Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy v Praze
Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Diplomová práce

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Living Europe
the alien impressions of Henry James and Lambert Strether

Praha, 2007

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Introduction: Going Abroad

Shortly after Henry James's death, T.S. Eliot claimed that this quintessential trans-Atlantic writer had had the great distinction of "everywhere a foreigner." Eliot applauded the peripatetic nature of James's life and his role as an international citizen: "It is the final perfection, the consummation of an American to become, not an Englishman, but a European – something which no born European, no person of European nationality, can become." [1] James was, of course, an expatriate par excellence, having spent most of his adult life in Europe, and eventually becoming a citizen of Europe – or, as Eliot suggested, a citizen of the world. Like so many of the subjects of his novels, James was moved to leave the increasing commercial ambience of his native America for old world traditions and values. Europe presented him with an ambience and a set of experiences America could not. As the young James himself expressed it, Europe opened itself to him as a "vaunted scene," the "threshold of expectation", the "scene for the reverential spirit," the "world in fine raised to the richest and noblest expression."[2]

Certainly for many of Henry James's generation, travel to Europe was both a new protocol made possible wealth and a ritual necessary for leisure class respectability. The Americans who were traveling abroad went to Europe to acquire refinement. In his social history of expatriation in the nineteenth century, *Going Abroad*, William Stowe notes that "[t]o obtain these desirable elements of a gracious and refined way of life one naturally had to travel to Europe." With "the rapid expansion of the [tourist] industry" as well as the "fast, comfortable, and fairly reliable North Atlantic steamships" and "European railway networks" "the American

[1] T.S. Eliot, quoted in Malcolm Bradbury, *Dangerous Pilgrimages* (London: Penguin, 1995) 201.
[2] James, quoted in Bradbury 188.

tourist in Europe became a commonplace" figure.[3] At the juncture where economy meets culture, society's surplus wealth allowed privileged Americans the occasion to purchase the respectability they lacked.[4] As we shall see, the consumption of European cultural effects by wealthy Americans is a favorite theme of James's in stories like *The American*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*. Beyond cultural consumption, Europe also offered Americans opportunities to escape the moral constrictions of American life. Stowe observes that Europe in the nineteenth century "served as a stage for independent self-definition, [but also] for establishing personal relations with culture and society that did not necessarily fit the conventional patterns described by hometown and family standards" (5). Thus, the American who escaped the physical bounds of his homeland also escaped the social and moral bounds of his culture. In his Freudian-reading of travel, *Haunted Journeys*, critic Dennis Porter notes that, broadly, travel "seem[s] to promise or allow us to fantasize the satisfaction of desires that for one reason or another is denied at home."[5] For James too, immigration meant escaping the simplistic attitudes towards culture and gender that he witnessed in the American society of "pecuniary emulation."[6]

From a young age, Henry James had opportunities to travel in Europe. In fact, Donald Stone has noted that the "major conditioning fact of his youth was the instability, the rootlessness, the wanderings of his family circle, which turned him into an observer caught

[3] William Stowe, *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994) 8.
[4] Remarking on Thorstein Veblen's classic economic study *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Stowe notes that Veblen offers insight into the economics behind nonproductive activity. Stowe states that for Veblen "the leisure and the priestly classes are parallel manifestations of a society's ability to support nonproductive activity: their occupations, the rituals of 'decent' expenditure and divine service, are parallel ways of using the surplus time and money generated by a booming bourgeois economy to create a stable, 'respectable' society." 19.
[5] Dennis Porter, quoted in Stowe 165.
[6] James, quoted in Bradbury 199.

between two worlds [...]."[7] The in-betweenness of James's life re-emerges in his fiction as an essential component to James's "international theme" in which characters alien to their surroundings attempt to navigate the new (and old) worlds they inhabit. Novels and stories like *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Daisy Miller*, and later, *The Ambassadors* (1903), offer tales of American neophytes who come into contact with European worlds that eventually transform their worldview. His stories of Americans in Europe present a myriad of cultural clashes that are the driving force behind his greatest novels, and which give James his greatest musings as a writer: "I glory in the piling up of complications of every sort."[8] His international theme provided fertile ground to explore the limits and potentialities of national, international, racial, historical, and class identities. In fact, from his early novels, James navigates the tropes of international difference as part of the landscape of cosmopolitan modernity. As Malcolm Bradbury suggests in his study on trans-Atlantic expatriation *Dangerous Pilgrimages*, "James is the great teaser of transatlantic vocabulary, the great explorer of all the mythic underpinnings that the western traffic had developed."[9]

Yet, as we shall see in Part one, James's expatriation faced criticism from social critics like Theodore Roosevelt who was famously critical of intellectual expatriates[10] whom he categorized as "the undersized man of letters, who flees his country because he, wit his delicate, effeminate sensibilities [...] finds he cannot play a man's part among men [...]."[11] Like Roosevelt, even present day Jamesian scholars like William Stowe have expressed ambivalences

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[7] Donald Stone, *Novelists in a Changing World: Meredith, James, and the Transformation of English Fiction in the 1880's* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972) 179.
[8] James, quoted in Ross Posnock, "Affirming the Alien: the Pragmatist Pluralism of the American Scene," *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, ed. Jonathan Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 225.
[9] Bradbury 187.
[10] A prolific study of the history of anti-intellectualism is Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (Toronto: Random House, 1962).
[11] Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in Martha Banta, "Men, Women, and the American Way," *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, ed. Jonathan Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 26.

regarding the American privileged class to which James belonged. Stowe claims that by relocating to Europe the "newly rich Americans could simultaneously claim membership in a superior social class and *justify* the privileges of that class by demonstrating its 'inherent' sensitivity and refinement."[12] He minimizes James's personal genius as a mere "product of cultural work" and curiously undervalues James's writing as a simple translation of class privilege:

> This so-called grace manifests itself as knowledge, as sophistication, and, in the best of cases – in James himself, in some of his characters, and in his most appreciative readers – as heightened moral and aesthetic consciousness, all of which contribute to the production of class-based cultural power.[13]

Stowe therefore categorizes James's writing as part of an imperial gesture by which privileged Americans asserted cultural power and further justified class distinctions. However, as I will argue in part one of this essay, James's oeuvre cannot be reduced to an artifact of either economic power or national might. Stowe's use of nation, culture and class as criteria can only partially account for James's creative genius.

I argue that James exposes the undercurrent of American exploitation overseas and, in doing so, is far from complicit in iterating powered, class values. James finds a great wealth of material in *disturbing* the essentialist identities of American and European. By complicating the limits of identity he produces stories which elude obvious social, cultural, and national limits. Malcolm Bradbury notes that this especially true of what was known as the late phase of James's writing, where "innocence and experience are no longer to be clearly designated as national entities: innocent American, experienced or corrupt Europe," but instead "moral shades have now become strangely oblique and obscure, and both Europe and America are ambiguous

[12] Stowe 5.
[13] Stowe 5.

entities."[14] In other words, James takes great strides to blur social distinctions, dramatizing the wealth of contradictions, anxieties, and possibilities at play on the international scene.

In sum, in part one of this thesis I analyze the impact of expatriation on Henry James's fiction on terms of his persistent engagement with themes of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, imperialism, and mass culture. Ultimately, I conclude that James created a unique perspective on cultural, social and moral hybridization in the nineteenth century.

This brings me to part two of this paper, in which I examine the "oblique" picture of international relationships through a close reading of his expatriate novel, *The Ambassadors*, the story of the aging American, Lambert Strether, and his trip to Europe to "save" the son of his wife-to-be from the arms of a "wicked" (in other words, sexual) European woman.[15] Instead of charting the tropes of difference in the story, however, I am interested in the authorial techniques in the novel that establish James's use of sight as a way to engage his European environment.

On this theme, Henry James's own experiences in Europe resonate loudly in Strether's consciousness, a subject under scrutiny. Unlike the expatriates of the Lost Generation who would follow, James and his characters do not 'live' Europe through escapades in sexual exploration or moral degeneration. In fact, James was wary of the seductive quality of European life and its potential to deplete artistic vitality. Donald Stone observes that James "discovered that the lazy, absorbent atmosphere of Italy was fatal to artistic production [...]."[16] Similarly, in *The Ambassadors*, Strether suffers a strong desire to experience the education of the senses he has not encountered in America. But, as is so common in James's narrative, plot does not conclude in a utopian union, but in renunciation. Apparently, James agreed with his friend and colleague, William Dean Howells, who claimed that realism in writing should avoid the demand for

[14] 198-9 Bradbury.
[15] Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (London: Everyman Paperbacks, 1999) 56.
[16] Stone 183.

"'passions' as something in itself admirable." Eric Haralson suggests that James was a "real man of action in art [...] [who] knew better than to violate the canons of realism, as 'the feminine...hand' typically did, by exaggerating the role of romance in making the world go round [...]."[17] In *The Ambassadors*, as we will see, James makes greater use of Strether's consciousness by leaving him denied the pleasures of European sophistication, and thus standing, like the author at a distance from the world.

Thus is James's own proclivity for observation in Europe translated into fiction. Donald Stone claims that James had "ability to convert [his] subjective impressions into literature, to relate his aesthetic consciousness of 'life' to the enduring realm of 'art'."[18] In other words, James found detachment from the world a necessary stance for the creation of art.[19] In *The Ambassadors*, James significantly restricts Strether's personal power in the world in order to facilitate his detachment observation of everyday life. As the "slightest of subjects," Strether's limitations as a fictional subject empower his vantage for observation. Furthermore, his status as an *observer* has much to suggest about the nature of authorial consciousness per se.

If the first part of this paper can be seen as addressing what James represented with his international theme, the second part responds to *how* James represented his material. However, as we shall see, neither formal nor cultural themes in James's oeuvre are easily parsed as separate categories. Rather, they participate in an incessant exchange. James deploys his various cultural and social themes in conjunction with his formalism providing one of the most rich and

[17] Haralson 175-6
[18] Stone 176.
[19] Malcolm Bradbury reminds us "Under the influence of "impressionism," there is a great intensification [in James's novels] of concern with perception, patterning and symbolic reverberation, and with the entire relation of consciousness to the all too material world. The result is a new abstraction of method which could be called both American and modern, a response to a world of material energy and force which dislocates all significant social forms." Bradbury 197.

complex bodies of fiction in the past two centuries. In this paper, I endeavor to identify a few of James's complications from the double perspective of a formal and cultural discussion.

PART ONE: James, Nation, and Modernity

1.1) National identity in an international world

At a fundamental level, Henry James's so-called international theme deployed narratives of trans-Atlantic tourism (discussed in the Introduction to this paper) as allegories of individual fate. The mode in which characters reflect and transmit their nationality in an international ambit coincides with the forging of personal destiny. Expatriation emerges as a metaphor for the occasion to be *free* or to *live*. In other words, James's international theme figures expatriation as both the *possibility* for and as anxiety over individual change. As Donald Stone explains, in James's stories about "'innocent' American travelers or expatriates, hungry for experience and art, and experienced Europeans [...] who desire only simplicity and nature"[20] the theme of national identity finds its greatest strength and persistence in pervasive unintelligibility and possibility. James's affinity for the 'type' of American and European character is also complicated by his allowing that type to be unraveled and reassembled.

The international theme is thus more than the pairing of national differences along the triple axes of stereotype, language, and culture. While, national 'types' (the brash American, the refined European) are explored and used (sometimes to comedic effect), they are never fixed and rigid but deployed to engage larger issues surrounding the inter-mixing of nationalities in modernity. The question of nationality is fluid in James's writing and subject to an economy of power, which allows for both opportunity and exploitation across national boundaries. According to Jonathan Freedman, James offers a world "where national and cultural identity exists [...] as does [...] family [...] as something to be made, not something given, in a world where new

[20] Stone 189.

possibilities of identity-formation are being conjured forth by an internationalizing economy organized by leisure, travel, and mass culture"[21] Nationality in James's novels is one of a number of identity traits subject to the influences of the cultural marketplace – where name, nationality, history, and lineage are recast.

At the turn-of-the-century, national identity was increasingly an international issue. Jonathan Freedman has observed that the question over national identity affected Americans and Europeans alike, even those whose identities were allegedly established through their history and language:

> At the moment when identities start to circulate across and through national borders [...] financial and cultural capital are being exported wholesale from an attenuating British empire or a vitiated Europe to a new kind of world power, what it is to be 'English' or 'Italian' or 'French' is as much up for grabs as is [sic] what it is to be 'American'.[22]

The backdrop for this social transformation is the rise of the nation-state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and simultaneously, the rise of international markets, tourism, and immigration. With the domestic influx of an increasing number of immigrants into the United States there came foreign cultures, histories, languages, and races – all of which went into making up the melting pot of American identity. What is viewed in romantic terms today was, in fact, a tumultuous and anxious time in American history. Numerous politicians and social critics (including James) remarked on the benefits and dangers the immigration population was having on American identity. In his landing on Ellis Island in 1904, James asks the essential question of the time "Which is the American [...] which is not the alien [...]?"[23] The very fact that these two abstract ideas of "American" and "alien" are indistinguishable to the observer speaks to the nature of the historical moment itself. For, the idea of what constitutes an "American" was being

[21] Jonathan Freedman, "Introduction: the Moment of Henry James," *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, ed. Jonathan Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 11.
[22] Freedman 8.
[23] James quoted in Posnock 225.

shaped during this time.[24] What constituted an 'American' was a question of both race and history (invoking a fair amount of xenophobia), but also of power.

Thus, James's writing does not reify 'nation' as a fixed entity, or 'nationalism' as a fixed identity. Instead, James's discussion of the exchange of capital, bodies, and culture in modernity makes national identity an international question. Indeed, the modern opportunity to refashion identities through expatriation and exportation was a phenomenon that fascinated James.

Furthermore, the question of national identity is also the question of the balance of power globally, according to Jonathan Freedman:

> James understands[...].that national identity is an increasingly powerful force in the world at precisely the moment of, and through precisely the logic of, the increasing ease of international exchange; and that, in such a context, the idea of the nation could do powerfully complex work.[25]

On a global scale, the ambiguity of national identity coincided with the moment of crucial global power relations. The intersecting of national power with national identity is allegorically reflected in James's stories in which relationships across cultural, linguistic, and class boundaries forge new identities and, in doing so, renegotiate the location and possession of power. In James's dramatization of the mixing of nationalities the sense of large stakes is palpable. Familial and gender relations are always subtended by the powers inherent in wealth, history, and legacy. In *The Ambassadors*, Mrs. Newsome's fear that her son has fallen into the arms of a "wicked woman" is not simply a matter of American puritanical anxiety, but a matter of securing Chad's "high hopes" (56) for maintaining the family fortune at home in America. In his essay "Henry James and Globalization" John Carlos Rowe notes that in *Daisy Miller*, Winterbourne's anxiety over Daisy Miller's immorality spawns from her "fraterniz[ation] with people from the working class," namely, her Italian suitor. Daisy's intimate mixing with a foreign man of a lower

[24] It continues today, though, with a far more romanticized rhetoric.
[25] Freedman 8.

class is problematic for Winterbourne because it represents "the transgression of proper social boundaries, notably those regulating class and gender"[26] across national borders, argues Rowe. The confused, risky, and anxious aspect of mixing relations in James's narratives reflect the broader concerns over national retention of culture, wealth, and bodies in the modern world.

Thus, national identity is open to the influences of both cultural and economic capital and often to great concern for those involved. Before looking at the interplay between internationalism and modernity, I would like to explore the Jamesian theme of American wealth which links aestheticism to moneyed power. Given the American economic might that figures into many of his stories of the international theme, Americans are often shown to remake their national identity through the exchange of capital for culture. While James was acutely aware of the benefits to be gleaned from American global might – namely, the culture and cosmopolitanism he himself embodied – James dramatizes the dangers of American consumption of culture, a theme that resonates with American imperialism, exposing James's larger concerns regarding American power unchecked in the world.

1.2) American power plays

While earlier works like *The American Scene* confront modern domestic issues, novels of James's late phase such as *The Golden Bowl*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *Wings of a Dove*, and *The Ambassadors* illustrate the anxiety over America's newly powerful position in the world at large. As Jonathan Freedman has noted, "The translation of Empire[...]is one with the transmission of culture: the matter of Americans abroad in Europe is not simply a case of the innocents abroad,

[26] John Carlos Rowe "Henry James and Globalization," *The Henry James Review* 24.3 (2003): 207.

but also one of the remaking of cultural power at the moment of modernity."[27] James's narratives dramatize American power abroad through the American consumption of history; through the commodification of Europe with little discrimination between people, places, and things. In James's international world, all of Europe's history is subject to the fluctuations of the marketplace – each an objet d'art, a consumable artifact. The American abroad pursues the history he is denied by his own country, acquiring those artifacts of history Europe holds in abundance. Europe's *inheritance* – its titles, its artifacts, its architecture, indeed all its history – represents a cultural capital captured by American dollars.

Yet, James is highly suspicious of American consumption, doubting the authenticity of European artifacts once purchased by American dollars. In *The Ambassadors*, for instance, James shows that despite the power of the American money, differences forever remains visible between what is inherited and what is bought. If the European wealth of Prince Amerigo in *The Golden Bowl* and Lord Warburton in *Portrait of a Lady* lies in their aristocratic titles, in *The Ambassadors* Madame de Vionnet's great European wealth is in her inherited relics, the result of the "transmission from her father's line." We are told that among these relics "there had been objects she or her [familial] predecessors might even conceivably have parted with under need, but Strether couldn't suspect them of having sold old pieces to get 'better' ones" (182). By contrast, the American consumer, Miss Gostrey, occupies a darkened home which is lighted by "glints of gold" from her "shrine" of old-world antiques *collected* during "a thousand flights and funny little passionate pounces." Everywhere Strether looks he sees an "old ivory or an old brocade," enlarging his vision of her "empire of 'things'" (99). Yet, in that Madame DeVionnet's artifacts are inherited not bought, Strether observes that such relics show "as something quite different from Miss Gostrey's little museum of bargains and from Chad's lovely home." Strether

[27] Freedman 7-8.

recognizes the "old accumulations" that fill the space cannot be compared to "any contemporary method of acquisition or form of curiosity." The "old accumulations" show the authentic quality of a fortune giving the "air of supreme respectability" not visually apparent in the collections of his American friends, collections that have been "rummaged and purchased and picked up and exchanged, [by] sifting, selecting, [and] comparing [...]." The division between old and new wealth – the authentically inherited European relic and the historical object consumed by visiting Americans – is thereby visually "marked" by *history* itself (182).

The mining of European familial treasures by American capitalists and collectors goes hand in hand with American tourism. In other words, James's Americans commodify the history they survey. John Carlos Rowe observes that "the American abroad may fetishize European culture, as Osmond does with his careful copies of Old Roman coins and Adam Verver does with his purchases of American art for his museum in American city [...]."[28] In *The Golden Bowl*, the commodification of history is given by Maggie Verver's marriage to Prince Amerigo (as well as the art collection Adam Verver plans on exporting). The marriage represents the merging of worlds new and old, but also the commodification of the Prince's aristocratic title. The Prince is said to be a "part of [the] collection," a "*morceau de musée*."[29] In this manner, Adam Verver's wealth buys the cultured name and cultural artifacts he cannot acquire at home. With characters such as Miss Gostrey and Adam Verver who "try to buy imagination and taste,"[30] James seems to be saying that America's mining of cultural and historical relics puts it in the ranks of the imperialist tradition.

James is suggesting then that at the point of cultural exchange between America and Europe, a certain degree of exploitation is also in play. The point at which the appreciation of

[28] Rowe, "Henry James and Globalization" 209.
[29] Henry James *The Golden Bowl*, cited in William Peyser *Utopia and Cosmopolis* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998) 137.
[30] Rowe, "Henry James and Globalization" 213.

Europe involves the exporting of its treasures is at the center of the crisis over cultural imperialism, of which James suspects America will be the next leader. John Carlos Rowe interprets James's anxiety over America's gaining influence in the world as linked to the British imperialist tradition, specifically citing the valuation of art as a quality of that imperialism: "Henry James understood America to be following this lead and refining even further the extent to which the aesthetic aura might be used to disguise its conquering will."[31] James's dramatization of the Ververs' deployment of American wealth in foreign lands mirrored real events such as the American occupation of the Philippines. I am informed here by William Peyser suggestion that "*The Golden Bowl*, in fact, is imbued with a sense of danger related to the expansiveness of Europe and the United States" present at the time.[32] The acquisition of the Prince and of European art by the Ververs represents the museumification of culture, an allegory that finds its double in the treatment of the people of the Philippines as "exhibits for their own protection" by their American occupiers.[33]

Peyser notes the parallel between American imperialism and American purchasing power: To a "surprising degree imperial discourse treats the world as a museum, a habit often associated with Henry James's and the Ververs' aestheticism [...]."[34] The anxiety and anticipation surrounding America's imperialism, suggests Margery Sabin, can be found in the pages of *The Golden Bowl*:

> The question that haunts the psychological, moral, and cultural situation depicted in *The Golden Bowl* is whether America's new wealth would sponsor a new and superior civilization or whether America was doomed merely to replicate the worst patterns of its earlier masters and rivals.[35]

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[31] Rowe, "Henry James and Globalization" 213.
[32] Peyser 145.
[33] Peyser 151.
[34] Peyser 151.
[35] Margery Sabin, "Henry James's American Dream in the Golden Bowl," *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James,* Ed. Jonathan Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 206-7.

James recognized that the new and unbounded wealth America had acquired relatively quickly created opportunities in far away lands spurring imperialist aspirations. But, this assertion can be extended beyond *The Golden Bowl* to general formulations by James that link American innocence with America's newly burgeoning wealth. Thomas Peyser is right to observe the resemblance between America's youthful colonial ambitions and the innocent Americans of James's novels who set out to "live" the world. In Peyser's argument, James "seems to cast the United States as an Isabel Archer embarking on a career that threatens demoralization even as it offers a deepened engagement with life and the world."[36] Whatever their fates, the American characters who seek out their providence in the international arena all share a common youthful ambition comparable to American national power in the world. The constant Jamesian motif of giving and receiving opportunities represents American idealism, embodied by characters such as Isabel Archer and Lambert Strether.

Here, we might reference Donald Stone's claims that *Portrait of a Lady* makes "the fullest tribute to the idealism of the 'American Dream,' the American myth of self-reliance and self-importance, while at the same time, revealing the sharpest awareness of its limitations."[37] Isabel Archer's romantic idealism is presented from the start, where – as a poor girl who owes nothing and is free from obligation – she claims to "belong quite to the independent class."[38] Her romantic imagination is only further aroused when she is given the means to achieve the limits of that imagination by her cousin, Ralph Touchett, who hopes, like many of James's 'observers' to live vicariously through her successes. Isabel, of course, doesn't succeed, but is in fact limited by those very fortunes that give her flight. In dooming Isabel's future, James is not suggesting that

[36] Peyser 145.
[37] Stone 207.
[38] Henry James *The Portrait of a Lady*, cited in Stone 214.

America's mounting wealth will lead to its doom, but rather that there is a great danger in the romanticism of American (and particularly Emersonian) self-reliance. Stone observes of the novel, "Isabel would not be so vulnerable if James had not made her so romantic to begin (though not to end) with."[39] James has given her a "romantic willfulness"[40] coupled with "the faculty of seeing without judging."[41] Her failure is the failure of American zealousness for its own self-reliance and independence in the world it encounters.

It becomes clear that what James opposes is not imperialism itself as a practice, but the American national mythologies which produce naïve optimism, specifically Emersonian self-reliance, and nativism. In contextualizing James's writing in a historical framework, what begins to take shape is a matrix of anxieties and hopes (sometimes doomed ones) over the position of America and its citizens in the world. Emersonian values, American economic might, and ambitious youth are risky enterprises of optimism but also hubris. According to Peyser, "Like the protagonists of his works exploring the 'international theme,' James's America is faced with a dangerous opportunity."[42] But, as will be fleshed out, American power abroad *also* figured as an opportunity for the construction of James's world.

1.3) Cosmopolitanism and its critics

If Margery Sabin has observed that "James's psychological narratives allegorically dramatize America's embattled postcolonial position at the end of the nineteenth century," other critics have also located a number of convergences between his writing and America's

[39] Stone 216.
[40] Stone 217.
[41] James, quoted in Stone 217.
[42] Peyser 145.

imperialist opportunities in the world. If, with novels like *The Golden Bowl*, James is describing a moment in the "haunting dynamics of American power" he does not close that moment off from potential benefits to be gained from American expansionism.[43] While James didn't approve of the "bosses" in foreign lands, he recognizes the richness in culture as partly due to a nation's colonialist success. Meditating on the positive effects of English imperialism on English culture, James wonders whether America's "encounter with the alien might yield spiritual gold to[...] [its] colonizers[...]" suggesting that "expansionism[...]has so made the English what they are – for good or for ill, but on the whole for good[...].It has educated the English."[44] James recognized that America's position in the world produced opportunities for Americans to go abroad, forge new identities, and occupy a valuable position on the international scene. The American society woman who circulates among a European crowd (such as Madame Mearle, Miss Gostrey, or Charlotte Verver), the collector, the capitalist, and the innocent – none of these 'types' would exist without American power having laid the groundwork first with its political and economic capital. John Carlos Rowe notes the duality of pride and anxiety evident in James's at-times divergent opinions:

> Even as he criticizes American cultural deficiencies and capitalist excesses, James still takes pride in the growing centrality of the American as the type of the cosmopolitan, as the Italian had been in the Quattrocento and the Englishman in the Victorian era.[45]

Rowe's observation does not accuse James of hypocrisy but rather makes evident the uncertainty surrounding American power, as well as the ambiguity of James himself as a writer and person. Furthermore, that there is a certain amount of ambiguity surrounding his position over America's role in the world should come as no surprise considering the tumultuousness of the debated issues of imperialism and immigration. James does not assert that America should stay within its

[43] Sabin 206.
[44] James, quoted in Peyser 144-5.
[45] Rowe, "Henry James and Globalization" 212.

borders for fear of treading on toes. On the contrary, he actively advocates the travel he was educated with in his youth. Though indicating the pitfalls of America's role in the world, James's narratives identify much potential for the American taking up his place in the world of international values and cultures.

Travel affords James's Americans the opportunity to adopt new cultural and social vocabulary not available to them at home. The process of becoming international is about more than crossing the Atlantic, but instead refers to a process of moral and social investment, the ideal of which is a cosmopolitan international personality. John Carlos Rowe continues, noting that

> the cosmopolitanism endorsed by Henry James is best exemplified in his own life, and it has a certain *Americanness* to it, even when James is at his most European. The ideal American for James is precisely the modern cosmopolitan, who [...].strives to maintain his or her balance as interested in other cultural influences and willing to incorporate them into work or life in ways that change both.[46]

Richard Poirier has claimed that "Morality for James [...] is a kind of educated cosmopolitanism of the spirit" meaning that morality for James is determined by the quality of visual appreciation and cultural consciousness his characters display for the world around them.[47] Becoming cosmopolitan means adopting the international vocabulary of language, culture, and imagination. But it is also a moment at which one becomes alienated from their native country, in the sense that they must reexamine its codes and values among an international crowd. Among other things, the change Strether and Isabel experience is a transition of values. The American innocent, those Donald Stone has identified as "childish adult[s]," are informed by an education of worldly experience which they then use to redefine their own American identities.[48] Jonathan

[46] Rowe, "Henry James and Globalization" 212.
[47] Richard Poirier, quoted in Stone 186.
[48] Stone 332.

Freedman has defined the moment of gleaning worldly experience to be also one of self-examination and redefinition:

> But if what he called 'the complex fate' of being American is at the center of James's concern with the national question, this fate is not interrogated in isolation. What remains at stake throughout is the *relationality* of national feeling at the moment of international intermingling. It is only when they travel to Europe, after all, that James's Americans are able to define their own national identity.[49]

The process of going abroad provides the rare introspective moment into national identity. Among literary characters, Jonathan Freedman continues, there are "fewer as finely imagined and fully wrought as his dazed and confused Americans searching for a purchase on their own identity in a foreign clime."[50] James's narratives continuously open up nationality to be swayed by the influences of class, gender, history, race and other essential elastic categories of modernity. James's characters often find themselves engaging with their own nationalism through the registers of class, economy, gender and race. While American nationalists like James's contemporary, Theodore Roosevelt, sought blind dedication to country, James took up the confusion of nationalities to ferret out the more realistic, complicated truth, engaging nationalism on numerous plateaus not restricted by the nation-state dynamic. The politics of James's writings seem to exist on the cusp of re-imagining national identity while simultaneously being immersed in it.

Yet, James's cosmopolitanism had its critics. Theodore Roosevelt, found cosmopolitanism a "flaccid habit of mind" for the "delicate" man of "effeminate sensitiveness."[51] Going abroad did not qualify as an act enriching national identity, but debilitating its strength. Those who went abroad, according to Roosevelt, lost their pride in nationality, gender, and race – in short, failed to embody what he called the "American

[49] Freedman 8.
[50] Freedman 8.
[51] Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in Martha Banta 26.

character." The "American character" stood for the common values of hard work, neighborly love, and patriotism – the backbone of American national strength. Martha Banta demonstrates that, according to Roosevelt, American national strength was undermined by two types. The first was "the unassimilable immigrant who defiles native purity with his bad 'blood' and bad 'character'"[52] thereby undermining the strength of the nation. The second was the expatriate. As Roosevelt asserted, "The man [...] who becomes Europeanized, who loses his power of doing good work on this side of the water, and who loses his love for his native land, is not a traitor; but he is a silly and undesirable citizen." And he insisted that American expatriates, or "second-rate European[s]," undermine national power in that they fail to identify their homeland as the dominant characteristic determining their nationality.[53]

James parodies the Rooseveltian nationalist in *The Ambassadors* through the all-too-native, Waymarsh. If Lambert Strether, according to Donald Stone, "bears the closest resemblance to James"[54] as an observer whose personal position is sacrificed for that of observing the international world he occupies, Waymarsh also finds his reflection in that great voice of American nationalism, Theodore Roosevelt. The moment of confronting personal possibilities and limitations in a worldly setting – that which Lambert Strether, Winterbourne, and Isabel Archer all undergo – is a lesson which, in his stubborn nativism, Waymarsh refuses to learn. While Miss Gostrey immediately recognizes Strether's "failure to enjoy" (31) it is Waymarsh who fully embodies the characterization of the puritanical American who renounces enjoyment to the end. In his staunch and overt dedication to his homeland, Waymarsh represents something of a cosmopolitan in reverse. All of his instincts and philosophies are firmly planted in America, a country to which he is desperate to return. Resembling an "American statesman,

[52] Banta 26.
[53] Roosevelt, quoted in Banta 26.
[54] Stone 223.

the statesmen trained in 'Congressional halls', of an elder day" with his "great political brow," Waymarsh resembles that stoic Rooseveltian figure made "familiar by engravings and busts, of some great national worthy of the earlier part of the mid-century." He values above all else his work ethic – so much so that he narrowly escaped "a general nervous collapse" in his occupation (37). In visiting Europe he resists its splendors of art, culture, and history – everything which might appeal to the cosmopolitan observer. Waymarsh conflates feudalism and the Catholic Church as "the enemy" institutions of Europe, "evil" and "wicked" (47). In opposing the institutions of the church and the monarchy, Waymarsh demonstrates his attachment to democratic American values.

The scene in which Miss Gostrey takes Strether and Waymarsh to the fashionable Burlington Arcade – "a woman of fashion [...] floating him into society" – is one of Strether's first engagements with the spectacle of Europe. Though still nascent at this point, Strether feels he is moving away from Waymarsh's ethic, leaving "an old friend deserted on the brink" Strether's "desertion" of Waymarsh in this scene marks the start of his growing engagement with the European world Waymarsh classifies as vain: "'He thinks us sophisticated, he thinks us *worldly*, he thinks us wicked, he thinks us all sorts of queer things', Strether reflected [...]" (my emphasis, 47). Notice the play of associations: Waymarsh's linking of "sophisiticat[ion]" with "worldl[iness]" with "wicked[ness]" exemplifies an American puritanical view of European life. His criticism of European travel as a vain enterprise echoes the rhetoric of the reproachful American voice of Theodore Roosevelt who classified those who indulged in Europe's pleasure as "over-civilized, oversensitive, [and] over-refined"[55] Furthermore, James broadcasts internationalism as progressive by equating the youthfully free nature of Miss Gostrey with worldliness and the aged and stubborn Waymarsh with provincial nationalism. Miss Gostrey's

[55] Roosevelt, quoted in Banta 26.

cultured stature as the "companion at large" (32) for visiting Americans, "the woman of fashion" (47) who "know[s] all the shops and the prices" (32) is like Bilham, later, in that both act as foils to Waymarsh, the parochial "alternative" to Strether's newly discovered international scene (86).

James thus parodies American provinciality as limited by the narrow scope of its ethics. The cosmopolitan life has no value for the Rooseveltian nationalist who is blind to see beyond his own borders. Those who take interest in the capital of culture subvert the American masculinity of Roosevelt's formulation. As we will see in part two of this paper, the failure to iterate national values of work undermines gender. According to American standards of virility, the European culture of conversation takes on a feminine shade. Martha Banta observes of *The Golden Bowl*, for instance, that "Adam Verver turns 'feminine' in Europe, as Roosevelt might expect when the American male allows himself 'to go native' and to forget his duties as the manly American citizen."[56] In short, cosmopolitanism is achieved through the investment in European cultural life by the American abroad, an act that circumvents American national and masculine values.

1.4) James & Hawthorne: Internationalizing of American literary tradition

The distance from American provinciality James achieved through his international theme is even further complicated considering his historical position as an American author. What James offered through his international theme was a means to circumvent the limits of nationality laid down by both American statesmen and the American literary tradition itself. If defining one's Americanness is at stake for many of the globe trotters of his novels, James himself used internationalism to stake his claim in the literary world as well. James critiques

[56] Banta 35.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, in *Hawthorne*, renouncing Hawthorne's Americanism as "provincial" in order to establish his own "international" version of the American literary tradition. I am informed here by John Carlos Rowe's discussion of the text which he classifies as an ambiguous but determined "misreading" in which James aims to "swerve from [his] precursor's influence."[57] If James was largely influence by Hawthorne he claims his abilities were limited by the provinciality of his American environment. As Rowe argues, "James mythologized Hawthorne as the last American innocent, alienated by the provinciality of young America, precisely to establish for himself a local and native American tradition that could be taken up in order to be denationalized."[58] Criticizing the influence Hawthorne has had on the American literary tradition, James hopes he can reshape his own literary destiny, "to avoid such determinism in his own career by putting his master [...] in the Jamesian frame."[59] Like the "oblong gilt frame" Lambert Strether constructs through which he frames his observations in *The Ambassadors*, James misunderstands Hawthorne in order to relinquish himself from the aesthetic influence he owes his master (380).

Rowe shows that, aware of his predecessor's influence, James distances himself from the American tradition in order to reshape it on his own "international" terms. James attacks Hawthorne's "provincialism" in an effort to jettison Hawthorne's influence from his own future oeuvre and also to redeem the American literary tradition itself from its "morbid national consciousness."[60] *Hawthorne* proves not only a matter of aesthetic differences, but a moment in which James attempts to unmoor the American literary tradition from the influence of his own master. Written early in James's career, the stories which would follow extend the argument

[57] John Carlos Rowe, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin P, 1984) 49. Hereafter, this citation appears as: Rowe *Theoretical.*
[58] Rowe *Theoretical* 46.
[59] Rowe *Theoretical* 47.
[60] James, quoted in Rowe 50.

asserted in *Hawthorne* for internationalizing the American character. In displacing the American character from his native land, James is able to invent a wholly new set of ethical and cultural coordinates by which Americans can define their identity, specifically their national identity. James's strategies percolate tales of American innocents abroad gaining experiences and reshaping their American identities to redeem the "American consciousness" by "transforming it into an international" one.[61] Furthermore, Rowe demonstrates, in internationalizing his characters James is able to negotiate new territory for himself as a writer in the American literary tradition.

Rowe rightly revises earlier comments by Marius Bewley that James's criticism can be reduced (in Rowe's words) as "primarily the translation of cultural differences between Europe and America into the distinctively American themes of innocence and experience."[62] To claim that the James-Hawthorne difference simply owes to trans-Atlantic differences overlooks the influence of modernity on the literary tradition. Rowe interprets James's "internationalization of the international theme" [63] as a consequence of modernity, reading "modernity" through Paul de Man's notion that modernity becomes "conscious of its own strategies [...] to be a generative power that [...] engenders history [...and] extends back far into the past."[64] Rowe traces James's discounting of Hawthorne's influence to the psychic "anxiety of influence"[65] James suffers – a problem which stems from modernity itself. Rowe's claim refigures the international theme as James's effort to come to terms with his own artistic tradition in the wake of awareness brought on by modern life.

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[61] Rowe *Theoretical* 50.
[62] Rowe *Theoretical* 47.
[63] Rowe *Theoretical* 47.
[64] de Man, quoted in Rowe *Theoretical* n.265.
[65] Rowe, using Harold Bloom's term, in *Theoretical* 47.

In spite of its artistic motivations, James's international theme mobilizes efforts to re-imagine nationality by a global and modern measure. Rowe claims that "[t]he destiny of American literary nationality, then, is economically expressed in the relation of Hawthorne and James, which works through its national phase to embrace at last the psychology of nationalism as the more general need of the modern for identity, significance, and relation to others."[66] James's international theme engenders a new "psychology" of nationalism by reimagining nationality among *modern* coordinates, wherein the modern affects nationality to produce both its dissemination and reconstruction. James commentary on Hawthorne isn't mere traducement, but belongs to a larger phenomenon of metonymic activity I shall explore in the next section. The transition from the national to the international deployed in the work of Henry James further delineates the transition from the *Victorian to the modern*.

1.5) Observing the transition from Victorian to the Modern

In discussing the great currents of modernity represented in Henry James's work is the scope of inquiry not limited to a specific leisured class of Americans who lead lives of "conspicuous consumption"? Is it not true that James's subjects hail from the stratum of "privileged, influential Americans in the nineteenth century"[67] with whom he was most familiar and intimate? Then, to what demographic does James's commentary on nationalism apply? Since James's stories rarely addresses histories of displaced peoples, of focuses on the poor and persecuted that populate the realist novels of the time, to what degree can we see James's engagement with modernism to be merely the illustration of the power of a privileged few?

[66] Rowe *Theoretical* 34.
[67] Stowe 15.

Select recent critics of cultural studies have accused James of elitism in both his subject matter and aesthetic literary pose, questioning James's validity in an age of heightened social awareness. Leftist critics such as Terry Eagleton, Mark Seltzer, and Fredric Jameson have accused James's dramas of "epitomizing the cult of the personal in bourgeois capitalist ideology."[68] Such "private" narratives, complain these critics, are elitist in subject and form and the product of an "ahistorical aesthete enforcing the privilege of his class."[69] Similarly, critics William Stowe and Pierre Bourdieu have been critical of James's cultural hauteur, reducing Henry James's "genius" to the "elegant distance" James's family wealth provided him. In a passage worth quoting at length, Stowe describes the tremendous accusation of ethnocentricism leveled at James's "genius":

> Following [Thorstein] Veblen, [Pierre] Bourdieu argues that the work of high- and even middle-brow culture is simultaneously to produce and to ratify social distinctions. A "taste" for the disinterested pleasures of art and literature, he believes, marks the social difference between people who have achieved and a certain elegant distance from the demands of economic necessity and people whose time and attention are entirely absorbed by mercenary or domestic labor. It masquerades as a personal characteristic, a distinguishing attribute of an individual, but it is in fact *the product of cultural work*, the effort of a socioeconomic class to perpetuate itself and to justify its privileges by acquiring what looks like a natural, inborn grace. This so-called grace manifests itself as knowledge, as sophistication, and, in the best of cases – in James himself, in some of his characters, and in his most appreciative readers – as heightened moral and aesthetic consciousness, all of which contribute to the production of class-based cultural power. What James and his contemporaries meant when they spoke of Europe, then, was a continent and a string of cities and landscapes and works of art, but also and perhaps most importantly a sense of cultural legitimacy.

Stowe acknowledges that Bourdieu's argument is "far too simple [an] account" to describe "James's relations to Europe, to travel, and to writing" but he nevertheless goes on to connect James's travels to the economics surrounding European travel.[70] These critics are astute in identifying the interdependent economies of leisure and of travel with the privilege classes.

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[68] Sabin 206.
[69] Freedman 11.
[70] My emphasis, Stowe 162.

"Cultural power" is drawn from the surplus wealth and leisure time of the upper classes and used to legitimate the power they have already won in the arenas of business, politics, and class. Yet, by reducing James to his wealth and class, Bourdieu and Stowe also portray James as excessively narcissistic. While it is an economic fact that James's travel writing's "helped promote the nascent tourist industry," Stowe is too unilateral in reducing James's high-brow pose to snobbery. James's travel writing, Stowe argues, "encouraged its culturally elite readers to think of themselves [...] naturally superior to foreigners [...] vulgar tourists [and] the poor, unlettered herd" of "compatriots." One of the elite's "chief tasks" was to "create its own audience by promoting the social and aesthetic satisfactions [...] available primarily [...] to members of the 'high social class' taking shape in the latter years of the nineteenth century."[71] Stowe, however, conflates James's observer-pose with the readerly interpretations formed about James's writing. The circulation of surplus wealth as cultural power certainly can be identified, but it should be observed that by engaging the international on *modern* terms James disengages the specter of capitalist cultural power he is accused of iterating.

One must recognize that not only did cultural power "legitimate" the upper classes, but in resisting mass culture to retain the uniqueness of the work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction, James resisted the broad histories or theories composed for public consumption (like those of Theodore Roosevelt). In other words, as Jonathan Freedman suggests, by embracing a demanding, or "high-brow" aesthetic: "James [...] seeks to oppose the political work of mass culture in its most banalizing sense by writing a prose that cannot be consumed easily or digested at will."[72] If Marx argued that capitalism alienates man from the means of production, James's writing, by virtue of its complexities (in prose and theme) escapes the ranks of the

[71] Stowe 179.
[72] Freedman 10.

generic art that crowd mass culture. With the rise of modern capitalism the original, the unique, work of art is increasingly rare. Walter Benjamin claims "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art."[73] That James's writing is a product of privilege says little to diminish its effect on its historical moment in modernity. If, according to Benjamin, a true work of "art demands concentration from the spectator," James's prose by its very nature of complication functions to restore art to a strata which mechanical and mass-reproduction subverts.[74] Despite the social status of his readers, James's writing liberates the aesthetic work from its ties to class and economy by appealing to spiritual senses not easily commodified into the economies supporting wealth and leisure. John Carlos Rowe similarly notes of James, "Throughout his long career, Henry James resisted the incipient commercialization of the aesthetic process, insisted upon the intangible, spiritual values of art and damned the confusion of culture and economics."[75]

I side here with critics who have argued for a more nuanced reading of James's life and work, an analysis which recognizes James's important engagement with the issues of modernity. Margery Sabin reads beyond Mark Seltzer's accusation that James offers a "'complicity' with power" in *The Golden Bowl*, uncovering the "aggressive coercions just below social decorum."[76] John Carlos Rowe also acknowledges that "[f]rom *The Tragic Muse* (1890) on, James's writings seem to identify cosmopolitanism not only with understanding different cultures' achievements but also with a certain latitude in regard to social, sexual, and personal identities."[77] Ross Posnock goes even further in refuting the categorization of James as "genteel aesthete," arguing for the recognition of both James's unique historical position and methodology of observation.

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[73] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1968) 215.
[74] Benjamin 232.
[75] Rowe, "Henry James and Globalization" 214.
[76] Sabin 207.
[77] Rowe, "Henry James and Globalization" 212.

By virtue of the ambivalent complexity of James's writing coupled with a determination to submerge himself in the cultures that he observed, James actively and honestly takes up the issues of modernity. By confronting the society of the Victorian era as it underwent a social transformation, James "bears direct witness to the transition from a Victorian culture of hierarchy and homogeneity to a more unsettling urban modernity" complete with "freely confessed ambivalence and even acute unease."[78] At this crossing James's writing discovers its most valued problematic: the exchange of culture under the rise of modernity.

As has been discussed above, James resists the simplistic *cultural* view propagated by turn-of-the-century America, one of "social control, and of the imperialism and nativism that marked the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt."[79] To reduce James's narratives to products or dramatizations of the rococo ignores that James's writing provokes the "banalizing" aspects of modern mass-culture put forward by those like Roosevelt, while it simultaneously witnesses the effects of modernity on a fragmenting Victorian upper-class whence it originated. Donald Stone notes that "James took advantage of the dissolution of the Victorian world to make of it a subject of fiction."[80] In his own words, James found the rise of modernity a "great broad, rich theme" for a novel to capture

> the great modern collapse of all the forms and 'superstitions' and respects, good and bad, and restraints and mysteries – a vivid and mere showy general hit at the decadences and vulgarities and confusions and masculinizations and feminizations – the materializations and abdications and intrusions, and Americanizations, the lost sense, the brutalized manner – the publicity, the newspapers, the general revolution, the failure of fastidiousness. *Ah que de choses, que de choses*! [81]

What makes James ultimately so modern in tone is his ability to hover in the space of difference itself, to explore the *moment* of "the great modern collapse." It is the gesture of *questioning* what

[78] Posnock 227.
[79] Posnock 228.
[80] Stone 337.
[81] James, quoted in Stone 337.

was to be lost, won, suffered, and shamed during modernity that gives James currency today in cultural studies. While it is true that Henry James did not participate in radical political causes – and did, to an extent, echo the prejudices of his time and class – by insisting on the *confusion* of modernity in his writing James escapes the current labels – racist, sexist, homophobic, and so on – which might undercut his impact as an analyst of modernity. Returning to James's stance on nation that began part one of this thesis, it becomes clear that through his insistence on the heterogeneous quality of nation and nationalism in modernity, James's international theme retains its relevance today, even finding a common ground with the inquiries with the words of those like Homi K. Bhabba and Edward Said.

In his essay *DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation*, Homi K. Bhabba remarks extensively on problems surrounding formulations that figure nation as totality, an idea James categorically denied. Bhabba notes "[t]o write the story of the nation demands that we articulate that archaic ambivalence that informs modernity."[82] James's analysis of American life, for instance, does not confirm the values of his class, but confronts the confusion of the time. By disturbing the institutions which impose the conformity in identity – marriage, family, nation, wealth – James, argues Ross Posnock, "generates a vision of an alternative melting pot, one irreducibly heterogeneous [...]."[83] James saw the creation of identity, as an opportunity to expose the murky relations of modernity, claiming "I hate American simplicity. I glory in the piling up of complications of every sort."[84] According to Jonathan Freedman, James was highly suspicious of the tendency for "mass culture" to "create wholesale histories [and] identities," he witnessed occurring in America. Mass immigration and mass

[82] Homi K. Bhabba, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," *Nation and Narration*, Ed. Homi K. Bhabba (New York: Routledge, 1990) 294.
[83] Posnock 232.
[84] James, quoted in Posnock 225.

culture led to the creation of "a national subject [...] by witnessing [...] fictions of home-grown exoticism," namely those "invented traditions" of the American past, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm.[85]

In rejecting the simplistic nature of the American scene, James's politics finds semblance with the work of contemporary critics who argue for a more difficult understanding of the spatiotemporal dimensions of nation. Bhabba notes that "counter-narratives" disturb the "liminality of national culture"[86] which groups together a heterogeneous people under one nation. Bhabba understands "counter-narratives" as those "exiles and émigrés and refugees" (and expatriates) whose presence undermine the imagined totality of nation. "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities."[87] It is precisely by introducing the element of difference into the concepts that stabilize identity that James's international theme does its most profound work. The heterogeneous quality of his writing envisages nation as surpassable and identity, malleable, and resists the "wholesale" histories of American life given by Rooseveltian America, which imagined America as bound by common borders, language, and race. According to Edward Said, this debate continues today:

> [A]s an immigrant settler -society superimposed on the ruins of the considerable native presence, American identity is too varied to be a unitary and homogeneous thing; indeed the battle within it is between advocates of a unitary identity and those who see the whole as a complex but not reductively unified one. This opposition implies two different perspectives, two histographies, one linear and subsuming, the other contrapuntal and often nomadic.[88]

[85] Freedman 9.
[86] Bhabba 304.
[87] Bhabba 300.
[88] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd, 1993) xxix.

James's peripatetical narratives offer, then, a counter-pose to the imagined limits of nation. Expatriation in James's narratives ultimately illustrates the disunity of nation (and all identities) during modernity. James's characters who suffer under the very parameters of their own identity, wishing to escape them – to become worldly, to *live*, to be *free* – can be understood as sentiments symptomatic of the larger modern impulse towards heterogeneity.

PART TWO: Observation in *The Ambassadors*

2.1) The Aestheticism that links Subject and Author

For the second part of my essay I will focus on Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, offering a close reading of the main protagonist, Lambert Strether, and *how* he acts out his role as a fictional subject. As a starting point for my study, I would like to consult David Carroll's essay *The (Dis)Placement of the ("I"): Point of View, Voice and the Forms of Fiction*[89] to provide the theoretical coordinates which frame my reading of *The Ambassadors*. In his essay, Carroll confronts the ways in which points of view function in the work of Henry James, specifically focusing on the split between the fictional subject (character) and the author-subject (narrator) in order to get to the heart of what matters most to the Henry James late novel: point of view. Carroll states "Most critics would agree that the essential element of James's theory of the novel, the very 'center' of his theory, is a discussion of point of view. Point of view is for James *the principle* of the novel – its center – that principle around which the novel structures itself as form."[90] In other words, the center of the Jamesian novel is constituted by the consciousness of the "fictional subject," an individual, usually, that establishes the "identity of an 'I'" as its center.[91] As will become evident in my discussion of Lambert Strether, the protagonist of James's major novel, *The Ambassadors*, the fictional subject need not be a strong, intelligent, or informed character, but can indeed be what James called a "slight personality." What determines the point of view of the novel is rather the fictional subject's "place at the center"[92]

[89] Carroll, David. The Subject in Question, Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1982.
[90] Carroll 53.
[91] Carroll 52.
[92] Carroll 55

and his ability to transmit the "[d]irect impression[s] of life" from his place. In this position at the center, the fictional subject is able to re-present the world he surveys. James's familiar metaphor of "the house of fiction"[93] may help further reveal James's theory on the inter-dependent roles of subject, author, and reader.

In the house of fiction as James theorizes it in "The Art of Fiction", the fictional subject is one of an infinite number of windows looking out onto the fictional world he/she occupies. The window looks out onto this scene in his/her own way, offering their unique impression of their world to the reader. Though the world of the story is forever at a distance for the reader, he/she is able to assume a position behind the eyes of the fictional subject in order to look out onto that world. Here the reader can look at the world of fiction through the *subjective* eyes of the *central* fictional subject, the "I" (the narrator in the novel) and "eye" (in the house of fiction) in Carroll's terms.[94] But even this isn't enough, for there is a third, and most important player in this metaphor: the author himself. Carroll states,

> What ultimately guarantees the integrity of the house of fiction, however, and the possibility of the reader being able to assume the place of the fictional subject adequately and completely is that behind the window is another figure, this one supposedly 'real' and present in the 'real world' – the author himself.

This implies that, behind the subject's "voice" and eyes" are those of the author himself.[95] By aligning himself with his own subject, argues Carroll, the author "is both 'outside' [the text] in order to ground the fiction and 'within' it in as much as he [...] uses the voice of his characters."[96] In *The Ambassadors*, James's role as an author behind the consciousness of his fictional subject is at its clearest. Commenting on *The Portrait of a Lady*, Donald Stone argues that "Ralph [Touchett] is the culminating figure of the tragedy of ironic detachment," "who bears

[93] James, quoted in Carroll 55.
[94] Carroll 52.
[95] Carroll 56.
[96] Carroll 57.

the closest resemblance to James" but only "*after* Lambert Strether."[97] In their shared use of *sight*, they achieve a "detachment" from the world as *observers*, a position that clearly links Strether-as-subject to James-as-author. Investigating James's use of sight as a shared function of both author and fictional subject – to discover what allows for Strether's point of view – will require engaging both phenomenological and formalist readings of the novel.[98] This double strategy expands on the critical method that exclusively considers the formalist registers of "point of view, voice, or the originality of the narrative process is to limit the possibilities of fiction [...]." As Carroll suggests, "the fictions of voice, consciousness, point of view, and the narrative process [...] *must be investigated*"[99] in a larger effort to engender readings which explore both of the "two positions" of James's theory of the novel.[100]

However, the second part of this thesis will focus on how Strether's point of view is validated by his "detachment" from the world he occupies. I argue that Strether's subject position as a "slight personality" further substantiates his reliance on sight, the activity which intimately links subject and author. In discussing Strether's "slight personality" – in his psychological activity, his lowly public status, his inability to understand the world he encounters, and other social dimensions – Strether's role of *observation* is given great dimension. The goal isn't to pin down Strether's identity as a character. Instead, the goal is to uncover his reduced status as a fictional subject in order to illuminate *how* his reliance on

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[97] Stone 223.

[98] David Carroll expands on the divisive nature of criticism surrounding James's theory of point of view in the novel: "The problem of point of view in James has led critics, then, not only in the direction of formalism (the description of point of view and how it works as a form-giving element) but also in the direction of a phenomenological approach to literature (the definition and description of the subject at the origin of form and consciousness). Even though the two positions seem at first to be contradictory, each is derived from one aspect of James's theory, for the contradiction between form and consciousness [of his subjects] is at the heart of his concept of point of view." 58.

[99] My emphasis, Carroll 58.

[100] Unfortunately, including an examination of James's extensive personal writings on theory would prove far too exhaustive for this brief study of *The Ambassadors*. Rather, James's personal theories will be used in conjunction with critical sources to illuminate both aspects of *The Ambassadors*, psychological and theoretical. Both readings will be accessed as part of a larger effort to penetrate Strether's *point of view* in the novel.

observational techniques supports the authorial presence in the novel. If the "prime intention"[101] of the author is to provide "windows from behind which the reader and author can look and be at one with the consciousness of the fictional subject, at one with his or her point of view," then *The Ambassadors* reaches this "intention" through its insistence on Strether's aestheticism.[102] Strether's reliance on sight, as well as his inability to value his impressions beyond their aesthetic impact *reveals* (though it does *not* warrant) his closely allied position with James's authorial position. In other words, in closely reading Strether's position as an *observer who is unable to "live"* Europe, Strether reflects narrative strategies that link him (as fictional subject) to the author-subject position (embodied by the narrator).

It is for this reason that part two is largely concerned with Strether's limitations and his use of the aesthetic, instead of offering a theoretical comparison between Strether's psychology and James's biography in an effort to link subject and author. In revealing the author "within" the text, the author "outside" [103] the text will come into sharper focus, for it is the "consciousness of the author"[104] which is at the center of the novel. Kaja Silverman's discussion of James further advocates reading James's texts with the purpose of illuminating extra-textual elements at play within:

> Since it is in large part the shadow cast "outside" the text by the author "inside" the text" which constitutes what we conventionally think of as the author, it is with the latter that we should begin our interrogation of authorship, rather than with the wealth of biographical detail that supports most traditional archaeologies.[105]

Whereas, in the part one of this paper I cited James's novels as further evidence for his engagement with modernity, part two shall reverse that strategy. Studying the interchange

[101] James, quoted in Carroll 58.
[102] Carroll 58.
[103] Carroll 58.
[104] James, quoted in Carroll 57.
[105] Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 161-2.

between character and narrator as it occurs in *The Ambassadors* provides an opportunity to see how the author's position is enabled through the *imbalance* of that exchange. However, first let me offer a few words on Henry James's predilection for observational practices.

2.2) The Observer of 'Real' Life

The reliance on expression through visual observation is widely recognized as a method Henry James employs in many of his novels. Donald Stone notes that in his celebrated story, "The Lesson of the Master" James commented on "the need for the artist...to abandon his manhood and the desire to live."[106] Many James scholars have determined that since there are no records of James ever having had a love affair, it is likely he took his own theories seriously.[107] In his writing – from his travel sketches to his late novels – James uses the observer-pose as a primary method to engage a scene. Yet, James's aestheticism was not necessarily like that of the passive examiner surveying life before him. For James, aestheticism was an active engagement with an environment, often supplanting experience itself. In his reading of *The American Scene*, James's reflections on American life, Posnock recalls James's self-categorization as a "restless analyst" and suggests that James "topples the aesthetic from contemplation to make it practice."[108]

James's emphasis on aestheticism as a method for engaging the world also translated well into James's fiction, saturating its prose and themes. Like the scientist of the Victorian novel,

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[106] Stone 180.
[107] From an early age James equated the practice of living with that of seeing. Henry James Sr., his father, taught Henry to devalue the notion of living, to reduce life to its artistic equivalent: "When a man *lives*, that is lives enough, he can scarcely write." Quoted in Stone 180.
[108] Posnock 226.

James's protagonists often treat the world as an exhibit to be observed.[109] Furthermore, this character-observer proves a fertile ground for the author's position. Donald Stone notes that James's observational technique to view the world as art is the principal quality of his authorship:

> If the using of other people is the Hawthornian sin of sins, for James it is the artist's necessity, but the degree to which one is a successful artist in life – the life of the James novel, that is – depends on the breadth of one's *point of view*, the degree to which one imagines oneself related to other people and other people to oneself.[110]

As this suggests, in the Jamesian novel point of view is negotiated between the position of the fictional subject and the author-subject. James's use of sight enables that interdependent relationship to take root. In James's travel writing, for instance, James transmits observations through a variety of character positions that he adopts in order to relay the scene before him.[111] The balance of this relationship is not equal, but, as John Carlos Rowe notes, "'observation' itself is the primary subject, and character is minimized."[112] Note that character is not abolished to make way for pure observation, but is only "*minimized*." It is from the position of *minimized* character that observational technique finds its home, its voice in the fictional subject. As we shall see in Lambert Strether, though he occupies the observer-function, James does not allow the authorial or narrative positions to overtake the character of Strether. Instead, during all of the major scenes (the opera, the balcony, the garden, the French countryside) Strether's character is an integral part of the enunciation of observer function. His nationality, gender, age, and class all participate in the process by which he engages the spectacle of European life, and are essential in

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[109] According to Thomas Peyser, Jamesian aestheticism dramatized in *The Golden Bowl* finds its parallel in the museumification of foreign cultures. To a "surprising degree imperial discourse treats the world as a museum, a habit often associated with Henry James's and the Ververs' aestheticism[...]." Peyser 151.
[110] My emphasis, Stone 196.
[111] I am informed here by William Stowe's close reading of James's travel writing and the style used to engage readers. Stowe notes "To be a traveler is necessarily to play a role, and James used his travels to experiment with a range of personas [...]." 166.
[112] Rowe *Theoretical* 202.

composing his narrative voice. Yet, this relationship between narrator and character position is by no means balanced or without faults, and it is clear that James recognizes the limitations of occupying the observer position. Ralph Touchett and Lambert Strether, for instance, both discover the danger in their over-reliance on sight, seeking to live vicariously through the observation of others. As Donald Stone notes "The moral danger of James's artist-heroes is that they move on a plane where conscience is replaced by artistic propriety."[113] As I will argue in the next sections, Strether's limitations as an "artist-hero" mobilize James's greatest authorial ability: to observe.

2.3): Observing cultural difference

As discussed in the first part of this paper, critics have noted that American and European differences are not so easily reduced to their autonomous categories, but indeed participate in a shared chaos at the moment of modernity. For example, Jonathan Freedman notes that "...the matter of Americans abroad in Europe is not simply a case of the innocents abroad, but also one of the remaking of cultural power at the moment of modernity."[114] James's confrontation of modernity through the matching of American innocence versus European experience is a moment of cultural uncertainty that is further transmitted through James's use of the aesthetic. The chaos of values he encounters give the novel its great momentum and produces Strether's famous realization to "live all you can" (164). The epiphany that Strether experiences in the garden of Gloriani's party – in fact, the one that resonates throughout the book starting at the moment Strether stands before his dressing mirror in his hotel room – is not a call to action, but a

[113] Stone 224-5.
[114] Freedman 7-8.

realization that the world around him (Europe) is out of step with the world he has thus far experienced (America). The famous moment is falsely framed as a call to action (to "live"), for it is instead the words of a man discovering the great *difference* between his past American life and his present European one, and regretting it. It is necessary that James lays the crux of the novel on Strether coming to terms with the impressions he receives, for it makes it possible for him to play out what Donald Stone calls the "Jamesian code of non-action."[115] Visually engaged by the European-American difference he recognizes, Strether can occupy the role of the Jamesian observer, who translates action into observation. Unlike Chad, Strether does not easily digest his impressions of the world around him and *act* out his desires for Madame de Vionnet (or Miss Gostrey), but instead relegates his desires to the realm of aesthetic values. Jonathan Levin remarks

> *The Ambassadors* records the process by which Strether awakens and responds to the world around him, a world that includes passionate love. It is this burgeoning responsiveness that enables him to advise Little Bilham, 'Live all you can'. A fine responsiveness would be meaningless, even potentially destructive, if it did not cultivate a *creative engagement with the material of experience*.[116]

By "creative engagement" Levin implies that Strether assigns aesthetic value to the "material of experience" he undergoes and witnesses. From the first moment the clash of American with European values gives great occasion for Strether's host of impressions. In a story of an aging man witnessing a world of pleasures he will never enter into, these impressions take shape in his mind producing a range of sentiments – of confusion, hope, disappointment, envy, and anxiety to name a few. But, these sentiments are not simply symptomatic of one of James's naïve Americans experiencing culture shock. Rather, these sentiments are products of Strether's continuous alienation from a world he wishes to engage.

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[115] Stone 194.
[116] Jonathan Levin, *The Poetics of Transition* (Durham: Duke UP, 1999) 129.

The pivotal issue of *The Ambassadors*, the subject which occupies Strether's consciousness is discovering the true nature of the world around him, of examining the people and their relationships to one another and his position in relation to that world. Seeking to understand the truth of Chad's European world, Strether invokes fallible referential and ethical knowledge to make sense of the social differences he witnesses. Strether is occupied with the cultural differences between American and European life, a subject from which his aesthetic and ethical investigation and comparisons unfold. The most striking example in the novel is the question over Madame de Vionnet and Chads' relationship, one which occupies Strether's attention to the end. The question over their "virtuous" relationship summons in Strether cultural, moral, and social identifications, based not only on American morals but on comprehending discrete difference itself. From start to finish understanding evades Strether, as he acknowledges near the end of the story: "And it had for me – has still – such elements of strangeness. Her greater age than his, her different world, traditions, association; her other opportunities, liabilities, standards" (413). If Strether's observation is the great enterprise of the novel, the object of that enterprise is the division between American and European values.

James uses the occasion of Strether's subjectivity, his alienation from the world, to move into the aesthetic arrangements of the novel. Karen Scherzinger notes "Like James, Lambert Strether is troubled by his position as an alien, situates himself as a discrete observer, and tends towards the aesthetic reconfiguration of his observations in order to make sense of them."[117] Strether's position as an alien deserves significant attention for it is this that primes Strether's aesthetic pose, or "creative engagement" with the world around him.[118] Thus, the lucid profile of Strether-as-subject, of an aging man at odds with the world around him, will be read to illustrate

[117] Karen Scherzinger, "Lurking Ghosts": Metaphor, the Ambassadors, and Henry James's Population of the American Scene," *The Henry James Review* 24.2 2003: 171.
[118] Levin 129.

how the subject cannot become a strong character with a stable identity. The details of Strether's consciousness giver rise to the referential and ethical vocabulary he invokes in interpreting the signs he is exposed to. The details of his subject disclose the aligning of Strether's consciousness with the author's own position, in order to establish a more unified point of view. For, although Strether performs a literary function, it is through his status as a "slightest of subjects" that primes the ground for his move to observational techniques that make up his point of view.

2.4) The "dreadful cheerful sociable solitude": Strether Subjected

What reader can forget the almost absurd point to which Strether is reduced from the start of the novel, the heights of his comedic compunction? Strether comes to Europe "one of weariest of men," carrying the burden of his "long ache" of past failures. Unlike his financially successful friend, Waymarsh, Strether is a man who has "failed…in everything, in each relation and in half a dozen trades" (75). Socially, he has only "three or four" close friends to relieve his loneliness– what he calls the "dreadful cheerful sociable solitude." He has no immediate family but the memory of a "young wife" and "young son" that he "lost" or, rather, "sacrificed" (76). We are told "no slate would hold" the summary of his failures. Self-pityingly he asks himself "Had ever a man…lost so much and even done some much for so little?" Strether, our pathetic hero, is a man who has little or nothing to claim as his own but a "summary of his failures" that "no slate would hold" (75).

In creating Strether, James has penned a character at odds with his European surroundings, yet also perfectly deserving of them. William Stowe writes that Strether is "profoundly shaken by his exposure to the beauty, the luxury, and the moral standards of

European life."[119] Europe offers Strether the attractive spectacle of an unspent youth, and creates in him a feeling of self-pity for his meager accomplishments. Strether's regrettable youth is represented by those "yellow coloured volumes" he sees in the shop window in Paris, the same ones he had purchased during his first trip to Europe, which years later lie "somewhere at home, the dozen – stale and soiled and never sent to the binder[...]." If the new yellow volumes Strether re-encounters in Europe acts as a metaphor for the spirit of youth, then Mrs. Newsome's journal he edits back home in Woollett, Massachusetts represents its opposite: a resigned mediocrity. In its "specious shell" of a green cover, the journal is "no tribute to letters" and represents Strether's "acceptance of fate" that being Mrs. Newsome's partner is his biggest achievement in life (78). The narrator reveals "He was Lambert Strether because he was on the cover, whereas it should have been, for anything like glory, that he was on the cover because he was Lambert Strether" (76).

The new volumes also represent the opportunity for the consumption of a pleasure which Strether has missed. William Stowe recognizes that Strether's "experience of Europe is as disturbing and as fateful, if not ultimately so melodramatic, for the most fully developed tourist in all of James's oeuvre [...]."[120] It may be overly conclusive to describe Strether's experience as "disturbing" or "fateful," but alongside his regret for the forsaken past Strether's tour does unearth in him a desire for Europe. On the "bright highway" of Paris his "fears [are] confirmed" that "there were 'movements' he was too late for" (79). The "freedom" Strether discovers in his isolated adventures stirs in him a longing for "the youth he had long ago missed" (352). While the spectacle of Paris provokes in Strether the fear that he is "too late" to live, it also presents him with opportunity to fantasize over the enjoyment of that which he is too late for. As Strether

[119] Stowe 187-8.
[120] Stowe 184.

begins to set into the European life he begins to "find himself young" resigning himself to "the common unattainable art of taking things as they came" (74-5). In comparison with his dismal life back in the United States, Paris appears to him as "the vast bright Babylon, like some huge iridescent object, a jewel brilliant and hard [...]" (79).

On the streets of Paris, Strether finds aesthetic pleasures in his explorations as a *flanêur*, navigating the visual space of the urban, European city. But once the spectacle exceeds the scope over which he can exercise visual control, a complicated array of moral and referential values are enacted. Interacting on an inter-personal level of social life (rather than on a purely spectatorial level), awakens a value system that undercuts the purity of aestheticism, and produces a host of attempts to interpret his impressions. In his early experiences, Strether summons forth a vocabulary of Woollett referential and ethical values to decode the foreign world before him, but finds such codes in disjunction with the outer world of Europe.

2.5) Strether's Ethical and Referential Vocabulary[121]

The moment the European life exceeds the spectatorial form Strether has carved out gives rise to Strether's ethical and referential knowledge matrix. When the European spectacle exceeds the aesthetic bounds he has laid out for it on the streets of Paris and steadfastly enters the life of conversation, Strether recalls a Woollett vocabulary in order to derive sense beyond the aesthetic. The aesthetic image, he thinks, must carry moral meaning or find its likeness in a Woollett past. Early scenes of Strether's interaction with Miss Gostrey, the savvy and

[121] I am informed by Meili Steele's categorization of *The Ambassadors* into the "dynamics of referential, aesthetic, and ethical values," and will use this terminology throughout. But where Steele divides the novel on the basis of language, I am rather interested in how these "values" are used to establish point of view in the novel. Meili Steele, "Value and Subjectivity: the Dynamics of the Sentence in James's the Ambassadors," *Comparative Literature* 43.2 1991: 114.

knowledgeable American guide, bear the markings of Strether's attempts to render meaningful sense from European social life.

Miss Gostrey, the "companion at large" who rightfully claims "[...] there is nothing I don't know. I know all the shops and all the prices – but I know worse things still" unveils to Strether the spectacle of beauty in European life first at the shopping arcade and later at the opera (32-3). Upon his trip to the opera with Miss Gostrey he observes the "rose-coloured shades and the small table and the soft fragrance of the lady," Miss Gostrey, whose "dress was 'cut down'" and whose throat was encircled with a "a broad red velvet band with an antique jewel [...]" Strether thoughts multiply as he tries to come to terms with the great impression that "served to carry on and complicate [...] his vision [...]." He begins to compare his observation of Miss Gostrey with his memory of Mrs. Newsome, only to find that the memory represents "an alien order, [in] almost as many things as the manner in which Miss Gostrey's was." His memory of Mrs. Newsome neither resembles his new impression nor gives him the referent he needs to connect the two. He remembers Mrs. Newsome's dress as being "very handsome...but it was rather imperfectly romantic." She is said to be the image of "Queen Elizabeth" (54) and Miss Gostrey that of "Mary Stuart". Confused, Strether concludes "It was an evening, it was a world of types, and this was a connexion above all in which the figures and faces in the stalls were interchangeable with those on the stage" (55). The world before him bears out little meaning other than that of a theatrical spectacle. Invoking his Woollett referential knowledge proves a futile venture, for it provides him no insight into the foreign world he perceives.

Then, with a limited capacity to understand the world around him Strether remains on the fringes of the society that Miss Gostrey is "floating him into" (47). Strether's perplexity over his exposure to the sensuality of European life is due to his lack of a referential language, what Meili

Steele calls his "conceptual knowledge," that he can interpret the European spectacle he encounters. Without the proper referent, Strether's impression cannot be transformed into meaning. Meili Steele remarks "Thus, when he locates the same 'image' or 'impression' [between Miss Gostrey and Mrs. Newsome] – that is, complex of language and perception – he finds that 'it' no longer has the same meaning or referential resonance."[122] Strether's analysis of the opera scene grasps for referential values back home in Woollett, Massachusetts but finds none. He is left only with the aesthetic value of the spectacle; image empty of meaning. The European world, "in which the figures and faces in the stalls were interchangeable with those on the stage," lacks referential meaning for Strether and therefore resembles the stage performance. Without the means to imagine the meaning of his impressions, the scene he surveys remains purely an aesthetic image, like the setting onstage.

Strether's confusion over the foreign world he witnesses at the opera is telling of Strether's reliance on referential and ethical values of Woollett. Though he penetrates the European society, he fails to make sense of the sights and signs transmitted to him. And in lacking the "conceptual knowledge"[123] to make sense of these signs he stands excluded from this society. But his failure to make sense of Europe is not only due to his demand that the world imitate his American experience, like his friend Waymarsh. In fact, as the novel proceeds, Strether moves away from a specular strategy, seeking out American referents. Strether's position *changes* from attempting to make sense of Chad's world to embracing a very personal interest in his own past and future – that is, his own subjectivity. Strether's subjectivity gives rise to his observer function, but it is the difference between his subjectivity and his potential that gives rise to a host of negative sentiments Strether experiences. As a spectator, Strether can

[122] Steele 119.
[123] Steele 119.

admire the world he sees. But, the subjectivisation of his character position produces in him envy of a life he cannot live. But before discussing Strether's envy, first, I want to establish the enormous weight of worthlessness that weighs on Strether as a fictional subject. Since it is Strether's own subjectivity as a character which determines his aesthetic interpretation of his many impressions, it is worth our attention.

2.6) Moneyed Masculinity

If the narrative of Isabel Archer's "doomed idealism" in *Portrait of a Lady* reveals "the American myth of self-reliance and self-importance, while at the same time, revealing the sharpest awareness of its limitations" James reverses these qualities in Lambert Strether.[124] If Isabel is "doomed" by her sense of independence, Lambert Strether's is a doomed by his overwhelming *lack of independence*. Restricted by his personal ambitions to be a part of the Newsome family and its wealth, any sense of independence Strether acquires in the book is either pestered by his own sense of guilt, or a foolishly rendered defiance of his future. Strether's dependence on Mrs. Newsome for a livelihood is put in further relief when accounting for Strether's personal failures. Praising the financial success of Waymarsh to Miss Gostrey at the start of the novel, Strether categorizes himself as a "perfectly equipped failure" (49). As Kaja Silverman reminds us, Strether is "a man without (economic) means, who must be financed by Mrs. Newsome."[125] Lacking funds, influence, and social connections beyond those given to him the Newsomes, Strether is a kept man, whose fate is largely determined by the cash nexus secured by his marital plans. It is further clear that Strether is aware of this grim reality, when

[124] Stone 207.
[125] Silverman 167.

Waymarsh observes to Strether that his fate (financial and social) hinges on his success in executing Mrs. Newsome's will to bring Chad home:

> "Because if you get him [Chad] you also get Mrs. Newsome?"
> Strether faced it. "Yes."
> "And if you don't get him you don't get her?"
> It might have been merciless, but he continued not to flinch. "I think it might have some effect on our personal understanding. Chad's of real importance – or can easily become so if he will – to the business."
> "And the business is of real importance to the mother's husband?"
> "Well, I naturally want what my future wife wants [...]." (93-4)

That his fate is bound to the financial destiny of the Newsome family business, it is no wonder that Strether's attraction to European life generates personal guilt (for being attracted at all) and envy for Chad (for being attracted freely without guilt). In that Strether continuous treats his European experience as an act of defiance of the values of Woollett, shows that he occupies the psychic coordinates of his native land. In other words, caught up in the endless play of comparisons, Strether's is anchored in the psyche of Woollett. It's for this reason that Strether feels guilty for enjoying his early escapades in visual exploration with Miss Gostrey and Chad, and the visual richness of the Parisian streets during his own tour. He is guilty for enjoying the world, which, in his "business" as Mrs. Newsome's "ambassador" he is positioned to stand against (85). The towering figure of Mrs. Newsome plagues Strether's conscience throughout the novel and is further example of his emasculation. Though she never appears in the novel (except through indirect conversation), the woman who "feels things" (295) haunts Strether with an overwhelming sense of guilt and denied responsibility. At first, she writes Strether often, her letters arriving "several a week" and "none of them short," (74) and by the middle of the book his guilt is so great he makes a phantasm of her. It is strange for Strether and reader alike that "in Paris itself, of all places, he should find this ghost of the lady of Woollett more importunate than any other presence" (242). Mrs. Newsome's haunting presence is then assisted by the other

Woollett folk. Sarah Pocock "loom[s] larger than life" to Lambert Strether, giving him "fantastic waking dreams" (251) about her visit, which he sees as a kind of sentencing: "He saw himself, under her direction, recommitted to Woollett as juvenile offenders are committed to reformatories" (252). With Waymarsh too, Strether feels guilty from the first enjoyment of Europe. During his trip to the Burlington Arcade with Miss Gostrey, Strether fears "He thinks us sophisticated, he thinks us worldly, he thinks us wicked, he thinks us all sorts of queer things [...]" (74). Later, upon entering Chad's apartment (and his European society) Strether feels it "was like consciously leaving Waymarsh," the figure of Woollettian values "out." He can only redeem his feeling of guilt for abandoning him by swearing to "tell him all about it" (86).

As the book wears on Strether wishes most to escape the chimera of Woollett life[126] and therefore begins to envy Chad's position. Strether is attracted by Chad's independence, for by association, Chad's presence secretly grants Strether "some self-respect, some sense of power, oddly perverted; something latent and beyond access, ominous and perhaps enviable?" (125). It must be observed that linking "self-respect" and "power" in speaking about Chad's personal freedom, speaks volumes to Strether's own emasculated position. Factoring in the American values James was categorically aware of, Strether is enormously emasculated by his failure to succeed in business furthered by his dependency on a woman for sustenance. Henry James was most aware of the American veneration of financial success and its link to gendered positions. Martha Banta notes that "James learned early that being demonstrably 'masculine' in America was mainly associated with the making of money [...]."[127] Masculinity, suggests Banta, was given three broad models for success: The man who earned money (the capitalist or "Man of

[126] The narrator meditates about Strether, "[h]is clearest vision was when he made out that what he most desired was an account more full and free of Mrs. Newsome's state of mind than any he felt he could now expect from herself; that calculation went hand in hand with the sharp consciousness of wishing to prove to himself that he was not afraid to look his behaviour in the face." 352.
[127] Banta 28.

Business")[128], the politician (the "Public Man") or the man who was "tipsy (the idler living on inherited wealth)."[129] Thus, whether he becomes the "Man of Business" or remains "the idler" Chad's two destinies are both inherently masculine by the American value system and Woollett ethics Strether so esteems. Strether, on the other hand, has no personal income nor can he count what money he receives as his rightful inheritance since he has yet to wed his financier. Strether's other close male Woollett companion, the workaholic Waymarsh, also trumps Strether in masculine terms. Strether remarks about him, "He's a success of a kind I haven't approached" (49). Eric Haralson notes that as depicted in *The Ambassadors*, the "expectations for masculine performance" on the American scene were threefold:

> As Strether's habitual inferiority complex makes clear, this challenge to one's gender loyalties took on a distinctive accent on the American scene, where, pledging allegiance to manhood demanded not only assuming the roles of husband and paterfamilias but providing oneself as 'an immense man of business' like the late Abel Newsome of Woollett, or commanding a 'large income' that could 'look any one [sic] in the face,' like the commercial attorney, Waymarsh.[130]

Such gender qualifications are put out of reach for Strether's manhood. James further nails down Strether's failure at masculinity and limited status as subject by surrounding him with masculine 'types' who fill and exceed their gendered expectations. While Chad's masculinity is qualified by size ("immense"), and Waymarsh's by his sheer effort ("overwork"), Strether fails to carry any adjective describing his activity but "failure" – an adjective he bears throughout the novel (426, 38, 49). From the start Strether's failure is publicized through his comparative emasculation with Waymarsh, Jim Pocock, and Chad. In comparison with Waymarsh, "[T]he figure of the income he had arrived at had never been high enough to look any one in the face"

[128] Banta 24.
[129] Banta 23.
[130] Eric Haralson, "Lambert Strether's Excellent Adventure," *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, Ed. Jonathan Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 173.

(39). Living in constant comparison with these manly men, Strether's bears the *public* sign of failure and emasculation.

Furthermore, in observing the examples of manly success, Strether is even said to be wrongly gendered. In the flurry of his own social activity, Strether's involvement in Chad's affairs is a sign qualified by the Woollett crowd as *feminine*. Later in the book, Strether is compared to the representative American male, the "normal" "cheerful" "leading Woollett business-man," Jim Pocock. Strether deduces that his own activity, his investment into social life is not "normal" for a man: "He [Pocock] seemed to say that there was a whole side of life on which the perfectly usual *was* for leading Woollett business-men to be out of the question" (265). Strether's masculinity is even further reduced when he, failing to manifest those cultural attributes which signify his masculinity, takes on activities meant for women, namely socializing. Martha Banta observes that in *The American Scene* James's observed the rigidity of (gender) 'types': "With business (males making money as their only public activity) defining what America 'meant' before the world, then culture (what women were delegated to do by default of male participation) had no worth on the American scene."[131] Strether observes that the Woollett society women, Sarah and Mamie Pocock, are "well recognised and acclaimed" for their social abilities, "whereas the most a leading Woollett business-man [like Jim] could hope to achieve socially...was a certain freedom to play into this general glamour." But, Strether is *not* a "Woollett business-man" – not even a lowly one – and therefore finds himself caught up in the "society of women" back home, a role he recognizes is "an odd situation for a *man*" (265). Furthermore, any value Strether does gain from his social activities cannot be converted into masculine capital. Meili Steele has observed that the ethical values of Woollett rest on *financial* not social success: "Thus, social and aesthetic practices – ways of speaking, thinking, of being –

[131] Banta 29.

do not exist as 'things' of value in Woollett, for they are not material products that one gets in exchange for the performance of certain behaviour[...]."[132] Henry James was acutely aware of the American division of the sexes,[133] and in *The Ambassadors* he marshals them in with full effect. James found tremendous value in culture and conversation for both sexes, despising American attitudes that relegated men to business life and women to social life. In the novel, James uses the (false) American scale for determining masculinity in *The Ambassadors* in order to further undervalue Strether's as a fictional character. That he cannot achieve manhood in the eyes of the people who matter to him most, he becomes an almost hollow character, who can observe but cannot truly participate. The subject's powerlessness forces him to live vicariously through observing others around him, an act that gives credence to his envy.

2.7) Envy

To Strether, the difference between European life and American life is represented by the polarized categories of an Edenic ease and that of a mediocrity with shades of despair. Underlying each of the scenes of parties, introductions, and observations is the tension of values in what is viewed as strange, attractive, and corrupt about European life through American eyes. The tension that envelopes the novel exists on the rift between Strether's remembered (and regretted) American past and the new possibilities of a life in Europe. If it's possible, Strether's fall into the social whirligig of European life marks the start of machinations that will lead to an

[132] Steele 125.
[133] The registers of value that compose male and female expectations was an issue that had currency in James's own life and times. In comparing Henry James to Theodore Roosevelt, Martha Banta recognizes that both men "debate the nature of the 'proper' division of labor between the sexes," but that "James starts to veer away from Roosevelt when it comes to the lives of Americans of either sex who create culture, not nations; who make conversations, not money." Banta, 27.

unquenchable desire and a *further* awareness of his own inability to "live" (164). Upon his landing in Europe, Strether begins to weigh his past against his future possibilities. Beginning there and then" Strether begins to feel "disconnected from the sense of his past" (27). He tries to remind himself of his duty to his future wife, Mrs. Newsome, to bring her son, Chad, from the arms of a "wicked woman" (56). But, as time wears on, Strether's resolve weakens and he begins to enjoy the Parisian life he has come to occupy. Regretfully remembering "the pale figure of his real youth," (76) Strether begins to desire European life, asking himself whether he really must "renounce all amusement for the sweet sake of that authority" over Chad (79). In other words, Strether begins to slip from his objective and focused stance into an awareness of his own subjectivity.

Limited as he was before by his numerous failures, Strether's exposure to Europe will inspire in him a desire that he realizes he cannot claim. He wants to understand and live the *youthful* European life he witnesses, but is aware of limitations as an aging Woollett failure. The central fault point of this rift of values is Chad Newsome, a character who, by virtue of his own vigorous activity, reinforces Strether's observer position. Meili Steele suggests "Strether quickly becomes attached to the aesthetic mode, and Chad is one of the means by which he achieves this. The young man becomes the link between Strether's past and his present."[134] His limited vantage point into his new European world is evident in his relationship with Chad, where Strether both reverts to and represses the "language of Woollett."[135] In that Chad is the person with whom Strether's destiny lies, he represents Strether's duty to Woollett and Mrs. Newsome. In that Chad's new appearance veils his past image and seduces Strether's eye, he is the central force that represses Strether's feelings of obligation to Woollett. "In gleams, in glances, the past

[134] Steele 124.
[135] Steele 123.

did perhaps peep out of it [Chad's face]; but such lights were faint and instantly merged" in the face of a refined Chad (122). In that Chad reminds Strether of the life of youthful ease he hasn't lived, Chad becomes the object of Strether's envy and regret: "Chad...was a kind of link for hopeless fancy, an implication of possibilities – oh if everything had been different!" (152).

Strether's envy signals the moment he becomes aware of his limitations. Rather than willingly accepting his status as an emasculated, morally myopic, aging character he resists the very limitations that establish his narrowly aesthetic point of view. Strether's envy is given by his iterated admiration for "youth" or to "live" (in the balcony scene, for instance). In the garden party of the sculpture Gloriani, Strether becomes suddenly aware of his limitations as an observer on the outside of society, to a deep concern for his own personal position. At the start of the scene, Strether predictably accesses Woollett referents in order to make sense of the spectacle. He wonders if Madame de Vionnet might not be so different from the ladies of Woollett like Mrs. Newsome of Mrs. Pocock, asking himself, had Chad "deep down" "attach[ed] himself to elements" in Europe "that would remind him most of the old air and the old soil?" (161). Unable to discover the truth behind "Chad's strange communities" using a Woollettian vocabulary, Strether's is overtaken by the disappointing fact that his understanding of the world is limited by his having failed to explore it. Strether's shortsightedness is spatially marked by his distance with others guests at the party, whom he cannot socialize with for he is "too late." [136] In a moment, Strether gives his social belatedness a second and greater meaning: the awareness of his subjective lateness. Eric Haralson has suggested that "The key to Strether, apparently, lies in his belatedness – or better, his belated *discovery* of belatedness under the barrage of impressions

[136] Strether is too "late" to meet the guests: "He didn't want to be introduced; he had been introduced already about as far as he could go[...] the half-dozen other men who were distinguished, the artists, the critics and oh the great dramatist...[Strether] wanted – no thanks, really – to talk with none of them; having nothing at all to say and finding it would do beautifully as it was; do beautifully because what it was – well, was just simply too late." 164.

that play havoc with his 'categories' in Europe" (169). From all the "impressions of Chad and of [the] people" Strether has "seen at *his* place" it is "dropped" into his mind that he has "missed the train" and is "too late" "to live" (164). Strether's proclamation was what James had in mind as the germ of *The Ambassadors*. Though James himself was aware of the likelihood that the central idea would transform as the novel underwent its organic growth, the moment still remains of great importance. For, if point of view is what matters in the Jamesian novel, it is established on the negotiated ground between the fictional subject and the authorial subject over *what it is* "to live." If Strether's plea "to live" is demonstrated as a false hope from this point forward, it is because Strether's narratory position (embodied by the voice of the author) will not concede the novel's point of view to the desires of the fictional subjective. For James there is more to gain in the renunciation of desires than in their fulfillment.

Before approaching Strether's renunciation, let us address the question of desire – and eventually envy – that tantalizes the fictional subject. Strether desire "to live" finds its model examples in the novel's two male sex symbols: the artist, Gloriani, and Chad, in whom Strether voices substantial yearning that borders on (some argue, enters into) homosexuality.[137] Gloriani, the "glossy male tiger, magnificently marked," functions as an extension of the spectacle of European ease and splendor that first presented itself to Strether in the streets of Paris. Strether admires Gloriani success in European society, exalting him as a "genius," a "great artist" with "his honours and rewards all round [...]." Strether allows his "rather grey interior [to] drink in for once the sun of a clime not marked in his old geography" (151). Like the streets of Paris, Gloriani's presence attracts Strether with "a personal lustre" that "made him envy" the spectacle of his pure aesthetic beauty. Even Gloriani's name indicates the desirous lens through which

[137] Eric Haralson's reading of Strether's curious actions reaches this conclusion in Haralson's paper cited here.

Strether reads the man. As a symbol of enviable *glory*, Gloriani's presence is a coveted spectacle to Strether: "I know...whom *I* should enjoy being like!"(166).

Strether's envy of Gloriani's glimmer "with the romance...of glory" (76) is further refracted in Chad's masculinity. While Strether goes there as Mrs. Newsome's companion, the arm of the "society of women" (266) at Woollett, Chad's freedom in Europe appeals to his bachelorhood and intoxicates Strether's judgment. From the moment of his personal realization, Strether's great interest in Chad transfigures from paternal concern to envy and admiration of his youth and masculinity. Strether admires the "brown and thick and strong" quality of his appearance, the "smooth" features that "cleared his eyes and settled his colour and polished his fine square teeth" (122). "Chad's intending bravado or swagger" is only exceeded by his social *presence* which shines as a man "marked out by women" who are "sufficiently distinguished" (123). Chad's confidence, sexuality, and masculinity all figure into his "massive young manhood." Chad's destiny as the heir to the successful Newsome business gives Strether further cause for envy. In addition to the "allowance" his mother provides, Chad "unfortunately" has – "on no small scale" – "his independent supply – money left him by his grandfather" (61). If Chad returns home his wealth increases, for "he can come into" the "roaring trade" of the family "business" (59). In short, if he goes home he will become the "immense man of business" his father was before him (426). And, if he decides to stay in Europe he will have funds still to enjoy the Eden of Europe. Thus, while Chad experiences pressure for his return to the United States, at first from Strether, then from the Pococks, and ultimately from his mother, Chad is able to weather these influences to choose his direction freely "with impunity" (131).

Strether's envies Chad and Gloriani for their masculinity, success, sexuality, but, perhaps most of all for the inherent power of social *freedom* each of these qualities provides. Although

Strether yearns for a life of greater freedom, and regrets his missed opportunities, he still holds potential in both America and Europe. If he returns to Woollett, successful in his mission, he can marry into the Newsome family fortune. And, if he stays in Europe, he can live a life of marital bliss with Miss Gostrey. With possibilities of a – if not free, at least – comfortable life on both continents, why does Strether suffer resolutely under the sign of failure and envy? Strether's desire "to live" and his envy of those who do so freely, it will be shown, is the result of the penury of Strether's own countenance *as a fictional subject*. As we shall see, Strether's inability "to live" and his renunciation of his opportunities work to establish and transmits the novel's point of view.

2.8) Renunciation for Observation

Among American company, he is emasculated and a failure. He even fails in his one purpose of bringing Chad back to America (hence, the second wave of American ambassadors). By the end, Strether has lost his engagement to Mrs. Newsome, and with it, any financial potential in America. Miss Gostrey confronts Strether on the futility of going home: "What then do you go home to?" In Europe, Strether has – though he largely fails to interpret the European cues with his Woollett vocabulary – at least two female admirers in Madame de Vionnet and Miss Gostrey. As Miss Gostrey makes clear, Strether, more than ever, should find a reason for staying in Europe with a woman who offers him "the world": "There's nothing, you know, I wouldn't do for you... There's nothing...in all the world" (429). If Strether was ever going to endeavor to "live all you can" he now has the chance, "the offer of exquisite service, of lightened care, for the rest of his days [...]" (164, 429). Nevertheless, Strether leaves, admitting to himself

that "It was awkward, it was almost stupid, not to seem to prize such things" as Miss Gostrey's offer (429). So why *does* Strether decline this attractive offer and return home to nothing?

Eric Haralson has observed that "transcendence" is a frequently cited explanation for Strether's fateful move. "The cultural warrant" for the denial of pleasure, Haralson argues, flickers as the light of "transcendence": "Strether rises above the sometimes brutal economies of intimacy by thwarting the demands of 'the wretched self'."[138] Certainly, there is a show of "transcendence" in Strether's disapproval of the European moral attitudes he observes in the spied the intimacy between Chad and Madame de Vionnet. Strether conveys his disapproval to Miss Gostrey:

> "She knows perfectly how I see here."
> "Not favourably enough, she mentioned to me, to wish to see her again. She told me you had taken a final leave of her. She says you've done with her."
> "So I have." (414)

But it would be inaccurate to claim Strether's disapproval as a gesture of his grandstanding Woollett moral superiority over a base European one. Even here Strether's Woollett morals aren't so prevalent as to suggest moralism as the dominant feature of this comic novel. Strether's actions don't imitate the Victorian literary "conviction," that Nicolas Buchele (citing Michael Manson) identifies, in which "the spirit must triumph at last over the flesh."[139] As Miss Gostrey indicates with her joking response to Strether's morals ("I'm sorry for us all!") moral differences are a disappointing and awkward matter but they don't define Strether's existence, and certainly not the novel itself (414).

Like transcendence, Strether's decision can be attributed *in part* to the Jamesian propensity for renunciation over fulfillment. Nicolas Buchele points out that often the "Jamesian

[138] Haralson 172, with Haralson's own citation from *The Ambassadors*.
[139] Nicolas Buchele, "Renunciation in James's Late Novels," *Henry James and Homo-Erotic Desire*, Ed. John R. Bradley (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 139.

protagonist will assert his or her moral superiority through renunciation"[140] Strether's last move is certainly thought of on renunciatory terms by Strether, who lamely explains to a deprecating Miss Gostrey, "That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself" (429). According to Eric Haralson, Strether's renunciation of his possibilities in Europe ultimately has to do with Strether's (wrongly) gender identity: "*The Ambassadors* simultaneously reflects and confronts the power of the modern gender system, especially in its prescriptions and expectations for masculine performance" Haralson finds in Strether's confusing preference for renunciation as a sign of deeper motivations sub-textual motives at play, a point that leads into a larger discussion on powered positions in the modern gender system. Haralson rejects earlier critics (namely Richard Poirier) who have reduced Strether's actions to his aesthetic pose, but instead reads Strether's actions through its psychic coordinates, denying the trend to "treat 'his [Strether's] indifference to sexual liaison' as a natural, even negligible aspect of his winsome 'aesthetic dandyism'." [141] As has been made clear here, there is exhausting evidence for Strether's emasculated and wrongly gendered position in the novel. And, in recognizing those points, there is validity in linking Strether's masculinity (or lack thereof) to the studies of modern gendering and sexuality in the works of Thomas Laqueur and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as Haralson does. But, such a reading is incomplete without the acknowledgement of formalist activity in the text, that which cannot afford to be extricated from any reading of James. Once again we return to the division outlined between phenomenological and formalist readings of James by David Carroll, a theory that began this reading of *The Ambassadors*. Carroll refutes as incomplete any individual reading of James that fails to consider the other: "Even though the two positions seem at first to be contradictory, each is derived from

[140] Buchele 138-9.
[141] Haralson 172.

one aspect of James's theory, for the contradiction between form and consciousness [of his subjects] is at the heart of his concept of point of view."[142] In short, to extirpate either formalist or phenomenological aspects of James's writing is to leave any discussion of point of view incomplete.

Strether cannot be reduced to his psychic position alone, nor can his position as an observer be concealed under the shroud of sexual dysfunction. Nor, either, is Strether's psychology exclusively *the result of his aesthetic pose* (i.e. "'aesthetic dandyism'"[143]). Rather, Strether's limitations as a fictional subject (in gender, ethics, referents, business) exists on a plane of its own, but also *in relation to* the author-subject role as an observer When Kaja Silverman identifies Strether "the prototypical Jamesian character," "the one who...gets nothing for him or herself 'out of the whole affair'" she identifies his limitations as a subject. As is revealed in his comparison to other characters, Strether's point of view is profoundly shaped by his own shortcomings. But, when Silverman adds that he is "the one who is, moreover, precisely *marked* by vulnerability" she indicates the act of *marking* as a sign of extra-textual measures by the author's position, an act that neither transcendence nor renunciation fully disclose. [144]

Reading the novel through James's emphasis on ocular strategies, it becomes clear that Strether's failure to "live," his denial of Miss Gostrey's conviviality is not only the result of the tally of his failures, but is due to James's authorial insistence that Strether equate *living* with *seeing*. Discussing the ending of *The Ambassadors* in his introduction to the novel, Leon Edel notes that by its end Strether "will return to Woollett – which isn't sure 'it ought to enjoy' life – with a feeling that if Europe is amoral, it also offers him greater emotional and *aesthetic*

[142] Carroll 58.
[143] Richard Poirier, quoted in Haralson 172.
[144] Silverman 159.

freedom."[145] Donald Stone concurs that "Lambert Strether's great plea to 'live' [...] is qualified into the injunction to 'see' (as Leon Edel points out) [...]."[146] In the text view is expressed by Miss Gostrey as a counterpoint to Strether's final compunction for leaving Europe and "[n]ot, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself" (429). She observes "with your wonderful impressions you'll have got a great deal" (430). It is clear that what Strether gains from his trip to Europe is not necessarily new 'experiences' but an informed eye. Miss Gostrey's final observation of Strether's adventure illuminates the theme James gives credence to the entire novel. It is clear that the great "germ" of the novel to 'live' has, all along, been intimately tied to Strether's sight. Kaja Silverman recalls "As we discover in *The Notebooks*, this speech, with its insistence upon Strether's status as a spectator, and his marked isolation from what he sees, was the 'germ' of the entire novel."[147]

Remember, Strether's plea to Little Bilham to "live all you can" is qualified by his own surrender to his ocular subjectivity: "I haven't done so [lived] enough before – and now I'm too old; too old at any rate for what I see. Oh I *do* see, at least; and more than you'd believe or I can express" (164). It is in *vision* which Strether identifies his remaining power. Because Strether's impressions rarely translate into referential or ethical values of Woollett, he emphasizes their aesthetic value, as an observer. Meili Steele claims "By containing desire within the aesthetic, the subject diminishes the demands of reference. This is the one sentential possibility for the famous Jamesian observer who represses his own positionality."[148] While Steele is right in several observations about Strether's positionality, Strether is far less conscious of his interpretative mode than Steele grants. The subject here does not "diminish" the need for a

[145] My emphasis, Leon Edel, "Introduction," *The Ambassadors* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1970) 8.
[146] Stone 180.
[147] Silverman 163.
[148] Steele 120.

referent through the voluntary use of the aesthetic, but, instead, it is his own inherent subjected position that leaves him nothing but the *aesthetic value* of his impressions. Strether's interpretations as a narrator are very much determined by the character position James relegates him to, namely that of the emasculated, out of place, and childish man. It is from his own subjectivity that Strether accesses his aesthetic purchase.

2.9) Distant Observations

The domination of sight over experience is first illustrated early in the novel during Strether's visit to the home of Chad, the object of his pursuit whom he has yet to meet in Paris. In comparing the scene before and after Strether has entered Chad's home it is clear that Strether has greater power through his voyeuristic detachment. Strether's position on the streets of Paris comes into sharper relief, as that of the voyeur who does not possess the object of his gaze *except* through sight. Christian Metz claims that the act of voyeurism "*concretely represents the absence of its object* in the distance at which it maintains it and which is part of its very definition: distance of the look, distance of the listening."[149] What confirms Strether's status as the permanent voyeur is that his object of desire is its *most accessible* at a distance. At a distance, Strether finds the normal registers of reference, ethic, and envy, but it is only in *sight* he finds his point of access to these ideas.

Standing below the balcony of Chad's home in the Boulevard Malesherbes, Strether admires and envies the spectacle before him. From the moment he "pause[s]" to look his impressions unfold and admirations "'spr[i]ng' on him." He admires the aesthetic composure of the spectacle of the house – the "high broad clear" "admirably built" house – and the man on the

[149] Christian Metz, quoted in Silverman 164.

balcony who, for Strether, symbolizes youth. All elements in the scene are conflated into one spectacle for visual consumption. Kept at a distance, Strether's observations beckon forth envy for the youthful spectacle he cannot reach but through sight. For Strether, "...there was youth in the surrender to the balcony, there was youth for Strether at this moment in everything but his own business" of bringing Chad back to America. "Chad's thus pronounced association with youth" gives "extraordinary quick lift" to Strether's hopes of penetrating the youthful European society he perceives. He "found himself at the end of another moment rejoicing to think he might reach" the "admirable image" of this private world (85).

Strether's voyeurism is further reflected in the visual division between private and public spheres in the scene, and gives pause for thought. Jonathan Levin has commented that "the balcony represents the ideal balance between public and private: it is the external face of a carefully cultivated interior world."[150] Waymarsh's inverse, the young man on the balcony broadcasts the private enclosure of the world of youth, the valued object of the "elderly watcher."[151] In the visual exchange of glances that occur between Little Bilham and Strether the division between Chad's private, youthful world and that of the "elderly" public stranger is demarcated (85). Entangled in the matrices of Strether's mind's eye, the balcony servers as a "marginal space" suspended between the interior world of Strether's consciousness and the interior world of European society. Levin misreads Chad's balcony as "a marginal space, mediating between the interior apartment and the wide world of Paris" for the division occurs rather between the "interior apartment" and *Strether's internal world*.[152] For Strether, the "wide world of Paris" Levin identifies is like the apartment in that it represents yet another object of Strether's observant eye, a spectacle for his contemplation and desire. For Strether "the perched

[150] Levin 127.
[151] The story claims "Waymarsh [...] struck him as the present alternative to the young man on the balcony" 86.
[152] Levin 126-7

privacy was open, and he saw it now but in one light – that of the only domicile, the only fireside, in the great ironic city, on which he had the shadow of a *claim*" (my emphasis, 85).

But, Strether's "claim" is only truly accessible on visual terms. The object of Strether's gaze, the balcony serves as a gate through which Strether hopes to visually "transition" from his position into Chad's. Jonathan Levin notes that "The balcony figures the possible transition between Strether's duties, represented in the repeated appeal to 'Woollett,' 'Waymarsh,' and 'Mrs. Newsome,' and his deepest, largely unacknowledged creative potential."[153] The space is a medium through which, standing at a distance, Strether can visually access Chad's inner society. But, herein lays the scene's irony, an irony repeated throughout the novel. When Strether finally enters the apartment he finds himself still relegated to the position of a distanced observer who gleans little information from what he sees. Conditioned by Mrs. Newsome to "save" (69) Chad from European wickedness, Strether suffers "the worst confusion of mind" at hearing Chad's friends Miss Barace and Little Bilham "do him honour" speaking highly of his character (98). He finds his impression of Chad "mystifying" with "little light," and resolves that he "mustn't dispossess himself of the faculty of *seeing* things as they were" (my emphasis, 98). As the text unfolds, it becomes clear he possesses neither the power he needs for "seeing things as they were" nor the imagination to give meaning to his observations. Nor is he as sober an observer as he would like to be, for, as his mission proceeds his exposure to Europe becomes intermixed with an awareness of his own subjective position.

Thus, distance figures as a necessary component in James's construction of Strether's observer function. Keeping a removed relation to the scene he observes, Strether needs no referent or ethical equivalent to analyze the culture of conversation of Chad's inner world. Moreover, he bypasses the negative sentiments of guilt and envy produced when he begins to

[153] Levin 127.

desire "to live" (164) through experience. As has been noted, Strether's contact with Chad's friends leaves him dislocated from a referential and ethical knowledge matrix, thus leaving him with his aesthetic view of the world. The use of *sight*, then, is Strether's one obvious will to power, for though Strether is a slight subject, as an observer he lays claim to the power of visual construction.

2.10) "His world was all material"[154]

Donald Stone has commented extensively on James's ability to translate his personal impressions into pieces of art. Of James's literary technique, Stone has noted, he possessed an ability "to relate his aesthetic consciousness of 'life' to the enduring realm of 'art'." James's own techniques remind of Strether's propensity to see the world as art, in that the world before him becomes the object of his visual scrutiny, but also his muse for artistic creation. Donald Stone has noted of Strether's visual technique that, "Strether's consciousness, in particular, turns everything and everyone that it sees 'into visions' (according to Richard Poirier), detaching 'them from time and from the demands of nature,' and providing them with the composition of *objet d'art*'."[155] Strether's trip into "French ruralism" in which he compares the scenery before his eyes to a Lambinet painting is the most remarkable example in *The Ambassadors* of Strether converting his impressions of the world into art.

Upon entering the countryside, Strether compares the pastoral scene to the memory of "a certain small Lambinet that had charmed him, long years before, at a Boston dealer's [...]" (375). From the moment of visual registration, memory and referent are invoked in relation to the scene

[154] James speaking about Theophile Gautier, quoted in Stone 184.
[155] Richard Poirier and Stone, quoted in Stone 333.

before his eyes. Where before Strether uses his Woollett references to understand the foreign world of European social life, his memories here act to create the world he surveys. The pastoral scene he surveys is brought into focus through the "oblong gilt frame" (376) of the painting he recalls. That the scene does not challenge Strether's memories or ethics is the first sign of the constructed nature of the scene. The frame that Strether summons metaphorically transforms his 'real' impression of French ruralism into a work of art of his creation. The fantasized scene escapes its signifier (the Lambinet) accommodating the limits of Strether's creativity. "The frame had drawn itself out *for him*, as much as you please." The "spell of the picture" escapes the Lambinet from Tremont Street in Boston of Strether's memory to become it's own "scene and stage" for which "the play and the characters...offer themselves, in the conditions so supplied, with a kind of inevitability" (my emphasis 380). That the scene occurs with "inevitability" indicates Strether's creative power over it, what John Carlos Rowe has described as "a complicated construction of Strether's own textuality."[156]

Containing the countryside within his own "frame" Strether exercises more control over his impressions than he has yet had for his impressions of Parisian social life. In composing his Lambinet of the French countryside, Strether is able to evade the elements of Parisian society life which challenge his artful omniscience, which invoke his anxiety, his ethic, his referents as a character: "It was as if he had found out he was tired – tired not from his walk, but from that *inward* exercise which had known, on the whole, for three months, so little intermission" (377). John Carlos Rowe interprets Strether's interest in reading during his trip as an ironic metaphor for the "freedom of not reading" the Parisian impressions that play upon his mind.[157] Transforming the impression into a work of art allows him a painterly freedom to edit the scene

[156] Rowe *Theoretical* 198.
[157] Rowe *Theoretical* 198.

at his discretion, an opportunity not possible in Paris social life. Strether is able to compose an *objet d'art* until it is "complete. Not a single one of his observations but somehow fell into a place in it [...]." Strether even includes in his composition the visual decorations of the hostess of the Cheval Blanc (his hotel). Strether's "picture and the play seemed supremely to melt together in the good woman's broad sketch of what she could do for her visitor's appetite." The hotel's "most improbable shade" is absorbed into his work of art marked out by the "oblong gilt frame" accommodating Strether's creation (380).

Strether preference for the fabricated quality of his scene ("It was as if the conditions made theme not only inevitable, but so much more nearly natural and right as they were at least easier, pleasanter, to put up with") speaks volumes to his alliance with the artist (and author) who prefers to control the scene he composes (380). Even the actual Boston Lambinet Strether prefers not to encounter again (he "never found himself wishing [... the real painting] would turn up again"), preferring his mental recreation over the real thing. But, he claims, "it would be a different...to see the remembered mixture resolved back into its elements – to assist at the restoration to nature of the whole far-away hour [...]." Any recreation or re-presentation of the scene requires more than the original source of the impression (the painting), but all of Strether's artfully *composed* impressions, "the *whole* far-away hour" (my emphasis, 374). The configuration of the Lambinet scene mirrors another of James's stories, "The Real Thing," in which the simulacrum supersedes its 'real' referent. In the story, a painter specializing in the depiction of upper class life rejects the offer of a couple of social standing (the "real thing") to pose for his painting. Though they are the "real thing," the couple proves inadequate as models for their own representation. The artist requires *representations* in order create a more painterly scene. The artist uses the servants of the house as proxies for the real thing for they are able to

better *represent* the artist's intentions. In *The Ambassadors* it is also clear that the canvas of Strether's mind prefers the *representation* of the countryside to the real French ruralism. The Boston Lambinet (like the servants) is the representation that supplants the real French pastoral scene (like the noble couple) in the creation of an independent rendering of Strether's own painterly picture.

But, where the narrator's artful illusion overtakes his insight into the world he looks out onto, deception is afoot. Point of view in the novel is established by both the fictional subject and the author-subject, according to David Carroll. While, thus far, it has been shown how the slight subject opens a path for the author-function through observation, James demonstrates with the Lambinet scene that the subject cannot be eradicated from the equation. The scene is more than just a demonstration of Strether's artful inclinations as an observer, but indeed warns of the dangers in pure aestheticism without the presence of the central subject and his consciousness. Rowe states, "The pure perception, the 'artless' impression are dangerous illusions in James, which ought to signal to the reader a character's willing self blindness."[158] In his relationship to the world Strether participates in as a subject, the subject's consciousness is present in those sentiments of confusion, envy, and guilt – sentiments mysteriously absent from the scene of Strether's own creation. In other words, Strether needs the Parisian world he cannot access in order to remain a *subject* and accurately transmit the novel's point of view. James makes it abundantly clear that the fictional subject presence in his world and in relation to other subjects anchors the novel's point of view in the world of the story.

The spell of Strether's "superior" impression is, broken by the entrance of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's boat into his scene, revealing the dangers of pure observation. Strether's constructed scene (illusions) collides with the true, intimate nature of the couple's relationship,

[158] Rowe Theoretical 199.

revealing the fabricated quality of Strether's composition. Rowe characterizes it as "a metaliterary moment not only for James's novel but, more important, for Strether's own composition of self, which is made up as much by the characters with whom he is involved and defined as of 'himself': the unbounded, liberated 'observer'."[159](198-9). Thus, Strether's observational role is somehow dependent on the Parisian society he wishes to escape. Left to his own device, he drifts into censored perception and (self-) deception. That "these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted more or less all day" indicates the incompleteness of Strether's picture without the Parisian world of his own subjectivity (383). Returning to James's metaphor of the house of fiction, the window of Strether's eye therefore needs the fictional subject within ("I") the world of fiction that it looks out onto. The removal of the fictional subject (defined in relation to other subjects) leaves only false perception from the author-subject (narrator) of a world that isn't there, as occurs in Strether's construction of the French countryside.

2.11) The Frame that was there all along: The Window

In addition to shattering Strether's illusionary scene, Chad and Madame de Vionnets' intimacy reveals the limitations of Strether's *interpretations* up to this point. The couple's entrance into Strether's framed scene not only disturbs the picture he's organized as an observer, but undermines his knowledge as a fictional subject. Strether suddenly understands the truth behind their love affair, "that they were expert, familiar, frequent – that this wouldn't at all events be the first time. They know how to do it, he vaguely felt [...]" (383). Strether's rude

[159] Rowe *Theoretical* 198-99.

awakening at the sight of the primal scene allows, then, more than the reader's discovery that Strether is wrong in his understanding, but signals it to Strether himself.

As an observer, Strether "frame[s]" or interprets his impressions as an observer through the constricted coordinates given to him by his subjective consciousness. His sudden decision to see things through a frame is an ironic gesture of Strether's willing suppression of his cognitive limits. John Carlos Rowe's understands Strether's emphasis on framing the Lambinet scene as an ironic gesture: "[T]he frame for this picture has been there all along, effaced only by Strether's will for the unframed and spontaneous drift of his tourism." What the primal scene of *The Ambassadors* reveals is that *knowledge is not enough without an ability to interpret that knowledge*. Rowe has understood Strether's impressions as "indications of a certain blindness, an inability to see beneath the surface of events" and serves as a reminder that he has "not yet learned to read the codes of 'imagination'" (194). Strether's knowledge, it is disclosed, is restricted to the visual surface of his impressions.

As has been argued, Strether's original plea to "live" is qualified not by experience but by sight itself. Nicholas Buchele remarks "In terms of James's late novels, therefore, everything is about seeing over being. All those exhortations to 'live' seem to assume that the essence of it is not experience but knowledge."[160] But this knowledge is limited to sight itself, and no more. That Strether doesn't see things as they are doesn't reveal his willing expurgation of elements which offend his Puritanism, but rather sign his naiveté, his failure to *imagine* the ethical value of his impressions. In this sense, Strether truly resembles one of James's "childish adult[s]" that Donald Stone identifies, who lacks elements of other adult characters.[161] Readers will remember that Strether is marked by his own belated condition. His wish to live is both regret for past

[160] Buchele 139.
[161] Stone 332.

events, and regret for his continuous present state of limitation. Strether's belatedness restricts his position to that of the child who has eyes to *see* the world around him, but lacks the cognition to fully imagine its meaning. According to Meili Steele, Strether fails to rise to the occasion and give his impressions the "value of enrichment."[162] Like a child, Strether gives the scene he witnesses little or no value other than its aesthetic one (categorizing it more or less as a pretty picture). Furthermore, Strether self-discovery warrants the site of trauma for the childish character. The character finds the situation "quite horrible" "as if in a dream." He fears "they would have gone on" had he not been made out. The moment nearly reaches violence, for the moment that interrupts the scene is categorized as an "odd impression as of violence averted – the violence of their having 'cut' him, out there in the eye of nature, on the assumption that he wouldn't know it" (384). Strether defers the blame to the couple, whose actions wouldn't be a "lie" hadn't Strether willingly fooled himself into believing their relationship was virtuous "charming affair" in the first place.[163]

Donald Stone comments that if James in his earlier novels "showed the limitations of the individual point of view left to itself, James's later novels reversed that lesson. It is precisely the consciousness of a Lambert Strether....which is superior to the standards of the world."[164] How can we understand, then, Strether's superior position in light of the primal scene? In David Carroll's terms, "superiority" is the omniscience of consciousness. "Omniscience is simply the ideal form of consciousness." The omniscient character imposes "closure" on his world, "excluding or suppressing from this world anything which challenges his omniscience, anything

[162] Steele 128.
[163] Kaja Silverman offers a very thorough reading (in the text used here) of Strether's childishness as related to the fantasy of the Freudian Wolfman.
[164] Stone 333.

which resists the sense imposed on it [...]."[165] But Strether's "superior[ity]" or "omniscience" is one which relies on his control over his own point of view; control which he has only with the Lambinet. His composition of the Lambinet "scene" functions as an opportunity to role-play the omniscient consciousness, to demonstrate his full control over his surroundings, where all elements are "inevatible[y]" paint on his palate (380). The couple's sudden entrance into the scene of his own composition forces him to see he has been wrong about the couple's relationship him and thereby understand his own *inferiority* as an interpreter of events in the novel. The primal scene underscores the uncertainty of the knowledge Strether has hitherto claimed from his impressions.

The primal scene underscores that which the balcony scene first propounded: Strether is a subject who can access the object of his sight *exclusively* on visual terms. Where the balcony scene allows Strether to escape ultimate meaning (thereby allowing the space for created meaning) the primal scene is a markedly different impression, one that forces Strether to come to terms with his own role as the detached observer. In this light, Miss Gostrey's final hopeful suggestion that Strether will leave Europe with his "wonderful impressions" (430) gains new meaning. For, in fact, Strether leaves with impressions which he cannot properly decipher. Jonathan Freedman accurately sums up the state of Strether's final position as one of empty aestheticism: "Somehow it seems, merely seeing is enough: he can return to America not so much with a *knowledge* of his own, but with a knowledge of what knowledge looks like, with a greater intimacy with intimacy itself."[166]

[165] Carroll 72.
[166] Freedman 15.

I have argued that Strether's status as a "slightest of subjects"[167] allows his observations to be expressed, but that expression needs the subject's consciousness to keep it from self-deception. The novel's success in transmitting point of view then must be found in the shared site of the fictional subject and author-subject that I outlined at the beginning of this paper. David Carroll notes of James's theories, "A novel that is successful....[is] one in which there are... only windows behind which the reader and author can look and be at one with the consciousness of the fictional subject, at one with his or her point of view[...]."[168] Though Strether's point of view is limited by his own qualities as a slight subject, James is able to retain the center of his novel by expressing the consciousness of the author to the reader. On an extra-textual level, the primal scene gives Strether a vision of his author-subject function. In realizing that he has got nothing out of the story for himself, James acknowledges by irony (of the protagonist questioning the very purpose of the text at its close) that Strether was never meant to get anything out of it. Instead, Strether serves as a proxy for the reader, offering his consciousness as a gateway through which the reader can access the consciousness of the author. The conflict of Strether's self-guided myopia about the truth of the couple's Parisian relationship shows that meaning can only be derived through Strether's function as an observer who transmits information *from the author to the reader*. From "behind" that window the reader and author find the novel's true meaning, and the "prime intention" of the Jamesian novel.[169]

[167] Carroll 73.
[168] Carroll's full quote is as follows: "A novel that is successful....[is] one in which there are... only windows behind which the reader and author can look and be at one with the consciousness of the fictional subject, at one with his or her point of view, is a novel that realizes the 'prime intention' of its author." Carroll 58.
[169] James quoted in Carroll 58.

Conclusion: The Double Perspective of James

Lambert Strether's position in *The Ambassadors* is, in my view, a metafictional allegory for James's techniques of authorial perspective. As Donald Stone notes, "It was James's contribution to fiction that [...] he not only codified the subjective nature of the novelist, but transformed the hero of fiction into a limited [...] observer."[170] James effectively expresses his authorial consciousness in a novel that courts a more complicated delegation of positional plays between reader, author, and subject. Thus, I disagree with William Stowe's assertion that *The Ambassadors'* theme of "how life can and ought to be lived" presents problems for which neither the novel's subject nor author "has a solution, problems that challenge the reader to [sic] reexamine the very valuation of European experience which the texts seems also to be promoting."[171] Considering James's formal virtuosity, it becomes clear that James has more to express to the reader than the "valuation of European experience."[172] Indeed, I hope it has been made clear over these last pages that "the solution" for how "to live" is fixed in Jamesian aestheticism. James broadcasts a double perspective that simultaneously engages the aesthetic along the social fissures of modernity, producing "masterpieces of presentational technique"[173] to cite Malcolm Bradbury.

Because the author can stage himself through the consciousness of the fictional subject, there is, of course, a tendency to deploy the observer-protagonist figure. Strether, after all, belongs to a broad company of observer characters in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction, and one needs only consult the works of other American masters such as Hawthorne and

[170] Stone 176.
[171] Stowe, 184.
[172] Stowe 184.
[173] Bradbury 197.

Poe to recognize the wealth of similarities.[174] As my study here is limited to James and *The Ambassadors*, regretfully, I could not dedicate more time to laterally compare visual technique across the canon American Literature.[175]

Before closing, of course, we must also take a moment to preserve the distinction between the author and the narrator of *The Ambassadors*. In their critical study of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist observe that the "author-creator's presence in the text" is not *merely* identified with the narrator, but is an entity larger than the narrator can express. Lambert Strether's narratory presence is able to relay the author's consciousness to the reader as I have noted, but, as Clark and Holquist argue (reading Bakhtin's narrative theory), "even such [...] an interstitial narrator as the one in *The Ambassadors* does not constitute a presence whose figure is adequate to the wholeness of the author-creator's presence in the text."[176] Thus, it should be noted that this thesis paper does not claim to fully account for James's authorial presence in *The Ambassadors*, but simply hopes to identify coordination between author and fictional subject that establish *point of view* (or the center) of the novel, that I outlined at the start of part two of this paper. The author's consciousness, argues Bakhtin (in his own words), is economically articulated through the narrator – but the narrator can never reveal the complete presence of the author (the "author-creator"[177]) in the text. The author is involved

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[174] Jonathan Crary provokes the historical position of the observer in the nineteenth century in his book *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990). Crary states that "In proposing that during the first few decades of the nineteenth century a new kind of observer took shape in Europe radically different from the type of observer dominant in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I doubtless provoke the question of how one can pose such large generalities, such unqualified categories as 'the observer in the nineteenth century.'" Crary's thesis goes on to question "immense diversity that characterized visual experience in that century [.]" 6-7.

[175] John Carlos Rowe cites Hawthorne's *The Blithdale Romance* as a key text in reading Hawthorne against James, through their shared use of sight. He provocatively argues that "James suggests [...] that Hawthorne's representative American innocence requires its complement of experience, the transformation of Hawthorne as 'spectator' into James as 'observer'." 50.

[176] Clark and Holquist 89-90.

[177] Clark and Holquist 89.

in a paradox of his own construction – of being "in the text but invisible by the same strategy" that expresses his point of view through the narrator. Thus, I do not to claim to have reached the central meaning of *The Ambassadors*, or to have fully revealed James's authorial consciousness through my close reading of Strether. To come to a more informed understanding of James's oeuvre would require reading more peripheral texts in conjunctions with James's fictional texts and biographical material in order to show the discursive practices at play that establish and "articulate" James's authorship – a study, I regret, that would require more time and space available here.[178] Yet, what in reading parts one and two together what I hope has been achieved in this thesis is a picture of the double – and, I believe, simultaneous – perspective from which we can see James's writing. James authorial techniques seek a unity of theme and form, a perspective not disparate but linked together, an intermingling that produces a layered work of writing.

As we saw in part one, James's international theme interpellates in the modern debate over fixed identities and borders – of what constitutes a citizen or immigrant, a nation or region, an individual or body. Internationalism and expatriation fuel the arsenal of questions James launches at modernity. The chaos of modern life is given dimension through stories that thematically engage modern uncertainties, and challenge parochial nationalism. As we witness in *The Ambassadors*, however, James's meditations on modern life are also in harmony with his

[178] David Carroll's discussion of author in James's theory is different than that of the author in relation to discourse in Michel Foucault's in his well-known article "What is an author?". Foucault states that "the 'author-function' is tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses; it does not operate in a uniform manner in all discourses, at all times, and in any given culture; it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy." While James's author-function as "articulate[d]" in specific discourses might prove an interesting study of its own, here I concentrate on the authorial *techniques* of James– or the relationship between author and fictional subject. Above quote from Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley: University of California P, 1991) 456-7.

formal techniques. James utilizes the cacophony of modern life – of gender, family, history, class, race, and other socio-cultural qualities – to situate his authorial presence in his observer-hero. In *The Ambassadors*, the powered positions of modern life limit the fictional subject to the observer function, thereby facilitating the narratory position (the author's main point of access). In short, James conjoins modern issues and authorial technique to achieve reciprocity between theme and form that marks his fluency as a modern American writer.

Résumé

Diplomová práce se zabývá tématem amerického občana, jenž se rozhodne opustit svou vlast a odjet do Evropy, a srovnává aspekty tohoto tématu jak v životě Henryho Jamese, tak v jeho románu *The Ambassadors*. Je rozdělena do dvou základních částí, z nichž první zeširoka pojednává o Jamesově životě a díle, přičemž se zabývá autorovým vztahem k různým skutečnostem, které vyvstaly v důsledku jeho vystěhování i internacionalismu. Druhá část práce je pak zaměřena na jedno z jeho velice dobře známých děl o expatriaci, román *The Ambassadors*, a věnuje se především textové i mimotextové analýze díla a identifikaci jevů v daných rovinách.

V první kapitole rozebírám vztah autorova života a díla ke kulturnímu fenoménu, jenž se objevuje v důsledku odchodu z rodné země, a to v moderní době, která v sobě zahrnuje kosmopolitismus, imperialismus a masovou kulturu. Rozeznávám hlavní tendence, se kterými se setkáváme jako s důsledkem touhy amerických naivních hrdinů odejít z domoviny, aby „mohli žít“, a zabývám se jak přínosem tak riziky transatlantických cest v Jamesových románech. Henry James varuje před vykořisťováním ze strany Američanů všude ve světě, což je, jak ukazuji, téma, ve kterém se odráží dobové imperialistické tendence Spojených Států. Upozorňuji však také na to, že James si velmi silně uvědomuje, že z globální síly Spojených Států lze velice dobře těžit, a zdůrazňuji tento bod v kapitole pojednávající o jamesovském kosmopolitismu. Dále definuji body, které se vztahují k Jamesovu takzvanému „mezinárodnímu tématu“ („international theme“), a poté se zabývám kritikami autorova díla ve vztahu k moderní době všeobecně. Přikláním se ke kritikům, podle nichž dílo Henryho Jamese přesahuje meze národnosti v moderní době. Tvrdím, že James zpochybňuje moderní úzkostlivé lpění na pojetí „národa“ jakožto neměnného útvaru a „vlastenectví“ jakožto ustálené identity. Při tomto rozboru jsem hojně využíval díla Johna Carlose Rowa. Jelikož se v dané chvíli nesoustředím na žádné konkrétní

Jamesovo dílo, spoléhám se zejména na sekundární zdroje předních autorových kritiků a mým cílem je v této části umožnit celkový náhled na to, jakým způsobem se obraz národní identity na mezinárodní scéně odráží v Jamesově životě a díle, jež se vyznačuje nesporně moderní a ve své podstatě fragmentární vypravěčskou technikou.

Druhá část diplomové práce je založena na hlubinném, resp. pozorném čtení (tzv. „close reading“) Jamesova díla *The Ambassadors*, příběhu o stárnoucím Američanu Lambertu Stretherovi a jeho výpravě do Evropy, na kterou se vydává s cílem „zachránit“ syna své nastávající ze spárů „nebezpečné“ (rozuměj sexuálně přitažlivé) Evropanky. V průběhu cesty si Strether začíná uvědomovat vlastní, veskrze subjektivní postoj člověka, který ještě stále čeká na to, až bude moci „prožít“ svůj život. To v něm vyvolává touhu zažít život plný mladického potěšení, který mu byl v Americe upírán. Toto uvědomění však pro typ postavy, kterou Henry James popsal jako „ten nejubožejší jedinec,“ představuje náročný problém, neboť není schopen „prožívat“ tak jako ostatní.

Zeširoka zkoumám Stretherovu pozici jako *jedince*, jenž ve své snaze interpretovat dojmy z Evropy na pozadí morálních i obecných zásad, jak je zná z amerického kontinentu, přes veškeré úsilí totálně selhává. Ukazuji, že mu nezbývá než vykládat setkání s neznámým cizím světem skrze *estétství*. V této části se zabývám převážně Stretherovým hlediskem, které je „odtrženo“ od svého světa, jakožto prostředkem, jímž James převádí zkušenost na obraz, výsledek pozorování. Stretherova pozice jedince s „ubohým charakterem“ dále ospravedlňuje užití vizuálního vnímání, a díky tomu je nakonec autor se svou postavou velmi úzce propojen. Při rozboru mimotextových znaků románu jsem se nechal inspirovat postojem Davida Carrolla, jenž přistupuje ke čtení Jamesových děl skrze kategorii postavy románu (subjektivního vědomí) a kategorii vypravěče (autorského subjektu), které dohromady tvoří „hledisko.“ V metaforickém

konceptu „domu fikce“ („house of fiction“) James tvrdí, že postava má dvě funkce: jednak zastává roli postavy románu (ono „já“ ve vyprávění), a za druhé je oknem do mysli vypravěče, či „okem,“ které dohlíží na románový svět postavy. Obě funkce se podílejí na tom, jak je hledisko příběhu přenášeno od autora ke čtenáři.

Při rozboru Stretherovy „ubohé osobnosti“ – jeho duševních pochodů, nízkého společenského postavení, neschopnosti porozumět světu, ve kterém se ocitá, a dalších sociálních rozměrů – se soustředím zejména na Stretherovu důvěru v *pozorování*, jež je podstatná ve vztahu k roli autorského subjektu. Cílem není definovat přesně Stretherovu osobnost jakožto postavy, ale přijít na to, *jakým způsobem* užití zraku umožňuje funkci autorské postavy. Stretherova důvěra ve zrak stejně jako jeho neschopnost hodnotit dojmy i jiným než estetickým měřítkem *odhalují* (ačkoliv to neznamená, že by ji garantovaly) pozici úzce provázanou s autorskou pozicí Henryho Jamese. Stretherovo nízké postavení jako postavy, která nedokáže „prožít“ Evropu, odráží vypravěčské strategie, jež spojují Strethera (jakožto literární postavu) s pozicí autorského subjektu (reprezentované vypravěčem).

Poté, co jsem ukázal, jak Stretherův nízký statut jakožto postavy dává prostor autorskému hlasu, uvádím v posledních oddílech druhé části klíčové scény, v nichž je demonstrováno Stretherovo estétství a jeho vztah k roli postavy autora. Pomocí zraku nachází Strether způsob, jak objevovat různé roviny touhy, které mu v reálné skutečnosti zůstávají odepřeny. Zároveň se však vystavuje nebezpečí, že se mu tato schopnost vymkne z rukou, a trpí sebeklamem. Scéna, kdy si Strether představuje svět, který neexistuje, při pohledu na Lambinetův obraz, je nápadně jasným autorovým varováním, že vnímat svět jako čisté umění vede k sebeklamu. Při tomto rozboru se znovu vracím ke Carrollově tezi, podle které je pro Jamese podstatné ukotvit románové hledisko jak k roli románové postavy, tak k roli autorského subjektu. V důsledku

jejich nedostatečné spolupráce se pak román, podle Carrollova chápání Jamesova díla, vystavuje nebezpečí, že nebude schopen přesně sdělit své hledisko čtenáři. Román *The Ambassadors* si však nakonec jádro – vyváženost mezi hlasem autora a postavy – udrží a autorovo vědomí je čtenáři odhalováno střízlivě a opatrně. Uzavírám tím, že Strether v konečném důsledku působí jako prostředník mezi čtenářem a autorem a skrze jeho vědomí má čtenář možnost proniknout do vědomí autora, tedy cílového místa čtenáře.

Na tuto práci lze nahlížet jako na analýzu postavy amerického občana v Evropě ze dvou různých úhlů. První část se zabývá historiografickými elementy Jamesova mezinárodního tématu a podrobuje je pečlivému zkoumání, přičemž ukazuje, jak se autorovo dílo vypořádává s otázkami expatriace v moderní době. Druhá část je věnována rozboru toho, jakým způsobem je toto téma na kulturním a teoretickém podkladě v Jamesových dílech ztvárněno. Dané téma pak rozebírám s poukázáním na důležitost jamesovské techniky pozorování a ukazuji, *jakým způsobem* jsou dojmy z evropského kontinentu v románu *The Ambassadors* vnímány a interpretovány.

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