote is not commensurate with those concerns, for *The Golden Bowl* ends up telling a rather different story: in the writing of his novel James discovered that endless money requires nothing beyond itself to legitimate itself. He was now writing about a world where Adam Verver defines legitimacy, not Prince Amerigo. After the First World War, Woodrow Wilson’s America would shape its foreign policy for the century to come in an effort to control and possess the world’s resources.¹⁷ Bob Assingham was now a residual figure of a residual geopolitical world order, Adam Verver an emergent figure of the emergent order. A world ruled by the US empire, and not what William described as *The Golden Bowl*’s “high-toned social atmosphere,” emerges as the condition and subject of James’s novel (*CWJ* 3: 301). Literature does not invent arbitrarily. Writing is a means and a record of investigation, and the knowledge discovered, by the very means of invention, in the end more often than not outstrips the terms of a work’s initial casting. These late works of James’s are no exception. They

¹⁷ For a discussion of these changes, see Mazower and Strachan.

unfold in a contradictory way, and the contradiction itself develops in necessary relation to the immanent historico-political world from which they emerged, not only reflecting that world but also discovering it. Reading *The Golden Bowl* in the light of *The American Scene* and *The Ivory Tower* it becomes clear that James had in his greatest novel written his version of the heart of darkness: the transformation and consolidation of the US into the 20th century's dominant imperial power. *The Golden Bowl* comes to understand that Adam Verver's world is leaving behind the world of Henry James.

Chapter 1: Writers at the End of Time: Joseph Conrad and Henry James

I

In 1896 Joseph Conrad sent Henry James, whom he addressed as his “master,” praise he paid no other writer, a copy of his second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896). James replied by sending Conrad *The Spoils of Poynton* (1896). These two novels encapsulate Conrad and James’s understanding of the birth of the modern world as a tragic ending.

An Outcast of the Islands tells the story of Peter Willems, whose first act of thievery starts a descent away from human community ending in death. Having deviated, there is no way back for Willems. Conrad would return again and again to stories of broken lives deformed by the loss or transgression of guiding moral limits. They are outcasts and exiles who, like the eponymous hero of *Lord Jim* (1902), long for an impossible return to honor, “shipwrecked castaways in boats, wanderers in a lost desert,” as Marlow in that novel describes suicidal persons (70). *The Spoils of Poynton* is about a mother and son who fall out over the inheritance of Poynton, both the sumptuous house of the title and its exquisite collection. *Spoils* and James’s next three novels take as their subject the unraveling of sexual, domestic, and social mores in English life, what in a notebook entry James termed “the great modern collapse of all the forms” (*Notebooks* 196). In James’s English phase marriages fall apart, vampiric lovers feed off one another, children are pawns in nasty divorces: the underpinning forms are not holding.

In his study *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* the philosopher Robert Pippin has argued that in taking the “collapse of all the forms” as his subject James was addressing nothing less than the moral crisis of modernity. Pippin suggests that in an

“increasingly anomic and disunified social world” we do not have a set of inherited moral categories that serve as a background into which we might weave ourselves and derive a code of moral norms (5). This atomistic world lacks a “basis for interpretation and assessment,” so that once adequate moral categories no longer obtain: “Types and kinds and classes and social position and ‘blood’ and family and races and institutions and social forms and even appeals to ‘human nature’ will no longer function in making possible...mutual understanding” (5). Pippin will define morality as presenting the following quandary: “Why should I ever suspend in some way the pursuit of my own interests...for the sake of another’s interests or claims of entitlement?” (24). With “conventions and background assumptions” having been lost such evaluation becomes tenuous at best, the moral status of behavior and intentions remaining inscrutable (5). For James, as for Conrad, “modernization is a kind of...disorienting loss,” leaving a moral vacancy in its wake.

I want to shift Pippin’s account in two ways. First, he does not address how unrestrained modern economic forces are crucial to James’s apprehension of the moral crisis of modern life (so that, for instance, the tenuous moral issue of Maggie and the Prince’s inability to understand one another in *The Golden Bowl* hinges upon the money she possesses and he lacks). For both James and Conrad money accumulated on a new scale and in new ways—advertising and brutal imperial conquest—has destroyed the possibility of mutual entitlement. In their works these new economic forces grant an unlimited authority a priori to the atomistic individual’s interests and pursuits, engendering in both cases the moral abomination of cruelty and violence. Second, Pippin the philosopher elides the contradictoriness of James and Conrad the novelists’ urgent

response to the moral crisis developing in relation to new imperial and commercial forces: like Jim clinging to an archaic honor, James and Conrad clung with tenacity to a stable moral framework even as they apprehended a world on which it no longer had a purchase. As outsiders from the margins of the European world James and Conrad cherished European values, ranks, customs, and architecture even as they watched the modern world arise as their loss. James came from the west, from the New World, Conrad from the east, from a part of the Old World so old its European status was ambiguous.

“However British you may be, I am more British still” James is supposed to have said to Edmund Gosse.¹⁸ Yet in his late work, after two decades, he returned in his greatest and darkest set of writings to the subject of America. Why the shift? The modernity of America as a place of self-made individuals had always intrigued James, but in his first novels and criticism America’s vacancy was charming. Europe was always in the background and served as a guide for architectural, social, and moral form. The continuity of the Anglo-Saxon world suggested in James’s early canon that the drama of America would be its arriving at some version of Europe. But the boundless horizon of America’s unwritten future evolved into a moral and economic crisis in James’s late writing, too little becoming too much and of the wrong kind. James might be said to have developed toward a Conradian sense of modernity as he discovered a new historical epoch ruled and defined not by Europe’s inherited forms, but by American imperial and pecuniary forces and the atomistic modernity of America. In James’s late work, immoral and wealthy Americans supplant the murderous Ultramontane Catholic Bellegardes of

¹⁸ Qtd. in Alan Holder, *Three Voyagers in Search of Europe: A Study of Henry James, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 91.

The American (1876). As America's future became for James a moral darkness that left him nowhere he cleaved to the continuity of Europe as the ground of moral order.

Conrad was a displaced heir of noble ideals specific to the Polish szlachta, the class of nobility and gentry. Conrad's biographer Zdzislaw Najder has described the szlachta's "chivalric ethics of honor and loyalty" and found central to Conrad's works "his traditionalism and his heroic clinging to an *ideal* fellowship" (*Perspective* 149). According to Najder, Conrad's Polish traditionalism led him to disdain modern democratic society as tending toward chaos, autocracy and greed, his ideal society one that would seem to be pre-modern, "organically integrated and structuralized by a hierarchy of obligations" (*Perspective* 149). Conrad never abandoned the feudal-aristocratic values—fidelity, duty, honor—he inherited from the Polish nobility. At the same time, his fictions embody a world that has outstripped those values.

My chapter begins with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and then moves to *The Ambassadors*. In a coda I suggest how James and Conrad's despair about modern life played out in two pairs of each author's later novels. Written within a few years of one another, Conrad and James's turn of the century works, arguably their greatest, address the developing economic forces of the modern world as outstripping, if not smashing apart, the mutual entitlement of morality. Conrad's Kurtz has, in accruing untold quantities of ivory in a lawless manner, perpetrated moral horror. In his 1905 essay "Autocracy and War," in which Conrad forecast a future European conflagration as a result of German militarization, he wrote that "concord, good faith, and justice" were no longer sufficient to organize the life of Europe's nations "as against the fascination of a material advantage" (*Notes* 91). Europe now lacked an "abstract principle" that would

restrain “dynastic ambitions” (*Notes* 91, 87). As a consequence, “*Il n’y a plus d’Europe*,” there no longer was a Europe, and the cause of its demise was modern economic forces: “there is only an armed and trading continent, the home of slowly maturing contests for life and death and of loudly proclaimed world-wide ambitions” (*Notes* 92). With Kurtz, Conrad had already forecast what he warned about in this essay.

I will argue that James returned to the subject-matter of America in *The Ambassadors*, the first of his late American novels, like Strether’s at its end, as a continent of moral and economic darkness. The ugly specter of economic and social necessity that haunts the novel the whole way through ambushes Strether, and his novel, at the end, where advertising and America emerge as twin modern moral horrors. The moral crisis of modernity becomes evident not as a figure in the carpet, as James titled one of his stories, but as the redefinition of the threads that composed the carpet, and even, a little, as its unraveling.

That is, from *Spoils* on James had developed a writing that followed the speech, thoughts, and reactions of a person whose reflective intelligence, no less than moral nature is, in a Jamesian word, prodigious. This intelligent and moral character discovers what she is about as James’s writing does, so that she is an adjunct of the narrator and thus a component of the writing’s seamless web of consciousness as it works to grasp its subject simultaneously with the writing’s development. James discovered in *The Ambassadors* that the meaning of his characters was not primarily inside, in the pause of reflection and the delay of curiosity, but in an outside that preceded and authorized the inside—economic and social position, money. Money preempts and redefines the

Jamesian character's intelligence. In *The Golden Bowl*, money converts the Jamesian character's epistemological process of apprehension itself into moral darkness.

Both *Heart of Darkness* and *The Ambassadors* are about modern instances of moral desecration. In both works that desecration is embodied in an immoral master in relation to whom Marlow and Strether travel on economic missions. Yet they also share a gallant commitment to the truth out of synch with those missions. We see Marlow and Strether turning against the collapse of all the forms; the tide of modernity, however, renders their gallantry futile.

II

Robinson Crusoe's first action is to disobey his father and leave his father's house. In one moment in the origins of the novel, Crusoe takes imperial possession of an island. Kurtz is a negative fulfillment of Crusoe's self-creation—he builds a world in his own image to the effect of moral abomination. It is left to Marlow to tell the tale, who with “sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, straight back, an ascetic aspect, and with his arms dropped, resembled an idol.” Marlow is an idol, one who knows, an oracle whose modern knowledge, however, does not bring peace or certainty: like Strether's, his is a wisdom gathered from the heart of darkness. If in *Lord Jim* Marlow embodies with probity the values of the institution of sailing, in *Heart of Darkness* he is a not very wealthy drifter who has been harrowed by knowledge, the detritus of conquest awaiting the turn of the tide as he tells his tale.

James's Strether is on leave from his editorship of a literary magazine. The Marlow of *Heart of Darkness* is on active duty. He takes a job as the captain of a steamship for an ivory trading company in the Congo, the story he tells his audience on

board the Nellie that of his encounter with the company's gifted scion, who has been collecting vast quantities of ivory, Kurtz, "the chief of the Inner Station" (47). The company's work of extraction goes on under "a philanthropic pretence" for the purpose of "humanising, improving, instructing" (46, 58). But when Marlow arrives in the Congo he sees a "scene of inhabited devastation...Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming, half effaced within the dim light" (32).

Marlow is demonstrating a gap between a moral idea, indeed an ideal, and the ugly, immanent truth of an enterprise whose sole concern is money, brutalized, dying bodies the opposite, the extirpation, of philanthropy. He will later draw the conclusion: "To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe" (55). Marlow often draws conclusions like this in *Heart of Darkness* in order to make visible the absolute divergence between the violence of extraction and the supposed "moral purpose" of colonial conquest, the lie of the former used to justify the truth of the latter. For Marlow "There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality, in lies."

Marlow is, like Strether, a moral gallant committed to the truth (49). He journeys toward Kurtz and also toward that truth. When you have to worry about driftwood, Marlow says, "the inner truth remains hidden—luckily, luckily" (60). Yet the story he tells is of how he discovers that "inner truth" with a curiosity as omnivorous as Strether's. At the beginning of his narration he explains that, "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What

redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to” (20). The “idea” looks forward to Kurtz, who seems to be an exception to the rule of the moral lie of conquest. Before Marlow arrives at the Inner Station he hears from the company’s manager that Kurtz “is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress” (47). He is curious to know “whether this man who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort would climb to the top after all” (55).

It will turn out that Kurtz proves the rule with a ferocious irony, his moral ideas having become the eradication of pity and progress. In his seventeen page report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs (the length of the title showing it to be a Conradian irony) Kurtz argues that, ““By the exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded”” (83). But Marlow discovers that Kurtz’s “good” has become moral horror, his report ending with the appended exclamation ““Exterminate all the brutes!”” (84). Kurtz seems exalted above the company lackeys with the moral ideas he believes until their final shattering in his final moment of life when he sees that he has committed moral atrocity. His moral ideas, reigning with an absolute lack of limits, are inextricable from the moral darkness he incurs. In James’s novel *Chad Newsome* transgresses moral limits in relation to the economic forces he wields.

Despite his “moral ideas” and his monologues on topics “the most exalted,” on “love, justice, conduct of life,” Kurtz has evacuated the mutual entitlement of morality (96). Crusoe owns his island and takes charge of his man Friday in the moral manner of industry and land cultivation. Kurtz subjugates in a lawless riot, demanding the chiefs

crawl when approaching him, a detail “more intolerable” to Marlow than the heads drying on the stakes that surround Kurtz’s station (95). The heads signal the fate of those who would not submit to Kurtz, as his Russian follower explains: “these were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels!...Those rebellious heads looked very subdued on their sticks.” Kurtz has inflicted violence with an absolute and unlimited rule, and used the results of the violence to adorn his dwelling (96). Marlow turns his voice against his audience, explaining they cannot possibly understand the issue at the heart of Kurtz’s moral transgression into the heart of darkness: “How could you?—with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbors ready to cheer you on or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the policeman and the butcher” (81). Guiding normative limits emerge as constitutive of morality. Kurtz has been spinning in a limitless void and as a consequence there is nothing to restrain “his various lusts” (95). “There was nothing either above or below him—and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces” (107). Kurtz’s self-fulfillment has destroyed his place in a hierarchy: Kurtz rejects all limits to Kurtz. Free-floating from any impingement, he perpetrates the moral darkness at which he cries out with his last words: “‘The horror! The horror!’” (112). Marlow and Kurtz together arrive at a final knowledge of the moral horror of colonialism.

Kurtz, with the mastery of his eloquence, takes ideas as true that are not true, that do not penetrate far enough into what Marlow describes as the “inner truth.” Kurtz’s moral ideas conceal from his own knowledge, until “the very last,” such aspects of the inner truth as the “black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom” Marlow sees on his journey (35). Kurtz’s ideas tyrannize over the

immanent moral darkness of his own story; Marlow works to render all of the parts of that story, including Kurtz's seductive mastery. From the outset then, Marlow distinguishes himself from Kurtz in that he neither sets up a redeeming idea nor bows down before one.

Kurtz is a law unto himself, inflicting horror because there are no demarcations "either above or below him." "My Intended, my ivory, my station, my...' everything belonged to him" (81). Marlow speculates that Kurtz must have written his report before going wrong and presiding "at certain midnight dances ending in unspeakable rites," a vague but suggestive term, unspeakable in the literal sense that Marlow will not speak their terms (83). Kurtz the master of "unspeakable rites" has smashed apart moral limits. But he lives out his violence in relation to his mastery of European cultural forms. A painter, reciter of poetry and rhetorician, Kurtz culminates the Europe of which he is a product. "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz," and Kurtz is a final unmaking of moral bonds and boundaries (83). With Kurtz, Europe has arrived at its endgame—just over the horizon is the smashup Conrad brooded over in his 1905 essay, brought about in part by mounting tensions between European powers over their imperial dominions. Thus T.S. Eliot's use of "'Mistah Kurtz—he dead'" as an epigraph to "The Hollow Men" (1925): grand illusions end in a less than grand death.

Kurtz's greatest gift is that of language, a mastery that permits and also conceals his moral horror from himself and his misfit Russian follower as what it is. Kurtz's eloquence stands in relation to his moral horror as the idea one sets up and worships stands in relation to the ugliness of the "conquest of the earth": moral ideas justify moral horror not "too pretty" when one looks into it. His report on savage customs "made me

tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence—of words—of burning noble words” (83). Kurtz’s words lift Marlow while he also knows their nobility is anything but: “the point was in his being a gifted creature and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light or the deceitful flow from the heart of an immense darkness” (79). Marlow does justice to Kurtz in all his contradiction, Kurtz’s words at once exalted and contemptible, gripping but false, a light that also expunges the light. (In *The Ambassadors*, as we will see, Chad is a gifted master of the mere surfaces of what Strether describes as “an immense moral uplift” (168).

For Marlow, Kurtz’s final recognition of the truth comprises “an affirmation, a moral victory” (114). There is a gallantry in Marlow’s consequent dedication to Kurtz, as there is a gallantry even in Kurtz’s recognition of the horror he has inflicted: he sees in a moment of despairing knowledge, as though Conrad wanted his modern anomic hollow man to be adequate to the horror he has engendered. Kurtz himself is responsible for his moral transgression (he is “hollow at the core,” Marlow says), rather than the impersonal economic forces in relation to which he all the while lives out his moral drama (95).

Conrad’s account of imperial conquest has a touch of Jim’s archaic honor to it.

Like Kurtz, Marlow also commands an eloquent capacity for speech. But Kurtz’s language, unlike Marlow’s, is abstract. The book’s febrile urgency, with what F.R. Leavis devalued as an “adjectival insistence,” is the sound of a man gripped by knowledge, using adjectives to make the moral darkness of that knowledge visible (*Great Tradition* 198).¹⁹

¹⁹ Leavis wrote that Conrad, “feels that there is, or ought to be, some horror, some significance he has yet to bring out. So we have an adjectival and worse than supererogatory insistence” (179). Despite his negative

If conquest “is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much,” Marlow sets off by investigating what is so morally dark it does not bear examination, the hypocrisy, stupidity, greed, and brutality beneath and behind, in James’s phrase, colonialism. Reality is Marlow’s, not Kurtz’s, subject. The inner truth dictates the shape of Marlow’s narration. Lies taste like death for Marlow, and when Strether realizes he has been lied to all along, “It was the quantity of make-believe involved and so vividly exemplified that most disagreed with his spiritual stomach.” Kurtz’s untruthful abstractions are an evasion of the inner truth of conquest, the ugliness that becomes visible upon looking into it, truth and morality both bound by inescapable limits. The limiting forms through which morality manifests itself in the world as moral, and a moral commitment to truth, is one reason why America’s future in *The Ambassadors*, in the shape of the manipulator of appearances extraordinaire Chad Newsome, looks bleak.

III

Marlow travels up the Congo and meets the scion of an ivory trading company. In *The Ambassadors* Lewis Lambert Strether travels from the New World to Paris on a different sort of business errand, to retrieve back to the grim Woollett, Massachusetts Chad Newsome, the heir of a family manufacturing business of an always-unnamed “small, trivial, rather ridiculous object of the commonest domestic use” (48). Strether’s success in returning with Chad will secure his own financial future in the shape of an editorship of a literary magazine and marriage to Chad’s mother, who also happens to finance the journal. He must take Chad back from Paris, the Nineteenth Century’s Old

evaluation, Leavis does identify an insistent quality of Conrad’s writing. There is something that Conrad has *yet* to bring out, something whose recalcitrance resists the writing. Edward Said brought together the adjectivalness of Conrad’s writing with what he was attempting to make visible and clear: in Said’s account, Conrad does not possess understanding prior to the writing. His writing reaches toward a horizon of darkness, an impenetrable moral and epistemological abyss (*Autobiography* 4).

World city of light and pleasure, the “vast bright Babylon” where Chad has been hobnobbing with beautiful women and great artists and that proves the perfect breeding ground for Strether’s “depraved curiosity” (64, 72). But when Strether arrives in Paris and begins to penetrate into the inner truth, the immanent complexity on the ground, he cannot in good conscience take Chad back to Woollett.

Kurtz earns Marlow’s loyalty because of his final recognition of the truth of the horror. No less gallant, Strether delays his ambassadorial mission in discovering that the man he is supposed to bring back to Woollett has undergone “an immense moral uplift” at the hands of Madame de Vionnet, the woman who worries Woollett a great deal. Strether will sacrifice his own financial security to the truth of that improvement. When Little Bilham tells Strether he has overpaid for his portion of lunch, “‘Oh I always give too much!’ Strether helplessly sighed” (112). Strether overpays because he is, like Marlow, a belated outcast of a lapsing moral order. His gallant generosity, no less than his moral commitment to the truth, is out of step with the techno-bureaucratic world Chad forecasts.

In another turn of the screw it will turn out that the Newsome fortune, about to be augmented by Chad’s future career in advertising, the modern manipulation of appearances to the end of making money, looms over the ravage and ruins of the novel’s dark end as moral and economic darkness. Chad’s future in advertising is of a piece with the rise of US corporate capitalism, with the age of Taylor and Ford, business management and efficiency experts. Marlow discovers a heart of moral darkness to inhere in imperial conquest. Strether will uncover Chad’s “uplift” itself as mastery over appearances, an ugly Emersonianism always in transition but with nothing of substance at

stake in each new moment. Chad at first surprises Strether, for he possesses all the paraphernalia of improvement (taste, delicacy of manner, French). Strether's bafflement at his betterment, however, already suggests the pessimistic logic of his new career: Chad's mastery will turn out to have manufactured Strether's delay itself.

Chad does not see that he has any moral responsibility to the woman who has made him better. Strether shifts from attempting to bring Chad back to an attempt to persuade him to stay in the light of his realization that erotic has made Chad better but it has also brutalized Madame de Vionnet. In Strether's final meeting with her Chad is in London learning about advertising (and probably with another woman). She sees that she has lost him: "the next thing he knew he had uttered all his thought. 'You're afraid for your life!' ... A spasm came into her face, the tears she had been unable to hide overflowed at first in silence, and then, as the sound suddenly comes from a child, quickened to gasps, to sobs" (324). Characters in James novels do not often cry. Strether is struck that this woman, who earns his devotion even to the end, has been reduced to the state of a "maidservant crying for her young man" (helpless in social position and gender), her sobs racking her body and crippling her speech, the instrument of James's characters struggling into being (325).

The erotic is darker here than the narrator claims it is in *The Sacred Fount* (1901), James's previous novel that also concerns a man made better under a woman's influence. According to his theory, erotic relations incur an asymmetry of pain: from the fact that one lover has become better it follows that the other lover must be depleted to the same degree. The sacred fount offers lovers a rather profane, immoral drink. The later novel is darker in linking the brutality of Madame de Vionnet's abjection by erotic love for Chad,

and his incapacity to grasp her value, with his decision to return to America and take up advertising. The latter is the proof of the former: Chad's brutal use of a rare woman makes visible, is the proof of, the moral and economic darkness of the modern America he embodies. Like Kurtz, the vanguard of the modern, Chad fails to recognize binding moral limits and he does so in relation to a limitless power a new economic force grants him.

Strether does all he can for Madame de Vionnet, flying into action in the final section of the novel to keep everything right, pleading with Little Bilham to marry Mamie Pocock, so that Mamie, sent over to lure back the wayward scion, cannot herself marry Chad. But his gallant task emerges as quixotic. It is at this moment in the novel that his tone becomes bitter, weary, and angry, harrowing his consummate wit, the sign by which the other characters know him as Strether.

I want here to turn back briefly to the lunch Strether shares with Madame de Vionnet half-way through the novel. Back in London, Strether had felt the need for explanations for dining with Maria Gostrey. Now, however, "he had either soared above or sunk below them," and the raw physicality that surrounds him seems to make its own answer: "How could he wish it to be lucid for others, for any one, that he, for the hour, saw reasons enough in the mere way the bright clean ordered water-side life came in at the open window?—the mere way Madame de Vionnet, opposite him over their intensely white table-linen, their *omelette aux tomates*, their bottle of straw-colored Chablis, thanked him for everything with almost with the smile of a child" (178). That is the tone of enthrallment, of giddy pleasure revealed in the elegance of a simple lunch. Richard Poirier wrote of this scene and that of the transfiguration of Gloriani's face as instances

of James's building, in the title of his book, a world elsewhere, this world not sufficing his American writers because it is for them "as if history can give no life to 'freedom'"

(5). Scenes like this one burn with Strether's attempt to take hold of an immanent beauty the terms of which are not bound by his task as Mrs. Newsome's ambassador, (at the same time, they are also not pleasures that betray that task). It is as though James was keen to preserve something of the experience of Paris's beauty for his character above and beyond the revelations in the novel's close.

Yet, it seems to me that Strether's final scene with Madame de Vionnet reveals this earlier scene to be a half-truth, to be not true enough, to be even a little precious. From the revelation in the countryside to the novel's close, reality will meet Strether as ugliness, as poverty, abjection, aging, cruelty, and, above all, money, not as the ineffable charm of a bottle of wine. Bottles of wine are not less real than brutalized lovers necessarily. But Strether is enjoying his by not seeing something else, by opening himself to a truth (lunch in Paris with a beautiful woman who he finds so remarkable he crucifies his own life for her) that conceals a darker and peremptory truth. In James, the truth will always out. Madame de Vionnet accuses Strether of not wanting to see the ugliness of it all, replying to his assertion that "I never think a step further than I'm obliged to" by saying "That's perfectly false, I believe...except that you may, no doubt, often pull up when things become *too* ugly; or even, to save you a protest, too beautiful" (326). If things were too beautiful, they would compromise Strether's ambassadorial role. Too ugly, they would compromise his taking things as they come, keeping the sky clear of explanations. In fact, these closing pages are presenting something of a crisis for James's form, as that form is embodied in Strether's curiosity.

Chad's moral darkness upstages and diminishes Stretherian curiosity. Matters devolve in their final meeting, where Strether has now become Madame de Vionnet's ambassador. Climbing the stairs to Chad's apartment in the artists' quarter of Paris where he does not so much live as stays as a long-term tourist, Strether comes to have "a final rather breathless sense of what Chad's life was doing with Chad's mother's emissary. It was dragging him, at strange hours, up the staircases of the rich; it was keeping him out of bed at the end of long hot days; it was transforming beyond recognition the simple, subtle, conveniently uniform thing that had anciently passed with him for a life of his own" (335-36). There is a hint of the acerbic to Strether's finally defeated sense of Chad. Strether is not one of the rich whom he thinks of here with spite and whose staircases he climbs late at night. His sole purpose in seeing Chad is to tell him in no uncertain terms that "'You'll be a brute, you know—you'll be guilty of the last infamy—if you ever forsake her,'" deepening the charge in convicting him in taking such a course of action as "a criminal of the deepest dye" (338). But this is not warning so much as prediction ("He protests too much Strether tells Maria in the novel's last pages). As they are winding up their conversation, Chad explains that while he has been away, and without a word to Strether, he has been learning the "art of advertisement," the art of increasing profits (341).

The conversation about advertising following on the heels of the one about Madame de Vionnet, the taint of the latter becomes visible in relation to the moral issue of the former.

Advertising scientifically worked presented itself thus as the great new force. 'It really does the thing, you know.'

They were face to face under the street-lamp as they had been the first night, and Strether, no doubt, looked blank. ‘Affects, you mean, the sale of the object advertised?’

‘Yes—but affects it extraordinarily; really beyond what one had supposed. I’ve been finding out a little; though it doubtless doesn’t amount to much more than what you originally, so awfully vividly—and all very nearly—that first night put before me. It’s an art like another, and infinite like all the arts.’ He went on as if for the joke of it—almost as if his friend’s face amused him. ‘In the hands, naturally, of a master. The right man must take hold. With the right man to work it *c’est un monde*.’ (341)

The master echoes James’s own title, but Chad’s smug grandiosity and haughty cool is chilling: the whole world advertising can create is like the whole world of a novel but without the complexity of which Chad is incapable. Without limits, the modern man smashes moral form apart just as he is about to embark upon the modern art of accruing money. Chad has enough money from his grandfather upon which to live, so necessary money is not at stake. What is at stake is rather demonic unrestrained Kurtzian power that brushes aside the limits of the moral. In his essay “The Manners of American Women” (1907) James linked the American woman’s lack of manners, of limiting forms for behavior, to advertising: “Then it is that he seems really to possess his subject! For it [criticism of manners] is forestalled to begin with, by Advertisement, on a new scale that is a new thing under the sun, and that not only takes the wind out of the critic’s sails but blows all there is of it straight back into his face” (*Culture* 73). Advertisement deflates the critic’s activity, object of criticism acting with impunity by reabsorbing the critical

energy first addressed to it in a modern dialectic (one that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer would later in the century dub the “culture industry”).²⁰

The impunity of advertising and the money it makes possible delegitimizes the authority of the moral form that would require Chad to stay (Chad is a moral abomination and he is also the inevitable course of the future). Money, not Madame de Vionnet, turns out to be Chad’s only consideration: “There at any rate the fact is—the fact of the money in it.” “Oh damn the money in it!” said Strether. And then as the young man’s fixed smile seemed to shine out more strange: “Shall you give your friend up for the money in it?” (342). Of course Chad will give her up for the money in it, his “fixed smile” amused and arrogant. Although he agrees to stay with words that have proven worthless, Strether’s final comment to him is that ““You’re restless,”” but unlike James’s description of himself in *The American Scene* as the restless analyst, Chad’s is the restlessness of the modern hollow man (346). James has opposed love for a titled Old World woman, whose house echoes for Strether with the romance of the French Revolution, to a form of modern American money that has outstripped the tradition that woman incarnates.

Strether leaves worse than when he arrived, having lost his financial position. Thus his grim brooding about his future “impoverishment.” He is a failure the terms of which make him a success in being the opposite of Chad. Marlow finds that lies taste like death. Strether risks a great deal defending the truth of what he sees as Chad’s “moral uplift.” He is no less gallant now in maintaining that his only way out is a moral one, that he must go, as he explains to

²⁰ For instance, in the volume of essays *The Culture Industry*. James shared with Adorno a horrified despair at what they both understood to be the uniform regimentation and pernicious domination of a technocratic culture industry. *The Ambassadors* looks forward to the full-fledged mass culture Adorno addressed. Both men, heirs of merchants, moved among the highest cultural spheres, their alienation from the mass culture of twentieth century life legitimated by positions of authority within those spheres.

Maria Gostery, another rare woman who has just told him that “‘There’s nothing, you know, I wouldn’t do for you’” (346). She can do nothing for him that would not compromise his moral integrity: “He had got it at last. ‘To be right.’ ‘To be right?’ She had echoed it in vague deprecation, but he felt it already clear for her. ‘That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself’” (346). Strether will define being right as understanding in the right manner. His renunciation entwines concomitant and coincidental moral and epistemic coherence, his ability to perceive permitting moral clarity. Clarity of vision keeps Strether straight. “‘Then there we are!’ said Strether” (347).

IV

The novel has concluded and Strether has gotten his tone back. But moral and economic darkness loom. *The Ambassadors* despairs about the futureless future of America, the dark continent of modernity and money on a new scale that has emerged as James’s new topic. Unrestrained economic forces as a causative factor of moral crisis is central to James’s densest novel, *The Golden Bowl*, and to Conrad’s massive panorama about the creation of a new nation in the New World, *Nostromo*. Published in the same year, these works culminate each author’s apprehension of the moral crisis of modernity. In the background of both is the rise at the turn of the century of the US as an overseas empire, perceived by James and others, including his brother William, as the betrayal of the American republic for economic interests.

Nostromo is a tale of moral degeneration in relation to the unlimited power of the San Tome silver mine (another of Conrad’s stories of the extraction of natural resources). Silver has in that novel rearranged moral structures in the modern world. Conrad tells a

modern story: that of a province become a nation through a revolt financed by the US and in the service of international economic interests. His novel was based in part upon the manufacturing of Panama, in which the US, in order to link trade routes in the Pacific to those in the Atlantic, would play a pivotal role. The creation of Panama occurred in the wake of the US's rising imperial ambitions and its aggressive claim to dominion over South America with the 1895 Venezuela Boundary Dispute. At the beginning of the novel the American financier Holroyd coolly prophesies the United States ruling the world as if by the decree of destiny: "And then we shall have the leisure to take in hand the outlying islands and continents of the earth. We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not. The world can't help it—and neither can we, I guess" (58). Holroyd's smug certainty and self-satisfaction are sure Conradian indications of his moral corruption.

Conrad's tale of moral decline is told not only in Nostromo's theft of the silver but also in the character Charles Gould. Gould returns to reclaim the San Tome silver mine in order, with Holroyd's financial assistance, to redeem his father's bitter life, destroyed by the mine. In the end Gould realizes he has been "vanquished in a lifelong struggle with the powers of moral darkness, whose stagnant depths breed monstrous crimes and monstrous illusions" (259). Instead of Gould possessing the mine, the mine possesses him. In this moment Gould, like Kurtz, confronts his moral illusions in realizing his own dominion over the mine has engendered moral darkness (there is a kind of moral imperative at work in both cases, in that Conrad does not let either one exit without confronting his own moral transgression). Gould's commitment to his father's

memory, and his moral struggle itself, has become irrelevant in the impersonal, corporate economic order he helps to bring about.

Strether incarnates a process of knowledge. But his moral coherence depends upon his lack of money: his pennilessness ensures his powerlessness. In *The Golden Bowl* the moral coherence of Strether has been swallowed into the abyss of moral darkness Chad Newsome's American money suggests. James named his wealthy American character Adam, even as Adam's fortune unravels the innocence of the America his name seems to typify, as though he wanted in this novel to return to a vision of America no longer available—indeed, if Adam's name is almost crude in its schematic quality, the schema strains and cracks. *The Golden Bowl* recorded James's loss of America as the second Eden and his loss of Europe as well. In the writing of his novel James realized that endless money requires nothing beyond itself to legitimate itself. Adam's fortune now defines legitimacy, not the title of nobility he acquires through Prince Amerigo, the buying of the title at the novel's opening a transfer of legitimacy. At the end of the novel Adam is set to return with his collection of expensive objects, including his wife, to American City. His journey west follows the historical consolidation of the US into the 20th century's dominant imperial power. In *The Golden Bowl* James discovered that Adam Verver's world was leaving behind Henry James's world.

Adam's daughter Maggie, when she begins to suspect of the adultery between Charlotte and the Prince, will make it the central goal of her immense moral passion never to let Adam eat of the fruit of knowledge, never to let his Eve take him from Eden. At the same time, in Maggie, the Jamesian elaboration of knowledge becomes a limitless void for the exercise of a power granted to her a priori by her money. The drama of

James's reflective characters' realization of knowledge has itself become a moral darkness as Maggie wields the difference between what she knows and what she knows the others know of her knowledge. The American girl, a type in James's fiction from his earliest writing, has become a moral monster. By means of her unlimited money Maggie wields a "merciless manipulation" of the impoverished *sposi* who are the "yielding beneficiaries" of her father's fortune and thus are at her mercy (399). Strether takes nothing for himself; Maggie takes everything. Maggie's lack of apprehension for the means (Charlotte and the Prince) to her moral end (keeping her father from knowing) converts that same end into moral darkness.

In "The Manners of American Women" James worried that the American woman recognizes no social norm for her manners, therefore assuming "the formidable care of extracting a conception of the universe and a scheme of manners from her moral consciousness alone" (*Culture* 110). Maggie's money is as limitless as her American sense of an individual morality that arises "from her moral consciousness alone." Her unlimited money legitimates her boundless moral passion to keep her father away from knowledge. But without such a boundary Maggie's moral sense veers in the direction of the breakdown of morality, and for the same reason that Kurtz's moral ideas concerning "love, justice, conduct of life—or what not" lay waste to morality: without the guidance of form—the structure put in place by possibilities within limits—nothing maintains the integrity of morality, and prevents the moral from collapsing into the absence of the moral.

As James and Conrad's despair about the modern world deepened, they both attempted to return to the gallantry of characters such as Marlow and Strether, but their

counter-reaction to the moral darkness of modernity with redoubled efforts to attain moral clarity becomes as well formal reduction. Marlow reflects that he might have died along with Kurtz but did not: “I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more. Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is—that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile reason” (112). Marlow’s loyalty to Kurtz is an aspect of a merciless logic not his or his to arrange. In this way he is unlike Axel Heyst in *Victory: An Island Tale* (1915), who typifies Conrad’s later characters in that he is capable of arranging his moral life to his own purposes. Heyst is a Swedish baron with a “distant courtliness” and a “system of restless wandering,” a rudderless “man of the last hour” (190, 72, 282). His father was a philosopher whose character Conrad seems to have based on Schopenhauer. Heyst is the son of the “destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs,” an arch pessimist who bequeaths to his heir not a place in the world but rather a negation and cessation of life (137). Still, Heyst possesses an impeccable moral sense: in the course of the novel he attempts to save two lives at great cost to himself. In both cases he fails, but the failure heightens his moral stature.

Heyst’s moral clarity is a gallantry that is the extreme version of Jim’s gallant mourning for his honor and Marlow’s fidelity to Kurtz. Schomberg, a callow, selfish German hotelkeeper (whenever Germans and Russians appear in Conrad the Pole’s fictions they are criminals or idiots) sends the false gentleman Mr. Jones, his lackey Ricardo, and their barbarian servant to Heyst’s island in revenge for Heyst’s safeguarding the desperate Lena, whom Schomberg himself covets. All of these men are Heyst’s moral opposites, but equally clear in their moral composition. The leader Mr. Jones claims to possess “breeding” and “tradition,” but of course he is the evacuation of tradition (300).

He defines himself as “an outcast—almost an outlaw,” so that he is the mirror image of Heyst, but also his sinister, unthinking opposite (296). Heyst is an outcast who would never become an outlaw, Mr. Jones an outlaw whose common criminal nature makes him a lesser version of Kurtz. James’s never completed last novel *The Ivory Tower* (written 1914, publ. posthumously 1917) shares with Conrad’s *Victory* a desire for moral clarity.

Newport was the occasion for one of the unhappiest chapters in the whole of *The American Scene*. In combined tones of outrage and nostalgia, James described the mansions of the new wealthy there as “white elephants” that were a moral abomination he likened in a grotesque passage to the violation of a young maiden. In *The American Scene* James despaired about the moral and economic corruption of Newport, an index for him of all that had been lost in America, yet he set his next major novel there. Graham Fielder, an American brought up in Europe, returns to Newport to see his dying, wealthy uncle Mr. Betterman. Gray enters a world ruled and defined by money but, a moral gallant with a prodigious knowledge of European art, he lacks any understanding of the ways and means of acquiring or wielding money. Gray, a strand of light in a dark and corrupted place, is as moral through and through as Heyst and has not an acquisitive particle in his being. Both characters are incapable of a single immoral action, as though Conrad and James were drawing the battle lines of an epic: Achilles facing Hector. Like Gray Heyst is as good as he is helpless and ineffectual. He burns in the conflagration at the end of the novel, when he sets fire to his house to die with the woman he loves but could not save from murder by Mr. Jones (a rather sentimental Conradian story). Like Heyst, Gray is a moral hero who possesses an inflexible nobility of character.

Gray enters America from a mythical land known as Europe. *The Ivory Tower* cleaves to Europe as the only alternative to what has emerged as the dark continent of America, even as it had become apparent already earlier in *The Golden Bowl* that with unrestrained modern pecuniary forces James had lost both America and Europe. It follows with logic of tragedy that James broke off work on the novel with the First World War, the catastrophe that ripped up by its roots the European world of moral convention and inherited social forms.

In his lecture “The Argentine Writer and Tradition” Jorge Luis Borges compared the position of the Argentine writer in the South American cone, at the margin of the European world, to the position of the Jewish writer in Europe and the Irish writer in England: both understand themselves to be outside the dominant culture, so that they “act within that culture” while by virtue of their marginal position they are not bound to the dominant culture and thus able “to make innovations” in it, their position at the margins allowing for the emergence of major works in both cases (426). Borges illuminates why Conrad and James’s status as outsiders was one central reason their work addressed the pressures of history with such urgency. James and Conrad typify how the innovation of major modern writers and the development of new genres often emerge out of wrenching historical dislocation. They were outsiders to England from the edges of the European world whose literary projects arose in relation to this doubled situation of being at once internal and external, “homo duplex” as Conrad described himself in a letter (*LJC* 3: 89). They wrote with prescience about mass killing and the ruthless extraction of natural resources on the one hand, and the rise of US imperialism and corporate capitalism on the

other, because they looked on at what was for them the horror of modern moral life with contempt and despair from a now residual vantage point for moral assessment.

Both writers calibrated the emerging misery of the twentieth century with surprise, outrage, and terror. But they both cleaved to old moral norms even as they realized in writing their fiction a new world that had rendered them archaic. Thus, this chapter attempts to press back against contemporary criticism that celebrates Conrad as our contemporary because he wrote about terrorism or celebrates James as a writer who embraced the flux of modernity.²¹ I have no interest in endorsing nor in denouncing James and Conrad's politics because their crises were not our crises, their values are no longer our values, and their loss is not our loss. To understand their historical difference from us is the crux of their interest: in reading them we read epistemological artifacts from what is now another historical epoch.

The next chapter resumes with *The Golden Bowl*, further exploring the implications of its Conradian character Bob Assingham who is peripheral but also central to the novel's own understanding that all arrangements are, as Bob suggests, "pecuniary arrangements." Maggie Verver's limitless modern fortune dissolves the moral coherence of James's innocent American girl type. In Maggie the Jamesian reflective consciousness itself wields knowledge to the effect of what are at best morally ambiguous ends.

²¹ For instance, for accounts of Conrad our contemporary who addressed terrorism and imperialism in ways that are important because we can see reflections of our own moment in his writings see Anthony Fothergill and J. Hillis Miller. For an account of James as a writer who embraced the flux of modernity see Ross Posnock, *The Trial Of Curiosity*.

Chapter 2: Money and Morality: *The Golden Bowl*

I

A colonel in the British army, an agent of the British Empire, Bob has experienced what few James characters have: “He might in old bewildering climates, in old campaigns of cruelty and license, have had such revelations and known such amazements that he had nothing more to learn” (87). The Jamesian epistemological project for the novel end in the arranging power of money and the violence of imperialism. Beyond such imperial violence, used to secure European economic interests abroad, there is nothing more to know. Knowledge ends at the end of James’s career, as if he were here responding directly to Conrad. James’s fiction moves toward an impasse when brought in relation to contemporary economic forces and “cruelty and license.”

At the end of James’s career, his fiction is awash in money as a literary subject and a moral and historical problem. *The Golden Bowl* is the most elusive, most evolved, and least penetrable of his novels. Formal fulfillment and historical difficulty develop in his late phase in relation to one another. The most wrought of his fictions is also the most unsettled. The implications of this mutually emerging complexity in James’s late prose presents several important implications: Money, in the shape of large American fortunes (the Newsomes, Millie Theale, Adam Verver, and Frank Betterman), drives the succession of novels and tales towards increasingly irresolvable crises. James’s fiction was most realized at the moment when historical forces became for him most troubling, discordant, and recalcitrant. The expansiveness and ambition of the major phase works cannot be separated from a new uneasiness about the contemporary world.

These works in fact *depend* on the difficulty of historical understanding that arises in them. James's fulfillment as a writer emerges simultaneously with a deepening disjunction in his fiction between history and the capacity of form to take hold of it. The fulfillment of writing proceeds in parallel to radical historical change. In *The Golden Bowl* American good nature is most morally ambiguous, most problematical and dark. Moral darkness, historical complexity, and an extreme kind of formally innovative writing all occur in conjunction to one another.

When the formal properties of writing are most exploited, most developed and wielded, literature does not retreat from the world but on the contrary knows to the furthest ends of the world, to an account of reality that does not stop at logic's opposition of p or not p, but beyond, into a vision that can include them both at once. *The Golden Bowl* is a literary culmination, and it articulates a historical culmination. It is an instance of how literary form meets up with radical historical disorder in moments of catastrophe and transformation.

Bob and his wife Fanny don't see life in the same terms and enjoy very much discussing the issue, the sparkle of their banter the only note of humor *The Golden Bowl* has to offer. Fanny will for her part continually take cognizance in the best Jamesian manner, continually revising her account of things as the recalcitrance of reality presents itself, so that she is at once a creature moral and intellectual. She in fact tells Bob that, "stupidity pushed to a certain point *is*, you know, immorality. Just so what is morality but high intelligence?" (101). But by the end of the novel it will not be at all clear that Bob's jaundiced view is not right. Nor will there be any moral position that is not so compromised as to make it only dubiously moral—Maggie is moral and intelligent and

she is also immoral, the implosion of morality. To be an end-setting moral agent, conscious and responsive to the world, in this novel, is to inhabit an incoherent, debased, morally compromised position in the world. To be in *The Golden Bowl* is to be compromised.

This includes Fanny, who will come to realize her own misjudgments and miscalculations, who will see how she was off the pace, as they say in European football, in understanding what's happening. Because of what she doesn't know and understand, she will incur moral problems for herself due to what she has unknowingly brought about, and this despite the fact that she goes on the best account she has, that at every moment she strives to get her account of things right. When she comes back from the ball at which Charlotte and the Prince are alone together, "It almost resembled a return from a funeral – unless indeed it resembled more the hushed approach to a home of mourning. What indeed had she come home for but to inter, as decently as possible, her mistake?" (242). Fanny's is a mistake of understanding, of the capacity of intelligence (and hers is of a very high order) to take in the world, for the understanding to be equal to what it encounters. She has not been able to judge, to realize, to see. As Maggie comes closer to understanding, Fanny sees the depths of her own compromise—it will look as though she has gotten something out of the marriage for herself, "an equivalent, of a kind best known to myself, for me shrewdly to consider"" (413). She has not gotten anything of the kind, but that does not allow her to escape compromise. In *The Golden Bowl*, money renders Maggie's moral passion incoherent, and it does so in relation to, in resonance with, an accelerated unraveling in both America and Europe.

The Golden Bowl is a novel built up of discrete intervals, durations, and modes of understanding among a limited set of characters. Yet, it is also a novel in which knowing, articulate, and intelligent characters are frustrated by what is beyond their apprehension. The Prince and Charlotte, Adam and Maggie, as well as Fanny, all see up to a certain insurmountable point and no further, each of them moving through what James described in relation to Maggie as “accumulations of the unanswered” (334). James does not dismiss or stand above any of these characters’ understandings, but works out the shape of their knowledge from within it, handing authority to each discrete moment and aspect of that understanding. Knowledge emerges here as itself formal—structured, shaped, and bounded within historical processes. I want to examine in this chapter the way in which in this novel radical moral problems accrue all around in relation to the limits of knowledge. The intricate link between the limits of knowledge and the concomitant incoherence and limits of any moral position distinguish this, the last great completed novel in James’s career, from the earlier succession of novels that at the same time led up to it, a point I will elaborate below.

By the moral I mean what Robert Pippin describes as central to James’s sense of the tenuousness of moral life in the modern world, the

experience of a tension or conflict between one’s own advantage or interest and either the advantage or interests of others or the rights and entitlements of others to consideration (most controversially, to equal consideration). The moral question in general is always some version of the question: Why should I ever suspend in some way the pursuit of my own interests...for the sake of another’s interests or claims of entitlement? (24)

How do end-setting beings judge, evaluate, and act as moral agents when they are living through a transition beyond “moral frameworks and categories and typologies within which intelligible human engagement and understanding were formerly possible” (35)?

One essential contribution Pippin’s book makes to James studies is to suggest that James was a writer peculiarly responsive to modern historical forces. For Pippin, James was not recoiling from modernity, trying to control his authorial image or trying to offset the force of the market by creating the “art novel.” In his far more nuanced understanding, James’s writings proceed from within history, grapple with history, and offer an understanding of historical forces shaping the contemporary world. His writings are not static, but develop dynamically in relation to a dynamic history: “James is not the ahistorical, apolitical novelist of sensibility he is sometimes made out to be. His setting is as broadly ambitious as it can be. It concerns the fate of a secular, capitalist, broadly materialist, wholly new form of civilized life, and the link between such a new form and our struggle to understand and evaluate each other” (34). For Pippin, James’s work manifests an engagement with a historical transformation in Europe and America concerning the moral realm, a transformation that had engendered deepening complications in categories of moral evaluation and judgment due to the “increasing unavailability of what we used to be able to rely on in interpreting and assessing each other, on the new role of money and the social mobility it made possible” (11-12). I would only add that such problems of assessment develop across James’s career in fiction, develop at the end into what in *The Golden Bowl* might be described as the crisis

of mutual assessment. In contrast, as I hope to show below, the characters in *The American*, concerned with a similar subject, are available to moral assessment.

If James's great subject is moral life and moral conflict, as Pippin has argued, this is a novel of moral collapse. At the end of his writing career, James wrote what was perhaps his most intense fiction of moral scrutiny, but in which he also wrote his way to the limits of the moral. This developmental aspect is key for me. I am interested in tracing out here how the terms of the novel work toward an understanding of the terms, how the writing of the novel arrives at the end at an irresolvable moral contradiction, sees its way toward a kind of morality that is also immoral.

Florence Goyet's thinking is crucially useful here. Goyet argues that the epic arises as a response to moments of radical historical disorder by providing an intensity of order, a rigid opposition of categories: Trojan and Greek, Oliver and Roland. But as the work proceeds these categories are subject to complication, reversal, and disorganization as it thinks through the politics of its moment to a political reality not yet in evidence. For Goyet, the epic thus provides a mode of thinking about contemporary historical reality, what she calls "thinking without concepts," available nowhere else. The epic begins by providing oppositions that attempt to provide order, but these oppositions evolve along the way out of opposition, precisely because literature does not provide static wholes, but discrete movements, not wholes but parts that accumulate as a development in thinking and comprehension. Hector, for instance, will be the victor in *The Iliad* in that the values he embodies will triumph in looking forward to Athenian democracy. It seems to return to the organizing and clarifying terms of *The American*, French Ultramontanes on the one

hand and an American Protestant new man of a remarkably good nature on the other, even as it does no such thing.

In James's late period of revision and review, as his writing fulfilled its own possibilities, problems of knowledge and morality, which are tied to developments in his historical and economic understanding, become most resonant. This chapter concerns how assessment and judgment of others in this novel depends upon one's social, historical, and, especially, economic position. Knowledge of others is immanent to the possession or, on the other hand, the lack and of wealth. Morality is an issue of knowledge, and money and morality are inseparable.

This moral crisis of money includes, perhaps especially, Maggie. She emerges as a character who is quite simply morally irresolvable. In Maggie, knowledge, morality, and cruelty come together, so that what is fundamentally at stake in this novel is a definitive disarticulation of epistemology and morality, ethics and aesthetics, categories that, as we will see, *The Ambassadors*, written just a few years earlier, brings together seamlessly. Maggie is the most moral of James's characters and the most morally repellant. She is compromised, not because she is immoral but because her limitless money converts her moral consciousness into moral monstrosity. Her economic position gives her awakening to knowledge and the inflexibility of her moral sense of outrage a total authority. Adam and Maggie alike see and act in moral terms and their moral status is unquestionable.

The shape of Maggie's vision, what she sees and also what is beyond her apprehension, is always structured and facilitated by the brutal force of her money, around which the other characters shape their lives and discrete social positions. If

knowledge and morality are bound together, above both aspects “pecuniary arrangements” brood and hover with a suffocating forcefulness. Maggie and Adam have between them acres of money. Charlotte and the Prince have no money, and they understand themselves to follow the forms imposed by Adam and Maggie, fulfilling and shaping themselves to the roles for which they were bought.

If no one will ever know what Adam Verver really knows, Maggie will not know the inward development of Charlotte and the Prince’s understanding of what they are in the Ververs’ lives for—that the closeness of father and daughter gives them no other options. (Fanny’s own knowledge will also be limited: “Of course it’s I who have been, and who continue to be cheated – cheated by the Prince and Charlotte” (412). Her sense of developments is both limited and ungenerous, though the very possibility of generosity does not seem available to her). Maggie’s money gives her vision the strength of success. She is wronged in her understanding, seeing in moral terms of the most stringent, blinding light. Which is not to say that the novel condemns Maggie and excuses Charlotte and the Prince. Rather it is written in such a way that it works from within the endlessness of its own materials—in negating neither the Prince and Charlotte’s vision nor Maggie’s vision, the writing makes visible their irreconcilability. By excavating and investigating the aspects of the germ from within the germ, the novel discovers these problems of morality, knowledge, and money.

The moral unraveling of *The Golden Bowl* apprehends this accelerating history entering an endgame. The novel seems to insist on what James’s secretary Theodora Bosanquet, before Pippin’s account, described as his fundamental moral drama: “When he walked out of the refuge of his study into the world and looked about him, he saw a

place of torment, where creatures of prey perpetually thrust their claws into the quivering flesh of the poor, defenceless children of light” (57). Bosanquet’s dramatic description is not more dramatic than many of James’s novels—she is quite accurate, I think, in naming as James’s fundamental subject these opposed terms, moral light against arrayed forces of darkness.

In *The Golden Bowl*, however, the opposition does not hold, morality itself becoming a kind of moral darkness. The terms are familiar, but the understanding of the terms the novel realizes is not familiar at all. James’s late moment of return to America was a moment of radical revision. In this novel, the organizing elements of the earlier fiction have become related to immanent processes of transformation—an Old World Prince in a new empire, New World money from a changed and changing United States, and a formulation of morality new in James’s writing in that it interacts with and indeed directly shapes an immanent social drama. Maggie Verver is a moral being who, in the very act of wielding her moral commitments to bring about a desired result, becomes deeply morally compromised. The compelling discovery at the heart of the novel is that morality itself becomes a historical category for James (as opposed to the earlier Maisie, a comparison I will take up again later), taking shape against a transforming historical backdrop even as its accumulation of power brings it through to the other side of the moral. *The Golden Bowl* is a novel of interrelated moral, historical, and epistemological crises, all of which emerge formally.

The Verver fortune controls every turn of the plot and every crisis that arises. Money broods over the novel, pre-empting “moral and intellectual reaction.” Money shapes the social, epistemological, and historical possibilities of all of these characters—

as if at the end of his life Henry James became, contra Jameson's reading, a dialectical materialist, or that the end throws into relief the long process of James's deepening understanding of emerging economic forces, an understanding that spans the arc of his entire career. In the midst of its moral-epistemological crisis, and indeed as a part of that crisis, *The Golden Bowl* returns to the allegorical, organizing terms of the earlier *The American*, as though it is attempting to return to return to an earlier vision of America as the second garden of Eden, all the while realizing that vision is no longer available. Adam's Adamic lack of knowledge has become uncertain in moral terms. In the fragment *The Ivory Tower*, money comes to kill James's writing.

James was late in his career, his life, and in the nineteenth century world of both his native and his adopted countries when he wrote *The Golden Bowl*, which opens late in the summer. His withdrawal from American values was concomitant with a return to America in his fiction, which he had brought into its own late phase with the most elaborated, self-responsive, omnivorous voice, a novel in which all the characters sound alike, all of them developed tools for the writing. A novel that returns to the past of America and turns to the future bigness of the nation as well ends with a trip of return. Adam and Charlotte, at what is ultimately Maggie's decision, go back to American City, the heart of a dark continent. Fanny Assingham envisions Charlotte "as thrown for a grim future beyond the great sea and the great continent" (540).

James's late writings attest to a darkening Conradian vision of the modern world. The erotic realm of *The Sacred Fount* (1899) is a vicious depleting of one person's resources by another. Generational inheritance becomes an ugly discontinuity in *The Spoils of Poynton* (1895) and in *What Maisie Knew* (1897) domestic structures are

breaking apart at the joints, no longer able to accommodate and structure lives. *The Golden Bowl* culminates James's pessimism concerning the categories of modern life. If there is a disturbing suggestion of incest in the closeness of daughter and father, it is most powerfully understood in this larger context in James's fiction, in which domestic relations are coming apart all over the place (son and mother provide a no less happier picture in *Spoils*).

America at the turn of the century was passing through a radical transformation, no longer the province of England James had described in his *Hawthorne* (1879), while the British Empire was felt to be entering its late stages, the former soon to replace the latter as the leading world power. The American landscape was changing with industrial growth and its geography was changing, the country expanding into the Caribbean and the Philippines in order to secure trade routes and protect investments such as those in sugar. The late stages of the imperial division of the world by Europe as a causative factor in the collapse of the First World War was on the horizon.

James was a different writer at the end of his career and he returned to a changed and changing America. If America was developing into an industrial and imperial force, England was also in a moment of transition.

II

On November 1, 1899 James wrote to his brother William that, "There is something sinister in this S.A. disaster—& it scatters gloom, & these next days, or weeks, will be nervous" (*CWJ* 3: 92). On January 26th, 1900, he wrote to Mrs. Everard Cotes that, "there is nothing cheerful to talk of. South Africa darkens all our sky here, and I gloom and brood and have craven questions of 'Finis Britanniae'? in solitude" (*LHJ* 1:

348). James was referring in both letters to the British Empire's annexation of the South African Boer republics in second Boer War, partly as a response to the recent discovery of large gold deposits there. There was a contemporary sense that the war, the first that England had fought with a European rival since Waterloo nearly a century earlier, marked a vertiginous moment for the Empire, coming significantly at the end of the century. According to Ronald Hyam, the conflict became "the most important and divisive war of Empire since the loss of the American colonies, a difficult and humiliating conflict" (48). James's letter indicates a pessimism afoot that the Empire might have reached its last stage, giving "the death blow to the optimistic idea that that the Englishman was the born ruler of the world" and that the "days of an expanding Empire were over" (48, 51).²²

The Boer War produced shockwaves of uncertainty about the future of the Empire. The conflict was also seen as rash, autocratic, and a debased pursuit of commercial interests, betraying what critics claimed to be the true ideals of British imperialism. This was an inaugural moment in the relation between the Empire and its citizens that not always could "imperial expansion always be had on the cheap" and that "there was no guarantee that the process of imperial conquest would provide a glorious or edifying spectacle" (Judd 156).

²² The end of the empire seems to have long occupied James's mind. In a letter to Grace Norton, dated January 24th, 1885, he described the precarious situation he found England to be in: the Fenian Brotherhood, "Irish dynamiters" as James described them, had set off bombs in Westminster Hall and the Tower of London, there was an "ominous want of news" from Sudan (a few days later Charles Gordon and his garrison would be defeated by the Mahdist army), and a "general sense ahead in the foreign relations of the country." He went on to say that, "The possible *malheurs*, reverses, dangers, embarrassments, the 'decline,' in a word, of old England, go to my heart, and I can imagine no spectacle more touching, more thrilling and even dramatic, than to see this great precarious, artificial empire, on behalf of which, nevertheless, so much of the strongest and finest stuff of the greatest race (for such they are) has been expended, struggling with forces which, perhaps, in the long run will prove too many for it" (*HJL* 3: 67).

There was as well a humanitarian outcry against the scorched earth policy of burning Boer farms and the concentration camps, which this war had the distinction of introducing to the world, in which Boers and African natives alike were interred and in which over 20,000 inmates died (Wilson 612). Chinese laborers were imported to the region to mine the gold and lived in slum-like conditions, depicted in billboards in England as a form of slavery for which British soldiers had perversely died (Tuchman 354, 351). The war, in short, “devalued the moral content which the imperialists liked to attach to the cause of Empire” (Tuchman 354).

If the British Empire had reached a crisis, the United States was quickly emerging into an ascendant position, “manifestly an expanding power, and the new economic giant” (Hyam 58). In fact, “by the 1890’s the U.S. had passed Britain as the world’s leading industrial power” (Phillips 34). The post-Civil War era saw the base of economic power in the country shift from “the slave-owning South to Northern financiers and industrialists” (Phillips 296). Alan Trachtenberg described this moment as the “incorporation of America,” which names a new aggregation of persons and resources: the formation of universities, vertically and horizontally integrated businesses, run on principles of systematic management known as Taylorism, and unions. His term also refers to a broader standardization and bureaucratization across the spectrum of economic, political, and social life.²³ The railroad and the telegraph provided the means

²³ For other accounts of this moment of cultural, economic, and social shift see also Robert Wiebe’s classic *Search for Order: 1877-1920* (1966); Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (1984); Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (2001); and Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age 1865-1905* (2005). For an argument concerning the widespread and deep effects of imperialism on American culture, indeed an argument that the domestic and the foreign, the empire abroad and the local America, the rigidification of racial categories in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* and the specter of “nonwhite citizens from abroad” (9), are mutually constitutive, see Kaplan *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*.

to bring together the “loosely tied parcels of diverse sections” of the country (Hirschfield 75). Henry Cabot Lodge declared that “The tendency of modern times is toward consolidation” and that the US needed to secure and extend its base of power by gaining a naval station in Cuba or a neighboring island in order to compete with European nations (qtd in Kinzer 104). A.T. Mahan wrote in 1890 that industrialization led to competition for markets, so that the increasing productivity of the US and the subsequent demand for new markets would produce the need for a powerful navy (Lafeber 88).²⁴

The new industrial order in America was one with “many large-scale enterprises operating all over the country” (Calhoun 12). The vast, unprecedented fortunes of the new plutocrats such as Rockefeller and Carnegie were accumulated in steel, iron, coal, oil, and railroads, fortunes that “rested on near-monopolies and combinations, some of them tariff-supported” (Phillips 253).²⁵ The story is told in Standard Oil’s growth, worth 1 million dollars when capitalized in 1870 and 300 million dollars at the turn of the century. The stock market and investment banking evolved in order “to make it possible to funnel so many millions into single enterprises” (Porter 19). Wealth production and concentration of the kind the Ververs possess and the “centralization of the economy through industrial combines, corporate monopolies, and trusts” were twin phenomena (Phillips 43). As the nineteenth century progressed, “The New World increasingly

²⁴ On the other side of the Atlantic, Germany was also rapidly industrializing, expanding its navy, and challenging for imperial possessions—(its conflict with France in the Agadir and Tangier crises, for instance, was part of the tightening imperial fabric that led the way to the collapse of the First World War). Germany tells a story analogous to America at the same historical moment. According to Painter, in fact, the American navy “was designed to counter the buildup of German naval strength” and to stop Germany from preventing American access to the much-vaunted markets of China (148). Secretary of State John Hay’s Open Door Notes would demand from European powers (and later Japan) the assurance of access to markets with their spheres of influence (Cashman 351-52).

²⁵ The rapid accumulation of industrial and financial fortunes in America was experienced as a seismic shift in the fabric of the country. American money stood in contrast to England, where the majority of fortunes were inherited from one or more generations (Hobsbawm, *Capital* 146).

confronted Europe not as the new society, but as the society of the newly rich” (Hobsbawm, *Empire* 137).

This domestic economic revolution was intertwined with commercial and imperial expansion abroad. A desire for foreign markets and a sense of a national mission were factors in launching the United States as an international imperial power in the company of European nations. In the Venezuela border dispute of 1895, the US claimed that the Monroe Doctrine extended to the entire South American hemisphere and demanded that England accept a US appointed commission to settle a border dispute between British Guiana and Venezuela. Henry James was shocked by the ensuing bellicose attitude America took and by the threat of war. In a letter to William he wrote of how “the absolute war-hunger as against this country—is a thing to darken one’s meditations. Whence, why does it, to-day, explode in such immense volume—in such apparent preponderance, & whither does it tend?” (*CWJ* 2: 383). William responded in kind: “The good name for being a *safe* country that 80 years has gained for us is squandered in 3 days and we are now as *dangerous* to the world as anything since Bonaparte’s time” (*CWJ* 2: 384). But what William called in another letter to Henry “The wanton jingo talk” was nothing compared to what was right around the corner (*CWJ* 2: 385).

The Spanish-American War of 1898, ostensibly fought on behalf of Cuban independence, was the US’s “awakening to an expanding world in which it had a major role to play,” a watershed moment in its transformation into the center of empire, when, as William James, wrote, the US was “in the trough of the sea between its older and its newer conceptions of its mission and possible destiny” (Painter 142, *CWJ* 3: 36).

Subsequently, the US established a protectorate in Cuba, a military occupation in Puerto Rico, Guam, and, after intense fighting with the independence movement that had previously struggled with Spain, the Philippines, while the annexation of Hawaii followed, all of which “gave notice of a broad redefinition of American interests” (Brands 35). These actions would secure US commercial investment in Cuba, gain control of trade routes to China, establishing coaling stations on the way, and protect a proposed canal through Central America in a nation shortly to be manufactured for the purpose. In short, the war and its aftermath consolidated “American dominance of the Western hemisphere” and a future of “expanding American power and influence” (Porter 215). 1898 looks directly forward to 1916, when the US would enter the First World War in a bid to shape world affairs (Strachan xvii).

Brooks Adams connected the movement of empire west with the movement of centers of trade. But he claimed that the US could offset the subsequent decay threatening America and maintain economic supremacy by way of centralization, the control of markets in Asia, and the development of the martial spirit (the antidote to the enervating greed and dishonesty of the finance class), which he found in Theodore Roosevelt (Lafaber 84). In his 1903 book *The New Empire*, Adams would make the definitive claim that, “The seat of energy has migrated from Europe to America” (xi).

If Lodge, Mahan, and Adams found the emergence of America into a position of imperial, and therefore martial, power inevitable, salutary, and even necessary for the salvation of the country, many in James’s milieu reacted to overseas expansion as burdensome, as dangerously integrating alien races into the nation, and as the tragic passing away of the democratic ideals upon which the republic was founded (Andrew

Carnegie was a member of the Anti-Imperialist League because he feared that imperialism would threaten the American virtue of individualism).²⁶ James's long-time friend Charles Eliot Norton, also a member of the league, declared that in the war and its aftermath America "lost her unique position as a potential leader in the progress of civilization, and has taken up her place simply as one of the grasping and selfish nations of the present day" (qtd in Brands 27). For James also, the event signaled a catastrophic change in America's position, the degradation of its value. He wrote to William that, "we have ceased to be, among the big nations, the one great thing that made up for our so many crudities, & made us above all superior & unique—the only one with clean hands & no record of across-the-seas murder & theft. *Terminato—terminato!*" (*CWJ* 3: 63). In his response, William concurred: "'Terminata, terminata,' indeed is our national soul" (*CWJ* 3: 63).²⁷ James was apprehensive that the Boer War might have signaled the end of Britain. America, he wrote in this letter, had also reached a termination, but of a different kind.²⁸

²⁶ James was horrified by what was on the historical horizon in the wake of the congressional resolution for war, as he explained to William. "I confess that the blaze about to come leaves me woefully cold, thrilling with no glorious thrill or holy blood-thirst whatever. I see nothing but the madness, the passion, the hideous clumsiness of rage" (*CWJ* 3: 28).

²⁷ Other figures who responded to the war in this way include E.L. Godkin, editor of "The Nation," Mark Twain, who satirized the rhetoric of self-determination which surrounded public discourse about the war, as well as James's lifetime friend William Dean Howells (all of whom were part of the Anti-Imperialist League). The latter closed a letter to James, dated July 31, 1898, with the rueful remark that "Our war for humanity has unmasked itself as a war for coaling stations, and we are going to keep our booty to punish Spain for putting us to the trouble of using violence to rob her" (Anesko 311). Economic gain revealed a latent violence, and violence was pressed into the service of economic goals.

²⁸ However, James was ambivalent and contradictory on the issue of expansion. In a letter to his nephew, Henry James junior, he wrote that

Expansion has so made the English what they are for good or for ill, but on the whole for good that one doesn't quite feel one's way to say for one's country "No I'll have none of it !" It has educated the English. Will it only demoralize us? I suppose the answer to that is that we can get at home a bigger education than they in short as big a one as we require. Thank God, however, I've no opinions not even on the Dreyfus case. I'm more and more only aware of things as a more or less mad panorama, phantasmagoria and dime

The mutually accelerating forces of imperialism and industrialization were both resources and means of economic and national consolidation and expansion. They resonate in William's statement to Henry that "The day of 'big'ness—big national destinies, political parties, trade combines, newspapers, is sweeping every good principle and quality out of the world" (*CWJ* 3: 50). Big business, big fortunes, big organizations, and a big nation with a big military became the American order of the day. James contested Theodore Roosevelt's casting of the national consciousness as "at the best a very fierce affair" in James's review of Roosevelt's *American Ideals and Other Essays Social and Political* (1897). In that review James addressed this new bigness in America: "We may have been great fools to develop the post office, to invent the newspaper and the railway; but the harm is done—it will be our children who will see it; we have created a Frankenstein monster at whom our simplicity can only gape" (*AW* 664). The Frankenstein America was changing at a pace and in such a way as to make it somewhat incomprehensible. The logic of the passage implies that only future generations would be able to "see" it at all, as opposed to gaping in a prior kind of "simplicity," as if the future generation of this moment will become habituated to the Frankenstein. This passage registers a historical disjunction between persons and their lived moment, as if history had accelerated beyond them.

William and Henry were witnessing not the termination of America, but of the American republic with which they were familiar. "The self-contained, rural and small-town white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant America" into which the Jameses were born was fast becoming a thing of the past (Hirschfield 78).

III

The looming decline of the British Empire; the passing away of the rural American republic in the midst of consolidation, industrialization and mechanization; the consequent gravitational pull of the center of trade and finance west; America's emergence into an overseas empire; and, finally, the disintegration and reformulation of domestic and social mores within this changing imperial and economic background—it is within this historical context that James returned to Americans and America as the subject of his fiction after a 20 year hiatus. The last novel dealing with the subject was *The Portrait of a Lady*, (1881). In fact, James's return to America as his subject in *The Ambassadors*, the first of his last great novels, was a dramatic move, one that was so obvious we need not take it for granted, as Wittgenstein might remark. Going back to America and Americans abroad was a turn to the past as well as to the future, the calibration of historical change. James's turn back follows the course of his own writing in his great period of review and revision, and it also follows the course of history as the center of world power shifted west. Historical change became salient for James at this moment, rapid historical transitions newly definitive of a world becoming unrecognizable.

To clarify all of this, I want to go back, as James did in *The Golden Bowl*, to an inaugural moment in his career and then go forward, touching briefly on several seminal representations of American money. These shifts in representation also marks shifts in James's understanding of America, from Christopher Newman's aesthetic tourism to Adam Verver's aesthetic imperialism. This review of some of James's earlier fictions will make salient how writing is itself a means, an activity, of knowing, so that the

discrete representations of America across James's career trace as well a non-teleological historical epistemology in the arc of James's career as a novelist.

IV

Christopher Newman, the discoverer of Europe, the American of *The American* (1876) the allegorical new world man, has had one aim in life, "simply to wrest a fortune, the bigger the better, from defiant opportunity. This idea completely filled his horizon and satisfied his imagination" (32). He has made his money, though not in railroads or banks (he is not quite so base as an industrialist or a financier would make him), but in clean business of selling washtubs. Now that he is in possession of a fortune, he sets off for France. Newman's journey began in fact with a voluntary loss of money, so that already in the second chapter James separated the terms of his character from money. Having the chance to exact revenge to the tune of sixty thousand dollars on someone who had done him a wrong, Newman foregoes the opportunity. "The idea of losing that sixty thousand dollars, of letting it utterly slide and scuttle and never hearing of it again, seemed the sweetest thing in the world. And all this took place quite independently of my will, and I sat watching it as if it were a play at the theatre" (34). Newman renounces his financial pursuits and the power of revenge at once, the power of will not even involved in his renunciation, so that he is doubly insured against wielding power. In short, Newman has enough money for freedom and for a future wife, but possessing money is not morally compromising.

That first renunciation builds the way toward a second, for in Paris Newman again has the opportunity to exact revenge. The ghoulish and nasty Catholic, Ultramontane Bellegardes, the noble family of the woman he becomes engaged to, decides in the end to

reject him, and the woman enters a Carmelite convent. Newman comes into possession of proof of a family secret of murder. But he decides not to cash in on the secret. Even after he tells M. de Bellegarde his plans and is left alone in his rooms he says aloud to himself, “Well, I ought to be satisfied now!” (288). Clearly, revenge was never going to satisfy him (if it did, it would bring him close to being a monstrous character), and after a vigil in Notre Dame, the cathedral in which Strether will happen upon Madame de Vionnet, he renouncing revenge: “Whether it was Christian charity or unregenerate good nature—what it was, in the background of his soul—I don’t pretend to say; but Newman’s last thought was that of course he would let the Bellegardes go” (306). If Newman has acted out of Christian duty, then there is behind his renunciation an act of will. On the other hand, if his renunciation can be explained by his unregenerate good nature, his quest for revenge is a perversion of his unchanging being. For Newman to renounce revenge out of his prelapsarian nature means events would have had this outcome, so that he has not made a decision, has not even had the power to renounce power. Newman rejects the opportunity to take anything out of the affair for himself.²⁹

The possession of money does not implicate Christopher Newman in the moral problems the novel concerns. Quite the opposite, for Newman is defined by his ability to surpass the business instinct that has brought him the money to come to Europe. The

²⁹ Until the ending, when the question of whether Newman has done anything at all rises to a sharp irony. When, after burning the incriminating piece of blue paper, Newman’s confidante Mrs. Tristram tells him the Bellegardes knew all along he would not act on his information because they could count on his good nature. With that, “Newman instinctively turned to see if the little paper was in fact consumed; but there was nothing left of it” (309). In turning, Newman’s revenge becomes realized as an actual possibility. To be aware that his renunciation was predicted undercuts the meaning of the renunciation. Newman’s instinct to turn and see if the paper is gone and the good nature Mrs. Tristram invokes are mutually exclusive. In the one case Newman’s nature prevents him from acting, whereas in the other he cannot prevent himself from acting. In the one case Newman cannot be separated from his good nature while in the other he takes on a complexity that cannot be contained within, or explained by, that goodness. When he looks back at the piece of paper, he examines his choice to burn it *as a choice*. Newman’s act of turning to see if the letter is gone revises his act of burning it.

French Catholics are vicious, cruel, and self-serving. If Newman is a little naïve, he is altogether of a good nature. Money does not burden him with the consequences of possessing and wielding the power that money confers (it is central to the novel that nothing threaten his moral integrity).

Throughout *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Isabel Archer does not ask for, work towards, or expect the 60,000 pounds Mr. Touchett, at Ralph's insistence, leaves her. Henrietta Stackpole disapproves, but not because Isabel will be prone to luxury: "I mean your exposure on the moral side" (238). To the arts of deception Isabel is a total stranger, and her moral exposure comes in the form of handing over the freedom her money confers to one adept at control and appearance. Gilbert Osmond is a nastier character than the Bellegardes, and he embodies a far more serious threat of moral complications. He is perhaps the most odious aesthete in all of James's fiction, that small-minded type who loves art the wrong way around because he does not distinguish it from life. Where Newman comes out unscathed, Isabel finds herself in a state of ruination. In the pivotal Chapter XLII, she reflects that, "There were certain things they must do, a certain posture they must take, certain people they must know and not know. When she saw this rigid system close around her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, that sense of darkness and suffocation I have spoken of took possession of her" (463). Isabel's awareness is at its fullest in this chapter, her understanding in direct proportion to Osmond's arrangements. His arranging is of a high quality, like a tapestry, but she is only a piece within it, is not herself an arranger. Newman also comes to realize a wrong done to him, but it never threatens him with this gravity. Money causes Isabel suffers in a way that it does not for Newman.

There is a yawning gap between what Isabel's life appears to be and what it is, the tapestry and the inescapable system. The freedom money was to confer has facilitated Osmond's monstrous means of totalizing his authority. Isabel is not to have an independent existence because Osmond allows for nothing outside himself. She is entwined with a man who lacks the recognition of the claims of others, the "proper account of the results of one's actions on others," as Pippin puts it. This is the distinguishing feature of Jamesian morality, and a measure of Osmond's odiousness (7-8). Still, like Newman, Isabel is not herself a causative agent of moral wrong. The "rigid system" inflicts itself upon her; in these lines, and indeed in the whole chapter, she does not act, her will not in question.

Taking cognizance, knowing to the full extent of what can be known, is in James's fiction an act of high morality. To know well in James is to take account beyond epistemic foreclosure of other, end-setting beings. When in *The Ambassadors* Strether comes to Paris, he sees Chad is different from what he knew and expected, getting a handle on the newly complex reality he encounters. He thereby accedes to Chad as an end-setting being and delays his ambassadorial mission. In the background of the novel is the Newsome fortune and business, built upon the manufacture of an unnamed, small object. It is, Strether says, "a manufacture that, if it's only properly looked after, may well be on the way to become a monopoly" (47). It's a thriving business whose scion needs to be brought back from Paris. As I argued in Chapter 1, Chad will indeed go back to America and to the business, ready to use advertising, that most modern form of shaping appearances. The Newsome fortune hangs like a black cloud over the novel, Strether's attuned delay in tension with their business ethic. In this novel of return (both

for James and the characters), America has become a dark place ruled by the money-passion. The discordant note America comes to have in this novel is measured by Chad's sister's rejection of Madame de Vionnet's offer to show her around Paris: "'I *know* Paris,' said Sally Pocock in a tone that breathed a certain chill on Strether's heart" (220). Her statement is of course a measure of her ignorance.

From wanting to bring Chad back, Strether comes to think Chad must not leave, that the moral course is for him to stay with his lover Madame de Vionnet. It turns out, however, Chad is not even worthy of her, has become only ambiguously better. Strether comes to have a "final rather breathless sense of what Chad's life was doing with Chad's mother's emissary. It was dragging him, at strange hours, up the staircases of the rich; it was keeping him out of bed at the end of long hot days" (335-36). There is real deflation here, an acerbic, unsatisfied tone. Strether is certainly not one of the rich, whose staircases he climbs at odd hours. Strether's pennilessness, which makes him powerless, is crucial to his moral coherence. When he leaves Paris at the end of the novel, he leaves having witnessed a drama of moral darkness in which the erotic involves abjection, seeming transformation is managed appearance, and economic power looms like a black curtain signaling an end to the novel and a dark future across the Atlantic. The Newsome wealth is the deciding, active agent in the novel, the directing and shaping force. Strether will come to see and know better, but really nothing and no one can alter the juggernaut of the Newsomes: there is no answer to Sarah Pocock. From *Portrait*, money has become a more powerful force of moral darkness. In the novel in which James first returned to America, there is a marked complication of American values. Where the Bellegardes are monstrous and murderous Catholics, the titled Old World woman

Madame de Vionnet has made Chad better, her seduction having worked to positive effect. The French Catholic and the enterprising American businessman have switched positions in a moral reversal. Strether returns to a sterile continent of moral and economic darkness. If America is the future, there is no future there for Strether.

But still, Strether can leave in a moral position very much like Newman's and Isabel's. He tells Maria Gostrey at the end that he must leave "'To be right.' "'That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself'" (346). Staying in the right is for him what burning the paper is for Newman, a renunciation of one's own interests. Strether gets things right by not being in the wrong. His omnivorous cognizance is such that he knows what would at once make him wrong and would also limit his knowledge. Strether has witnessed an episode of moral, economic, and erotic darkness, but he works out a relation to the situation such that he will depart on a firm epistemological and moral footing—intelligence means morality for him, Fanny's dictum that stupidity is immorality when pushed far enough seen from the other side.

V

In *The Golden Bowl*, this moral and epistemic coherence is nowhere to be found. Strether *chooses* to go back to America, albeit Woollett is a place of no promise. But Strether himself is full of promise and possibility. Adam Verver and Charlotte, on the other hand, are a sterile couple with no heir and no possibility, she says, of one. Maggie has engineered their return, and American City is a worse place to return to than Woollett, west of the Mississippi but east of California, a very dark place in James's geography. There is no choice in Charlotte's return and no future to which she looks. No

one in the novel has a choice or the possibility of one. There is no social or moral position that is not beset by moral problems following upon choice. Charlotte is heading towards internment, barrenness, death. Her return signals the grim coming true of the ambiguous joke in the first scene of the novel between the Prince and Maggie, in which she says that he, unlike Adam's other treasures, won't be buried "Unless indeed you call it burial to go to American City'" (50). Charlotte's trip to American City might just be her death.

Money, money accumulated in excess and for itself as the means and the end, spelled for James the end of America as he had known it. If James's late work sometimes reads like one long sentence that re-opens its subject with a relentless revision, turning from dash to semi-colon, from one evolving, dependent clause to another, from one underdetermined, agnostic formulation to another awaiting an influx of new and unexpected evidence, money is the abrupt period to that sentence. Money negates the significance of the Jamesian development of consciousness and thus of the moral and formal drama of the writing. In fact, *The Golden Bowl* discovers that what it means to know arises from within specific economic and social positions. Money, in the form of Adam Verver's fantastic fortune, shapes the limits, possibilities, and meaning of knowing. Epistemic and moral positions emerge in this novel as depending upon economic positions. American innocence, in the shape of Maggie Verver (herself a revision of earlier versions of James's American girl type), is mutating into a kind of moral darkness. American money, which in James's earlier fiction had been benign, becomes suffocating and demoralizing. America had been the initial inspiration for James's late work, but then, overwhelmed by what James's powerful late style

discovered, that subject matter undid the writing. The culmination of James's art was also its dissolution.

As *The Golden Bowl* is a dense and obscure book, a quick summary will be helpful. The novel tells the story of a wealthy American, Adam Verver, now retired from the unnamed business that gave him his money, and his daughter Maggie, who have been collecting European artifacts for a museum in a grim place in the Midwest named American City. Maggie marries one of those artifacts, the aptly named Prince Amerigo. Adam, in order to assure Maggie that he really is all right without his daughter (they are peculiarly close), marries an old friend of Maggie's, Charlotte Stant. By a twist of fate, Charlotte and the Prince were once almost lovers, just before Maggie and he first met. The novel's first half revolves around the question and development of Charlotte and the Prince's relationship—they understand themselves to serve Maggie and Adam's needs, like servants or beautiful objects in the Verver collection, by keeping to one another in an adulterous relationship. But they are not self-serving in justifying actions that are clearly wrong. Their actions are not clearly wrong. Their understanding is real, actualized in the novel's formal commitment to knowing only through its characters, and their understanding conflicts with Maggie's view in irreconcilable contradiction.

The second volume of the book revolves around Maggie's awakening understanding and her relentless program never to let Adam know anything is amiss, including her suspicion that something is amiss. But in this novel about adultery, adultery is not quite the issue. *The Golden Bowl* revolves not around the adultery between the Prince and Charlotte, nor even around the knowledge Maggie gains of the adultery, but rather around the meaning of the knowledge of the adultery. Everything happens in *The*

Golden Bowl—the marriage of a daughter and a father, adultery, suspicion, and a final return home for the father and his wife. Everything happens, but nothing seems to happen, each scene and chapter concerned with speculation and dialogue that attempts to achieve understanding even as the facts continue to elude each character, including Maggie, who nevertheless believes that nothing has eluded her initial discovery.

The other important characters in the novel, Fanny and Colonel Bob Assingham, to whom I will return later, are also trying to understand what is happening. Fanny, a friend of Maggie's and the crucial causative factor in both marriages, is herself a return and revision of earlier of James's female characters, such as Mrs. Tristram and Maria Gostrey, who engineer the plot and attempt to apprehend what is happening. Fanny possesses consummate intelligence and wit, and her husband is perhaps the character in the novel who sees with the greatest degree of penetration (she and Bob are the only funny characters in the novel, and the ability intentionally to create humor gives them a certain authority). But so difficult of access is knowledge in this novel, not even Fanny and Bob can understand. She is, as they say in European football, always off the pace, always catching up, out of synch, realizing what she has missed. The novel is about understanding, and its sentences embody and record a process of its own understanding, carried out through the instruments of its characters and the probing, questioning, puzzled narrative voice. The characters in *The Golden Bowl* all sound alike and all sound like the narrator because narrator and characters alike are instruments of investigation through whom James came to perceive a moral darkness to inhere in his American subject-matter.

The Ververs are Americans with money, meaning they go to Europe, as indeed historical Americans with money did in the nineteenth century. This American

dependence on Europe for its social customs and cultural traditions, including novel writing (James understood himself to be writing in the tradition of Balzac and George Eliot more than in that of Hawthorne), was James's subject and it comprised part at least of what he meant when he wrote in an 1872 letter that, "It's a complex fate, being an American" (*HJL* 1: 274). James was not of the Ververs' milieu, but he shared with them a position of expatriation, so that his subject was to a degree a self-reflexive one.

James was an expatriate American in England, and he wrote the majority of his important works about Americans in Europe.³⁰ The Americans of James's early fiction, as I suggested earlier, are *good* Americans. In the wake of America's developing imperial expansion, a disillusioned bitterness and skeptical irony emerges into James's depictions of wealthy Americans, including Adam Verver, a reincarnation of Newman who likens himself to a Cortez discovering Europe's collection of old artifacts, his wife's passing a blessing as "No companion of Cortez had presumably been a real lady" (141).³¹ Adam's instrumental use of other people, particularly of Charlotte, strains against *The Golden Bowl*'s simultaneous, contradictory emphasis on his American innocence and good nature. Adam seems a good-natured man, generous and kind to his daughter and grandson and even to female visitors after his hand in marriage, to whom he is just, "a kind of justice he was always doing somebody" (131).

³⁰ For instance, James's first two major novels, *Roderick Hudson* (1875) and *The American* (1876-77) tell the story of an American's journey in Rome and Paris, respectively. *Daisy Miller* (1878) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) are both about American girls having an unhappy time in their respective stays abroad in Europe. James returned to writing about Americans in Europe with the trilogy of late novels—*The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

³¹ James claimed in his preface to *The American* that the book was false because impoverished French aristocrats would obviously marry into American money. In Maggie's marriage to the Prince (whom he originally planned to be French), he seemed to have revised what he understood to be the earlier novel's lack.

But despite passages like the above, it is Adam's moral standing that is hard to pin down, as though his justice were not unreal, but also not true enough. His name is an allegorical embodiment of America as a second Eden.³² It would seem impossible to miss the meaning of his name—the innocent who lacks knowledge. But the meaning of not knowing is just what is most elusive about him, and, indeed, knowledge in James's late work is always a necessary component of morality. Morality was for James a formal category in that one is moral for James only in recognizing the forms that guide and limit one's course. Yet, Adam's name insists on its bald allegorical clarity. The ambiguity of Adam's allegorical name shows more than it says, or than can be said about it.³³ What does it mean to be Adamic in a novel that despairs about Adam? The alienated despair of James's late fiction, emerging by way of its formal refusal of conclusion and closure, is illuminated when considered in relation to another writer who would seem an altogether unlikely match. Yet it was James who was Conrad's central living reference point, and, though no writer emerged unscathed from James's criticism, he in turn read Conrad's work with enthusiasm and praise.³⁴

³² America as a second Eden is a familiar trope in Americanist literary criticism, what Henry Nash Smith, for instance, described as virgin land in the title of his book and what Richard Poirier described as the "visionary ideal of America" (*A World Elsewhere* 53). See also Smith, *Virgin Land*.

³³ The bald convention of the novel emerges as well in Maggie's discovery that the Prince and Charlotte saw the bowl together on the eve of her marriage. She happens into the same store, the owner happens to feel guilty, comes to her house, sees a photo and recognizes the Prince and Charlotte. It would be hard to imagine a more baldly engineered means of recognition. The writing of *The Golden Bowl* is in this way all on the surface while it is also all in its depths.

³⁴ For instance, James wrote on Conrad in one public venue, the essay "The New Novel" (1914). James found Conrad's "prolonged hovering flight of the subjective over the outstretched ground of the case exposed" to obscure the matter in the end, a perverse criticism from a novelist committed to ambiguity of meaning brought out by what might be described as the hovering of subjectivity (*AW* 149). Despite James's praise, Conrad was wounded, writing in a letter after James's death that, "I may say, with scrupulous truth, that this was the *only* time a criticism affected me painfully" (*LJC* 5: 595). This awkward exchange speaks to the social distance between the two writers, a distance attested to by Lady Ottoline Morrell, who recalled

The Golden Bowl is, like *The Ambassadors*, a Conradian fiction in that it was his most pessimistic, unresolved vision of America as a dark continent made dark by immense money. As I argued in Chapter 1, James's late writings evolved toward a Conradian view of a modern social order both rapacious and violent. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is a story about material interests carried out with absolute power, under the illusion of humanitarian ideals. Marlow's encounter with Kurtz is an apprehension of the edge of knowledge, a final possibility of the cruelty of economic might. Kurtz and *The Golden Bowl*'s Maggie Verver are perhaps the most fulfilled of Conrad and James's characters: the full elaboration of self-deceiving power on the one hand and a knowing, perceiving consciousness on the other hand. Kurtz and Maggie wield economic might. Maggie converts the very ability to perceive into the ability to deceive and shape others' knowledge into a coercive force. Consciousness was the vehicle of curiosity, the cardinal Jamesian virtue. In Maggie Verver, however, James pressed consciousness so far it follows an arc that bends toward irresolvable moral ambiguity. The full formal elaboration of Kurtz and Maggie Verver is concomitant with the irrecusable moral tensions each incarnates. The moral complexity that inheres in Maggie Verver is irresolvable. Hers is a moral perpetration that is also a moral program. In a similar way, Kurtz's stacks of ivory permit him the monstrous, violent imposition of humanitarian ideals that become, in the very strength of his conviction, dialectically converted into their opposite.

in a memoir that she expressed admiration for Conrad's writings to James as well as a desire to meet him. "Henry James held up his hands in horror, and was so perturbed that he paced up and down the grey drawing-room... 'But, dear lady...but dear lady...He has lived his life at sea'" (*Joseph Conrad: Interviews and Recollections*, 27). James seems to have been perplexed and intrigued by Conrad, describing him, according to Edel, as that "poor queer man" (*The Master* 49). For an account of this awkward distance, see Ian Watt, "Conrad, James and *Chance*."

Conrad and James both insisted that the writing of fiction was an instrument of seeing, of knowing.³⁵ In Chapter 1, I brought *Heart of Darkness* together with *Ambassadors*. Here I bring it together with *The Golden Bowl* to chart James's further development toward the heart of darkness. If *Heart of Darkness* is Conrad's *The Golden Bowl* is perhaps the most capacious incarnation of James's endeavors to exploit the epistemic capacities of form farthest. It embodies as well his most pessimistic version of the moral abomination of unrestrained money, money accumulated in America, then brought to England to transform that money into wealth. Wealth is what money becomes for James within established social and cultural traditions. Money is brute force, and wealth is money transformed into the form of social power and cultural heritage.

VI

The recitations of Conrad's embedded narrators often recall encounters with what was most obscure, most recalcitrant to knowledge—Marlow's journey to the heart of darkness was, he says, "the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience" (7).³⁶ Conrad's stories are often about the unlucky, unhappy shock of an

³⁵ For instance, James rejected Shaw's injunction that James needed to give his play a clear message. Works of art, James claimed, "are capable of saying more things to man about himself than any other 'works' whatever are capable of doing—and it's only by thus saying as much to him as possible" that art is not a "a base and illusive humbug" (*HJL* 4: 513). Jehlen has argued in *Five Fictions in Search of Truth* that James's late formal invention was a means of understanding, his invention a means of discovery. For his part, Conrad wrote in his preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* that, "To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task. The task approached in tenderness and faith is...to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment" (*Fiction* 162-63). Fiction arrives at truth by concrete means—movement, color, form. The world exceeds the writer, who grabs for a piece, a fragment.

³⁶ Said suggested that the relation of the tale has to do with Conrad's sense of the worldiness of his own writing, its entanglement in other lives. Thus, Conrad attempts to undo the condition of writing, "using prose negatively for the transcendence of writing and the embodiment of both direct utterance and vision" (*The World, The Text, and the Critic* 109). Said accounts for Conrad's narrative structure literally. It is as if one were to argue, as indeed some have, that trompe l'oeil painting attempts to defeat the conditions of its own work and achieve a status of immediacy. In arguing against this kind of literalism, John Hyman has noted that if this kind of painting, which produces objects in exact proportion to the objects they represent,

encounter with the unknown, with the darkness, a word of simultaneous moral and epistemic dimensions. Conrad was obsessed with the moment when his characters confronted the limits of their own knowledge, with the process of its disintegration or rupture. This moment often forces a reckoning with what is so morally dark it resists comprehension. Violence seems always to shove his characters beyond cherished and preconceived ideas that become visible only when lost. What Conrad's characters know is at the extremity of James's vision of modern wealth—in that in the violence, nation building, and imperialism of Conrad there is not a continuous social fabric beneath which cruelty and power abides. There is only cruelty and power unleashed in their most violent guise. There is no retreat or escape from the cascading effect of material accumulation, from disasters engendered by and through the ivory Kurtz gathers.

“Things do not stand much looking into” is a kind of ironic motif that recurs with grim familiarity in *The Secret Agent* (145). Conrad's fictions often examine what does not bear examination. The phrase occurred earlier in *Heart of Darkness*: “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to” (7). When you examine the hidden reality of imperialism, you see an idea whose invention is obscured by the practice of worshipping it. “Kurtz had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort,” ideas that are established and bowed down before as though they were timeless and inflexible (31).

were intended to produce an illusion, “The play element would be lost and the enjoyment of skill and virtuosity, which trompe l’oeil cultivates and caters to, would be frustrated if it were true” (132). Similarly, Conrad exploited the possibilities of his narrative framing as writing.

The idea is false because it obscures its origins, ideology, in a word. The feverish tone of those sentences is that of a man in the grip of truth. The tone deflates the conquest of the earth into a taking based on arbitrary criteria. Marlow sees the idea, but he also sees the truth of the idea in the act of negating its pretence. He has seen worship of the idea so fanatical it becomes the inversion of the idea, a catastrophe.

Kurtz's monstrousness is inseparable from his seemingly enlightened purpose, just as his tract on exerting the power of good on the savages ends in the appended outburst "Exterminate all the brutes!" (51). Kurtz justifies his extremity by an abstract idea disconnected from the immanent actuality of his extractive imperial venture (his abstract principle is akin to the abstract moral principles that guide Maggie's moral program). "There was," Marlow says, "nothing either above or below him—and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces" (66). Kurtz authorizes and legitimates Kurtz. In carrying out a moral program from himself alone, with no limiting check or barrier, Kurtz has destroyed moral form. Kurtz—painter, a reciter of poetry, and a master of loquacity—embodies Europe's implosive demise as rapacious aggression: "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (49). Marlow speculates that Kurtz's knowledge of his own lack of restraint "came to him at the last—only at the very last" (57).

Kurtz's final moment is one of consciousness, of self-consciousness, and therefore a reckoning, an accounting. Kurtz's final moment is indeed one of apprehension:

"Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was

fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of somber pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath:

“‘The horror! The horror!’ (69)

Kurtz’s summation embraces his own moral story. It is, as Marlow says, a “moral victory” because Kurtz understands the horror he has himself engendered. When Kurtz’s knowledge extends farthest to include in its purview the horror of his degradation and transgression, it is then that he becomes a moral being. Kurtz’s moment of supreme knowledge is a review and compendium of his own life.

Kurtz in his final moment sees the meaning of his own story. It is a moment of radical discontinuity synonymous with apprehension. Kurtz’s final knowledge shatters the moral idealism that has guided and governed him (the way Maggie’s relationship to the others around her is shaped by her understanding of her own innocence). As in James’s novel, the most capacious awareness, the most extensive vision, is a vision of moral darkness. In the moment when Kurtz’s vision reveals his life to himself in every moment of its “desire, temptation, and surrender,” he has arrived at the complete knowledge, the encompassing view, James and Conrad sought in their writing.

Kurtz knows himself anew, instantiating a seeing of connections, a full grasp, and in that moment he understands. But Kurtz had all along, until his last, late moment of reckoning, understood himself as having come to the Congo “equipped with moral ideas

of some sort” (31). Kurtz comes into concussive contact with the Congo he plunders, his altruism the very means by which he lives out his annihilative story—ideals in Conrad quickly becomes their opposite in this dialectic of conversion. What Marlow understands as “the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern” Kurtz has given expression to in “a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman draped and blindfolded carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber—almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was almost sinister” (25). Kurtz is an artist of a kind, and in his sketch he shows the progress of the light of western culture entering the darkness. Yet, the figure itself appears sinister in its illumination by that very light.

Kurtz’s boundless lack of restrictions and limits in his implementation of pity, science and progress converts them into their opposite. In Maggie and in Kurtz, moral intensity becomes immoral, and in both cases it does so in relation to endless economic resources accumulated and wielded with unrestrained blitheness, the Ververs’ fortune and Kurtz’s ivory permitting a boundless lack of limits. All Europe has made Kurtz, and Kurtz’s making is a final unmaking of moral bonds and boundaries. All Europe has made Kurtz, and Kurtz embodies all of Europe and its cultural traditions arriving at its culminating moment of lateness.

In the one essay Conrad wrote about James, “Henry James: An Appreciation” (1905), there is a set of passages whose intriguing ambiguity stands out in a piece whose very title declares its admiration. The ambiguity resides in a sense that Conrad, despite his fulsome praise, found James’s characters too morally scrupulous, too removed from the darkness. “Mr. Henry James,” Conrad claimed there, “is the historian of fine

consciences” (*Fiction* 87). Earlier in his essay, Conrad observed that James’s “personal contests” are “adventures in which only choice souls are ever involved” (85). Only choice souls can be fine consciences. They display a tendency to reject where others would never think of doing so: “To most of us, living willingly in a sort of intellectual moonlight, in the faintly reflected light of truth, the shadows are so extraordinary that their rejection offends, by its uncalled-for scrupulousness, those business-like instincts which a careful Providence has implanted in our breasts” (88). The phrase “business-like instincts” refers to the bottom line, the material of money. They are the shadow of the truth rather than truth itself (here we might recall Conrad’s own Jim, who is gallant in never abandoning his high-toned version of honor), the thing for which James’s heroes opt in rejecting. Yet, most of us, Conrad implies, are too coarse for the fineness; we are indeed offended by James’s characters’ renunciation. Conrad’s essay was published close to *The Golden Bowl*, a novel in which James’s fine conscience emerges into moral monstrosity.

In *The Golden Bowl*, Strether’s moral and epistemic coherence is nowhere to be found. James introduced a character to the novel rather like Conrad’s narrators, and, in particular, rather like Marlow, Bob Assingham, a man whose critical eye is as sharp as it is pessimistic. When, for instance, Fanny tells him that the Prince and Charlotte did not have time to consummate their love he responds by asking ““Does it take so much time?”” (90). Bob sees the long and the short of things, a version of Strether injected with Marlow’s dark knowledge of the excesses perpetrated in an absolute lack of limits. In his “Notes” for *The Ivory Tower*, James wrote that the Bradhams would serve the function the Assinghams serve in this novel—the characters who clarify, or try to clarify, what is

happening. In the case of the Assinghams “it was the wife who had the intelligence and the husband was in a manner the fool” (300). But Bob is a fool in the in the sense of a Shakespearean fool, one who tells the harsh and bleak truth.

Bob’s penchant to see all matters in terms of “pecuniary arrangement” is in the end the most capacious vision. Bob is the character in the novel closest, perhaps, to James. Indeed, epistemic and moral positions emerge in this novel as depending upon economic positions. *The Golden Bowl* incarnates something like a Jamesian version of historical materialism. As a figure who embodies an ultimate knowledge of cruelty, license and pecuniary arrangement, as a figure of imperialism suggesting a culmination to a Europe having arrived at its own late moment, Bob seems to be James’s explicit response to Conrad. His critical, corrosive, far-reaching sight undermines Maggie and Adam’s blithe American way. Bob has a habit, particularly in the first volume, of making comments whose cutting tone is an indication of their penetration. At a crucial moment in the novel, Fanny comes to see that the issue of form is at the heart of the relations among the quartet, form being, she says to Bob, two thirds of conduct.

Is it form that’s keeping Charlotte away with the Prince at Matcham an extra day?

‘Yes – absolutely. *Their* forms.’

““Theirs” - ?’

‘Maggie’s and Mr Verver’s – those they *impose* on Charlotte and the Prince. Those,’ she developed, ‘that so perversely, as I say, have succeeded in setting themselves as the right ones.’

He considered – but only now at last really to relapse into woe.

‘Your “perversity”, my dear, is exactly what I don’t understand. The state of things existing hasn’t grown, like a field of mushrooms, in a night. Whatever they, all round, may be in for now is at least the consequence of what they’ve *done*. Are they mere helpless victims of fate?’

Well, Fanny at last had the courage of it. ‘Yes – they are. To be so abjectly innocent – that *is* to be victims of fate.’ (314-15)

Maggie and Adam assume themselves without self-consciousness. They have bought the Prince and Charlotte and in the process brought them together, have imposed forms unwittingly, all the while lacking consciousness of the existence of such forms. Here, Bob is acerbic and exasperated, challenging Fanny in pointing to the degree to which they “all round,” Adam and Maggie and Charlotte and the Prince, have been agents of their own lives—really, enough now, dear, they’re not simply “victims of fate.” Bob’s remark undercuts the breadth of the moral drama of Maggie’s discovery, insisting that her and her father’s lack of consciousness does not negate their responsibility for what they have done. But Fanny rejoins that their innocence does indeed make them victims. Fanny, herself an American, refuses Bob’s judgment. In this way, James’s account encompasses both Bob’s criticism as well as Fanny’s rejoinder, the novel’s omnivorousness able to include both understandings without choosing between them. Possibilities proliferate. Bob has pre-empted dissatisfied readers such as Theodore Roosevelt (and Fredric Jameson) who have found James to have written about spoiled people of privilege (see footnote 16). Fanny admits that the two of them, Maggie and her father, “are awfully quant, quaint with all *our* dear old quaintness – by which I don’t

mean yours and mine, but that of my own sweet country-people” (318). But by the end of the novel the status of that very sweetness and quaintness will itself be morally suspect.

Maggie, or the Princess, James wrote in the preface of the New York Edition of the novel, “duplicates, as it were, her value and becomes a compositional value” (*EW* 1324). Maggie is at once a participant in the novel and the novel’s means by which it comes into being. She shares her role, James suggested, in this way with the Prince, the novel residing in his consciousness for the first volume of the novel, “The Prince,” and in Maggie’s for the second, “The Princess.” However, the two volumes of the novel are not equivalent. The Prince and Charlotte’s impoverishment leads them to understand themselves as serving Adam and Maggie. On the other hand, Maggie’s knowledge emerges as her ability to force and coerce, to limit her father’s knowledge in an absolute manner. Maggie’s moral passion, to keep her father from ever knowing anything, including her own knowledge, exists on a seamless continuum with her violent ability to shape the course of events.

The Jamesian drama of coming to know, the writing’s knowing fused and inhering in the knowing of its characters, reaches a crisis in Maggie Verver. Many critics have found her imposition of a ferocious moral passion to keep her father from knowledge repellant if not repugnant. (Indeed, Maggie’s status is the central, dividing issue of criticism of the novel).³⁷ But Maggie’s moral ambiguity is irreducible, her moral vision one and the same with her immorality. We cannot reduce Maggie to wrong or right

³⁷ Bersani seems to me particularly arbitrary in dividing character from narrator in “The Jamesian Lie.” Who is the narrator with “his own designs” apart from the plot? Indeed, where can he be, as the character is, but in the writing? This suggests that there is a character there prior to the writing of the character who has his or her own temporality, which the narrator *then* goes on to ignore. It is only by means of separating form and content that Bersani can say that what might have been spoken is narrator and not character. This argument projects James’s writing as static in taking form as though it is not a vehicle that generates content as what it is, not instrumental in making the content salient, but merely ornamental.

without also reducing the writing that incarnates her. Moral stridency is rather emerging into an unbearable contradiction. In a novelist who prized consciousness and self-consciousness above all else, what is the moral standing of a character who strives to block another character's knowledge from developing as Maggie does? She wants to keep Adam innocent, and that course is moral but also the reverse, immoral in its aim of purity.

The formal uncovering of the thorny problem of Maggie emerges in the second volume. One indication and outcome of this moral thorniness is that Fanny becomes a little abject in relation to Maggie, while Bob disappears. Fanny is reduced from the splendor of her wit to cringing praise of Maggie. This thwarting and reduction of her character bears a direct relationship to Maggie's usurpation of the novel as the intensity of her moral vision swallows everything, including James's art insofar as that art is figured in Fanny and Bob as his self-conscious tools of accounting, investigating, and summarizing. The Prince settles with Maggie, and Maggie settles her account with a Charlotte defeated in not knowing that Maggie knows (Maggie's knowledge of her deprived state coming from the Prince). Charlotte will attempt to show Maggie a brave face, pretending she is taking her husband from his daughter. The settling and rearranging Maggie accomplishes has its origins in Charlotte and the Prince's poverty. They had just not enough money to marry. In the novel's first scene, the Prince recalls Maggie's having asked him where he would be "without your archives, annals, infamies" to which he replies that "I would have been in a better pecuniary situation," a situation in which he probably would not have married Maggie to begin with (47).

Money, the power that Adam Verver's money confers a priori on Maggie, drags back against the whole narrative of her discovery. James's American girl and his reflecting consciousness have in Maggie been reduced to the story of, in Bob's description, "the young woman who has a million a year" (93). Her discovery of something untoward in Charlotte and the Prince's relationship is rendered less than meaningful because the enormous fortune at her fingertips renders opaque the moral clarity the novel seems to suggest resides in her innocence. Money destroys James's character as a moral and epistemic resource, as an ethical and aesthetic actor in his novel. Strether leaves in the right, leaves in order to be right, his moral course following out the truth he has uncovered. Maggie, sure that she is right, is not in the right in an unambiguous way.

We cannot in this case decide upon Maggie as they do in logic by claiming the case to be p or $\neg p$, that, for instance, either I have a right hand or I do not. The inability to distinguish between Maggie's morality and her immorality is a formal event in the writing, the crisis of America as embodied in James's old type of the American girl. In the process of presenting a lack of any change in her relation to her own situation, Maggie will control and manipulate her social appearance in order to appear unknowing and accepting to the others.

Maggie went, she went – she felt herself going; she reminded herself of an actress who had been studying a part and rehearsing it, but who suddenly, on the stage, before the footlights that kept her up, made her rise higher: just as it was the sense of action that logically involved some platform – action quite positively for the first time in her life, or, counting in the previous afternoon, for the second. (348)

Action will become Maggie's mode; if she wants to save her father from knowledge, she must act to do so, in both the senses of doing and in that of being an actress. Maggie will rise into her role, performing with unexpected intensity. The terms of this metaphor are not promising for the moral stakes of the character. That the novel identifies Maggie in the role of an artist does not bode well. She is not like the writer, rubbing shoulders with the characters in the arena. She stands above the others, removed from them. If art is in James's vision a way of arriving at an encompassing understanding, Maggie has a relation to art and life alike that is limited and limiting in terms of both knowledge and morality. Maggie's is an art more akin to Chad's advertising than Strether's aesthetic adventures. The problem with Chad and his articulation of his projected future career in relation to the terms of the novel, Jehlen has written, is that while they share certain properties, Chad will work to make "the object appear better than it is, better than it would look if seen clearly. The trajectory is not outward from knowledge, but backward from knowledge" (*Five Fictions* 93). Maggie also creates an appearance of how things are not, in fact the diametrical opposite of the state of affairs. She works from the heights of knowledge toward a deliberate and manufactured obscurity.

If not a godlike role, she has taken a governing one—appointing, directing, and limiting. She will act as she is not in order to limit the cognizance of the others, particularly Adam. This position places her at the very edge of Jamesian morality (based as it is in Strether's case upon bringing together knowledge and writing, the formal and the moral), so close to being immoral it is not clear that she is not immoral.

This dynamic power to transform and shape the course of things distinguishes Maggie, as a reinvention of both Isabel and Maisie, from those characters. “Nothing was less new to Maisie than the art of not thinking singly,” so that she takes in each contributive particle of her story, of the many monstrous forms of abjection and distortion her parents’ various relations take on (174). Maisie is entirely removed from making any choice (childhood is the inverse equivalent of senescence, Maisie a means through which the writing can take hold of its matter in the way Strether also is, as Jehlen points out: “Great innocence and great knowledge are two faces of the same kind of observer” (99)). Maisie observes very nasty, brutish people, but she is one of the “defenceless children of light.” Maggie is Maisie become powerful and willing to exercise her power, choosing and deciding, and with a vast fortune and a nice house in the country to boot.

Maggie’s power to direct and manipulate others develops as the only means of saving her father:

The only way to sacrifice him would be to do so without his dreaming what it might be for. 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 – she did all these things so that he should sufficiently fail to dream of what they might be for. (382)

Maggie’s moral position becomes more ambiguous the more she strains and works for the sanctity of her father’s ignorance. The more she does for her father, the less coherent her own moral position becomes, the more suffocating her control. She will sacrifice him without incurring his awareness of being sacrificed.

There is in this passage an inner necessity to Maggie's actions. She is working for her father while also working against him. She carries out a vast array of minute actions—arranging his cravat—as if to no purpose, while every action is arranged and plotted for a hidden purpose. There is a sharp divide in this passage. Father and daughter are conjoined but throughout Maggie's understanding exceeds his. She stands over and apart from him, is entirely apart from him in what she knows.

What it means for Maggie to know, in relation to him, is an absolute moral commitment that he will never know what she is doing. Maggie is aware precisely in order to maintain what she hopes is his limited awareness. She will strive to save him and save the whole order of things at once. The abundance of her activity as opposed to his passivity raises moral questions. Maggie fulfills Pippin's definition of the moral—the suspension of one's own interests for the sake of another's. Yet, the cost of doing so is that at the same time erases her father himself as an end-setting moral agent. Maggie refuses knowledge to her father, a choppy moral action considering that James's fictions turn on the moral relevance of knowing. Strether is right by way of getting things right. Now, in this novel, there is a moral character who works to block off the possibility of knowing.

If the Prince and Charlotte understand themselves to be thrown together without options, Maggie follows the inner necessity of her devotion to her father. She is at once possibly immoral and impossibly moral, with no choice that is not fraught with treacherous consequences. There is no egress from her difficulty that is not a regression into darkness. To be bound to the claims of others is to be suffocated by those claims. In

those crucial two chapters that bring “Volume One: The Prince” to a close, Fanny traces it out:

Maggie had in the first place to make up to her father for her having suffered herself to become – poor little dear, as she believed – so intensely married. Then she had to make up to her husband for taking so much of the time they might otherwise have spent together to make this reparation to Mr Verver perfect. And her way to do this, precisely, was by allowing the Prince the use, the enjoyment, whatever you may call it, of Charlotte to cheer his path – by instalments, as it were – in proportion as she herself, making sure her father was all right, might be missed from his side. (316-17)

At every turn, Maggie fulfills her obligations to the others. In the difficulties of her position, she must make up to both her father and her husband for the differences in their lives her own life makes. James in this novel invented a character for whom moral fulfillments are a necessity, but who cannot fulfill that necessity without producing yet another necessity—invention and discovery proceed together and in relation. There is a kind of infinite regress in Maggie’s relations—regress without egress. Within the domestic arrangements of the quartet, there are deeper arrangements of commitment that are more akin to derangement. As Fanny outlines Maggie’s relations to her father and her husband in the above passage, she is all thought for others. She lives and acts by her belief in what she needs to do for them. In order to carry out to the end her obligation, she will sacrifice and control Charlotte and the Prince.

The control Maggie exhibits and inflicts leads Martha Banta to link her to the spirit of the age, to Frederick Taylor’s managerial practices and to Roosevelt’s

expansionism. Perhaps Maggie wins, Banta writes, because she “draws upon that special source of strength that comes to all good little American imperialists: her sincere belief that whatever she does, however ruthless her practices, is for the benefit of the natives” (78). But what she does, her whole managerial enterprise, is for others. And she wins, I would add, because the Prince and Charlotte are from the beginning helpless because penniless, taking what they can from a situation they have no power to direct. “She does everything herself. And that’s terrible”” Charlotte says to the Prince when they go to buy the bowl (111). It’s terrible because the stringency of her morality allows no one else into the circle, is exclusive and thus domineering. The limits of what Maggie knows completely preclude her from seeing herself in terms of domination or strength. The shape of her vision of the quartet is such that she sees herself abased and controlled: “Ah! Amerigo and Charlotte were arranged together, but she – to confine the matter only to herself – was arranged apart” (356). What is clearly off to the side of this understanding, what the novel has already accumulated in the first volume, is that Maggie’s terms of such passivity, as opposed to such activity on the part of the others, is more complex and tense.

Maggie does not throw her paper into the fire as Newman does. James has at the very end of his career written his way through the innocent American girl into an American girl who, while still innocent and of the highest moral strain, embodies at the same time moral and economic darkness. Isabel Archer’s lack of a choice resulted from the manipulation of others. With Maggie, the categories of control and manipulation are far messier, rioting in a chaos of complications from the beginning of her association with the Prince—he is bought and sold.

Maggie sits flush within her strength. She works her situation, choosing a solution that carries out her vision by way of a knowledge that is tensely limited:

She had all the while command of one way of meeting any objection, any complaint, on his wife's part, reported to her by her father; it would be open to her to retort to his possible 'What are your reasons, my dear?' by a lucidly-produced 'What are hers, love, please? – isn't that what we had better know? Mayn't her reasons be a dislike, beautifully founded, of the presence and thereby of the observation of persons who perhaps know about her things it's inconvenient to her they should know?' That hideous card she might in mere logic play – being at this time, at her still swifter private pace intimately familiar with all the fingered pasteboard in her pack. But she could play it only on the forbidden issue of sacrificing him; the issue so forbidden that it involved even a horror of finding out if he would really have consented to be sacrificed. What she must do she must do by keeping her hands off him; and nothing, meanwhile, as we see, had less in common with that scruple than such a merciless manipulation of their yielding beneficiaries as her spirit so boldly revelled in. She saw herself in this connexion without detachment—saw others alone with intensity; otherwise she might have been struck, fairly have been amused, by her free assignment of the pachydermatous quality. (398-99)

Maggie holds all the cards, withholding in this case the key card of sacrificing her father to knowledge. The assumption of directing the course of things sits easily on Maggie's shoulders. She has the options arrayed and held, like the "fingered pasteboard" of a pack of cards. This metaphor places her in the position of a conscious, calculating player,

watching and being watched, weighing the losses and the gains of her situation (there is also an aspect of pleasure, which will emerge as the novel progresses, in the fingering of the card—tactile contact and control). There is in this metaphor a moral problem already, which the rest of the passage will go on to elaborate. Maggie, with her options and her calculations behind each one, is alone, holding cards that belong to her, doing what she will. Everything she does is in relation to her father. The passage in this way makes salient the great contradiction embodied in Maggie—she works all for another but is also concealed from others, bound within herself. Maggie lives by and through moral terms, but how can the moral continue to be moral when isolated, individual, and asocial (taking into consideration Pippin’s helpful description of the moral as assessment of and interaction with others and the interests of those others)? How can the moral be moral if it is not lived out in relation to others?³⁸

Maggie’s Morality is ambiguous in the very strenuousness of its embodiment. She lives for her father, but the terms of her awareness are such that there is a gap between her actions and her knowledge so that her moral postures and actions are at once assessment and assumption. If this is a story of the growth of consciousness, that consciousness is finding a stunted, problematic way into the world it comes to know. Maggie will become aware, but as she does so she will inflict rigid categories onto what she learns, fitting the world into the a priori terms she has pre-established, so that what she already knows and what she comes to know is difficult to distinguish. Knowledge has now become a tyranny of the already known (in this regard, the novel is again different from *The Ambassadors*, Strether being a character capable of undoing and reshaping

³⁸ Here it is worth recalling “The Manners of American Women,” where James worried that the American woman recognizes no social norm for her manners, therefore assuming “the formidable care of extracting a conception of the universe and a scheme of manners from her moral consciousness alone” (*Culture* 110).

structures of knowledge. In *The Golden Bowl* the possibility of such a character as Strether has disappeared). The fluidity of Maggie's imposition, her ability to presume herself, flows from her social and economic position. Money, the power of money, confirms her at every step.

In the last two sentences of this passage, this mutually limiting relationship between knowledge and morality becomes more and more evident. James makes visible here the precise place where Maggie's sight shades off, demarcating it as a limited, shaped structure. Maggie sees herself as being part of the group and at the same time she sees the others as being "alone with intensity." She is within the group even as her examination places her apart. Notice that this is not what she thinks, but what she sees, her vision a real and tangible aspect of the situation.

The passage hinges on the semi-colons. The way the last sentence takes hold of its matter pivots on that piece of punctuation. The writing moves up to it and then stops, but doesn't stop definitively, having more to say, a crucial addition that opens into a larger, more comprehensive understanding. The semi-colon is a shift toward other possibilities that are integral to the epistemological event of the writing: "otherwise she might have been struck, fairly have been amused by her free assignment of the pachydermatous quality."

The passage shows at once the reality of the insulation, or the "pachydermatous quality," that Maggie sees in the others while it also shows that she herself is attributing this quality to them. She sees herself as being undetached, and in this very activity shows her position as one of detachment, as herself pachydermatous (literally, the word refers to cold-blooded animals, and figuratively it refers to cold-blooded, monstrous people). This

contradictory relation between Maggie's vision and her action, her moral position and the terms through which she concretizes that position will remain almost to the end. When her vision fulfills itself and includes her as well, she comes to see the infliction of her pain necessitated in her actions.

The second part of the sentence, while it is not what Maggie sees, is not unreal or illusory. It also is viable because it extends what the writing understands of the situation. James's sentence reaches into suspended alternatives—the “otherwise” functioning here much as ventriloquized speech functions elsewhere in the novel, as a tool of understanding. If things were otherwise than they are, Maggie might be struck by her “free” attribution of a quality to others. She “might have been struck, fairly have been amused”—here the second clause says more precisely what the situation is, amusement a distanced, perhaps ironic, way of being struck by something. But Maggie is not distanced from how she sees, does not have the capacity for such distance. The sentence moves toward a more thorough apprehension of what it is describing. And this is what form does; it takes in its matter as, sentence by sentence, subject matter resists form, forcing new and different formulations. If her vision were different, Maggie might be amused by how she sees everyone around her as cold-blooded. But she is not one given to amusement, certainly not self-amusement.

And this is key, because the tone of these sentences does partake of a kind of amusement, extending the vision beyond Maggie, uncovering the shape of her vision and also seeing beyond it, showing her as herself cold-blooded. The tone is amused by Maggie's total lack of being amused—the touch of using the word “pachydermatous” is a touch of wit (as is the luxurious, alliterative melting of “merciless manipulation,” which

is followed by not naming the Prince and Charlotte but by referring to them in an odd and surprising—though precise—way as “yielding beneficiaries” (yielding to who? in what way? this is vague, but in a such a way that it is within the shape of Maggie's vision, the internal processes of occurrence). The meandering narrative voice brings an element of extensive reflection and even irony to understanding the situation that is lacking from Maggie's own vision of things.

The sentences are amused but they do not negate what Maggie sees. On the contrary, they take her as a serious object of investigation. The second part of the sentence is a negative of the first part. The movement into that second part is indicated by the shift of the semi-colon, a pause that indicates there is more to say, more to understand of the situation. Where earlier incarnations of the American girl in James's work were innocent in an untroubled way, there's in fact something tense, even contradictory about Maggie. Contradiction is what these sentences bring into view, a field that includes Maggie's vision while also extending its reach beyond that vision, bringing both parts together while not leaving out either one.

Maggie's pachydermatous insulation from the others permits her to direct and shape the ensuing social drama. Her moral vision is total, a large sum, an unyielding and massive quantity. There is from beginning to end in Maggie a seamless cohesion to how she sees. This shaping power of morality undermines morality over the course of the novel. “She didn't care for what devotions, what dinners of their own the Assinghams might have been ‘booked’; that was a detail, and she could think without wincing of the ruptures and rearrangements to which her service condemned them” (425). Maggie's moral intensity leads her to sacrifice everyone else so as not to sacrifice her father. The

terms of other lives have no gravity or weight because, paradoxically, Maggie's moral commitment can afford them none. As she takes over the plot, there is in the novel diminishing room for anything outside of her terms.

Most tellingly, perhaps, this diminishment includes Fanny. Gone is her wit, and thus the only point of light in the novel. If Fanny begins with the kind of knowing authority of a Maria Gostrey, her authority reduces in the second half of the novel until she exits having become irrelevant, except in her relation to helping Maggie in order to make up for what she says she is "horrified and contrite" at having done (415). If she is like the Greek chorus, she begins to fall silent, if she is not rather chanting in an off note. The scope of her vision becomes more and more limited as she becomes an appendage of Maggie's vision and plan.

They move at any rate among the dangers I speak of – between that of their doing too much and that of their not having any longer the confidence or the nerve, or whatever you may call it, to do enough.' Her tone might by this time have shown a strangeness to match her smile; which was still more marked as she wound up. 'And that's how I make them do what I like!'

It had an effect on Mrs Assingham, who rose with the deliberation that from point to point marked the widening of her grasp. 'My dear child, you're amazing.'

'Amazing – ?'

'You're terrible.'

Maggie thoughtfully shook her head. ‘No; I’m not terrible, and you don’t think me so. I do strike you as surprising, no doubt – but surprisingly mild.

Because – don’t you see – I *am* mild. I can bear anything.’

‘Oh “bear”!’ Mrs Assingham fluted.

For love,’ said the Princess.

Fanny hesitated. ‘Of your father?’

‘For love,’ Maggie repeated.

It kept her friend watching. ‘Of your husband?’

‘For love,’ Maggie said again. (404-05)

The novel is accumulating the terms of this character who has silenced and stilled Charlotte and the Prince, undone the possibilities they have made for themselves and thereby brought about the impossibility of being end-setting beings. Her smile is the smile of triumph—she’s in control and she knows it. Maggie’s triple repetition of “For love” is answer that also deflects answering. Maggie is obscure, removed, and the highness of her high moral tone seals her into herself. The term of her love is complete in itself, unchanging, total from beginning to end. The hammer like quality of her repetition evinces the static quality of her relation to the terms of her moral position. Love for Maggie is absolute and abstract. The repetition both confirms her love while also negating Fanny in its light. Nothing can be said back, so that the interaction of Maggie with the world arises from her outward—there is no assessment or judgment that has any hold on her. Nor is there even the spark of a will outside her will that can dent the course of things. The most moral of James’s characters is without obligation to respond to the most intelligent of James’s characters.

Maggie gains control, and she enjoys control:

She found herself for five minutes thrilling with the idea of the prodigious effect that, just as she sat near them, she had at her command; with the sense that if she were but different – oh ever so different! – all this high decorum would hang by a hair. There reigned for her absolutely during these vertiginous moments that fascination of the monstrous, that temptation of the horribly possible, which we so often trace by its breaking out suddenly, lest it should go further, in unexplained retreats and reactions. (486-87)

The strength of Maggie's moral position is here the same as the strength to inflict pain. Is there just a slight note of humor at her expense in the "ever so different," as if she were really in the end not all that different? In Maggie, James found inherent within the moral the strength to inflict the "temptation of the horribly possible." The echo chamber of Maggie's moral monstrousness leaves her in a pride of strength—the fascination of the abomination, as Marlow says. Maggie's moral and formal coherence are alike hanging by a thread, as if at any moment she might not retreat but bring the novel into the heart of darkness. High decorum exists on a continuum with violent savagery. The effect of this passage is to raise the question of where the temptation and the act divide—for Maggie's vision of the others as pachydermatous has already enabled and justified her actions. The power her money confers ratifies that vision.

Adam and Maggie Verver are seeking a form for their money, social forms appropriate to their money. But their money occludes form from their apprehension. Maggie does not see herself, nor does she see her father, as an undetached, contributive factor to the strangeness of the quartet's lives. Behind Maggie stands Adam and behind

Adam stands immeasurable wealth. Together, they purchase Charlotte and the Prince, who are objects in their collection and understood as such. Charlotte and the Prince understand *themselves* as objects—knowledge is immanent in, and shaped by, economic and social position. Morality hinges on knowledge, and money and morality are inseparable. Because of her wealth, Maggie is able to gain control, a control she has always possessed, though she has been unaware of it, the Prince and Charlotte always having shaped themselves according to what they understand to be her plan.

Maggie exists between what she says and what she may mean. For instance, she will never reveal to Charlotte her suspicions, so that Charlotte will only be capable of guessing, while she will never tell the Prince about the status of Adam's knowledge. She truncates the knowledge of father and husband alike. Charlotte and the Prince are never sure if they are doing too much or not enough, Maggie tells Fanny. "Her tone might by this time have showed a strangeness to match her smile; which was still more marked as she wound up." "And that's how I make them do what I like!" (404). Her tone seems terrible, harsh to match a smile. In passages such as this, the effect of Maggie's ambiguity is a moral choppiness, a moral stridency always at the same time devolving, or threatening to devolve, into moral abomination. Christopher Newman burns the paper upon which the secret is recorded that would allow him a course of revenge. Maggie cashes in on her knowledge. The prose that embodies Maggie's character the Jamesian center of consciousness and the Jamesian American girl type to have become a Conradian darkness.

Maggie has in the end reduced Charlotte and the Prince to human objects. She and her father stand together at their last meeting before the departure for American City, while their spouses sit within their view:

Mrs Verver and the Prince fairly 'placed' themselves, however, unwittingly, as high

expressions of the kind of human furniture required aesthetically by such a scene.

The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase. There was much indeed in the tone in which Adam Verver spoke again, and who shall say where his thought stopped? '*Le compte y est*. You've got some good things.' (574)

Charlotte and the Prince tie the room together, their positions just what the scene requires to be a scene. Adam's straight sincerity jars against the narrator's grim irony in referring to the "lingering view," the view not available to Adam's smug satisfaction. But to a critical view, an encompassing view that sees in just the way Adam and Maggie do not see, Charlotte and the Prince are purchases. Who shall, indeed who could, say where Adam's sense of possession stops? His money obscures from his own sight the sinister element in taking Charlotte and the Prince as "good things" rather than end-setting agents. Adam views the scene as an abstract and false whole, to paraphrase Adorno's dictum. *Le compte y est*, they're all there. Adam's impunity is all in his gentleness, his gentleness an active feature of his impunity.

Maggie rearranges things so that her father returns to American City, suggesting the idea to her father, which Charlotte then cannot help but accept. But what is a return for Adam is exile for Charlotte. Fanny figures Charlotte “as thrown for a grim future beyond the great sea and the great continent” (54). Strether *chooses* to go back to America, albeit Woollett is a place of no promise, and Strether’s future a futureless future. But Strether himself is full of promise and possibility. Adam Verver and Charlotte, on the other hand, are a sterile couple with no heir and no possibility, she says, of one. American City is a worse place to return to than Woollett, west of the Mississippi but east of California, a very dark place in James’s geography. There is no choice in Charlotte’s return and no future to which she looks.

Bob’s experience of “cruelty and license” left him with “nothing more to learn.” Cruelty and license, the novel has discovered, inhere in the heart of the empire as well as at its edges, and in this way it has confirmed Bob’s view. Wives and husbands, friends and lovers, confidantes and rich fathers, moral daughters and impoverished princes—all relations tend toward cruelty and license.

Like Charlotte and Adam at the end of *The Golden Bowl*, James himself returned to America after a twenty-year absence immediately upon completing the novel. In his triumvirate of dense late novels *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* James had returned to the subject matter of his early fiction. But the return, I have argued in the last two chapters, was marked by James’s disarticulation from America, by a dissident dissatisfaction. James in *The Golden Bowl* reached backed to *The American*, Adam Verver the reincarnation of Christopher Newman. But American “good nature,” embodied in the innocent New World man had become undone in the wake of

American overseas imperialism and the rise of corporate capitalism. James's 1904-05 tour of America followed out the contradictory logic of his late writings, a series of revisitings and reviews: of his early novelistic material, of his childhood and of the return of the novelist to his native country.

Chapter 3: The Return of the Novelist: *The American Scene* and Related Writings

I

The return of the novelist was an unhappy one. This chapter takes as its central concern *The American Scene*, the book of travel essays James wrote about his tour, his first trip to his native country in over two decades. In conjunction with the book, and in order to clarify the chapter's argument, I first examine a series of essays James wrote in the same period: "The Question of Our Speech" (1905), delivered as an address to the graduating class of Bryn Mawr, "The Speech of American Women" (1906), and "The Manners of American Women" (1907). The final section returns, once again, to *The Golden Bowl*, published in America in November 1904, while James was there. The non-fictional writings illuminate the moral contradictions that constitute the novel's vision of America. The chapter ends by turning to James's next major novelistic endeavor, the fragment *The Ivory Tower*. In setting this piece in the Newport of the new rich, James was revisiting and revising *The American Scene*'s "The Sense of Newport." Newport was for James an index of what had been lost in America's past, as well as of an oncoming darkness of economic forces with no limiting context or framework, and this novel was the final installment of James's dissident dissatisfaction with contemporary America, this last novel. His last novel turns out to be a stark reversal of his very early *The American*. The chapter briefly touches on *The American* to make the radical difference of vision visible. As James's argument with America became louder, the sides more opposed and the stakes higher, he also began to cling to Europe as the saving grace to the unrestrained moral impunity made possible by American wealth, so that in *The Ivory Tower* Graham Fielder returns to the unlighted chaos of American plutocracy having lived and learned in

Europe. He is an American alien to America. Christopher Newman arrives in Paris having made his fortune; Gray returns with no money and an absence of money knowledge scrupulously emphasized again and again. It is as though the least trace of financial understanding would be a complete corruption.

In discussing *The Golden Bowl* I suggest that the anti-conclusive formal project of Henry James's late writings was an attempt to forestall foreclosure in an effort at the greatest possible encompassment. But as James's pessimism about America became increasingly discordant, the suspended unfolding of the writing went into reverse, its obliquity hardening into transparency. Modern American wealth, unrestrained and pursued as end and means, made it impossible for him to see in New York's sky-scrapers anything but a cancellation of form. In the post-*Golden Bowl* works, contemporary America began to outstrip the possibility of James's formal project.³⁹ James then beat a retreat to moral clarity in the character of Gray, a retreat that amounted to a retraction of the writing but that is also in itself a record of apprehension by despair.

James's deepening pessimism was a crisis of both moral and formal dimensions. The lack of moral-formal limits defined America for James and was the defining issue of his late work. As he wrote about them, Americans recognize no limits. American women speak whatever comes into their heads, and massive buildings are placed at random in the cityscape and even in the once secluded Newport. Limiting forms were for James moral,

³⁹ In *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920*, Jackson Lears has discussed turn of the century fascination with pre-modern religion and culture and with military exploits as a barometer of a contemporary dissatisfaction with the perceived mechanization, bureaucratization and over civilization of contemporary life. Of interest is the fact that Henry Adams, Charles Eliot Norton, and William James, all figure as part of Lears's canon, but not Henry James, as Ross Posnock has pointed out (11). In part, the subtlety of Henry James's writing is such that it does not lend itself to the formulation "anti-modernism." While Lears's book illuminates some of the issues of James's late writings, the issues are visible in them only as formal manifestations—there is no extractable formulae to work from, none of Adams's cult of the virgin or Ruskin's longing for a pre-modern craft.

while he defined morality as a recognition of limiting social forms. The moral is formal, the formal moral. Morality can only be moral inside defined limits. James's non-fictional writings take America's moral problem to be a refusal of such limits. Instead, America was celebrating what he described as the "too national belief in the sweet sanctity of free impulse" (*Culture* 98). The consequence of the refusal of forms that would act as a check on individual impulses amounted to the absence of a moral basis for American society. Without social forms, there is no regulation to free impulse. Form, in providing constraints, also provides a moral compass. Free impulse, when backed by a massive fortune, compounds the dilemma in giving free impulse an endless horizon to fulfill itself. America's rather charming lack of self-consciousness in James's early fiction had become an unsettling limitlessness in the late works. James financed his trip by delivering a public lecture "The Lesson of Balzac" in a number of American cities. The choice of Balzac as the subject for a talk to Americans in St. Louis and Philadelphia is far from obvious. On three separate occasions, James had written on Balzac, who had also been the central reference point for *The American*. This lecture clarifies James's late writing as an attempt to develop a writing immanent to the process of knowing. The irony is that he achievement of James's art was also its dissolution.

Money, money accumulated in excess and for itself as the means and the end, spelled for James the end of America as he had known it. The Verver fortune in *The Golden Bowl* converts American free impulse into moral monstrosity, so that the story of Maggie's emergence into awareness becomes instead the story of her imposition. If in James's late work the sentence opens and turns from dash to semi-colon, from one evolving dependent clause to another, money is the abrupt period to that sentence. Money

negates the significance of the Jamesian development of consciousness and thus of the moral and formal drama of the writing. *The American Scene*, whenever it encounters this money, concludes with a finality that amounts to a refusal of curiosity. James in this way discovered the historical limits of what it was possible for him to write. From *The American Scene* to the vast fortunes of *The Ivory Tower* is a journey into subject-matter so recalcitrant it turned the writing inside out, reducing it, as I hope to show, into a caricature of itself.

These writings are a lived record of James's engagement, indeed his obsession, with the transformation of what had once been the promise of the American republic into the menace of its emerging financial, industrial, and imperial power. They evolved as efforts to see in the dark, to give consciousness to historical transformations before they had become coherent and summarizable because a part of a completed past.

II

On August 24, 1904 Henry James set sail for America from Southampton aboard the *Kaiser Wilhelm II*. Ten years later the ship's name would prove ironic when, in August 1914 Wilhelm's Germany would help plunge Europe a war that ended James's fiction writing. James wrote Sarah Butler Wister in 1902 that "my native land, in my old age, has become, becomes more and more, romantic to me altogether" (*HJL* 4: 259). He yearned for the return and in 1903, he wrote to Howells that, despite the economic obstacles, "I *want* to come, quite pathetically & tragically—it is a passion of nostalgia; & I shall nurse the tender project in my arms...I should greatly like before I chuck up the game to write another (another!!) American novel or two—putting the thing in the country; which wd. take, God knows,—I mean wd. require—some impressions" (Anesko

306-07). There is excitement at the prospect of returning to America, where James imagined he would find future material, and, as he wrote to Howells the next month, he was “hungry for material.”

In a letter to his brother William, James echoed his sentiments to Wister and made it clear that America was in fact the one possibility for the future of his writing. America and material began to be equivalent. America was, he claimed, “my one little ewe-lamb of possible exotic experience, such experience as may convert itself, through the sense, through observation, imagination and reflection now at their maturity, into vivid and solid *material*, into a general renovation of one’s too monotonised grab-bag” (*HJL* 4: 271). America would rejuvenate his art. To William’s warning that the country would not at all please Henry, that Americans eat their eggs in a repulsive manner and surely the sight of such culinary barbarism would shock him into never returning, Henry replied that “the actual bristling (as fearfully bristling as you like) U.S.A. have merit and the precious property that they meet and fit into my (‘creative’) preoccupations.” Without America’s transformation at the turn of the century, Henry James may well have never have been the major writer he was. It was for the shocks that Henry would return, “*for* that class of phenomena, and every other class that I nurse my infatuation. I want to see them, I want to see everything, I want to See the country” (*CWJ* 3:). William for his part backed down and changed his mind and tone. If Henry was coming for material “all my stingy doubts wither, and are by enthusiasm that you are still so young-feeling, receptive, and hungry for more raw material and experience” (*CWJ* 3:). The receptivity and hunger that impressed William were the responses of an artist keen to extend his writing even to ungovernable shocks. He was not, he said in a letter to Howells, in “a position to answer

in advance for the quantity and quality, the exact form and colour, of my 'reaction' in presence of the native phenomena" (Anesko 398). He would come and look, he suggested, without arresting what he saw, shaping his sight to what he would see. But he didn't want to miss his opportunity and admonished Edith Wharton as well "in favor of the *American Subject*. There it is round you. Don't pass it by—the immediate, the real, the ours, the yours, the novelist's that it waits for. Take hold of it & keep hold, & let it pull you where it will...Profit, be warned, by my awful example of exile & ignorance" (Powers 34). "DO NEW YORK!" he told her (Powers 34). As though making up for what he had missed, James was intent on coming to America in order himself to profit from the American subject.

The American Scene's account of America is, by the terms of James's own ambitions, stunted, characterized by a complaining and finalizing conclusiveness. The book is an anti-account, but one whose formal reduction begins to limn the intractable obscurity of modern America. It turns out that James's curiosity became a rejection of the very material he insisted to William he was coming to America to find. The formal quality of that rejection is the subject of this chapter.

III

James attempted to work out his account of America from within his impressions, without an organizing conclusion that would explain the gathered, accruing, aggregating mass of their internal density. The writer goes over the ground of the impressions, giving a history of them as they developed. David L. Furth has observed that it is a principle of *The American Scene* that "James cannot search for his clues in anything but the impressions themselves, and these are not quite intelligible" (Furth 40). James went to the

trouble of composing a short preface, as if to make explicit the form and the aim of his book. “I made no scruple of my conviction that I should understand and should care better and more than the most earnest of visitors, and yet that I should vibrate with more curiosity—on the extent of ground, that is, on which I might aspire to intimate intelligence at all—than the pilgrim with the longest list of questions, the sharpest appetite for explanations, and the largest exposure to mistakes” (*CTW* 353). The writer asks his questions as they arise, has no interest in explanations, while mistakes come with the territory of writing. “I would take my stand on my gathered impressions, since it was all for them, for them only, that I returned; I would in fact go to the stake for them” (*CTW* 353).

But he insisted that these impressions of his were of a real world and that they counted as real knowledge. “There are features of the human scene, there are properties of the social air, that the newspapers, reports, surveys and blue-books would seem to confess themselves powerless to ‘handle,’ and that yet represented to me a greater array of items, a heavier expression of character, than my own pair of scales would ever weigh, keep them as clear for it as I might” (*CTW* 354). The material of his impressions, he suggested here, was more real than what the surveys offer. He will sort, compare, describe, and develop metaphors for what he sees, elaborating “the objective reality of impressions” (*CTW* 360).

To write for James was to inhabit the subject that is the occasion of the writing. In the chapter from *The American Scene* on Washington D.C., James was intrigued by what foreign delegates made of the place: “This interest is susceptible, on occasion, of becoming intense; all the more that curiosity must, for the most part, pursue its object

(that of truly looking over the alien shoulder and of seeing, judging, building, fearing, reporting with the alien sense) by subtle and tortuous ways” (CTW 629). Curiosity about the delegates leads to the relentless desire to see, judge, fear, to experience the delegate’s experience. Curiosity is a position of tentative under-determination that places one at risk in encountering a density that poses the possibility of undoing or overturning prior conclusions. If writing is attention to the world, curiosity is the activity through which that attention occurs.

Curiosity responds not to its own formulations but to the alien fact of the material that has sparked attention and drawn an attempted understanding. When the aspects of the American scene speak, it is as an activity of curiosity. To speak is to possess integrity. To argue, as Sharon Cameron has in *Thinking in Henry James*, that consciousness and voicing stifle and repress the world, is to cancel the writing, to take form as though it is not a vehicle that generates content as what it is, not instrumental in making the content salient, but merely ornamental. For Cameron, the writing conceals its content, but such an argument posits a prior content, a way of taking James that I believe reverses the order of things. On the contrary, Pippin has suggested that the proliferation of voices in the book has to do with James’s need for an interlocutor, “a presence wherein his own first reactions might be reflected” (41). The voicing of the material is a way of writing that is inchoate, emergent, immanent to the elaboration that is constitutive of the writing. Granting the material a voice is to grant it a dramatic presence and thus an inherent integrity. Nothing speaks authority like the authority to speak.

In “The Lesson of Balzac” James was also describing his own career as a writer who had attempted to develop an account of the American scene—the lecture helps to

describe the terms of James's own writing and to show how *The American Scene* falls apart. Balzac had been an important writer to James from as early as 1875, when in his first essay about the French writer he claimed that, "Balzac was to be preeminently a social novelist; his strength was to lie in representing the innumerable actual facts of the French civilization of his day—things only to be learned by patient experience" (*EW* 33). In choosing Balzac as his subject for the later lecture, James, I think, was implicitly aligning himself to the French novelist's attention to the actual facts, to his appetite for observing, recording, reflecting. In his 1875 essay, he stood in awe before "That huge, all-encompassing, all-desiring, all-devouring love of reality" of Balzac's, a love that translated into a proper deference: "The real, for his imagination, had an authority that it has never had for any other" (*EW* 66-7). The intrinsic authority of the subject is at the center of "The Lesson of Balzac." James said there of Balzac's relationship to his characters that, "It was by loving them—as the terms of his subject and the nuggets of his mine—that he knew them; it was not by knowing them that he loved" (*EW* 132). Balzac knew his characters by writing them.

In his lecture, James wrote that the French novelist's inhabiting of his characters was an instance of the writer's task to inhabit alien beings. "How do we know given persons, for any purpose of demonstration, unless we know their situation for themselves, unless we see it from their point of vision, that is from the point of pressing consciousness or sensation?—without our allowing for which there is no appreciation" (*EW* 132). We know persons, in the ultimate demonstration of art, by knowing their own knowing, so that the art James had in mind embodies (reconstructs, in Proust's word) the unfolding of the character's own existence. James imagined a fictional art that

reconstructs what is by dwelling immanently in the reach of a particular character's vision.

Thackeray displayed toward Becky Sharp "a desire positively to expose and desecrate" her (*EW* 132). The English writer desired to secure the proper moral judgment, while the French writer will "risk, for the sake of the subject and its interest, your spiritual salvation" (*FW* 132). "The Lesson of Balzac" suggests that writing must love its subject. "Your spiritual salvation" is an ironic inflation that claims Thackeray's novels to be inflated with prosing morals. Balzac's novels are successful in a way that Thackeray's are not, according to James, because Balzac wrote from within the skin of his characters. Balzac, not Thackeray, was the more moral novelist. If Thackeray has sacrificed character to moral judgment, Balzac has foresworn a moral in the interest of the character. Unlike Becky, Balzac's Madame Marneffe, "is 'exposed,' so far as anything in life, or in art, may be, by the working-out of the situation and the subject themselves" (*EW* 132). The "liberty of the subject" is granted or denied in the degree to which the subject's possibilities are investigated and brought out or foreclosed.

Thackeray's moral eagerness trumped and deformed the possibilities—the situation and the subject—of his characters, whereas the novel's character became in Balzac's hands an end antithetical to a detachable moral formulation. "It all comes back, in fine, to that respect for the liberty of the subject which I should be willing to name as *the* great sign of the painter of the first order. Such a witness to the human comedy fairly holds his breath for fear of arresting or diverting that natural license" (*EW* 133). The subject leads a life of its own, writing's formal ambitions an index to the degree of

allowing it to lead that life. James attempted to develop a writing whose result would be an encompassment, its ending irreducible to conclusions.

The liberty of the subject traduces any ends for which it serves merely as the means. The subject in its full free play and liberty demands a restless, unsettling attention. A self-conscious wielding of form is the measure through which curiosity lives into its subject, curiosity the very activity of writing. *The American Scene* turned out to be tragedy and not comedy.

James elevated Balzac above Thackeray because Balzac elevated the recalcitrant evidence of his subject-matter over limiting, summarizing and reducing moral judgments. What James valued in Balzac was the relationship between the writing and the subject-matter (Madame Marneffe is interesting and valuable not because she is a moral person but because of the curiosity the writing takes in her). This moral-formal relationship is one link between James's lecture and his "book of impressions."

In the last chapter of that book, "Florida," James celebrated the ongoingness of his own writing: "One had already, in moving about, winced often enough at sight of where one was, intellectually, to 'land,' under these last consistencies of observation and reflection; so I may put it here that I didn't, after all, land, but recoiled rather and forebore, making my skiff fast to no conclusion whatever" (*CTW* 700). This passage reflects on itself as a way of answering to a limiting necessity whose end is the endlessness of the world it observes. Balzac may have been a little less than an artist, James suggested in his lecture, merely recording and not shaping his material. But James, by tying his skiff fast to no conclusion, claimed his own writing to be at one with his subject-matter and at one with his writing, both at once and at one.

The many terms with which the writer refers to himself, objectifying the activity of his own engagement with his material, suggest an ongoing conclusionlessness to the writing of his book. To name but a few, he dubs himself at various times the “restored absentee,” the “fond observer,” the “homeless wanderer,” the “incurable eccentric,” the “brooding absentee,” the “brooding analyst,” and, most frequently of all, the “restless analyst” (*CTW* 453, 343, 494, 424, 343, 361). All of these self-objectifying self-descriptions point to ceaseless renewal within and through the writing. Ross Posnock’s nice description claims that in this book “perennial restlessness and distraction are not merely subjective but mimetic gestures, expressive gestures linked to the qualities of the environment that elicits them” (142). James’s was a writing that attuned itself to an ongoing attempt at mimetic activity, art itself the only thoroughly negative dialectic in that it moves toward complexity and reshapes itself necessarily in response to the environment that elicits the act of writing in the first place.

Conclusions were much on James’s mind back in England. On November 8, 1906 he wrote to H.G. Wells concerning the latter’s just published book *The Future in America: A Search after Realities*. James’s own book, *The American Scene*, to which Wells made admiring reference, was to be published the following year: “you tend always to simplify overmuch (that is as to large *particulars*—though in effect I don’t think you do here as to the whole). But what am I talking about, when just this ability and impulse to simplify—so vividly—is just what I all yearningly envy you?—I who was accursedly born to touch nothing save to complicate it” (*HJL* 4: 421). This is as backhanded a compliment as any James ever gave. Poor James could only yearn for Wells’s ability and his impulse to simplify, suggesting that Wells was a lesser writer. James’s

own impulse was all for turning his touches to elaboration and complication, his compliment one he paid to himself.

The next month, James wrote from Lamb House to his friend the French novelist Paul Bourget concerning the trip: “My time of nearly eleven months *la-bas* was full of interest to me, but I found the country formidable and fatiguing (I went to Florida and California); I also failed to arrive at a single conclusion, or to find myself entertaining a single *opinion*” (*HJL* 4: 388). He seems at once to lament and to admire his inveterate habit of circling his subject without the finality of settling down, of reflecting without summarizing. In both of these letters, James was bragging a bit: my complicating touch is such that I can never conclude, even though it would be nice once in a while not to have to be so very complex. James ended the brief preface he composed for the book on the note of his own conclusionless writing: “artistically concerned as I had been all my days with the human subject, with the appreciation of life itself, and with the consequent question of literary representation, I would not find such matters scant or simple. I was not in fact to do so, and they but led me on and on” (*CTW* 354). Led on and on into an endless continuation suggested by the material of his trip, Wells’ simplicity would not do for James.

But one might turn this claim about the ambition of James’s writing on its head, for when it comes to modern America, James could not stop relentlessly concluding. James was most explicit in his essays on American manners and speech about the moral-formal lack of limits in America. I will want to suggest that it is this moral-formal issue, and, in particular, its relation to limitless wealth, that so troubled James it came to unravel the form of his writing.

IV

“The Manners of American Women” begins inside a concrete instance of the subject that is also the impetus of the essay: “It was a scant impression, no doubt, yet a prompt and a suggestive, that I gathered, of a bright fresh afternoon early in October, in the course of a run from Boston down to the further South Shore” (*Culture* 82). The impression provokes attention because it indicates social structures under the strain of transformation. The scant impression is enough of one. The element of time, in this very first sentence, is crucial: the temporality of the understanding is incarnated into the essay as the temporality of its development. The essay is in its form immanent to the limited, partial, undeveloped, attentive but not yet clarified, understanding it sets out by recording. We begin with an impression whose import is clear but whose meaning is not yet evident.

The emphasis is that of a novelist absorbed in the irreducible authority and liberty of the subject—the liberty to be what it is at its maximum capacity. Indeed, one of the titles James entertained for his book of impressions was *The Return of the Novelist* (James rued the fact that Hardy had taken the title *The Return of the Native*, but he liked novelist better anyway), which he claimed in a letter to his American publisher George Harvey “*describes* really my point of view—the current of observation, feeling etc., that can float me further than any other. I’m so very much more of a Novelist than of anything else and see all things *as such*” (*HJL* 4: 328). To see as a novelist is to attend to the world with curiosity, to be gripped by the process of knowledge’s emergence, and to follow out

that interest by writing. "I recall sharply the felicity of the first glimpse," James noted early in his late preface to *The American* (*EW* 1054). The glimpse demands attention. Continuing inside the curiosity that brought the glimpse in the first place will be a way of attending instead with the self-consciousness of a need to know better, to get into closer contact with the bristling, recalcitrant, irreducible complexity. Curiosity as a mode of writing attends with the proper, rigorous deference for the "liberty of the subject."

Still, the ambition of the essay is to encompass the impressions of the girls and the train conductor into a larger field of vision that includes them both. The writing travels to that larger field only by way of the discreet stations of observation. "The essence of a relation, I thus more than ever perceived, is that it involves, at the worst, some slight margin; which margin is occupied, for the most part, in communities where the general question of manners has an importance, by the *form*, so to speak, that clothes the naked fact" (*Culture* 84). Human relations gain coherence in the "margin" provided by social forms, "in communities where the general question of manners has an importance, for the most part, by the *form*, so to speak, that clothes the naked fact" (*Culture* 84). The naked fact is unsuitable, an unfulfilled reduction. Clothes in this metaphor give a social presence to bodies in a way analogous to manners, so that the emphasis is not on hiding nakedness that should not be seen but rather on a protective and clarifying encasement. The naked fact is barbaric limitlessness.

Form inheres in social relations when they can be called relations "A relation is complete, so far as need be, when it has begun, has continued, and has ended—begun, say, with courtesy of interrogation, the 'I beg your pardon,' the 'Will you be so good?' that are thrown in so to speak, for the auspicious start, and ended, say, the business once

over, with the ‘Much obliged’ or ‘I see, thanks!’ that are thrown in for the happy conclusion” (*Culture* 84). Like a piece of writing, there is an arc to social interactions when fulfilled as obligations. All of these examples of speech are marks of courtesy, recognitions of the responsibility one person has to another. James’s tone here is a rather tart schooling in etiquette: let me explain from the beginning how it’s done. The difference between saying and not saying “I beg your pardon” is not exactly a matter of life and death. High seriousness here almost becomes ironic hilarity. James sounds like one who worries over peeling wallpaper when, in the midst of a bomb raid, the walls are themselves liable to come down. James does not quite see the full import of the problem he has in his hand. He worries over it, puzzled, but does not quite know what to make of it, like a naturalist perplexed by an astonishing and yet to be classified new specie. The outer edge to James’s essay, the edge that is wall and not the wallpaper, is that a formless relation is a breakdown and an abnegation of social bindings. Society becomes a terrifying unleashing of named, unrestrained will. He is anxious and concerned about a society without the “I beg your pardon.”

The dispensation of social responsibility he finds to be something of an axiom in America, a lawless social anarchy. “There is always a thrill for us at home in the observed operation of our law that any one may become among us, at two minutes’ notice, anything possible or impossible, even a gentleman, even a lady; but the deeper impression attaches, none the less, to the exhibited effects of being tutored, which correct usefully our too habitual, too national belief in the sweet sanctity of free impulse” (*Culture* 98). This sentence moves by a sharp irony, the thrill deflated and undermined by the emptiness of anyone, without qualification, becoming anyone (“always a thrill”

makes it a routine, the habitual sight of risings and fallings that are in fact not at all thrilling). For James, social stations are necessary and meaningful hierarchies.

Free impulse legislates itself as natural, an ordained, lawless law definitive for James of America's cherished belief about itself. "Our theory of social equality, combined with our unsurpassed disposition to accumulate those dollars that lighten the burden of consciousness, has had the effect of providing that the individual consciousness shall sit light, and of deprecating with vigilance all uncanny attempts to disconcert it" (*Culture* 99). There is contempt here for an equality that only serves to license free impulse created and backed by money. In this passage James has brought the more forceful, and deeper, argument to light: money without social restraint is distressing and terrifying. Backed by money, the individual consciousness is serene in refusing "all uncanny attempts to disconcert it." The "individual consciousness" is too little disconcerted, too assured and confident. Un-disconcerted, the "individual consciousness" refuses consciousness and self-consciousness, just the qualities James valued and triumphed and wrote novels about, in which consciousness allows a more encompassing, flexible, open-ended mode of understanding and being. A society based upon a refusal of social hierarchy and dedicated solely to the making of money obviates the need for consciousness or for self-consciousness. In short, money is emerging as the greatest threat to James's late art.

Americans of older generations had, according to James, a "conscientious substitute" for the margin supplied by manners, a rough but conscious rudeness. Their: "honest austerities were, in their way, never rudenesses—they were essentially anxious and strenuous *forms*, tributes to the idea of a social relation" (*Culture* 105). The honest

austerities were not an equivalent of the aggregation of deep and embedded social forms found in Europe. But they were substitutes for conscience, themselves conscientious.

James claimed that the novels of William Dean Howells, a lifelong friend and one of James's best readers, took as their main subject a society based on free impulse.

Such an expert study of the whole element as is supplied for instance in *The Kentons* catches in the very act the system to the working of which he all so ironically yet so incorruptibly testifies. This unsurpassed attempt to sound the grayest abysses of the average state and the middle condition projects for us the measure of how little their occupants may neglect the conviction, at least as a saving instinct, of the equal importance of all; all, that is, as a charge on the common forbearance or, to speak more nobly, the common humanity. (*Culture* 108)

Good humor acts as a moral agent, an authority or law that makes a claim on all to respond to the claims of all. The harshness of the old austerities found in this way a felicitous counter-balance in a moral awareness that limit the harshness. James has found in a vision of that old America a better version of the present one. Once upon a time and a very good time it was.⁴⁰ The writer of these sentences finds those "grayest abysses" to be impenetrable—gray in being both invisible and drained of life. But there is, even in those lifeless gray abysses a recognition of common humanity now lacking in America. But Howells has undertaken to write about "the average state and the middle condition" from a position immanent to the state and condition. In Howells's vision of a rough but

⁴⁰ James is, in his consideration of that older, better America, close to some of the writers in Lears's group, such as John Ruskin and Henry Adams, in the specific sense of proposing a myth of decline as a way of grasping contemporary complexity. There was once a whole, total, organic world, for instance of medieval craft, that unraveled into our present moment. Georg Lukacs and Fredric Jameson are two later builders of the myth of decline.

conscious America, “Nobody makes ‘short work,’ in a word, of any one or of anything, no matter how ‘impossible,’ ...on this strained basis the society depicted does in a manner creak along” (*Culture* 108). Manners are social forms held in common, submitted to and referenced in the case of a failure to fulfill them—the case of one’s having bad form.

Manners demand self-consciousness. Speech was James’s topic in a contemporaneous essay for the same reason. To speak a language is to understand oneself as a socially related being. Therefore, one’s proper speaking of the language was a moral necessity that responded to the demands that preceded any given speaker.

We may not be said to be able to study—and *a fortiori* do any of the things we study *for*—unless we are able to speak. All life therefore comes back to the question of our speech, the medium through which we communicate with each other; for all life comes back to the question of our relations with each other. These relations are made possible, are registered, are verily constituted, by our speech, and are successful (to repeat my word) in proportion as our speech is worthy of its great human and social function; is developed, delicate, flexible, rich—an adequate accomplished fact. The more it suggests and expresses the more we live by it—the more it promotes and enhances life. (*Culture* 44)

Language, spoken by socially shared rules, provides a moral and aesthetic necessity—one responds more fully to one’s relations with others the better one fulfills the language. All life resides in one’s relations and not in free impulse because social life demands self-consciousness and consciousness of others. The opportunities of life are commensurate with the opportunities available, but not necessarily taken, within the language. This passage strains toward an idea of language—“developed, delicate, flexible, rich”—that

sounds less than possible or plausible. Living by language by expression requires just that kind of self-consciousness made unlikely by American money in its unfortunate conjunction with the belief in free impulse. Linguistic possibilities jar against the actual circumstances, developed and delicate speech against the American refusal of consciousness.

The social laws that created the “margin” in relations were necessary but lacking in America: “That successful submission to law—unless we call it that crouching bondage to form—represents the opposite pole from the state, for a lady, of speaking as she ‘likes,’ and still more from the state of being able to give no account whatever, in such a matter, of any preference or any light” (*Culture* 62). The national belief in free impulse makes it a principle to interdict the possibility of self-conscious speech. These comments are spoken by one for whom laws and forms are necessities, in a tone of haughty frowning. The American woman can “give no account whatever” and this is the snuffing out of consciousness. It is as though this sentence follows its subject into the unlighted region of negated consciousness and cannot find a way out, the American woman’s inability to account for herself a blank and irredeemable wall.

The American speaks as she likes and, recognizing no barriers or limiting boundaries to her self, invents a moral sense purely out of herself, assuming “the formidable care of extracting a conception of the universe and a scheme of manners from her moral consciousness alone” (*Culture* 110). “Formidable care” is a biting means of undercutting the individual. The meaning of James’s sentence inheres in a subtle voicing that makes an assertion but is also unsaying what it has said, the tone of the sentence making it clear that this is a case of preposterous arrogance. How can a scheme of

manners be moral when not conceived socially, in relation to a larger tradition that sets clear limits to the reach of the individual? The possibility that inheres in a moral consciousness evolved from oneself alone is that the moral can easily slide off its rails—*The Golden Bowl*, to forecast the end of this chapter, tells the story of just such an undoing of an individually-based morality, backed by money, become a peculiarly American tragedy.

James ended his essay on manners as he had begun it, with an impression of a scene that was a telling instance of how a self-generated moral sense produces a failure of social form. Bicycling with some young people, he was struck by a non-American young lady's way of acknowledging repairs done to her bicycle in relation to an American young lady's acknowledgment for a similar, but much greater, service. "He made it over to its owner working quite smoothly again, and she dropped him, as she remounted, a thin, short, perfunctory, 'Thanks' which had the effect of making our eyes, his and mine, the next moment, meet in wondering intelligence" (*Culture* 111). Wondering intelligence comes against the blank, unreflective, all-too-assuming, un-self-examing American woman. She fulfilled her obligation in inverse proportion to her European counterpart. Because she has no social form to reference, she is answerable only to her own standard of behavior.

Social relations could become a deformation when operating under such a principle. "It was the last thing she could have dreamed of, but it was as if she had written herself, by her renunciation of the power intimately to touch, lonely, blighted, and disinherited. She was blind, she was deaf, to the stops of the social pipe, and its broken fragments seemed to crunch under her feet as she passed" (*Culture* 111-12). The minor

incident has in the representation of it become something of a tragic event, the young woman dispossessed and cut off from social relations and not aware of it. She does not see her own isolation nor is she even aware of the “social pipe” she crushes with blithe ignorance. American lack of consciousness is recusant. The American young lady is in a moral vacuum, spinning the moral fabric of her life from and by herself. She is herself the warp and the woof of her moral consciousness, is in fact the loom itself, with no moral necessity beyond her own consciousness. The American’s lack of proper thanks here is minor; indeed, it is trivial. Why the bother? No suffered beyond a slight slight. It seems to me that James took this incident with high seriousness because it was a subtle but telling glimpse of a problem whose full extent he had begun to understand in *The Golden Bowl*.

James attributed the “unlighted chaos of our manners” to lack of criticism, and this in turn was attributable to advertising: “Then it is that he seems really to possess his subject! For it [criticism] is forestalled, to begin with, by Advertisement, on a scale that is a new thing under the sun, and that not only takes the wind out of the critic’s sails but blows all there is of it straight back into his face” (*Culture* 73). The discovery of the writer’s subject arises simultaneously with a discovery of his own irrelevance.

Advertisement manages to ingest the critic’s own activity and reverse its direction, origin become destination, object of criticism become critic in this perverse and modern

dialectic.⁴¹ James’s dismay at the impunity of advertising recalls of course Chad

Newsome’s future career back in America and the moral evacuation of his character.

⁴¹ This is a moment that would be quite interesting to take up with reference to Theodor Adorno, who was alert to this conversion process and thought it was the job of art and criticism alike to fashion themselves in a manner that would be undigestible. (The interest here is not that Adorno gives credence to James, but that their socio-historico positions and concerns led them to similar discoveries).

Advertisement and America seem to be versions of one another in that they both license impunity to follow its own unrestrained development. “The impunity defies the criticism, and the criticism, gasping at the impunity, is reduced to the impotence of the traveller, waiting, carpet-bag of notes in hand, at a by-station, for the train that whizzes past without stopping” (*Culture* 73). That whizzing train of course calls to mind the luxurious Pullmans the restless analyst spends some time reporting on, as will be seen later in this chapter. America, the harbinger of modernity, is at one with the impunity of modernity. The American woman acts with an impunity akin to that of the train.

Advertising embodied for James the impunity of modernity as no other technology (the irredeemable Chad Newsome will bring advertising to his family business and that way sell its product better). The “carpet-bag of notes in hand,” the traveler is a tiny speck left behind by the headlong rush of all-licensing and monstrous advertising. But he does have that carpet-bag and he has taken notes, so the impunity also provokes curiosity. What are restless analysts for in a destitute time?

The link between advertising and the speech of American women is the refusal of criticism. American women do and speak as they want, but this seeming freedom is specious. There is a startling passage in *The American Scene* concerned with the American woman’s complete possession of the social field: “her manner of embodying and representing her sex has fairly made of her a new human convenience, not unlike fifty of the others, of a slightly different order, the ingenious mechanical appliances, stoves, refrigerators, sewing-machines, type-writers, cash-registers” (*CTW* 639). Complete self-possession has made the American woman into a complete possession. There is grim irony to that list, the “slightly different” working to elide the difference

between the items enumerated with mock seriousness and the American woman who is the subject's sentence. The six listed conveniences reveal her inclusion to be a perversion, a human that has been transfigured into a technologically produced object. But "would she not, in some other air and under some other sky, have been visited by a saving instinct? Would she not have said 'No, this is too unnatural; there must be a trap in it somewhere—it's addressed really, in the long run, to making a fool of me?'" (*CTW* 640). The passage shifts registers from the dead pan ironic reversal of the list to the American woman's own animate, human voice as it ventriloquizes the possibility of her actually possessing consciousness about the dialectical contradictions of her own position. "Would she not have said" almost pleads for this to be the case, argues against the fact that it is not and points to other forms of life in "some other air," where her consciousness would actually be a reality. What she might say imagines past the American woman's current condition, past the conditions of reality into the realm of the possible. What she would say if she were self-conscious is a possible possibility, one within reality.

James's essays on manners and speech suggest that the self-consciousness of form is constitutive of both morality and art. If James understood American morality to be a problem whose nature was formal, his account of the lack of formal consciousness in the modern American scene, in particular in the architecture of New York and Newport, reveals it to be simultaneously a moral problem.

V

The American Scene begins in New York City.⁴² As if unable to leave, it returns to the city after an excursion north to New England then hovers there for four chapters out of fourteen, the only place that gets more than a single piece. New York, the “terrible town,” as James called it, was perplexing and incomprehensible, vibrant and unsettling, excessive in the extreme: “the horrific, the unspeakable, extraordinary, yet partly interesting, amusing, and above all *bristling* New York” (*HJL* 4: 338). Finally, heading south to Philadelphia, it is as though New York is a ghost that refuses to leave the restless analyst in peace.⁴³ Philadelphia presented him with “the clear, the salient note” (*CTW*

⁴² The shock of the chapters has to do with the remembrance of New York, which James claimed as his native city. In a memorandum he wrote to Scribners to propose a definitive edition of his novels and tales that, “I should particularly like to call it the New York Edition if that may pass for a general title of sufficient dignity and distinctness. My feeling about the matter is that it refers the whole enterprise explicitly to my native city—to which I have had no great opportunity of rendering that sort of homage” (*HJL* 4: 368). New York would be the focus of James’s first volume of memoirs, *A Small Boy and Others*, the place that more than any other James would claim as his own. *The American Scene* records in part the loss of that ownership.

⁴³ Nor could James leave New York alone as a subject when he returned to England. To a remarkable degree, the moral problems of money, often in relation to a better, more charming and older American world, dominate the final set of his short fictions, written from 1906-1909. New York and money, money and New York, are inextricable. In “Crapy Cornelia,” the hero foregoes an economically advantageous marriage to spend his days in the company of an old acquaintance who he knew in his youth, who remembers old New York, and who has real antiques, as opposed to the vulgar and ultra-modern imitations of his deposed fiancé. In “A Round of Visits,” Mark Monteith comes back to America after learning that the friend to whom he had entrusted his finances has swindled him, though he will come to value along the way “disinterested sympathy” more than his lost resources. In “The Jolly Corner” (1908), Spencer Brydon also returns to New York from Europe after a long absence to look into his two properties, one of which he will preserve, the other of which he will develop for money. Like the later Graham Fielder, he lacks “a capacity for business and a sense for construction” (*CT* 699). But an old friend tells him that if he had stayed in America he might have gained money and therefore power, been consumed with what he calls the “rank money-passion” (*CT* 707). He might, in other words, have been part of the burgeoning financial and industrial class. It’s not, he tells her, that that rank passion appeals to him; “it’s only a question of what fantastic, yet perfectly possible, development of my own nature I mayn’t have missed” (*CT* 707). He is a typically Jamesian character in that his concern is with the possibilities of what he could have done and known, to what degree he presently encompasses and understands the possible arrangements of his life. His financial alter ego becomes a ghostly reality, appearing eventually in one of Brydon’s residences, but “Such an identity fitted his at no point” (*CT* 725). It is the face of “‘A black stranger!’,” the racial undercurrent marking him as deeply alien (*CT* 730). But the irony is that the stranger is in fact Brydon’s own American, money-passionate self, so different and hideous as to be unrecognizable to him. The money passion is never a pretty sight in James’s late fiction. These stories swerve in their interaction with history between a

579). This is as it should be, for the “essence of almost any settled aspect of anything may be extracted by the chemistry of criticism” (*CTW* 579). The critic is at sea when such extraction is inoperative: “The last thing decently permitted him is to recognize incoherence—to recognize it, that is, as baffling; though of course he may present and portray it, in all richness, *for* incoherence. That, I think, was what I had been mainly occupied with in New York” (*CTW* 579). New York was, for the writing of *The American Scene*, that American place least hospitable to conclusions, most demanding of an uncertain, ongoing process of analysis. It would seem then to be just the place for the book, the perfect setting for the restless analyst to carry out the weavings of his peripatetic criticism. And yet, as we will see, this is only ambiguously the case.

New York, with its “numerosity and quantity,” is incalculable:

He doesn't *know*, he can't *say*, before the facts, and he doesn't even want to know or to say; the facts themselves loom, before the understanding, in too large a mass for a mere mouthful: it is as if the syllables were too numerous to make a legible word. The *illegible* word, accordingly, the great inscrutable answer to questions hangs in the vast American sky, to his imagination, as something fantastic and *abracadabrant*, belonging to no known language, and it is under this convenient ensign that he travels and considers and contemplates, and, to the best of his ability, enjoys. (*CTW* 456)

With reference to this passage Nancy Bentley has recently written that, “Something unknown and unknowable hangs in the sky, an anti-symbol to the certainty of a transparent American destiny,” signaling “the resistances and opacities of history” (301).

stringent moral and historical evacuation, and a slightly genteel sentimentality. This is the difference between *The Golden Bowl* and *The Ivory Tower*.

For Bentley, it is no accident that “abracadabrant” brings the passage into relation with an emerging mass culture, the inauguration of a “postliterary” public. This overstated and dubious historical claim, however, does not negate Bentley’s insight that this passage registers the historically recalcitrant, amenable to no conclusion or language. The restless analyst can only formulate what is unsayable, what cannot be spoken because unspeakable.

The illegible word is not abracadabra, not a noun, as Bentley’s reading suggests, but adjectival, a way of working toward a formulation whose opacity cannot be clarified. Indeed, the passage insists that the answer is inscrutable and unspeakable. Bentley’s purpose in pointing to the popular cultural origin of abracadabra is to offer transparency, to explain the inscrutability the passage is explicit in setting forth. The American word that hangs in the sky is like an invocation—abracadabra itself a word of mystery, a word (generic though it may be) to locate mysterious power that remains mysterious. Not being tractable, New York would seem to be most demanding of restless curiosity.

A useful counterpoint to the baffled puzzlement in the New York chapters can be found in the first chapter of the book, “New England: An Autumn Impression.”

The question of the encircled waters too, larger and smaller—that again was perhaps an ado about trifles; but you can’t, in such conditions, and especially at first, resist the appeal of their extraordinarily mild faces and wooded brims, with the various choice spots where the great straight pines, interspaced them, and yielding to small strands as finely curved as the eyebrows of beauty, make the sacred grove and the American classic temple, the temple for the worship of the evening sky, of Fenimore Cooper, of W.C. Bryant, of the immortalizable water-

fowl. They look too much alike, the lakes and the ponds, and this is, indeed, all over the world, too much a reproach to lakes and ponds—to all save the pick of the family, say, like George and Chapman; the American idea moreover, is too inveterately that woods shall grow thick to the water. (*CTW* 370)

The writing pronounces with certainty, clarity and tart emphasis on the American lakes and the ponds are a matter upon which. Linked to a tradition of American writing concerned with the American wilderness's aesthetic possibilities, or deprivation thereof, the lakes and the ponds are an aspect of the American scene that do not trouble the restless analyst. He comes, he sees, he pronounces. The lakes and the ponds are all too alike, and in America they have not been cultivated, the trees growing wild right up to the water. Whatever there is of interest here, there is nothing that challenges, disconcerts, or grips the restless analyst, his analysis in perfect working order. The lakes and the ponds are available to evaluation in the terms of one familiar with the cultivation of the English countryside. The writer has seen and dispatched the ponds and the lakes as an aspect of the American scene. He is able to rise to a general conclusion: "this is, indeed, all over the world, too much a reproach to lakes and ponds." This is writing that proceeds from a snug position of clarity, of ease of judgment. The Americans lack a proper sense of the form that should be cultivated for ponds and lakes. The writing is not bewildered, lost, shaken in taking up the bodies of water in New England.

New York's skyscrapers, on the other hand, are unseemly, unnatural, ugly. They are themselves permutations of unrestrained money, money in excess and with no restraint, money corrupting the skyline with randomly placed and all powerful grotesqueries. While James boasted to Wells and Bourget about his inability to conclude

and form opinions, the evidence of his writing suggests that he was, on the contrary, rather a priori with the material of America. He could find nothing in it but a pecuniary violence committed against moral-formal order.⁴⁴

These modern buildings lack any integrity or relation to what surrounds them or what they have replaced.

The ‘tall buildings,’ which have so promptly usurped a glory that affects you as rather surprised, as yet, at itself, the multitudinous sky-scrapers standing up to the view, from the water, like extravagant pins in a cushion already overplanted, and stuck in as in the dark, anywhere and anyhow, have at least the felicity of carrying out the fairness of tone, of taking the sun and the shade in the manner of towers of marble. (*CTW* 419)

The glory of the tall buildings is the glory of a new center of finance and industry. Later in the book the houses of the new rich near Central Park call to mind an older economic center: “for what were the Venetians, after all, but the children of a Republic and of trade?” (*CTW* 507). Pecuniary might usurps glory, as it does usurp everything else.

But James’s tone toward the tall buildings is one of surprised and almost hostile bewilderment. They have what does not belong to them, rather like an illegitimate ruler whose force lends him authority. The restless analyst can see no organic relation between the cushion and the pins jabbed in without order or sense of proportion. There is a quality

⁴⁴ Consider Wells’s response to the sky-scraper in his *The Future of America*: “I found myself agape, admiring a sky-scraper, the prow of the Flat-iron building to be exact, ploughing up through the traffic of Broadway and Fifth Avenue in the afternoon light” (48). Wells has a metaphoric turning of his own, one that captures the magnificent reach of the Flat-iron’s wedged shape, hanging over the park. Wells is as blithe about the (very specific) Flat-iron as James is distraught by the (unspecified) giants of the mere market.

of violence and perversity to this depiction.⁴⁵ By the end of the sentence, the tall buildings have the manner of “towers of marble,” perhaps the marble towers of a former empire, such as the Roman. They have “at least the felicity” of appearing like towers, a begrudging compliment in an accumulated grievance. By the time we reach that last clause, the felicity the restless analyst finds in the buildings is ambiguous. The sentence has gathered so much evidence of their corrupt nature that their appearing like towers does not equal out the account; their usurped glory does not seem to redound to their glory.

James returned with insistent repetitiveness to the tall buildings as an expression of a repulsive economic accumulation:

One story is good only till another is told, and sky-scrappers are the last word of economic ingenuity only till another word be written. This shall be possibly a word of still uglier meaning, but the vocabulary of thrift at any price shows boundless resources, and the consciousness of the finite, the menaced, the essentially *invented* state, twinkles ever, to my perception, in the thousand glassy eyes of these giants of the mere market. Such a structure as the comparatively

⁴⁵ We are here at the other extreme of architectural order as that recorded in *English Hours*. James rhapsodized there over Trinity College, Oxford, with its walls of “time-deepened gray” (a “stray savage” need not know the difference, might not even be able to distinguish, between Oxford and Cambridge):

In the centre of the court are two or three acres of close-shaven lawn, out of the midst of which rises a grand Gothic fountain, where the serving-men fill up their buckets. There are towers and battlements and statues, and besides these things there are cloisters and gardens and bridges. There are charming rooms of stately gate-tower, and the rooms, occupying the thickness of the building, have windows looking out on one side over the magnificent quadrangle, with half a mile or so of Decorated architecture, and on the other into deep-bosomed trees. (CTW 211-12)

The whole of the scene holds together as a composed, time-deepened picture of the highest aesthetic quality. The luxuriously laid out lawn leads to the fountain, its complement and completion. The double view of the rooms keeps in view at once the expanse of architecture and the trees, the long view of monuments of long duration and the long-lasting trees, nature and art brought together in a composition stately and grand, arranged as if it were the very manifestation of the law of aesthetic. All of the elements of the scene are in harmony and nothing seems to be lacking. There is scarcely room to list all the *present* things, as opposed to the absent things James listed in *Hawthorne*, amid which the observer strolls at its ease. It is a testament to the accumulation of proper forms.

windowless bell-tower of Giotto, in Florence, looks supremely serene in its beauty. You don't feel it to have risen by the breath of an interested passion that, restless beyond all passions, is for ever seeking more pliable forms. Beauty has been the object of its creator's idea, and, having found beauty, it has found the form in which it splendidly rests. (*CTW* 420)

The sky-scrapers are provisional inventions of a new economic order. The story, at once the height and its tale, is good enough only for now. The story that takes their places will be in a language of profit. The tall buildings crowd out earlier architectural forms, both in specific instances such as Trinity church and in rising along a new logic. The "many-eyed giants of the mere market" are built for the purpose of money, that "mere" an unsettled indication of architecture's reduction to the market. The form of the tall building develops from its purpose, and its purpose is to facilitate economic accumulation that seems tethered to no ambition or aim beyond itself.

This passage makes sense of the brute ugliness of the sky-scraper by virtue of what it is not. The difference between its relation to the two structures under consideration is telling. Giotto's tower was built for beauty, whereas the giants are the negation of beauty. The writing approaches the skyscrapers with a skeptical, ironic, dismayed attitude, with a full arsenal of metaphoric turnings. The skyscrapers are baffling and insidious, and the restlessness of the writing turns to get a handle on their intractability. The passage comes to Giotto's bell-tower as though for relief, found in an embodiment of the beautiful. Giotto's tower is still, stable, serene, beautiful because coherent, coherent because beautiful. While the writing reaches for the means to describe the provisional skyscrapers, it finds no confusion in Giotto's tower. The passage

approves, categorically so, of Giotto's disinterested tower, with its proper proportion of windows. It rises up in the passage and looms there as an embodiment of perfection.

But the energy of the passage is all in developing the terms of a rejection of the tall buildings.⁴⁶ The "finite, the menaced, the essentially *invented* state" brings the writing into a headlong pitch, whereas the bell-tower's serenity deflects the very need for adjectives. Giotto's bell-tower is the central measure by which the restless analyst establishes the bounds of his thinking. But therein lies the problem, for the tall buildings are outside the terms of that thinking. The "thousand glassy eyes of these giants of the mere market" is a grotesque image, the giants looming monsters.

There is a stark, almost epic-like opposition between the bell-tower and the giants. The restless analyst accords the one a dramatic metaphoric turning, converting the windows of the building into so many grotesque eyes. He attacks the task of writing about the tall buildings but backs away from the bell tower with deference, and with no impulse to metaphorize it. Giotto's campanile is an expression of a beauty free of the burdens out of which the tall buildings emerge—no "interested passion" was involved in its creation. On the other hand, the giants of the mere market are direct manifestations of interest, the interest of accruing interest. The intensity with which the passage insists on the purity of Giotto's tower and, conversely, on the market-nature of the towers, gives one pause. The analyst's restlessness comes to a stand still before the skyscrapers. It is not only that he cannot find formal merit in the skyscrapers, but rather that he cannot find any form to them at all. They are deformations. There is an inequality in the treatment of the two objects whose putative comparison is the basis of the passage.

⁴⁶ Wendy Graham has remarked that the restless analyst's "reflections, even as a walker in the city, are irresistibly lifted to the emerging towers" (246). Adeline Tintner remarks on James's contradictory reaction to the sky-scraper, that he was both "aghast and overpowered" by them, curious and repelled (8).

The restless analyst, having found the material of New York he urged upon Edith Wharton, rejects it for Europe, where such things as towers of beauty could be built, a constant aesthetic reminder and measure of proper proportions. James could only have written his book in relation to a very old standard embodied in the traditions and monuments of Europe. The “mere market” shows up as the negative of beauty against the Old World. Europe is emerging as the stable, ordered background to the negating, consuming modern America. Having encountered the shock he told William he was counting on, James has begun to retreat into a version of Europe as a saving continuity to modern America.

But in the divergence of consideration of the bell tower and the sky-scraper a more radical discordance is becoming visible. The writing is encountering the historical limits of the writeable. It turns out that James could only “do” the shock of New York, as he enjoined Edith Wharton, in an account that is at bottom a refusal and a denial, an account of a failure to find anything redeemable in the sky-scraper. But this negative account is also the record of an encounter with the visible manifestation of historical change that arises in the writing by the absence of terms beyond a trenchant, bitter refusal amounting in the end to closure and conclusiveness.

Toward the beginning of the first New York chapter, “New York Revisited,” James wrote of how

these huge constructed and compressed communities, throbbing, through its myriad arteries and pores, with a single passion, even as a complicated watch throbs with the one purpose of telling you the hour and the minute, testified overwhelmingly to the *character* of New York—and the passion of the restless

analyst on his side is for the extraction of character. But there would be too much to say, just here, were this incurable eccentric to let himself go; the impression in question, fed by however brief an experience, kept overflowing the cup and spreading in a wide waste of speculation. I must dip into these depths later on; let me content myself with remembering how from the first, on all such ground, my thought went straight to poor great wonder-working Emile Zola and *his* love of the human aggregation, the artificial microcosm...What if *Le Ventre de Paris*, what if *Au Bonheur des Dames*, what if *Pot-Bouille* and *L'Argent*, could but have come into being under the New York inspiration? The answer to that, however, for the hour, was that, in all probability, New York was not going (as it turns such remarks) to produce both the maximum of 'business' spectacle and the maximum of ironic reflection of it" (CTW 424).

No sooner does the energy of the "myriad arteries" of the tall building startle the restless analyst than he backs away from the character it suggests. Reflection about that character will be for later. But why is this the case, extraction of character the very purpose of the restless analyst, as he himself says? The passion for the extraction of character is refusing such extraction, the material of New York undoing the restlessness of analysis. There is as well a coy disingenuousness to the assertion that the passion of the analyst has not already extracted the character to the degree that he can in naming the "single passion" in the tall building, that of making money. There is turbulence here, diffidence combined with certainty, interest sliding into repulsion. New York's intractability to reflection is of a piece with its monstrous, unlimited, economic development, with its "'business'

spectacle,” a phrase of finicky bafflement. New York outstrips the possibility of “ironic reflection.”

New York and dramatic capture are terms whose opposition do not cohere into the balance of a paradox but militate against one another like aggravated enemies.

The reflecting surfaces, of the ironic, of the epic order, suspended in the New York atmosphere, have yet to show symptoms of shining out, and the monstrous phenomena themselves, meanwhile, strike me as having, with the immense momentum, got the start, got ahead of, in proper parlance, any possibility of poetic, of dramatic capture. That conviction came to me perhaps while I gazed across at the special sky-scraper that overhangs poor old Trinity to the north—a south face as high and wide as the mountain-wall that drops the Alpine avalanche, from time to time, upon the village, and the village spire, at its foot; the interest of the case being above all, as I learned, to my stupefaction, in the fact that the very creators of the extinguisher are the church wardens themselves. (CTW 424-25)

The change in New York has accelerated faster than reflecting forms, refusing the possibility “of poetic, of dramatic capture,” a failure to extract character. Business at its maximum seems to exclude for James the very possibility of “ironic reflection,” even at its maximum. The one development has rendered the other impossible. This purported inability to capture New York is strange from a writer who claimed explicitly, in his “The Art of Fiction” and elsewhere, that all subjects are the writer’s domain.

Other writers, including James’s contemporary and friend William Dean Howells, reacted to modern New York with more tension, more alert to the interest, and even beauty, of New York’s dynamism. Howells’ *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), a novel

about modern New York James himself admired, describes Mr. March riding the elevated subway: “What suggestion! What drama! What infinite interest!...The track that found and lost itself a thousand times in the flare and tremor of the innumerable lights; the moony sheen of the electrics mixing with the reddish points and blots of gas far and near; the architectural shapes of houses and churches and towers...formed an incomparable perspective” (64-65). March responds with palpable excitement here to the moving and suspended view made possible by the subway’s height. The density of perspective provided by the train’s whizzing movement includes various planes of sight, and, similarly, March witnesses the drama of multiple lives even as they remain strangers to him. Placing these passages side by side, it seems March has beaten the restless analyst at his own game, adapting his observations to the city as he goes along, his skiff tied to no conclusion. By comparison, the restless analyst concludes, refusing to find in the tall buildings any interest or merit whatsoever. The restless analyst spends a lot of time denouncing New York. Four of fourteen chapters concern the city, the only place to which more than one is dedicated, so that the book hovers there, as though unable to leave—the “fascination of the abomination,” as Marlow says in *Heart of Darkness* (6). For the restless analyst, the limitless barbarism of the tall buildings amounted for James to a monstrosity that was unwriteable. The formlessness of the skyscraper meant it was impossible to develop a form adequate to it, the possibility “of poetic, of dramatic capture” bound by history.

The disjuncture between New York, in its unbridled mutation, and any writing that might be responsive to it occurs in relation to an architectural conjunction. Like an avalanche-prone mountain, the sky-scraper is menacing, unpredictable, and unstable. The

scale of the two buildings is as out of proportion as that of the village and the mountain. This reference to the Alpine has no interest in the awesome sublimity of nature (as Shelley does, for instance, in “Mont Blanc”). The link between the building and mountain is rather that of a gross and unseemly mismatch—the sky-scraper overpowers and overtowers Trinity as the mountain overtowers the village.

The tradition and custom-bound church has been made invisible by the money-making sky-scraper. Between the two buildings there is incoherence (an incoherence the restless analyst is not quite able to make as explicit as he claims in the “Philadelphia” chapter). Skyscrapers signal to the restless analyst the collapse of formal congruence, of architectural bodies that embody and give shape to traditions. Economically motivated and fueled, they have left a world in its wake no longer amenable to “the consequent question of literary representation” (*CTW* 354). The skyscraper records in its own monstrosity a peculiar kind of formless form.

The accrual of money in America emerges in the restless analyst’s account as a demonic and self-legitimizing force. The process of such accrual refuses limits as an intolerable restraint, including the limits of history. Having seen that his birthplace had been destroyed, the restless analyst searches in vain for a commemorative plaque:

The form is cultivated, to the greatly quickened interest of street-scenery, in many of the cities of Europe; and is it not verily bitter, for those who feel a poetry in the noted passage, longer or shorter, here and there, of great lost spirits, that the institution, the profit, the glory of any such association is denied in advance to communities tending, as the phrase is, to “run” preponderantly to the sky-scraper? Where, in fact, is the point of inserting a mural tablet, at any legible height, in a

building certain to be destroyed to make room for a sky-scraper? And from where, on the other hand, in a façade of fifty floors, does one “see” the pious plate recording the honour attached to one of the apartments look down on a responsive people? We have but to ask the question to recognize our necessary failure to answer it as a supremely characteristic local note—a note in the light of which the great city is projected into its future as, practically, a huge, continuous fifty-floored conspiracy against the very idea of the ancient graces, those that strike us as having flourished just in proportion as the parts of life and the signs of character have *not* been lumped together, not been indistinguishably sunk in the common fund of mere economic convenience. (*CTW* 432)

For “those who feel a poetry in the noted passage, longer or shorter, here and there, of great lost spirits,” the skyscraper is an abomination. This poetry of loss is almost maudlin, a sentimental piety concerning the snuffing out of the ancient graces. The turn to Europe here is again an appeal to an authoritative continuity that would school the obtrusive and forceful excess of the tall buildings’ ruthless denial of historical precedents. Placing a commemorative plaque is to place a limit, to recognize the present as belonging within a historical chain. The sky-scraper, on the other hand, a “fifty-floored conspiracy against the very idea of the ancient graces,” claims, in its abrupt and uncontainable form, a power only to transform, mutate, and usurp.

Irritated, the restless analyst is here hostile and acerbic. The emphasis of “very idea” is an exasperated rhetorical upbraiding, the “conspiracy” attributing a conscious, perverse effort, as though their purpose is to denigrate and deny the “very idea of the ancient graces.” That phrase stacks the deck in their favor, “ancient” endowing the old

with pathos, as though the graces are muses or renowned elders, part of a world that was once better. The rhythm of the passage accords a direct and inverse relationship to “the possibility of the ancient graces” and the current “common fund of mere economic convenience,” the reverence of the former a direct contrast to the taut dismissal of the latter. Money has destroyed proper distinctions, reducing them to the single economic measure. The stark opposition arises from the extent of the writer’s disgust with the moneyed condition of the world, his tone as shrill with relation to the one as it is precious with relation to the other.

Money is, once again, the final, unchangeable, irredeemable aspect of American life. Like the description of the skyscrapers as “giants of the mere market,” this passage comes up against the uncontainable force of money. The *mere* market, the common fund of *mere* economic convenience. Both phrasings suggest a paucity, the excess an impoverishment, the tone of both disgruntled and disgusted by the mere economic principle the buildings incarnate and reproduce. The opposition between the ancient graces and the common fund is akin to that between the bell-tower and giants. But there is a more jarring quality to this set of terms. Economic convenience cancels out the ancient graces, is itself a destructive anti-presence. The “common fund of mere economic convenience” is the tone of condemnation, like a lawyer appealing to the moral sensibility of a jury to clinch the case against an obvious outrage against more than the letter of the law.

Economic convenience reduces architectural possibilities to money-making propositions, brushes aside form. “The fatal ‘tall’ pecuniary enterprise rises where it will, in the candid glee of new worlds to conquer; the intervals between take whatever foolish

form they like; the sky-line, eternal victim of the artless jumble, submits again to the type of the broken hair-comb turned up" (*CTW* 472). The sky-scraper pursues the one pursuit of money with "candid glee," with a maniacal ferocity. It does not submit to the canon of any coherent taste or discipline. It is master and maker, destroyer and ruler. The broken hair comb is an image of disregard and uselessness become disfiguration. The tall buildings are an aggressive regression that mutilate the sky-line. The sky-scraper "rises where it will," meaning it should not be. Like the American woman evolving a moral consciousness from herself, it rejects all limits. The limitlessness of money ratifies the impunity of the sky-scraper.

Money is the dyspeptic note of the restless analyst's conclusive take on the tall building. It is a mere manifestation of mere economic accumulation, money embodied in looming, ugly buildings. Formal coherence in the tall building is impossible in the restless analyst's static certainty. "The attempt to take the aesthetic view is invariably blighted sooner or later by their most salient characteristic, *the* feature that speaks loudest for the economic idea. Window upon window, at any cost, is a condition never to be reconciled with any grace of building" (*CTW* 435). Serial windows are un-aesthetic a priori, so that the restless analyst has here approached an object of analysis with a preconceived formulation. There is in this passage a baffled and vexed tone of whinging complaint in the failed attempt to take the aesthetic view, a throwing up of the hands in face of the tall building's relentless aesthetic negation. The analyst pronounces upon an attempt to see the aesthetic blighted (the windows are a kind of disease, a poisoning of the aesthetic). He attempts to see the buildings one way, aesthetically, but gets no return on his effort. The second of these sentences is categorical. The undifferentiated and

instrumental rows of windows are “never to be reconciled with any grace of building.” “Never” and “any” raise the terms of the judgment to the status of an absolute. The inserted clause, “at any cost,” (a tone of dismissive condemnation for a moral laxness) is an aside that once again equates ugliness and economic ends. Every cost has been incurred for money: an expense of cost is complete waste.

The end of the paragraph is sardonic and mocking concerning the reason for all those windows. “Doesn’t it take in fact acres of window-glass to help even an expert New Yorker to get the better of another expert one, or to see that the other expert one doesn’t get the better of *him*? It is easy to conceive that, after all, with this origin and nature stamped upon their foreheads, the last word of the mercenary monsters should not be their address to our sense of formal beauty” (*CTW* 435). This is mordant humor full of tart exaggerations, beginning with the seeming question that in fact has only one answer, as well as the yawning and endless “acres” and the triple repetition of “expert,” a scathing description of the technical knowledge at work, the “even” underlining the harsh competition of business.⁴⁷ The business of making money in these “mercenary monsters” is destructive, self-generating and all consuming.

In short, the unrestrained pursuit of money is destructive of moral limits and incongruent with “formal beauty.” What has emerged out of the restless analyst’s disgust with the tall buildings is that they are ugly because immoral, immoral because ugly. The immorality of experts getting the better of one another inside the mercenary monsters is at odds with formal beauty. This is not an obvious connection to make, for couldn’t the

⁴⁷ In this passage James’s tone brings him quite close to the figures of Lears’s anti-modernist canon, who he argues attempted to overturn the felt threat “of modern comfort and complacency,” of the lifeless over-bureaucratization of life.

experts get the better of one another in beautiful buildings addressed to beauty? The lack of formal beauty in the tall buildings suggests, is already a part of a moral dissolution.

We are back with the concerns of the essays on manners—the formal structures of morality act as necessary limits to individuals. The formal structures of architecture are necessary moral limits, necessary but ignored. When not in the mode of pronouncing on lakes and ponds, money's destruction of those limits drives the restless analyst into a black rage he returns to with a repetitiveness his contemporary Sigmund Freud would have described as a compulsion. But the compulsion does not resolve in a memory. He can bring to the tall buildings neither analysis nor restlessness, but a finicky conviction that finds in the sky-scrapers nothing but an abomination. The inability to advance that observation records by means of its unfilled stuntedness a negative outline of what cannot be written, its repetition arriving over and over again at material whose intractability will not resolve its limitless monstrousness and relentless ugliness. The perpetual return to this ugliness is odd considering that the same conclusion recurs with little variation: the sky-scrapers traduce moral and formal responsibility. But the obsessive return is already an understanding of the recalcitrance of the material, the way in which it resists the restless analyst at the very foundations of his project. But his inability to account for them in the terms of his account is in itself the record of an apprehension, the coming into view of the historical limits of the write-able.

In his chapter on New England, James compared universities to monasteries in the “dark ages”: “They glow, the humblest of them, to the imagination—the imagination that fixes the surrounding scene as a huge Rappacini-garden, rank with each variety of the poison-plant of the money-passion—they glow with all the vividness of the defined

alternative, the possible antidote” (CTW 403). The “money-passion” (a phrase that will recur in *The Ivory Tower*) is like Rappaccini, whose pursuit of knowledge leads him to destroy his own daughter, his plants “no longer of God’s making, but the monstrous offspring of man’s depraved fancy” (CTW 991). Rappaccini destroys limits in refusing the moral claims of his own paternity, a refusal close to incest in its ultimate moral perversion. It was no accident that Hawthorne’s Rappaccini (James forgot the second “c”) was Italian. For Hawthorne, as for James, Italy was as dangerous as it was beautiful, as captivating as it was depraved. Now Rappaccini’s garden has migrated back to Eden, to the origin of Christopher Newman (the embodiment in James’s early novel of America, of an unassailable moral coherence). The word “intellectual” was just coming into use at this moment, and James was close here to figuring intellectual work as a strain resistant to the modern American money-passion.⁴⁸ The university is to modern America what the monastery was to the dark ages: a preservation of the light of culture against the barbarism of the experts, the limitlessness of modern economic forces.

Newport’s vast new houses were the residential counterpart to the sky-scrapers. Like the “giants of the mere market,” these new houses recognized no limits or constraints. As the restless analyst remembered it as a young man, in “The Sense of Newport,” Newport had “simply lain there like a little bare, white, open hand, with slightly-parted fingers” (CTW 528). The hinted sexual valence of the image is almost grotesque in its suggestion of an oncoming corruption. The hand of the maiden had since been defiled by excessive wealth: “The pink palm being empty, in other words, to their

⁴⁸ For a history of the emergence of the concept and the word, closely related to the Dreyfus affair and Zola’s “J’accuse,” see Posnock, *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual*. James had nothing but the highest praise for what he described as Zola’s “courage in the Dreyfus case” (EW 896).

vision, they had begun, from far back, to put things into it, things of their own, and of all sorts, and of many ugly, and of more and more expensive, sorts; to fill it substantially, that is, with gold, the gold that they have ended by heaping up there to an amount so oddly out of proportion to the scale of nature of space" (*CTW* 529-30). The pink palm suggests the monstrousness of what will fill it and is itself a grotesque image that suggests naked, childish innocence. The architectural excesses made possible by great wealth, the ugly and expensive things, the lumpish pile of gold, have a relation to the empty palm that is a perverse crime. The empty palm, passive and almost lifeless, seems destined for desecration by a willful crime.

The event of money was the fall of Newport, the best of America, into history. Pecuniary might is again the source of the restless analyst's dissatisfaction. The fall into history is a fall into impudent disproportions and immoral grotesquerie, the heaped gold a violent, rape-like aggression against the charming Newport whose cottages were inherently limited to a proper and innocent discretion. The innocent maiden has been despoiled by gold. That gold is reminiscent of *The Golden Bowl*. Adam Verver's endless wealth abominates his allegorical incarnation as the new world man, the inversion of Christopher Newman's new world moral coherence. The tone of this chapter wavers between a passionate, even sentimental, nostalgia for the past and outraged, disgusted repulsion with the desecration of that past.

Old Newport gave a necessary margin to the small band of cosmopolites, united by three common circumstances, that of their having for the most part more or less lived in Europe, that of their having sacrificed openly to the ivory idol whose name is leisure, and that, not least, of a formed critical habit.

These things had been felt as making them excrescences on the American surface, where nobody ever criticized, especially after the grand tour, and where the great black ebony god of business was the only one recognized. So I see them, at all events, in fond memory, lasting as long as they could and finding no successors; and they are most embalmed for me, I confess, in that scented, somewhat tattered, but faintly spiced, wrapper of their various “European” antecedents. (*CTW* 538)

The “‘European’ antecedents” of the cosmopolites was once the corrective balance to America’s “money passion,” embalming them as though in a magical protection in an old wrapper, a delicious, crumbling container from the past. (James was here retrojecting his present unhappiness with the American scene into the past—his works synonymous with the period in the past he refers to did not take this attitude toward money). Business and criticism are now mutually exclusive—Newman could only play out the drama of his moral being in Europe, and Strether could only have come to a critical rejection of Woollett, and of Chad’s future in advertising, in Paris, where his critical habit develops to the point that he will return to Woollett without being of it. Now business has destroyed Newport itself.

Leisure and business, ivory and ebony, the pink palm and the excessive, vulgar gold (and from earlier in the book, the sky-scraper and the bell tower)—the distinction between these oppositions is rigid and scrupulous, akin to the line dividing villain and hero, the detective and the criminal who poses a threat to bourgeois order. This rigid opposition is another aspect of James’s conclusiveness with relation to the subject-matter of the American republic’s undoing by money. The rigidity comprises evidence of despair that rises to desperation in the final paragraph of the chapter.

There were once “distant places beyond Bateman’s, or better still on the opposite isle of Connanicut, now blighted with ugly uses” (*CTW* 540). The old cottages have become massive “white elephants” trampling the once delicate place (*CTW* 540).

What an idea, originally, to have seen this miniature spot of earth, where the sea-nymphs on the curved sands, at the worst, might have chanted back to the shepherds, as a mere breeding-ground for white elephants! They look queer and conscious and lumpish—some of them, as with an air of the brandished proboscis, really grotesque—while their averted owners, roused from a witless dream, wonder what in the world is to be done with them. The answer to which, I think, can only be that there is absolutely nothing to be done; nothing but to let them stand there always, vast and blank, for reminder to those concerned of the prohibited degrees of witlessness, and of the peculiarly awkward vengeance of affronted proportion and discretion. (*CTW* 540)

The pastoral scene has been despoiled, Newport’s rude but touching bareness a dreamy seascape replete with figures from a pastoral—James’s conscious mobilization of a literary genre works to the effect of a plangent complaint at what has been lost. The quaint, pastoral shepherds were an organic extension, like the sea-nymphs, of the uninterrupted harmony of the scene of nature itself. They were in harmony with the place in the same degree the white elephants have been transplanted and imposed, constituting an irrevocable denigration by outsized, grotesque forms. The quiet seclusion of old Newport, once a retreat for those not gripped with the money-passion, has been overridden by that very passion.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ A telling comparison here is that of an early piece titled “Newport” (1870), published in *The Nation* and then in revised form in *Portraits of Places*. In that essay, James described the cottages subsequently

The passage imagines the owners of the houses endowed with a sudden consciousness of the moral transgression of their large houses, as though occurring right now in the present. Let them stand, “vast and blank, for reminder to those concerned of the prohibited degrees of witlessness, and of the peculiarly awkward vengeance of affronted proportion and discretion.” The houses themselves may look insolent and aware, but that is only further evidence that they have been built with no consciousness. They are a mere vengeance on a proper sense of limits—a transgression of prohibition. The appeal to “those concerned” is an angry appeal to a moral minority, those who are themselves not sunk in economic convenience. Vast and blank, the obscene white elephants are a corrupt nothingness nevertheless filling the landscape. They are a “mere manifestation” of a new society of wealth. “Affronted proportion and discretion” recoils from the offensive and repugnant, is itself affronted, as are the emphatic, bristling series of preceding adjectives that sound the rhetorical cadences of a declamatory speech.

Newport has become an abject place of ravage. The tone of that last sentence, the closing sentence of the chapter, rises to strident anger. In the skyscraper and bell tower passage there was a distance of ironic reflection between the writing and its subject. Here, outrage consumes the writing from within. The bell tower was a saving opposition to the sky-scraper. Here the writing does not reach for a European antecedent. There is no equivalent to the bell tower. The white elephants are all that there is, proportion and discretion wasted and lost once and for all. Outrage at their impunity presses the writing

overridden by the white elephants: “The plain gray nudity of these little warped and shingled boxes seems to make it a hopeless task on their part to present any positive appearance at all. . . . Their homely notches and splinters twinkle till the mere friendliness of the thing makes a surface. Their steep gray roofs, barnacled with lichens, remind you of old barges, overturned on the beach to dry” (*CTW* 764). The cottages’ humble lack of adornment gives way to the positive value of the homely. The splinters themselves twinkle, the steeped roofs shading off into the natural setting. This charming if rustic scene has given way in the account given in *The American Scene* to the grotesque and the monstrous.

beyond the languorous pacing of quizzical, absorbed fascination. The ease and clarity with which the analyst declared on the lakes and the ponds is here drained away into a bleak diffidence, a self-destroying unease that things are not as they should be. The immoral ugliness of wealth without bounds again emerges as a formal undoing with moral implications.

In his 1879 book *Hawthorne*, James listed all the things absent from America and the problem this absence posed for would be novelists: “it takes such an acquaintance of history and custom, such a complexity of manner and types, to form a fund of suggestion for a novelist” (*AW* 352). But now a new problem has arisen, a new view is being taken of that very absence in light of its destruction.

In the final chapter of the book, “Florida,” in a section the editor removed from the American edition of the book, the restless analyst heads to the Midwest on a Pullman train, “the Pullmans that are like rushing hotels and the hotels that are like stationary Pullmans” (*CTW* 689). The hotels and the trains are alike cages of luxury, anticipating needs they themselves have produced. The train seems to say ““See what I’m making of all this—see what I’m making, what I’m making!”” (*CTW* 734). The un pitying, unrelenting voice of the machine changes the continent in the process of crossing it is an, commanding voice.

It provokes a response, however, the restless analyst replying with dissidence, even dissonance, in one of the most acerbic, pessimistic passages in all of Henry James. The Pullman’s mechanized, predictable monologue becomes a dialogue.

If I were one of the painted savages you have dispossessed, or even some tough reactionary trying to emulate him, what you are making would doubtless impress

me more than what you are leaving unmade; for in that case it wouldn't be to *you* I should be looking in any degree for pity and charm. Beauty and charm would be for me in the solitude you have ravaged, and I should owe you my grudge for every disfigurement and every violence, for every wound with which you have caused the face of the land to bleed. (*CTW* 734)

Dispossessed and disfigured, America is a despoliation. The bleeding face is an unusual image in James in the blunt gruesomeness of its direct violence. (Violence to the face is particularly extreme, as though it is committed against the personhood of a person). In the peremptory nature of the violence James is here doing just what William complained he did not ever do, "to say a thing in one sentence as straight and explicit as it can be made" (*CWJ* 3:). This passage and that about Newport's sea-nymphs share a dyspeptic tone of outrage. Both passages also tap into a very old and potent rendering of America as synonymous with the uncorrupted continent itself, what Henry Nash Smith described in the title of his book as "virgin land," the mythic identification between America and the continent, and what Richard Poirier has characterized as "the visionary ideal of America" (*A World Elsewhere* 53).

Poirier's phrase occurs within the course of a discussion of the closing of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (a book of the generation just on the heels of James's, and one also concerned with America's modern fate). The enchanting and visionary new world, once a vision that compelled Dutch sailors, has been plundered, "the rewards actually desired of the landscape" in tension with the elusive vision of the landscape, lost as soon as found (*World* 53). Americans project themselves back to a point of origin in the putatively aboriginal continent, Poirier points out, in a way that is akin to Gatsby's

longing for his original, uncorrupted vision of Daisy. Myra Jehlen has argued in *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent*, that this visionary ideal is the core of America's ideological self-conception (an ideology, she points out, that Smith's account itself perpetuates in the assumption of the continent's vacancy) (29). Frederick Jackson Turner had just formulated his thesis that the frontier had made Americans American in his 1893 paper "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." James, I think, was conscious of the mythic overtones he was mobilizing with reference to America, turning the filling in of the land (like the filling of the pink palm) into a violent wounding. The appeal to the uncorrupted continent, and thus to America's central myth about itself, is a theatrical gesture, an intoning from on high just in case we may have missed the point. Looking back at James's letter to Wells, and the self-description in this chapter about tying his skiff fast to no conclusion, it seems as though James has concluded with urgent clarity, underlined the opinion we have already seen him repeating about sky-scrapers. Moral urgency about America has converted anti-conclusive elaboration into conclusive insistence.

The old world has its settled ruins, the new world ruination. There is irreversible completion in "every disfigurement and every violence." Ventriloquized speech has never in all of James's writings sounded so strident and adamant. Anger is uncommon in James—indirection and obliquity draw the writing away from such peremptoriness. James has traveled and written about New York's sky-scrapers, Newport's houses, Philadelphia's rational plan, Washington's social life. Here in the final section of the final chapter he has vented the greatest degree of anguish against the loss of a once present America.

Modern America has emerged in this final section as itself a violence. The ventriloquized response continues:

You touch the great lonely land—as one feels it still to be—only to plant upon it some ugliness about which, never dreaming of the grace of apology or contrition, you then proceed to brag with a cynicism all your own. You convert the large and noble sanities that I see around me, you convert them one after the other to crudities, to invalidities, hideous and unashamed; and you so leave them to add to the number of myriad aspects you simply spoil, of the myriad unanswerable questions that you scatter about as some monstrous unnatural mother might leave a family of unfathered infants on doorsteps or in waiting-rooms. (*CTW* 735)

The blight is without apology. This passage has become almost sentimental with its “great lonely land” and its “grace of apology.” The “sanities” have become crudities (themselves “unashamed” in the way that advertising legitimates itself). The opposition is actual and absolute, like that of the sea-nymphs and the white elephants. The Pullman train and all that it betokens has begun to settle the open, continual unfolding of the writing. The ravage of America has reconfigured the writing. The Pullman’s conversion of sanities into crudities has thrown up “unanswerable questions,” its destructive course a refusal of comprehensibility. The questions are themselves scattered by a “monstrous unnatural mother,” a mother who has abandoned her own progeny, and thus her role as mother, and has also begotten them by unnatural means. The questions are without answer and deformations of nature. The Pullman is a perversion propagating further perversions.

The American Scene ends with the restless analyst traveling toward the heart of a dark continent. The train declares itself a genius of the place on the make: “See what I’m making of all this.” The mechanical insistence of the voice repeats itself with sinister self-assurance, praising its work again and again, its lack of consciousness at one with its monstrousness. The making is an unmaking, the dystopic ravage of America’s once poignant and present promise, a copy-editor’s line of cancellation.

VI

The Golden Bowl is continuous with James’s non-fictional writings in its anxious brooding about the nature and fate of America. The novel ends with Maggie Verver banishing Charlotte back to American City, a place somewhere in the same Midwest the restless analyst heads toward at the end of *The American Scene*. Fanny sees Charlotte “thrown for a grim future beyond the great sea and the great continent” (540). Money, the power that Adam Verver’s money confers a priori, drags back against the whole narrative of Maggie’s discovery. Her discovery is rendered less meaningful because her enormous fortune gives her dominance of the situation, what turns out to be a black smudge that renders opaque the moral clarity the novel seems to suggest resides in her innocence. Money destroys the meaningful possibility of free moral agents to act meaningfully. Money is a moral faultline, unraveling the morality of the innocent American. Maggie settles in the heart of the dying British Empire while Adam returns to the rising US. In the end, money, having negated morality, also negates the possibility of the kind of fiction James had developed.

Maggie’s assumption of her right to wield and shape, to shift and sort, to use all the others around her as means to the end of preserving what she hopes is her father’s

ignorance, compromises her discovery of the adultery. The unexamined power of American money is a moral and epistemic black hole in James's late fiction. Maggie acts with what she herself understands to be moral clarity and certainty, while the novel's omnivorous ambition to encompass all the possibilities of the facts of the case makes that clarity salient as in itself a moral problem. James's old themes and their moral orders have evolved into exaggerated convolutions, indeed have developed into irresolvable moral contradictions. Money, ascendant and aggressive, seems increasingly to define and control the moral realm. The American girl (a perennial James type) has become almost monstrous; self-consciously wielding her money, she imposes an American innocence that now appears as a moral deformation, as a moral darkness.

Money cancels the significance of the inward drama of consciousness. The Jamesian story of the evolution of knowledge becomes in Maggie's case instead the imposition of an end facilitated by money. The Newsome fortune casts a black shadow across the process of Strether's coming to know. The deepening of consciousness and the elaboration of a flexible understanding in relation to irreducible complexity come to their end in face of vast American fortunes. Money overrules and overrides, dictates and directs. But money is also a necessity for this Jamesian elaboration of character. One cannot possess one's life as an elaboration of consciousness while tied to necessity—this is one reason why James's characters often begin with their finances settled. In the late fiction, the need for money and the possession of money alike incur moral compromise.

Money was not always a moral problem in James's fiction. In one of his first novels, *The American*, money and the moral coherence of the American were parts of a whole. Christopher Newman's story begins when he has enough money not to have to

concern himself with it any longer. Newman made his fortune in American business, then retiring to Paris, where the aristocratic Ultramontane Bellegarde family reject his proposal of marriage after initially accepting it. Newman acquires the evidence to expose a family secret of murder as a means of revenge for the Bellegardes having jilted him after an initial acceptance. But he turns the opportunity down. “Whether it was Christian charity or unregenerate good nature—what it was, in the background of his soul—I don’t pretend to say; but Newman’s last thought was that of course he would let the Bellegardes go” (306). Newman’s moral coherence sees him through a trial that (supposedly) might have unraveled it. The difference between Christian charity and unregenerate good nature is one of consciousness—does he know, is he really capable of the revenge, making his act a conscious one, or is it his untutored and therefore unconscious nature acting through him? The sentence recoils from saying because to decide in favor of the second option makes his act less than meaningful as a moral act. But the first option poses its own problems.

A conscious act gives Newman power, the power to impose his will, to withhold or to give Christian charity. The novel has been almost acrobatic in staving off any possibility of Newman himself producing results in his own life—even the idea of marrying Claire de Cintre originates with Mrs. Tristram. A more conscious Newman would present James with a different version of American, one aware of social forms and capable of revenge. There is no moment in the novel in which Newman is moved by the spirit of vengeance (it would make him into an ugly and monstrous character or pose the threat of doing so). Newman’s moral coherence survives to the end. Later, James will develop a character, Lambert Strether, upon whom nothing is lost, one who is almost

pure consciousness. But Strether has no money, so the possibility of power does not compromise his moral coherence either.

When James arrived at *The Golden Bowl* he had arrived at a morally fraught understanding of money. To be in *The Golden Bowl* is to be compromised, each discrete moral position unraveling in relation to money. In his last great completed novel, James wrote an American character, Maggie Verver, who comes into consciousness while backed by the possession of a vast fortune. The intensity of Maggie's moral intensity (she acts to maintain what she hopes is her father's lack of consciousness) compromises her moral coherence. Maggie's developing consciousness of the situation in which she finds herself becomes power, the power Newman never wielded.

Christopher Newman does not possess consciousness of the social forms that dictate a royal French family would reject a good-natured American (though James will come to reject the basis of that rejection in his late preface to the novel). But his good nature is impeccable, his lack of consciousness rather charming. Newman's money facilitates his trip to Europe but does not impinge on his moral constitution. Adam Verver's money and his character are a return to the same subject, written along the same allegorical lines. By the turn of the century the American's lack of consciousness and of form is a moral abyss. Between *The American* and *The Golden Bowl* something had gone radically wrong, in James's understanding of America. By the turn of the century the American's lack of consciousness and of form is a moral abyss. Why had America gone off the rails? James's argument with America had undergone an aggregating exacerbation. When he returned to America and Americans as the subject matter of his fiction, it was with a changed, developed sense of the problem of America. History had

changed America and James was a changed writer, who in re-examining America discovered it to be in the grip of a terrifying pecuniary drama occurring in a moral vacuum.

In his late writings James's dissonant, pessimistic apprehension of America had discovered the moral problem of form to go to the roots of his native country. Without social forms, there is no external imperative to dictate moral responsibility. The problem of form is at the center of the moral quandaries around which *The Golden Bowl* spins. A society built upon the free impulse, built upon a rejection of a constraint to free impulse, has no basis for moral duty. A collection of individuals acting upon free impulse have no basis upon which to respond, by duty, to the claims of socially constituted forms.

James's reference in "The Manners of American Women" to "those dollars that lighten the burden of consciousness" is not passing or incidental (*Culture* 99). Upon his return to America he found a society ravaged by "the money passion." Money ruled the American scene, money cut loose from any moral, aesthetic, or historical constraints. The accumulation of money at a perverse rate, along with the self-assuming self-legislation of the American girl proves a toxic combination in *The Golden Bowl*. The American does not perceive the lack of social forms as such.

In the first conversation of the novel, a mere 3 pages in, the Prince explains why it's a surprise that Adam Verver is a "*real* galantuomo" (45).

'Why his form', he had returned, 'might have made one doubt.'

'Father's form?' She hadn't seen it. 'It strikes me he hasn't got any.'

'He hasn't got mine - he hasn't even got yours.'

'Thank you for "even"!' the girl had laughed at him.

‘Oh yours, my dear, is tremendous. But your father has his own. I’ve made that

out. So don’t doubt it. It’s where it has brought him out – that’s the point.’

‘It’s his goodness that has brought him out,’ our young woman had, at this, objected.

‘Ah darling, goodness, I think, never brought any one out. Goodness, when it’s real, precisely, rather keeps people *in*.’ He had been interested in his discrimination, which amused him. ‘No, it’s his *way*. It belongs to him.’

But she had wondered still. “It’s the American way. That’s all.”

“Exactly – it’s all. It’s all I say! It fits him – so it must be good for something.” (45-6)

Goodness keeps people in because it constrains them in the bondage of form. Maggie does not see the form her father makes, simply sees his way as the American way, a way that is cosmic, pre-ordained, written into the very fabric of the universe. The American way is a natural way of goodness, so that Maggie sees her father Adam as Adam, the American man not yet fallen. Her tone in these opening pages is bright and crisp, her view of things troubling because so untroubled. The prince is himself troubled throughout the opening of the novel, demanding guidance from Fanny. Here he is worried and scrupulous in clarifying the terms of the situation. That Maggie does not see her father’s form is not a good sign because it indicates a lack of consciousness on her part, a lack of self-consciousness and self-criticism concerning her father, and herself as a kind of extension of him. Like the young American lady in the anecdote in “The Manners of

American Women,” she is blind and deaf to the social pipe she has crushed under her feet. She assumes a great deal without awareness of the forms of things.

Over the course of the novel, she will act only from the moral passion to keep her father from knowing and from suspecting that she suspects. But that moral passion is askew because she evolves it “from her moral consciousness alone.” (What is the moral significance of a such a character carrying out such a program in a fiction by a novelist who valued curiosity above all else and whose heroes and heroines always undergo a process of discovery?)

Maggie and Adam assume themselves and assume the power they have, never having consciousness of it as power. At a crucial moment in the novel, Fanny comes to see that the issue of form is at the heart of the relations among the quartet, form being, she says to Bob, two thirds of conduct. Is it form that’s keeping Charlotte away with the Prince at Matcham an extra day?

‘Yes – absolutely. *Their* forms.’

““Theirs” - ?’

‘Maggie’s and Mr Verver’s – those they *impose* on Charlotte and the Prince. Those,’ she developed, ‘that so perversely, as I say, have succeeded in setting themselves as the right ones.’

He considered – but only now at last really to relapse into woe.

‘Your “perversity”, my dear, is exactly what I don’t understand. The state of things existing hasn’t grown, like a field of mushrooms, in a night. Whatever they, all round, may be in for now is at least the consequence of what they’ve *done*. Are they mere helpless victims of fate?’

Well, Fanny at last had the courage of it. ‘Yes – they are. To be so abjectly innocent – that *is* to be victims of fate’. (314-15)

Maggie and Adam have brought the Prince and Charlotte together, have imposed forms unwittingly. “What is criticism but pessimism” James says in “The Manners of American Women” (99). Bob is a man whose critical eye is as sharp as it is pessimistic. He sees the long and the short of things and is the character in the novel closest, perhaps, to James, a version of Strether injected with Marlow’s dark knowledge of the excesses perpetrated in an absolute lack of limits. A former agent of the British Empire, “He might in old bewildering climates, in old campaigns of cruelty and license, have had such revelations and known such amazements that he had nothing more to learn” (87). Knowledge comes to an end in late James in cruelty and license, the free play of free impulse leading to the heart of darkness Kurtz recognizes in the final moment of his life. Bob is aware, to a greater extent than any James character, of European imperial violence in the nineteenth century. He knows everything about life and regards it for the most part as “pecuniary arrangement” (in this regard he is, again, close to James’s developing pessimism) (86).

Fanny admits that the two of them, Maggie and her father, “are awfully quaint, quaint with all *our* dear old quaintness – by which I don’t mean yours and mine, but that of my own sweet country-people” (318). But by the end of the novel the status of that very sweetness and quaintness will itself be morally suspect. We will never know what Adam Verver thinks or knows, as though what he thinks or knows is beyond the novel, too obscure, or too morally repugnant. His inscrutability is also necessary as the motivation of Maggie’s program (though the novel’s close identification with that program comes under intense pressure), but his knowledge counts by its absence. He

inhabits a distance from the social scene and a bland complacency that place him at a polar opposite position from Bob, nothing piercing his ease and optimism.

Whereas Bob knows everything, Adam need never examine his always assured strength in pulling all the strings, including his marriage to Charlotte and his ongoing command of her.

The thing that never failed now as an item in the picture was that gleam of the silken noose, his wife's immaterial tether, so marked to Maggie's sense during her last month in the country. Mrs Verver's straight neck had certainly not slipped it; nor had the other end of the long cord – oh quite conveniently long! – disengaged its smaller loop from the hooked thumb that, with his fingers closed upon it, her husband kept out of sight. (554)

Charlotte walks upon a leash he wields but does not *see*. Maggie sees the pain of Charlotte's separation from the Prince, but not the imposition of forms that created the situation in the first place, that her own moral consciousness was the key component in bringing the two of them together. Maggie has made what James called "short work" in "The Manners of American Women" of Charlotte and the Prince, using them as means to an end. Yet the novel does not denounce her. Her feeling for her father is not a trifle. But the relentless pursuit of her program emerges as though against the grain of the novel's construal of her as monstrous. (Money makes it possible for the love between daughter and father to continue with its intensity, for them not to take consciousness of others in their strange American way that lacks forms).

Maggie, with Adam's money backing her, has in the end reduced Charlotte and the Prince to objects. She and her father stand together at their last meeting before the

departure for American City, while their spouses sit within their view:

Mrs Verver and the Prince fairly 'placed' themselves, however, unwittingly, as high

expressions of the kind of human furniture required aesthetically by such a scene.

The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase. There was much indeed in the tone in which Adam Verver spoke again, and who shall say where his thought stopped? '*Le compte y est*. You've got some good things.' (574)

Charlotte and the Prince tie the room together, their positions just what the scene requires to be a scene. But to a critical view, an encompassing view that sees in just the way Adam and Maggie do not see, Charlotte and the Prince are purchases. Who shall, indeed who could, say where Adam's sense of possession stops? Yet his tone is as good natured and as bland as it always has been, intoning to Maggie with kind fatherliness. This conversation is one they both use to set one another straight, to make it clear that all is straight and level. So it is not that Adam is in fact evil but acts generously. It is rather that money shapes and ratifies his lack of self-consciousness. His money obscures from his own sight the sinister element in taking Charlotte and the Prince as "good things," reified purchases and not end-setting agents. Adam's impunity is all in his gentleness, his gentleness an active feature of his impunity. James has discovered the quaint American way, supported by seemingly limitless wealth, to be in its moral intensity at the same

time of an uncertain moral status, as though the whole time the novel wants to throw up its hands at ambiguity and uncertainty.

James followed out the arc of his late work in embarking on *The Ivory Tower*, what would have been a large, ambitious novel if it had been completed, about an American returning from Europe to modern Newport, where James projected the entirety of the book to take place. Antithetical to America, Graham Fielder is initiated into Europe. The moral complexity that inheres in Maggie Verver is irresolvable. Hers is a moral perpetration that is also a moral program. (Kurtz's stacks of ivory permit him the monstrous, violent imposition of humanitarian ideals that become, in the very strength of his conviction, dialectically converted into their opposite).

The Ivory Tower attacks and retreats from the dilemma money induces. The attack becomes the retreat. Unlike Maggie, Gray is a character whose conception and embodiment is incapable of moral ambiguity, designed for a moral clarity James's distress about money has thrown into relief. Maggie works towards her own ends with an understanding inadequate to that of the novel. As an artist of sorts, Maggie is a consummate manipulator of surfaces. But her art works to the effect of diminished understanding for everyone around her. Her full elaboration comes at the expense of others' elaborations. But Gray is like an artist with clean edges. In his "Notes" for the novel, James wrote that he would be "conscious of possibilities of 'writing' ... His 'culture,' his initiations of intelligence and experience, his possibilities of imagination, if one will, to say nothing of other things, make for me a sort of figure of a floating island on which he drifts and bumps and coasts about" (247). His status as an island is unlike the texture of *The Golden Bowl*, where no member of the quartet, not even the

Assinghams, is islanded. They are each and all involved with the others, each and all compromised and insufficient to an encompassing view.

Cultured as he could not possibly be at home in America, Gray is a character whose perfection and coherence gathers in the unraveling moral ends of *The Golden Bowl*. Innocent and passive, he returns to the pecuniary mire of Newport where money in excess runs the scene. In the "Notes," James suggested that he was going after "as complete a case as possible of the sort of thing that will make him an anomaly and an outsider alike in the New York world of business, the N.Y. world of ferocious acquisition, and the world there of enormities of expenditure and extravagance" (245). Gray inherits Betterman's fortune because he is untouched by the world of business and indeed by any shred of money knowledge (he himself never attempts to get his hands on the money, is almost disinterested in it). He tells his dying and wealthy uncle "I allow there's nothing I understand so little and like so little as the mystery of the 'market' and the hustle of any sort" (85). What Gray faces, and what constitutes the novel's matter, are "the black and merciless things that are behind the great possessions" (217). The darkness of the American scene drives this novel into its own formal extinction. The "black and merciless things" as well as Gray's total ignorance of money are indices of James's despair. That is, the overt clarity, the simplified character, the lack of ambiguity, is a retraction on James's part of his art. James has written his way into what amounted to a formal retraction, itself comprising a response to the darkness of the American scene.

We never know the sum of Adam Verver's fortune, or how he acquired it. Such facts stand at the edge of *The Golden Bowl*, not to the effect of obscuring the crucial role money plays in the novel, but because such a fact would itself obscure the way that

money structures knowledge and morality alike. But we are told that Rosanna will inherit precisely \$20 million from her father. When Rosanna names the figure she is to inherit to Gray

there was a kind of enormity in her very absence of pomp, and Gray felt as if he had dropped of a sudden, from his height of simplicity, far down into a familiar relation to quantities inconceivable—out of which depths he fairly blew and splashed to emerge, the familiar relation, of all things in the world being so strange a one. “*That’s* what you mean here when you talk of money?”

“That’s what we mean,” said Rosanna, “when we talk of anything at all—for of what else but money do we ever talk? (105)

In *The Golden Bowl*, no character would be allowed the kind of blameless, unsullied ignorance the novel affords Gray here. Everyone, including Fanny Assingham, is cognizant of money and the compromises it necessitates. She knows her position is far below the Ververs on the economic and social ladder and that she must act accordingly, as a useful manager of their social lives. Maggie may not know the extent to which money gives her unbounded power, but the novel is vivid in portraying the brutality the limits of her vision unleashes. She may not see the consequences of possessing great wealth, but the novel does not excuse her from inflicting those consequences.

Gray cannot even think about money, he has to learn it as if he were a child. It is as though money had become for James such a corrosive moral agent he had to preserve this character from its corruption in absolute terms. His total money ignorance begins to make him a little stupid, a little unaware and unperceptive (in contrast, say, to Strether’s all-perceiving sight). *The Ivory Tower* is a further development of James’s distress about

money in *The Golden Bowl* and *The American Scene*. They are parts of a process in which that distress began to unwrite the kind of writing he had developed, to unravel his moral and formal weaving. In *Maggie Verver*, James had uncovered moral tensions within knowledge, and it is as though the later novel is a refusal of knowledge.

Gray's uncle tells him that his never having come into contact with money is apparent in his person: "I mean it has never been near you. That sticks out of you—the way it hasn't. I knew it couldn't have been—and then she told me *she* knew. I see you're a blank and nobody here's a blank, not a creature I've ever touched" (112). Money is grosser, more exaggerated in the later novel, but it is also simpler. It is within the realm of possibilities for Gray's character that he can keep his distance from the money in which he himself is not entangled, and Rosanna can act in a moral manner not defined by the "money-passion." Betterman continues, more ominously: "That's what I've wanted,' the old man went on—'a perfect clean blank'" (112). Because he is an economic blank in a place where everyone else has been written over by money, Gray will inherit Betterman's fortune, only to be swindled by Haughty Vint. Gray is a receptacle the money passes through, he himself never an agent in attaining it. His relation to the money is akin to Isabel Archer's—he inherits it without working for it. Like Isabel, the drama revolving around money develops with him at its center. Like Isabel, the money in question never sullies him.

Europe makes Gray possible. He couldn't have lived in America, among the black and merciless things behind the great money passion, and have remained cultured and full of the possibility of imagination. Europe has by *The Ivory Tower* attained a status that is the reverse of *The American*. The moral positions of Europe and America have

exchanged places. There is no life in the Newport of the novel whose terms are not pre-empted by money. Gray's exemption from the money-passion is possible only because he has lived in Europe. The Old World is the saving grace to the implosive destruction of America's promise. *The Ivory Tower*, like *The American Scene*, clings to Europe as an inheritance of traditions that embody moral and formal limits that constrain the lives of individuals. Europe was in *The American* a ghoulish place of immorality; it has now become in this late late work a possible promise that might weigh in the scale of things against the reckless, unbridled money passion of America.

In the process of writing about modern America, the indirect obliquity of James's late writings, an obliquity he understood to be most capable of an encompassing view, ended in insignificance. The free play of consciousness shriveled into the fastidious and rather dim-witted Graham Fielder. But the negation of the writing had arrived at understanding by negative means. The reduction of the character, and thus of the writing, is a record of how increasingly obdurate subject-matter led James into the un-writeable.

The Ivory Tower, in the "Notes" and the first chapters James wrote, establishes a clearly underlined opposition that is nearly schematic. On one side there are two characters with not an avaricious bone between them and with a fortune apiece and on the other side two characters both lacking a fortune and scheming to take it from the others. There are the characters with a moral sense and who also happen to have a great deal of money and then there are the other characters. Charlotte and the Prince are nasty and self-serving, but Maggie comes off as no better, if not worse, her moral stridency itself nasty and brutish. *The Ivory Tower*'s oppositions organize and simplify its discordant historical matter into moral and economic clarity.

As money becomes a less and less resolvable problem, the weight of the moral-formal dramas of consciousness in James's late fictions assume an ambiguous status of legitimacy. Money cancels the moral coherence of America in James's writings, and then the formal coherence of his characters. Gray is a perverse return to the wholeness of Christopher Newman. All of his own innocence, Newman takes his leave without having wronged anyone and just a little worse for his adventure. Gray arrives in the black money-passion of Newport. James's "Notes" projected a stay that would not have been happy.

In August 1914 Europe, which had not experienced an internal military conflict since the Franco-Prussian a half century earlier, went to war in a conflict unprecedented in the number of nations involved, the technology deployed, and the military and civilian casualties. The day after England declared war on Germany, James broke off writing *The Ivory Tower*. America had become a continent of unlimited economic might and that way had given up the promise it seemed once to hold. *The Ivory Tower* finds in Europe the only counter-life to such a place. With the war the Old World Europe had been destroyed. James wrote in a letter to Hugh Walpole that with the war, "The subject-matter of one's effort has become *itself* utterly treacherous and false—its relation to reality utterly given away and smashed" (*LHJ* 2: 446). The war had canceled out the possibility of fiction.

Chapter 4: The First World War and the End of Writing

The First World War brought Henry James to the end of his historical world and to the limits of the write-able. With the war, he understood himself to be living belatedly, beyond an epoch that had reached its conclusion, and, in direct correlation, he discovered an incapacity to write, or rather a transformation in the limits and possibilities of his writing. James is often construed as a writer detached from necessity, as if he were an effete aesthete who retreats from the real world into a crystalline chamber of art, a chronicler of dinner parties and pointless, barely understandable conversations among characters of a privileged background, or else he is cast as a genteel writer repelled by modernity, who shapes elaborate, arcane sentences as a reaction to, and a desire to escape from, consumer culture. His response to the war, however, both in the topical essays that address the subject explicitly as well as in the three fragments he left uncompleted in its wake, begin to make possible a different account of his writing because it was the moment he found its relationship to history had broken down altogether, the crash of the one term entailing a radical shift in the other.

From the vantage of 1914, it becomes clearer how James's late writing had been discordant in its penetration of modern historical currents. At the turn of the century, James emerged into his full power as a writer, developing a prose alert to its own elaborative and metaphoric possibilities, a prose marked by long sentences, by deixis, obliquity, and ellipsis. This formal density occurred concomitantly with a set of moral, epistemic, domestic, and, particularly, economic crises. Far from retreating out of history, the peculiar quality of James's late works is in fact integral to the difficulty of historical understanding that arises in them, was itself a means of better accomplishing that

understanding. Just when James was most inside his form, historical time began to seem in greatest flux, social and economic problems became most irresolvable, and the world was least tractable to writing. The First World War was in this way a final moment in the accumulating history of James's engagement with historical complexity, not a sudden realization of that complexity.

But the war was a definitive historical crisis for James, a catastrophe surpassing any direct comprehension.⁵⁰ Many years before, he had marked the origin of his career by the advent of the Civil War, living after which he claimed had given him a capacity for observation that Hawthorne did not possess. In his First World War essays, James returned with obsessive frequency to the Civil War, the later conflict having reconfigured for him the meaning of the earlier one, as well as his sense of history itself. James understood the shape of his career, both its beginning and its end, to have taken its course from the shape of history.

Critics have described the series of topical essays he wrote as propaganda, so that for Adeline Tintner James "spent the last fourteen months of his life...writing war propaganda" (225).⁵¹ Tintner is responding in part to how James—the master of endless subtlety and refinement of understanding, he of the "still marked inveteracy of a certain indirect and oblique view of my presented action," as he says in the "Preface" to *The Golden Bowl*—had shifted from oblique indirectness to direct declarations, from the

⁵⁰ Eric Hobsbawm has defined catastrophe as the "failure to reproduce the past" (*History* 17)

⁵¹ See also Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking* and Roslyn Jolly, *History, Narrative, Fiction*. For Thurschwell, James's reference to the English as "they" in his war essays serves the propagandist function of creating a "public which will then feel addressed by it and rally to its cause" (172). For Jolly, the "oppositional imagination is subsumed by a propagandist rhetoric" (222). But James's mode of writing in these essays differs from that which Samuel Hynes describes in his cultural history of the war as the characteristic English one: "War became...a true English activity, and peace became vaguely foreign" (19). James's war writings, on the contrary, work to cast the war as foreign to England.

detached, quizzical irony of the restless analyst to the sincere explicator of the English mind (*EW* 1322).

However, the term propaganda is limited in its usefulness and reductive in its descriptive capacity, dropping out the discontinuities in the essays' drive toward simplifying resolutions and the positing of order on the one hand and the inability to say anything further in "face of such enormous horrors of destruction—" on the other, as James said in an interview with the *New York Times* (*Culture* 144).⁵² James often breaks off sentences with dashes, pointing towards residual matter, shown but not said, hinted at but not explicated. A dash brings a sentence to a temporary stop in the midst of its own motion, a pause pregnant with what is both sayable and, for the moment at least, unsayable. Jamesian dashes work to open up further vistas of possibility within the content at hand even as they address the problem of ever encompassing it. James had in fact earlier in the interview already gone on a little tangent about dashes: "Dashes, it seems almost platitudinous to say, have their particular representative virtue" (142). In light of this passage, James's use of the dash is inevitably resonant.

But the dash here has an uncharacteristic tone of despondency echoed elsewhere in the interview: "One finds it in the midst of all this as hard to apply one's words as to endure one's thoughts. The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have

⁵² James granted the interview for the purpose of drumming up support for the American Ambulance Volunteer Corps. The long title of the text declared this to be "Henry James's First Interview: Noted Critic and Novelist Break His rule of Years to Tell of the Good Work of the American Ambulance Corps," though James had in fact granted an interview in *American* 1904. In both cases, Pierre A. Walker has noted in his introduction to *Henry James on Culture*, James makes sure to point out "how much he is conceding by even granting the interview," a social form of which he was not at all fond (xxvi). Walker draws attention to the fact that three of James's war essays "appeared in one form or another in *American* newspapers," a medium of which he was highly critical. The war had changed James's relationship to the world, down to the material means through which his texts were circulated.

deteriorated like motor car tires” (145).⁵³ That the war repels words is a statement of despair, for among all the charges leveled at James no one has ever complained about his inability to apply words to any and every subject. Car tires are just that kind of quotidian, material fact one does not often find in James. The sentence is itself highly self-conscious, built upon a metaphor, after all, but one of a bleak, used up landscape, moving ineluctably toward exhaustion and depleted resources, the car tires unusable because overused. The dash does not snap with exuberant humor, and the metaphor envisages history having put words out of commission. The war was inaccessible to James’s familiar modes of writing. There is no languid, elaborated irony in his essays, no wit. To say the war has used up words is the opposite of witty, wit being a controlled command of language from a distance more than adequate to the object of the wit.

James’s war writings are contradictory, though, for while they are saturated with this kind of despair they also search out order and coherence in the face of a catastrophic rent in the fabric of history by turning to figures and structures of temporal and social continuity. Roslyn Jolly has described how James’s war essays “seek imaginatively to restore to their places the values and beliefs which had been set adrift by the shock of the war” (218). James’s writing wrestles with “this huge horror of blackness,” as he described the First World War, by projecting oppositions that recalibrate a clearly defined order in history, in this way simplifying and clarifying the radically new (*LHJ* 2: 384). He opposed the hideous money-passion in America to the culture of Europe, England to the continent, the inviolable peace of the island to the horror across the channel, what is

⁵³ Wai Chee Dimock has commented of this passage that, “Given that it is an attempt to drum up American support, it is odd that James should have *this* to say about the war” (2). She refers to the oddity of deflated hopelessness appearing in the midst of enthusiastically asking for funds.

within to what is without the “rim,” the soldier at rest in the hospital to the engine of destruction. In addition to this geographical symmetry, the essays oppose the mistaken sense of the post-bellum past to the abyss of the present. The earlier, deluded optimism served James as a way of approaching the unthinkability of the war.

But this attempt at restoration in the essays is always in tension with the sense that the new world inaugurated by the war was intractable to such means of ordering. These writings’ very search for order register how the First World War had opened a disjunction between the new nature of the historical world, to which James felt the need to respond, and the capacity of writing to answer to it. The turn to the sentimental in James’s best-known war essay, “Within the Rim,” for instance, seems to me a gesture of despair. The very organizing metaphor of the essay, a way of describing the English Channel, presents the possibility that the retreat into the quaintness of England, as opposed to the violence developing in the continent, indicates its irrelevance in relation to the engulfing chasm opened by the war. The essay records historical material, horrors of destruction, more potent than its explanations, the terms of order with which it responds to the “funeral pall of our murdered civilization” undercut by the felt inadequacy of those terms (*LHJ* 2: 387).

Florence Goyet’s recent work on the epic provides a way of understanding how James’s war writings approach the radically new. Goyet argues that the epic was a resource to think through and into such radically new moments in history, when no tools of ordering knowledge were available. According to Goyet, the epic arises at moments of historical disjunction, so that “the world they describe is a world that is prey to crisis, disorder, and chaos” (15). As a response to a disorder so profound it has outstripped

methods and means of comprehension, the epic turns back to an old story, to a distant time. The turn to the historically remote is an attempt to recover order, in which a meaningful and rigid opposition is readily available—for instance, between Trojans and Greeks or between Oliver and Roland—that is in fact about establishing order in a contemporary world that has proven recalcitrant to order and comprehension. James’s war essays propose static oppositions that are an attempt to locate order amid catastrophe.

To what degree is that awareness capable of restoring order when order seems all but overturned? This question arises in James’s essay’s “The Long Wards” and “Refugees in England.” In the former he recalled this scene of his visit to wounded Union soldiers in 1861. Though the visit “was a limited affair indeed” (*Culture* 169), James cherished it. It “only needed darkness to close round it a little from without in order to give forth a vague phosphorescent light” (*Culture* 169). The particular note that stayed with him across the years was that of “the alternative aspect, the passive as distinguished from the active, of the fighting man whose business is in the first instance formidably to bristle” (*Culture* 170). The weight of the observation rests upon the very possibility of the recovery of the meaning of the soldier out of the war in which he serves and the mechanized violence just then, in the First World War, being developed and implemented. James, in his description of the soldiers in the long ward, domesticated the impersonal, large-scale violence of war by locating meaning not in the aggregate but in the individual, who, having been domesticated, is within the rim. His attention is drawn to “the charm, as I can only call it, of the tone and temper of the man of action, the creature appointed to advance and explode and destroy, and elaborately instructed as to

how to do these things, reduced to helplessness in the innumerable instances now surrounding us” (*Culture* 172).

This sentence recovers the soldier from his role in appointed violence. The charm of the soldier’s helplessness is that it distances that violence by transforming the active figure whose role is to “explode and destroy” into the opposite, into a passive receiver of sympathy. The helplessness opens another possibility, an alternative that frames the results of the war. The sentence gives individual integrity and inherent, indwelling solemnity to the soldier. In James’s description, the meaning of the soldier does not on the one hand belong to his service to his country. On the other hand, the meaning of the wounded helplessness of the soldier does not lead to despair or bitterness. There is nothing in James’s passage of the estrangement Fussell describes the soldiers as having experienced from the cause of the war and from the “fatuous civilians at home” (86). Reduced to helplessness, the soldiers of the long ward reside in a space of continuous meaning.

“Refugees in England” chimes with the attempt of “The Long Wards” to rescue the meaning of the soldier from the violence of the war. The war, James wrote there, “has had no analogue in the experience of our modern generations, no matter how far back we go” (*Culture* 161). But he then went on: “We live into, that is we learn to cultivate, possibilities of sympathy and reaches of beneficence very much as the stricken and the suffering themselves live into their dreadful history and explore and reveal its extent” (*Culture* 161). Sympathy attempts to trace the shape of the suffering to which it responds, a response at once revelatory and identifactory, as if to know the suffering of the refugees is to refuse the epistemic and historical limits the war has revealed. To live into

the refugees' suffering is "not to consent in advance to any dull limitation"; it is, in short, to find an answer to the devastation of the war (*Culture* 161).

The essay ends with the memory of Belgian refugees arriving in Rye, particularly the voice of a woman carrying a child:

The resonance through our immemorial old street of her sobbing and sobbing cry was the voice itself of history; it brought home to me more things than I could then quite take the measure of, and these just because it expressed for her not direct anguish, but the incredibility, as we should say, of honest assured protection. Months have elapsed, and from having been then one of a few hundred she is now one of scores and scores of thousands; yet her cry is still in my ears, whether to speak most of what she had lately or what she actually felt, and it plays to my own sense, as a great fitful tragic light over the dark exposure of her people. (*Culture* 168)

The cry of the woman's voice is a material presence, a brute fact, the sound of history a disruption, grieving, lament. This passage bears the burden of the need to embody the contours of history in a particular image. We arrive at the thousands of refugees only through the sound of the single cry, which in its turn illuminates the "dark exposure of her people." The physical detail of the woman's voice cannot be summarized by numbers, cannot be incorporated into a compendium of facts or a system of measuring. Its force and meaning can only be calibrated with the proper attention of writing.

The passage is anxious that the woman's cry is for "honest assured protection," though the very disavowal of "direct anguish" admits, perhaps, of its presence, "incredibility" carrying the senses of both unbelievable and extraordinarily good. The

lingering cry in the writer's ear might be "what she had lately or what she actually felt," what she now feels on coming to Rye, or what she had felt before arriving. No sooner does the passage record the voice of history than it moves to domesticate it by providing the woman with solace. Earlier in the same essay, James described how the "the Belgian ideal of the constituted life, dismembered, disemboweled and shattered, had so supremely to represent the crack of doom and the end of everything" (*Culture* 164). "Honest assured protection" arises at the essay's end as another attempt to mitigate this disfigurement and uprooting of Belgium. The ambiguous meaning of the cry of history is in conflict with a stated notion about the evidence of the cry. The break in the hitherto assumed historical and social order remains to some degree, like the lingering sound of the woman's voice, unaccountable.

The finally mysterious cry comes at the end of an essay packed full with images of continuity. James, wanting to add "the atmosphere and the human motive that have conduced to their birth" to the accrual of information in the "Reports and Tables" (*Culture* 162), described at some length the history of Crosby Hall, recently dismantled and rebuilt on another site, and now being used to house the refugees:

Dismay and disgust were unable to save it: the most that could be done was to gather in with tenderness of care its innumerable constituent parts and convey them into safer conditions, where a sad defeated piety has been able to re-edify them into some semblance of the original majesty.

Strange withal some of the turns of the whirligig of time; the priceless structure came down to the sound of lamentation, not to say of execration, and of the gnashing of teeth, and went up again before cold and disbelieving, quite

despairing eyes; in spite of which history appears to have decided once more to cherish it and give a new consecration. (*Culture* 162-63)

The passage attempts to tell a story about the war—from the destruction being wrought can an order be re-established like that of this church? Is the history of the church representative of history? The “sad defeated piety has been able to re-edify” the church, “edify” resonant with both the senses of building and of moral uplift, used specifically in the context of religion. The rebuilt church retains “some semblance of the original majesty.” The church is now used as a home for refugees, but the very telling of the story of its uprooting and reconstruction, of a building that embodies history and tradition, is itself an instance of the re-edifying of the disorder wrought by the war. The woman has found “honest assured protection,” the refugees have a roof, and it is as if the essay hopes to provide history itself with a home.

In 1914, Henry James had entered his seventh decade, having recently lived through the disappointment of smaller than expected sales from his New York Edition, (which he hoped would secure his financial and literary future and for which he had spent four years writing his prefaces and revising his novels and tales), an acute depression, and the death of his brother William. But he was back at work on an ambitious new novel for which he had received an unusually generous advance of 8,000 dollars, secretly donated from Edith Wharton’s own royalties. Like Wharton in Paris, James threw himself into relief activities when war broke out. Shortly after its commencement, he became the Chairman of the American Volunteer Ambulance Corps, on whose behalf he was pleading for funds in the *Times* interview. He visited Belgian refugees and wounded English soldiers in hospitals. Leon Edel notes that, “His datebook provides a record of

constant visits and of aid to individual soldiers” (*Master* 515). When James’s servant Burgess Noakes enlisted, James gave him his blessing as well as an offer to supply him with socks (*Master* 414). Finally, in the summer of 1915, James changed his national citizenship. With Prime Minister H.H. Asquith as a witness, he “took the oath of allegiance to King George V” (*Master* 531).

From August 1914 to his death in February 1916, the war consumed James’s life. On August 5th, the day after Britain declared war on Germany for violation of a treaty ensuring Belgian neutrality, James wrote to Howard Sturgis of “the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and *meaning* is too tragic for any words” (*LHJ* 2: 385). History was now a tragic duration of looking away from the real, tragic nature of history. From that day on, James wrote about little else, producing eight essays that all concern the subject (including an introduction to a volume by an early figure of wartime martyrdom, Rupert Brooke) as well as his heavily revised interview with the *Times*. In addition, the war figures in two commemorative essays he wrote about post-Civil War America, a moment that became defined for James by its unknowing good faith, “violence sitting down again with averted face, and the conquests we felt the truly golden ones spreading and spreading behind its back” (*AW* 161). James wrote “Within the Rim” for Asquith’s daughter, who requested a piece to help raise funds for artists in hardship due to the war. The subject need not have necessarily been the war itself, but, in a footnote appended to the essay, she reports that: “‘It must be about the war,’ he said, ‘I can think of nothing else’” (*Culture* 208).

The war transformed James's sense of his own life's work—an attempt to develop an art capable of recovering the endlessness of reality. He announced that the lurching into existence of a new world order had rendered it irrelevant. In a letter from February 14, 1915 to Hugh Walpole, James explicitly linked the dilemma of writing to that of history: “The subject-matter of one's effort has become *itself* utterly treacherous and false—its relation to reality utterly given away and smashed. Reality is a world that was to be capable of *this*—and how represent that horrific capability, *historically* latent, historically ahead of it? How on the other hand *not* represent it either—without putting into play mere fiddlesticks?” (*LHJ* 2: 446). The war was not an ontic set of battles and dates and numbers of casualties, but was rather ontological. Reality had to be reconceived as teetering close to a possible smash-up, so that one's “subject-matter” appeared now “treacherous and false,” leaving an intensity of doubt about writing in its wake. James attested here to an agonized sense of epistemic loss, of having missed the significance and drift of history altogether, much to the sense of his own diminishment as a writer.⁵⁴ If the bottom of history can give out at any moment, was actually building towards its falling out, how do you represent it, James asked, but then how do you not represent it either, as nothing else is of any importance in relation to it? By “subject-matter” James might have meant social life itself—how does one write stories about society when

⁵⁴ I am grateful to Ross Posnock for pointing out an analogy here with the plots of James's late novels, which hinge on a kind of treachery: the serenity of social surfaces as opposed to viciousness just below them, what Lambert Strether's initial sense of Chad's improved state encompasses, as opposed to his later realization, what Kate Croy and Merton Densher present socially and what they are in fact doing. Strether revises his understanding, but the ability to understand, and the novel through which his understanding accumulates, is not itself demolished, as this letter claims James's writing was in light of the war. While the novels can account for uncertainty and answer to an enlarged account, the doubt opened by the war went so far down to the roots, was so radical, for James, he resisted doubt and clung tenaciously to belief, in the way that Peirce described, only with the war's occurrence. If it is not a question of the kind of treachery, it is a question of degree of treachery, of how far down the fissure is revealed to be, if there is a grounding for historical understanding at all.

subtending society is an imminent and complete collapse of civilization? But for James to refer to society would have been to refer to Europe, there being for him only a very little bit of civilization worth speaking of in America.

Immediately before the famous passage from his early book *Hawthorne*, in which he lists the “absent things in American life,” James wrote that, “it takes such an acquaintance of history and custom, such a complexity of manner and types, to form a fund of suggestion for a novelist” (*AW* 352, 351). In much of James’s major fiction, Europe is an organizing term for historical continuity, a place that is custom and manner and social density as such and in relation to which the custom less, modern Americans struggle into existence. The Parisian Ultramontane Bellegarde family in the early novel *The American* is so old it seems to have never begun at all but to reach back to the origin of time itself.⁵⁵ The American stories of James’s major-phase characters all develop against the backdrop of a stilled, completed Europe, a repository of history not itself subject to historical change. When in *The Ambassadors* Strether visits Madame de Vionnet, also of Paris, the ghost of the French Revolution haunts the scene: “that she should be in the simplest coolest white, of a character so old-fashioned, if he were not mistaken, that Madame Roland must on the scaffold have worn something like it” (319). The major turning point of modern French history is a story of old fashions and deaths on the guillotine that has worked itself out in such a way that Strether can see Madame de

⁵⁵ But this is not to say, as McGurl has suggested, that the novel aligns itself with the Bellegardes. In the context of James’s late “Preface,” which rejects the Bellegardes’ rejection of Newman on the grounds that it is romance to think they would do so, McGurl has argued that the novel presents “the dream of a world where there exist people committed enough to aristocratic identity and genealogical purity to resist the universal solvent of middle class money” (52). The Bellegardes are never given this kind of authority, are never not villains of the deepest, ultra-Catholic dye.

Vionnet in its light—her dress and her house refer back across the expanse of centuries, and Strether is more than capable of descrying the continuities between then and now.

Europe is a moral-historical anchor in the two novel fragments James left at his death, *The Ivory Tower* (the novel for which Wharton had supplied the advance) and *The Sense of the Past*. James broke off work on the former after the war commenced, while he attempted to pick up the latter after a fourteen-year hiatus, pushing, as he put it in a letter to Walpole, “a piece of fiction of sorts uphill at the rate of about an inch a day,” only to permanently abandon it again (*HJL* 4: 751). In addition, shortly after the war began, James set out on his third volume of memoirs, *The Middle Years* (which begins with a recollection of arriving in London as a young man), only to leave off the writing of it as well.

All of these uncompleted works revolve around the sense of the past in relation to an accelerating history out of the grasp of the writing. Together, this triumvirate of fragments tells a story of discontinuity, of endings and aborted beginnings, of a stricken departure from the continuity of a prolific writing life that extended back a half century. Despite James’s abjuration of his subject matter as “treacherous and false,” each piece in this set of fragments attempts to develop a writing adequate to history—the discrete biographical history of the writer, the history of Europe and of the very modern America, particularly a new form of modern finance unleashed there.

The war was the wreck of Europe as the destiny and destination of James’s characters, no longer a retreat into the ancient but a dynamic, dynamited place of devastation and change. The vast endlessness of their history is constitutive of Bellegardes. In the war, James witnessed this seeming timelessness of the old world in which he had

resided and traveled for his whole life rent asunder.⁵⁶ If the rending of the First World War brought James to the end of his career, the Civil War had legitimated his presence as a writer by offering him a story of his own historical origins.

In another key passage in *Hawthorne*, James claimed that he was a different writer from Hawthorne because America was a different place before and after the war:

The subsidence of that great convulsion has left a different tone from the one it found, and one may say that the Civil War marks an era in the history of the American mind. It introduced into the national consciousness a certain sense of proportion and relation, of the world being a more complicated place than it had hitherto seemed, the future more treacherous, success more difficult. At the rate at

⁵⁶ The First World War had, according to Paul Kennedy, “shredded the social and economic fabric of the Old World, and shaken the very foundations of every belligerent government” (14). The war was a logical but not necessary outcome of tensions in the structure of European power and the balance of imperial spheres of influence. In the face of increasing German industrial power and a developing German navy, designed to rival Britain’s, Britain entered into an alliance with France and Russia, in part to balance the Triple Alliance of Austria-Germany-Italy and in part to secure safe sea routes to and from the heart of its empire, India. These power blocs were forged out of economic and imperial necessity, rather than older considerations of blood and heritage. Not only had England and France been enemies for centuries, but also England’s expected ally would have been Germany—both countries were Protestant, and the Kaiser was Queen Victoria’s grandson. These newly emergent coalitions devolved into conflict only “when the opposed alliances were welded into permanence” (Hobsbawm *Empire*, 312). The causes of the war are clearly traceable (though historians continue to debate them hotly), but its effects were unprecedented, unexpected, and traumatic. The First World War was the inauguration of the modern age: the first war to be fought simultaneously on several continents for the maintenance of state power and the securing of material interests abroad; the first war to involve extended and seemingly uncontrollable civilian casualties, and to leave the death count in the millions (James, in fact, would not live through the most horrific moment of the war, which epitomizes its catastrophic scale and its gruesome pointlessness—namely, the battle of the Somme, which Paul Fussell characterizes as the “the largest engagement fought since the beginnings of civilization” (12). It was the war that marked a decisive shift from conflicts between single states to conflicts of international coalitions; the war that introduced now-familiar, modern technologies of combat such as the submarine, the airplane, the tank, a prototype of tear gas, and a calculated, devastating utilization of rapid fire machine guns (Strachan 43). From this war the shape of the modern world emerged: democratically elected nation-states would become the norm across Europe (Mazower ix); four empires, covering much of the extent of Europe, passed away, namely the Habsburg, the German, the Russian, and the Ottoman. The French and the British carved up much of the latter into nation states and thus gave shape to the modern Middle East, (including Arthur Balfour’s crucial promise that the Jews would have a home in Palestine). Replacing the Russian empire, the Soviet Union, “heir of the First World War,” came into being (Strachan xvii). Meanwhile, a new empire arose across the Atlantic, the United States’s entry into the war in April of 1917 a bid “to shape the future of international relations,” which bid would determine its foreign policy throughout the twentieth century (Strachan xvii).

which things are going, it is obvious that good Americans will be more numerous than ever; but the good American, in days to come, will be a more critical person than his complacent and confident grandfather. He has eaten of the tree of knowledge. He will not, I think, be a sceptic, and still less, I think, a cynic; but he will be, without discredit to his well-known capacity for action, an observer...The good American of which Hawthorne was so admirable a specimen was not critical, and it was perhaps for this reason that Franklin Pierce seemed to him a very proper President. (*AW* 428)

The “good American” emerges in James’s narrative out of complacency into a posture of critical awareness after the war, out of a prior innocence into a present knowledge. A quizzical observer no longer able to be so naïve or accepting has now superseded the “confident grandfather.” The post-bellum American is one who will be aware of complication, unlike the ready acceptance of the ante-bellum one.

The passage, while it is about a vexed historical event, is not itself troubled by that history. The writing does not face the kind of “treacherous future” the ante-bellum American mind was unaware of, but is instead filled with an enormous sense of its own power to perceive the world aright. If Hawthorne felt the ground cut from beneath his feet, James himself would not suffer a fall from delusion, standing on solid terrain, commanding an encompassing view. Indeed, the paragraph settles on a sentence witty at Hawthorne’s expense. The compliment that Hawthorne was an “admirable specimen” becomes sharply ambiguous when it ends. Whatever Hawthorne was a specimen of, it didn’t embrace a critical sense, for only a very uncritical person could have thought Pierce a “very proper president,” the “very” shifting the tone and the emphasis just over

to the realm of the derisive. Clearly, the writer of the sentence knows the score when it comes to the propriety of presidents. Hawthorne, and therefore Hawthorne's writing, was for James pre-historical, occurring before the war, in the wake of which the American mind had begun an existence within knowledge. The trajectory could not be clearer: there was Hawthorne, there was history, and then there was Henry James.

The Americans of James's early fictions are *good* Americans. Christopher Newman, the hero of *The American*, comes to Paris with a good nature that will prevent him from cashing in on the dirty family secret he is privy to in order to exact revenge on the Bellegardes for dropping him after having accepted his proposal of marriage. There is absolutely no possibility in the novel that Newman—the very type of the new world man—is capable of revenge.

Revenge is not a possibility even in the final sentence of the novel, in which Newman, having been told by another character that the Bellegardes knew all along his good nature would halt his course of revenge, turns to see if the piece of blue paper on which the secret is recorded and which he has thrown into the fire is in fact destroyed. “Newman instinctively turned to see if the little paper was in fact consumed but there was nothing left of it” (309). That last sentence electrifies the novel, precipitating a host of unexpected complexities in Newman's relation to, and knowledge of, his own story. Questions now arise: How aware *has* Newman been? To what degree is he responsible? Where does his consciousness begin and end? Still, the raising of these questions in the novel's ultimate sentence does not impugn Newman's moral character. If anything, the novel is even more at one with Newman. Throughout, the writing ironizes his abject lack of taste in art, while never ironizing his moral constitution. Newman is moral through and

through. Having made his fortune in the post-bellum Gilded Age, he then abandoned business to come to Europe, immediately after turning his back on another avenue of revenge, which would have gained him sixty thousand dollars to boot.

The revision that necessarily accompanies retrospection provided a more thorough version of the past, which threatened to negate that past. In another essay also concerned with the post-bellum era, a commemoration of “Mr. and Mrs. James T. Fields,” James wrote of recovering “a workable relation with the blessing in eclipse,” with what appears now to be the blissful peace of that time (*AW* 160). “I recover it in some degree with pity, as I say, by reason of the deep illusions and fallacies in which the great glare of the present seems to show us as then steeped; there being always, we can scarce not feel, something pathetic in the recoil from fond fatuities” (*AW* 160). If the past can only be seen in an eclipse, how does one recover that past before it was eclipsed? This is a question of the writing of history in the wake of so thorough a “break in experience” as that of the First World War (*AW* 178). What are now clearly “illusions and fallacies” were once the concrete conditions that structured, and were structured by, historical knowledge. The mistaken sense of history was clarified only in retrospect, and not because of a powerful hindsight, but because a historical catastrophe had reshaped the relation of knowledge to history. The problem James faced, then, is that the grasp of knowledge at any given moment does not reach to the horizon of history’s actuality. Without the vantage of retrospect, from within a historical moment as it develops, and which is immediately experienced as a crisis of history and of knowledge, how does one place oneself in relation to the present and to the past?

The First World War forced a crisis not only in James's sense of his own past as a writer but in his sense of America's past as well. In its wake, the optimism and good nature both represented and evinced in *The American's* Newman now appeared to James a fifty-year period of mistaken optimism and illusory "good faith" (*AW* 178). During the war, after three and a half decades of fiction writing, James returned to the era in which he had written the novel, and to the understanding of America embodied in it, by naming it the "Age of the Mistake." "The whole scene," he wrote in his brief "*The Founding of the 'Nation' Recollections of the 'Fairies' that Attended its Birth*," "and the whole time flushed to my actual view with a felicity and a unity that make them rather a page of romance than a picture of that degree of the real, the potentially so terrible truth of the life of man, which has now learnt to paint itself with so different a brush" (*AW* 177). James himself was now as skeptical of his own historical moment as he had been of that of Hawthorne's, post-bellum confidence now seen to be romance rather than realism, Hawthorne rather than James. Romance was for James a negative term that indicated a turning away from reality.⁵⁷

Would not living back into what James called the "Age of the Mistake" be to partake of that mistake, and in that way be a continuation of the delusion? Would the recovery of the past then not be necessarily a diminishment of the past? "There is, however, another way of taking it, which is to live it over personally and sentimentally, exactly to the sought confusion and reprobation of the forces now preying upon us,

⁵⁷ In his late "Preface" to *The American*, James wrote that "The only *general* attribute of projected romance that I can see, the only one that fits all its cases, is the fact of the kind of experience with which it deals—experience liberated, so to speak; experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it" (*EW* 1064). The defining attribute of romance is that it is disconnected from the world, floating free from the dense medium out of which it arose, therefore reducing the account of that medium offered in the romance.

exactly to the effect of saving it at least for the imagination if we may not save it for the reconciling reason” (*AW* 178). To save the “Age of the Mistake” for the imagination but not the reason is to reveal how constricted and hemmed in is such a rescue operation. Living the experience over personally is at best an ambiguous reprobation, the whole of the period under question itself already defined as romance. To live post-bellum optimism over “personally and sentimentally” is only to live back into the contemporary delusion that avoided the reality of violence latent within history. The essay reduces, diminishes, the understanding of the personal and the sentimental to being altogether mistaken in its movement through historical time. The withering, transformative glance of historical knowledge can only be offset by a pretense to not having access to that knowledge, which is deliberately not to understand the “so terrible truth of the life of man” latent within history.

In short, the essay opens with an epistemological transformation in relation to an age that is now seen as having ended. The First World War had revealed the limits of knowledge to be concomitant and commensurate with the movement of historical time, now imbued with new tensions and complications. The good faith of the post-bellum period emerged in relation to, could not see beyond, its own encapsulating moment. The dramatic, non-teleological conflagration of the old world had brought Henry James—once subject to the delusion—onto the other side of his historical awareness of the meaning of the Civil War. Recollection is revision, historical darkness and chaos now seen to have always subtended felicity and unity. The “terrible truth of the life of man” has emerged to give the lie to a false continuity, the whole foundation of the historical order only tenuously and momentarily held together, but all the while capable of coming

undone. In the passage in which he connected Hawthorne and the Civil War, James was certain of his own ability to discern the scope of events. In the First World War, the elation of standing on the firm ground of understanding gives way not to having the ground cut away but to a more fundamental sense that the very possibility of any grounding has itself disappeared, leaving a void in its wake. If the Civil War had brought about a realization that the world was a more complicated place than it seemed for Hawthorne, the present war was a realization that for James convulsion itself was the fundament of modernity. Hawthorne had not anticipated the violence America would endure, and James had not anticipated that the history of the west was moving toward a conclusive violence.

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With regard to the First World War, James began to see post-bellum knowledge and experience as *historical*. Only then was the period encapsulated and rounded in by and as a historically contained moment, now revealed to have passed away. James remembered the contemporary sense that “we had exactly *shed* the bad possibilities, were publicly purged of the dreadful disease which had come within an inch of being fatal to us, and were by that token warranted sound forever, superlatively safe” (*AW* 161). After the Civil War, history had seemed to progress fluidly and continuously, a major convulsion having settled the established order once and for all, the other wars that had followed relatively minor affairs in comparison. “How could peace not flourish, moreover, when wars either took only seven weeks or lasted but a summer and scarce more than a long-drawn autumn” (*AW* 161)? But the fifty years of the post-bellum period now appeared to have been a misrecognition, a use of the superlative when only the comparative was warranted. Both of these essays turn back to the post-bellum moment burdened by a newly sharpened sense of the past. The age of the mistake was entirely wrong to think it had lived to see “the worst become impossible” (*LHJ* 2: 389).

“Within the Rim” opens by returning to the Civil War.

The first sense of it all to me after the first shock and horror was that of a sudden leap back into life of the violence with which the American Civil War broke upon us, at the North, fifty-four years ago, when I had a consciousness of youth which perhaps equaled in vivacity my present consciousness of age. The illusion was complete, in its immediate rush; everything quite exactly matched in the two cases; the tension of the hours after the flag of the Union had been fired upon in South Carolina living again, with a tragic strangeness of recurrence, in the interval during which the fate of Belgium hung in the scales and the possibilities of that of France looked this country harder in the face, one recognised, than any possibility, even that of the England of the Armada, even that of the Napoleonic menace, could be imagined to have looked her. (*Culture* 178)

The essay's first sentence stutters with a repetition of firstness that only seemed first but was actually second—the first “sense” follows on the initial, uncontained, senseless response of horror. Already, the essay has presented findings of a rather complex order. The shock and horror demand some framing before comprehension can begin its course. The sentence arrives at the “first shock and horror” awkwardly, acknowledging it as first only after the first sense is made of it.

The essay begins with a response to the break in history by seeking analogy, or likeness, familiarity. Symmetry gives a shape to things, as if without some form history is unreadable. The old story throws the light of retrospection onto the new event, familiarizing its shock and horror, a recurrence rather than a rupture of history. The earlier war and the later war, the youth and age of the writer—everything matches up in a coherent structure. The temporal duration of fifty-four years links the two conflicts in a

historical chain, the historical antecedent providing the ground of apprehending the later moment. “I found myself literally knowing ‘by experience’ what immensities, what monstrosities, what revelations of what immeasurabilities, our affair would carry in its bosom—a knowledge that flattered me by its hint of immunity from illusion” (*Culture* 178). But the whole paragraph is a prolonged extension of the illusion of immunity from illusion, knowledge of the past that does not meet the boundaries of the present history. The Civil War, like the threat of the Armada and that of Napoleon, do not hold up as analogues. The past will find these monstrosities of history anything but familiar. The whole long paragraph is like the tension of a gathering storm just short of breaking, but blackening the atmosphere.

So the opening of the next paragraph comes as no surprise.

My point is, however, that upon this luxury I was allowed after all but ever so scantily to feed. I am unable to say when exactly it was that the rich analogy, the fine and sharp identity between the faded and the vivid case broke down, with the support obscurely derived from them; the moment anyhow came soon enough at which experience felt the ground give way and that one swung off into space, into history, into darkness, with every lamp extinguished and every abyss gaping.

(*Culture* 178)

An attempt to frame and understand is itself framed in the next paragraph by an epistemic unmooring. In writing these opening paragraphs of his definitive essay about the First World War, James began where he had always begun, by attempting to elaborate what in the world had arrested his attention in the first place, setting down the whole growth of

his understanding, going over the ground of it, his first impression, followed his first sense.

But the Civil War marked the point at which comprehension broke off, a frame of reference for violence that has now been left behind: the evidence stretched beyond the terms of understanding the evidence. Swinging off into history and darkness is an image of disorientation, a dislocation from the familiar ground of history and knowledge alike, the breakdown of the possibility of knowledge. The war is entirely incomprehensible: “if the present complication should begin to be as long as it was broad no term of comparison borrowed from the past would so much as begin to fit it” (*Culture* 178). This war would be both as long and far, far broader. At this point, the essay has come up against the limits of its own historical knowledge.

In what follows, though, the pressure of the unprecedented chaos of history has thrown up the need for a response of sense-making order. Geography provides the basis of that order. While “the curve of the globe” toward Belgium is of a very short distance, the channel, or the rim of James’s metaphor, divides England from the continent, a division that is of the deepest significance. The stringent opposition of the rim organizes the essay and the essay’s historical content. “One grew to feel that the nearer elements, those of land and water and sky at their loveliest, were making thus, day after day, a particular prodigious point, insisting in their manner on a sense and a wondrous story which it would be the restless watcher’s fault if he didn’t take it in” (*Culture* 179). Unlike the opaque inscrutability of the war, the wondrous story is entirely readable, a coherent narrative that will speak history to the restless watcher.

This passage marks a transition from the incomprehensibility of the war to the accessibility and permanence of an always-remaining order. The restless watcher merely takes in what is there in such a way that it is restorative:

Roundabout him stretched the scene of his fondest frequentation as time had determined the habit; but it was as if every reason and every sentiment conducing to the connection had, under the shock of events, entered into solution with every other, so that the only thinkable approach to rest, that is to the recovery of an inward order, would be in restoring them each, or to as many as would serve the purpose, some individual dignity and some form. (*Culture* 179)

Every abyss gaping, the restless watcher is faced with disconnection from the familiar scene, with an unsettling of the reasons and sentiments that tie him to the place. The shock produces a new disorder, an estrangement from the connecting threads that tie him to the scene. Threatened with an imminent loss of connection, with an engulfing homelessness and unfamiliarity in the wake of history, the writer cleaves to order, and the way to recovery is through form. Formlessness is incomprehensible and conversely comprehensibility provides dignity.

The geographical metaphor of the rim throws England and the English character into visibility as the ground of order: “Just over that line were unutterable things, massacre and ravage and anguish, all but irresistible assault and cruelty, bewilderment and heroism all but overwhelmed; from the sense of which one had but to turn one’s head to take in something unspeakably different and that yet produced, as by some extraordinary paradox, a pang almost as sharp” (*Culture* 180). The rim divides Europe into two zones of historical significance, ossifying the separation of two distinct orders of

meaning. Like the opening move of the epic, which provides absolute contrasts in response to historical catastrophe, the metaphor of the rim establishes a static opposition. History is an assault of “unutterable things, massacre and ravage and anguish,” in contrast to the stability, order, and clarity of England. Against a background of the trauma of a “murdered civilization,” England is an inviolable place of continuity, tradition, and familiarity: “Just the fixed *look* of England under the August sky, what was this but the most vivid exhibition of character conceivable and the face turned up, to repeat my expression, with a frankness that really left no further inquiry to be made?” (*Culture* 181). The “unutterable things” that are outside of the rim, on the other side of the channel, James opposed to the English character, figured here as a face, a metaphor that casts that character as both comfortingly recognizable, available to the restless watcher. The essay clings to the unbroken continuity embodied in England, “with all her long unbrokenness thick and rich upon her” (*Culture* 182).

England is in James’s war essays the embodiment of a yearning for unbroken continuity. He ended his essay “The Question of the Mind” with an almost rhapsodic consideration of the “good-nature” of the English mind—the question of the essay’s title finds an answer:

The wildness, the crudity, the undressed and uneconomised state are themselves the unidentified force, or the force to the identification of which we come nearest when we catch it in its supreme act of good-nature. What a blessing to work round again to the consciousness of *that* clue, the clue of the incorrigibility, in the hand! For the good-nature was the light—the light, ever so vividly, on the character; just as the character was the light, ever so richly and blurringly, but none the less ever

so extensively and perspectively, on the mind. So then I stood with my feet on the ground: the case was sole and single, and quite as splendid, yes, as one could have wished it to be. (*Culture* 158)

The restless watcher is far removed from the wildness of the English mind he observes. The latter is defined by its unaware formlessness, as if it belongs to the state of nature, the “unidentified force” a seamless whole that is one with itself⁵⁸. There is a suffocating inescapability to the passage: good-nature revealed the character, just as the character revealed the mind, which in its turn seems to be defined *by* incorrigibility and good-nature. English good-nature reveals itself to James, unalterable and pre-existent. The whole of the question has opened to him, perspective on perspective opening out, the English mind and the English character alike hinging on their good-nature.

Good-nature is Adamic, prelapsarian. We are back in the world of *The American*, with Christopher Newman’s “unregenerate good nature” having migrated from America to England. To act from good nature means to act involuntarily (306). The good nature of the English affirms the “unalterable laws” of an unchanging, unchangeable order. It provides moral and epistemological stability, at once inherently apprehensible and good. “So then I stood with my feet on the ground.” So there he is.

“Within the Rim” responds to the epistemic and historical abyss of the war by becoming rather sentimental about England, and, in what follows, about an unnamed, ahistorical English landscape: “the mere spread of the great trees, the mere gathers in the little bluey-white curtains of the cottage windows, the mere curl of the tinted smoke from

⁵⁸ The relation between the writer and the force is akin to that of Lukac’s novel and epic, the epic coming before the historical complexity amidst which the novel looks back with a sense of. To be aware of the incorrigibility of the English mind is a condition of not being within the circle of that incorrigibility. But such awareness is not the distance of irony, that crucial Jamesian stance; it is rather a mode of writing in which the possibility of irony collapses.

the old chimneys matching that note, became a sort of exquisite evidence” (*Culture* 182). All of these details could be lifted out of a Wordsworth poem, or a sentimentalized version of Wordsworth. This non-peopled rustic scene is minute in its scale, the trees and the smoke and the curtain the smallest, coziest details that harmoniously compose the restful scene in just the right way. The repeated “mere” is precious, making the whole place untouchable and sacrosanct. We could not imagine the writer inhabiting it, though we could imagine the literary folk who might emerge from the front door. The cottage is not only a scene of the domestic, but it is also entirely domesticated. It domesticates history through a touching image of the domestic⁵⁹. Swinging off into history is a brush with the crash of civilization, an articulation of the vertigo of epistemic and historical homelessness. The sentimentalized cottage is an attempt to bridge it over, to patch it up; in arriving at the cottage the essay has built a home, established a refuge and a retreat, a comfort.

The turn to the cottage also reflects despair. The essay provides no answer to the un-answerability of the war’s unprecedented status, but only a retreat, an abandonment of history altogether, for the metaphor of the rim divides temporal as well as spatial boundaries, divides England from the continent as well as the serenity of the past from the wreck of the present. The cottage is incommensurate with the horror across the channel, belonging to a different time, to “a world elsewhere,” in Richard Poirier’s phrase. Nothing could be further removed from massacre and ravage and anguish, in

⁵⁹ Paul Fussell notes the frequency with which various writers expressed a nostalgia for rural England. He writes in his chapter “Arcadian Resources” that, “If the opposite of war is peace, the opposite of experiencing moments of war is proposing moments of pastoral” (231). The movement into the cottage is a drastic dramatization of Fussell’s description of bucolic arrest as a resource of retreating from historical calamity.

history and tone alike, than a well-worn, seemingly timeless cottage with smoke pouring from its chimney. This idyll continues a few paragraphs later:

the blades of grass, the outlines of leaves, the drift of clouds, the streaks of mortar between old bricks, not to speak of the call of child-voices muffled in the comforting air, became, as I have noted, with a hundred other like touches, casually felt, extraordinary admonitions and symbols, close links of a tangible chain. When once the question fairly hung there of the possibility, more showily set forth than it had up to then presumed to be, of a world without use for the tradition so embodied, an order substituting for this, by an unmannerly thrust, quite another and really, it would seem, quite a ridiculous, a crudely and clumsily improvised story, we might all have resembled together a group of children at their nurse's knee disconcerted by some tale that it isn't their habit to hear.

(*Culture* 184)

All of these details are both specific and unlocatable. The old bricks extend into the distant past, not a part of this or that building or historical era, but an embodiment of old Englishness as such. The “close links of a tangible chain” can be held and grasped securely, as opposed to the lubricity and unexpected intensity of doubt to which history has now given rise. While James found himself inhabiting a world that had outstripped the “tradition so embodied,” the essay struggles to make that tradition relevant and resonant with the times. History is telling a story that has never been heard to people who have lived into a new, unfamiliar world.

As the essay's form emerges, a deep incoherence becomes salient. This incoherence, however, is itself a mode of understanding the essay manifests in its restless

shifts of tone, oscillations that index an inability to take hold of its subject matter.

James's attempt to take hold, in the sense of both the attempt to understand the rupture of the war and to reconcile that rupture with a definite, locatable, describable Englishness, flexes against an opposite understanding the essay also offers, a counter-texture or counter-tone to the more asserted one, and which suggests that the war is an incomprehensible, profound break, a historical catastrophe of unparalleled proportions.

"Within the Rim" registers with despair, against the drift of its own claims, how James had lived on to see an old order gone. He had hoped that this was not the case: "We loved the old tale, or at least I did, exactly because I knew it" (*Culture* 184). But the old tale is old only when it refers to an epoch that has passed, that is sealed off now in the past, nostalgia always being for the unattainable. To love the old tale, as James did, is also to know that it is a tale incommensurate with the shape historical reality has now taken in the present, while the new tale was for James finally unknowable.

The war was a final disordering of the historical-social world of Henry James, but it marked the end rather than the beginning of his engagement with a rebarbative contemporary history, the quality of his prose developing in direct relation to that history. His writing had proceeded into its late, notoriously elusive density in relation to a deepening sense of an accelerating economic and social history proceeding into a state of crisis. The passing away of the rural American republic in the midst of consolidation, industrialization and mechanization; the consequent gravitational pull of the center of trade and finance to New York; and, finally, America's emergence into an overseas empire. This historical context set the stage for James's return to Americans and America in his trilogy of major-phase novels along with a withdrawal from American values.

The final novel in the trilogy, *The Golden Bowl*, was the culmination of James's fiction, and it articulates a historical culmination. The novel is a return to *The American* that also revises and reverses the earlier novel's understanding of America.

In Maggie Verver and her father Adam (also a Gilded Age businessman and also not insignificantly named), James returned to the subject matter at the very origins of his career, American good nature. But as he did so the morality of the American, which he had earlier taken for granted, or was not salient, gradually developed into a crisis of the moral realm and of America, evolved into the darkness of American innocence. Newman is morally uncompromised by the possession of money—it merely provides him the means to transcend into his latent possibilities, to overcome the acquisition of money as a necessity. Unlike him, the Ververs wield social power due to their economic power, and their strength to impose a moral and epistemic vision onto the events surrounding them incurs for them irresolvable moral tensions.

In *The Golden Bowl*, the possession of great wealth emerges as a morally and epistemically significant problem the characters must negotiate. What the Ververs see and also what is beyond their apprehension is always structured and facilitated by the brutal force of their money, around which the other characters shape their lives and discrete social positions. Far from being ideologically separated from the world, the characters in *The Golden Bowl* can find no exit from moral and social positions that are fundamentally generated by and around money. Whereas Newman's fortune provided him with the means to become his inherently moral self, money in *The Golden Bowl* precludes moral coherence. The novel is a definitive dismantling of morality.

The Ivory Tower also engages the unrestrained wealth acquisition that rules the American scene, but it does so in reduced, reducing, simplified terms. Whereas no character is exempted from *The Golden Bowl*'s thoroughgoing moral incoherence, the later novel attempts to recover some form of moral order by means of an epic-like opposition. Graham Fielder returns to Newport at the request of a wealthy uncle, Frank Betterman, who is on his deathbed and has no other heir. Betterman had been persuaded to request his return by Rosanna Gaw, the daughter of his ex-business partner, who felt responsible for a former break between uncle and nephew. Gray enters stage right, like an epic wanderer, from Europe—the Old World, history, culture, the tone of time—where he has lived and been educated, though himself an American by descent.⁶⁰ He returns to a dark continent made dark by money, encountering “the black and merciless things that are behind the great possessions” (217). Gray knows absolutely nothing of money or its acquisition and likes nothing so little as “the ‘mystery’ of the market and the hustle of any sort” (85). James described Gray in his “Notes” for the novel “as complete a case as possible of the sort of thing that will make him an anomaly and an outsider alike in the New York world of business, the N.Y. world of ferocious acquisition, and the world there of enormities of expenditure and extravagance” (245). His complete “difference of association and sensibility” renders him entirely alien from the American scene (245).

Gray moves among the merciless things behind the great fortunes but is entirely quarantined from, and opposed to, their moral taint. He “is a sort of a figure of a floating

⁶⁰ Gray's return to Newport is an incarnation of an earlier account of James's own return to Newport, recalled in *The American Scene*, and thus to the memory of the Newport of his youth. The sweetness of old Newport, James found upon re-visiting it, had been “trampled by the white elephants,” or large and gaudy houses (166). “What an idea, originally, to have seen this miniature spot of earth, where the sea-nymphs on the curved sands, at the worst, might have chanted backs to the shepherds, as a mere breeding ground for white elephants!” (167). The change wrought in the landscape of Newport throws up an idyllic past that precedes the money passion. The meaning of past and present alike becomes clear in the light of one another.

island,” one entirely uncorrupted and incorruptible by the extravagance of Newport. Precisely because Gray would not even know how to exercise himself to get his uncle’s fortune if he wanted to, he inherits it. James projected that another character, to whom Gray would entrust the management of his fortune, would later easily prey upon his naiveté and swindle him out of it. Characters speak of Gray’s goodness with awed abjection. The lover of the character who will eventually take advantage of Gray says to Rosanna: “You must keep him from us, because we’re not good enough and you *are*; you must act in the sense of what you feel, and must feel exactly as you’ve a right to” (48). We are back in *The American*’s ringing moral clarity. The morally and financially bankrupt aristocrats, the Bellegardes, have been replaced by the morally bankrupt Americans who are either in possession of wealth or seeking it by any means. *The Ivory Tower* emerges on the other side of *The Golden Bowl*’s subtlety, a subtlety that is simultaneously an implosion into insufferable and inescapable moral irresolvability. In the earlier novel, the most moral character, Maggie, is the most morally reprehensible character as well.

We never know the sum of Adam Verver’s fortune, or how he acquired it. Such facts stand at the edge of *The Golden Bowl*, not to the effect of obscuring the crucial role money plays in the novel, but because such a fact would itself obscure the way that money structures knowledge and morality alike. But we are told that Rosanna will inherit precisely twenty million dollars from her father. When Rosanna names the figure she is to inherit to Gray

there was a kind of enormity in her very absence of pomp, and Gray felt as if he had dropped of a sudden, from his height of simplicity, far down into a familiar

relation to quantities inconceivable—out of which depths he fairly blew and splashed to emerge, the familiar relation, of all things in the world being so strange a one. “*That’s* what you mean here when you talk of money?”

“That’s what we mean,” said Rosanna, “when we talk of anything at all—for of what else but money do we ever talk? (105)

In *The Golden Bowl*, no character would be allowed the kind of blameless and unsullied state of ignorance the novel affords Gray here. Everyone, including Fanny Assingham, is perfectly cognizant of what money means and the compromises it necessitates. She knows perfectly well her position is far below the Ververs on the economic and social ladder and that she must act accordingly, a useful manager of their social lives. Maggie may not know the extent to which money gives her unbounded power, but the novel is vivid in portraying the brutality the limits of her vision unleashes. She may not see the consequences of possessing great wealth, but the novel does not excuse her from inflicting those consequences.

Gray cannot even think about money, he has to learn it as if he were a child. Money is grosser, more exaggerated in the later novel, but it is also simpler. Gray can keep his distance from these monstrous economic facts in which he himself is not entangled, and Rosanna can act in a moral manner not defined by the “money-passion.” But to be in *The Golden Bowl* is to be morally compromised.

The Ivory Tower in this way establishes a clearly underlined opposition that is nearly schematic. On one side there are two characters with not an avaricious bone between them and with a fortune apiece and on the other side two characters both lacking a fortune and scheming to take it from the others. There are the characters with a moral

sense and then there are the other characters. Charlotte and the Prince are nasty and self-serving, but Maggie comes off as no better, if not worse, her moral stridency itself nasty and brutish. *The Ivory Tower*'s oppositions organize and simplify its dark, repellant, discordant historical matter into the kind of moral coherence and clarity *The Golden Bowl* trenchantly refuses. In the wake of the war, a historical event more disconcerting than that of his novel, James broke off *The Ivory Tower* and shortly after picked up *The Sense of the Past*.

The Sense of the Past turns on the legibility of the past. A young, prehensile American, Ralph Pendrel, inherits an old London home from a distant English relative in recognition of Ralph's appreciation of the past, as set forth in his book "An Essay in the Aid of Reading History." The past is legible for Ralph because he can understand its formal qualities. His relative "had nowhere seen the love of old things, of the scrutable, palpable past, nowhere felt an ear for stilled voices, as precious as they are faint, as seizable truly, as they are fine, affirm a more remarkable power than in the pages that had moved him to gratitude" (41). Ralph travels to his new acquisition, crossing the Atlantic in the opposite direction from that of Gray. When he visits the house, Ralph is transported into the past and assumes the place of his American ancestor who was engaged to one of his English cousins, while his ancestor takes up residence in the present.

The novel's story relates how very adequate Ralph has been in mastering the past. The fantastic plot of the novel is a way of pressing that mastery to its logical extreme. A character who writes about the reading of history enters into history, the past not merely visitable but visited. Ralph is, after an initial mistake in guessing which sister he is

engaged to, never wrong in his surmises, for instance about the fact that a relative needs money or that he will find a particular object in his pocket, the absence of which would give him away. Immersed in the past, he has little trouble discerning it, its contents entirely tractable, and this understanding allows him to move fluidly in its confines.

James ended a letter from December 1st, 1914 to Edith Wharton by discussing the novel:

I have got back to trying to work—on one of three books begun and abandoned—at the end of some “30,000 words”—15 years ago, and fished out of the depths of an old drawer at Lamb House (I sent Miss Bosanquet down to hunt it up) as perhaps offering a certain defiance of subject to the law by which most things now perish in the public blight. This does seem to kind of intrinsically resist—and I have hopes. But I must rally now before getting back to it. (*LHJ* 2: 426)

The war is a blight on writing. In his introduction to the posthumously published fragment, Percy Lubbock writes that James “found that in the conditions he could not then go on with *The Ivory Tower*.” But he hoped “that he would be able to work upon a story of remote and phantasmal life” (v). In the midst of realizing his own past and the past of Europe and America as the “Age of the Mistake,” James returned to a fragment from the past that explores the coherence of the past. James’s letter suggests that the novel defies the “public blight” because the past provides a means of ordering the contemporary.

In the “Notes for the Sense of the Past” James dictated in 1915, the central event he forecast was that Ralph would find the past to be not aesthetically pleasing in the end, but rather shabby, inferior to his own moment. He now “sees only the ripeness, richness,

attraction and civilization, the virtual perfection without a flaw” of the future (331). At the very moment when James experienced a deep-lying, fundamental despair about both the tragedy of history as well as his “subject-matter” and was unable to finish another projected novel, he planned to end this one with its protagonist realizing the “wonders and splendours” of the present. Jolly writes of this contradiction that *The Sense of the Past* “re-establishes the meliorist myth that the war had smashed” (218). Pendrel’s appreciation of the past finds a balancing reverse in his appreciation of the modern. That symmetry, which drives towards historical coherence as such, is a means of thinking beyond historical disorder. Going back turned out to be really a way of going forward, of proposing the contemporary to be an improvement over the past. Rather than the tragedy of a murdered civilization, the “Notes” proposes a vision of historical congruence. The past is endlessly recoverable to the perceiving mind, historical time moving predictably and evenly.

James concluded the second volume of his memoirs *Notes of a Son and Brother* by writing about his own and William’s reaction to the break in their lives occasioned by their cousin Minny Temple’s premature death: “We felt it together as the end of our youth” (544). After the war broke out, he began dictating a projected third volume of his memoirs, *The Middle Years*. The first paragraph begins this way:

If the author of this meandering record has noted elsewhere that an event occurring early in 1870 was to mark the end of his youth, he is moved here at once to qualify in one or two respects that emphasis. Everything depends in such a view on what one means by one’s youth—so shifting a consciousness is this, and so related at the same time to many different matters. We are never old, that is

we never cease easily to be young, for *all* life at the same time; youth is an army, the whole battalion of our faculties and our freshneses, our passions and our illusions, on a considerably reluctant march into the enemy's country, the country of the general lost freshness; and I think it throws out at least as many stragglers behind as skirmishers ahead—stragglers who often catch up but belatedly with the main body, and even in many a case never catch up at all. Or under another figure it is a book in several volumes, and even at this a mere instalment of the large library of life, with a volume here and there closing, as something in the clap of its covers may assure us, while another remains either completely agape or kept open by a fond finger thrust in between the leaves. (547-48)

This passage directly addresses several issues relevant to this discussion: the question of the past as being at once continuous and discontinuous, so that a life continues forward in relation to sharp endings (Minny's death); the ability in the present to hold the past in its grasp; and finally, the search for the right resources to deploy in the project of recovering the past. Where *Notes* ends with a sharp divide, a placing and circumscription of youth, this paragraph immediately works back against that divide.

Returning to the moment, James found it to be more complex than his previous description had allowed for. Now, in two subsequent metaphors, he described the past as precisely not an end but an on goingness. Youth is never entirely lost, but maintains an afterlife, like a ghost, its skirmishers and stragglers spreading out the army over a spatial expanse just as a book can continue across a spatial expanse. The army moves forward at various temporalities, connecting all of its parts, and reading a codex in "several volumes," in James's metaphor, also brings discontinuity under the reign of continuity.

Both metaphors formulate youth as at least in part recoverable. The personal and sentimental provides a coherent framing of the past in the opening of *The Middle Years*, a coherence that, as we have seen, James was intensely anguished to discover had slipped from his whole generation's hold. At the moment the deepening complexity of the past was becoming apparent, the personal and sentimental was for James able to overcome divides in his own history. The past, in the form of his youth, was graspable, able to be touched and opened as a book is.

Virginia Woolf, who in *Mrs. Dalloway* would write a major novel by struggling to make the catastrophe of the war apprehensible, described James's attitude in this work before his own subject: "he hardly knows how to divest himself of it all—where to find space to set down this and that, how to resist altogether the claims of some other gleaming object in the background; appearing so busy, so unwieldy with ponderous treasure that his dexterity in disposing of it, his consummate knowledge of how best to place each fragment, afford us the greatest delight" (134-35). Reality is endlessly recoverable, James's ability to work that recovery in his writing facing only those limits set by space, connections and relations abounding at every step, the congruent elements lining up flush with one another, the endlessness of the past entirely amenable to writing's efforts to recover that endlessness. The fragmented state of *The Ivory Tower*, *The Sense of the Past*, and *The Middle Years*, however, tells another tale, one of writing overwhelmed by history. For it is precisely this congruence—of past and present, the Old World and its timelessness, writing and the tractability of the world—that history disarticulated for Henry James in August 1914.

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