

AT PLAY IN THE MASTER'S WORKSHOP:
THE EXPERIENCE OF READING IN
THE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

THESIS

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DEBORAH ANN SEDDON

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Abstract

James's belief that "it is art that *makes* life" is essential to his own literary technique and to the reading experience within and in relation to his novels. The thesis seeks to posit the notion of reading as a fundamental concern in Henry James's fiction. Drawing largely on the phenomenological and anthropological approaches to the reading process of Wolfgang Iser, this thesis examines the Jamesian text as a performative event involving author, reader and character in creative and interpretative narrational struggles. Iser uses "play" as an integral term to describe the dynamic between author-reader-text which produces a literary work of art. In James's fiction the doubling of the author/reader and reader/character role within the text crucially structures a narrative form which is itself an inquiry into the human use of fiction. The Iserian conception of the act of reading as an engagement with the "gaps" within the play-space of the literary text can elucidate James's structural and thematic use of such sites of indeterminacy to foreground the enlivening necessity of an indeterminate "felt life" within human narrative structures.

What Maisie Knew highlights the most important rule in the game -- the necessity for the reader to create meaning from the indeterminate aspects of the text. The shared exercise for author-reader-character is the attempt to access the child's unformulated inner reality to ascertain what Maisie knows. In the section on The Portrait of a Lady Iser's notion of reading as an ideational activity aids an inquiry into the human use of mental fictive picturing to compose reality. The Ambassadors demonstrates the "anthropological" need for the particular mode of consciousness brought about by the literary text when we engage in a world as real as but different to our own. Strether is the reader's ambassador in this world and his interpretative activity mirrors the reader's quest. In The Golden Bowl the bewildering multiplicity of readings made possible by the indeterminate aspects of the literary text instigates a contest for narrative forms in which the chosen fictions of the readers/characters must be actively willed into existence.

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List of Abbreviations.

AN	<u>The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces</u>
GB	<u>The Golden Bowl</u>
LHJ	<u>The Letters of Henry James</u>
MK	<u>What Maisie Knew</u>
PL	<u>The Portrait of a Lady</u>
SLHJ	<u>Selected Letters of Henry James</u>
TA	<u>The Ambassadors</u>
TF	<u>Theory of Fiction</u>
WJ	<u>Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking.</u> <u>The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel.</u>

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Introduction.

The Story of An Unfinished Story.

The contradictions that feed our questions do not lead to nothingness but to the unsayable that we must put into words.

Edmond Jabés, The Book of Margins (117)

(It all comes back to that, to my and your "fun" -- if we but allow the term its full extension; to the production of which no humblest question involved, even to that of the shade of a cadence or the position of a comma, is not richly pertinent). We have but to think a moment of such a matter as the play of *representational* values....

Henry James: Preface to The Golden Bowl (lviii)

One could be forgiven for assuming from the above quotation that James sees art as being mere "fun", a supplementary diversion, however stylistically demanding it may seem to the artist concerned. James however asks for a "full extension" of the term -- an extension which effectively demolishes the word's ordinary usage. For "fun" here includes all the serious and demanding virtues that are usually opposed to it. Indeed for James a constant transaction between fun and seriousness, between art and life, is fundamental to any intelligent existence, and this insight is instrumental in the shaping of his own fiction. James's famous statement in his letter to H.G. Wells asserts his conviction of the centrality of art to human existence:

It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance, for our consideration and application of these things, and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process. (LHJ, 2:490)

Wells's reply clarifies and extends the scope of James's assertion. It is clear that Wells understands James to be referring to more than the fundamental place of art in the life of an artist: "When you say 'it's art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance,' I can only *read into it* by assuming that you are using 'art' for every conscious human activity" (LHJ, 2:490, my italics).

This multi-layered exchange between two friends, two authors and two texts makes a fitting spring-board for the examination of the reading experience in the novels of Henry James as

it interestingly represents the concerns from which my exploration will evolve. Wells's creative "reading into" adds in what he feels has been implied but unstated by James's words. It demonstrates what reader-response critics have described as the activity of co-authorship which every reader of a text attempts, especially if such a text is the type we refer to as fictional or literary. Wells's reply, both the action itself and in its content, attests to the "art" in every conscious human activity.

As an expression of the necessary dependence of life and art, reader and text, the reading experience is central to Jamesian novels. As is the case with any novel it is the reader's "art" which brings the words on the page to life -- creating a work of art from an object formed of paper and ink. James is more aware than most of this mutual contribution, and builds his recognition into the fabric of each novel. The statement from James's final Preface with which I began this Introduction attests, with its emphasis on "my and your 'fun'" as equally pertinent, to his abiding sense of an interactive relationship between reader and author in which both are at play with the words of the text. The activity of engaging as a reader with the works of "the Master" in the prefaces and the novels brings into play another type of artistry -- that of the reader's consciousness. James notes in the Preface to The Golden Bowl

That one should, as an author, reduce one's reader, "artistically" inclined, to such a state of hallucination by the images one has evoked as doesn't permit him to rest till he has noted or recorded them, set up some semblance of them *in his own other medium, by his own other art* -- nothing could be better consort than *that*, I naturally allow, with the desire or the pretension to cast a literary spell. Charming ... for this manipulator of aspects to see such power as he may possess approved and registered by the springing of such fruit from his seed. (GB, xlvi, my italics)

James frequently uses the imagery of indeterminate organic growth to describe his process of authorship in which the germ of suggestion provided by life becomes, through his imaginative cultivation, a literary text: "most of the stories straining to shape under my hand have sprung from a single small seed" (AN, 119). His use of the same imagery to describe the process of reading the text gains in impact when viewed in the light of James's re-reading of his own novels; as we shall

see, the same imagery of organic flowering recurs in the process of revision.

The crucial importance of the reading experience to Henry James himself is illustrated by his commitment to the revision of his own work for the New York Edition. Dana J. Ringuette suggests that in the process of revision "we see James reproducing a drama of sorts between himself as artist and reader" (1990, 119). James's experience not only as author but as reader of his work is described in rich and elaborate detail in the prefaces which add another layer to the readings allowed for by the Jamesian text. It becomes possible since the Edition was first published for the reader and critic to read or re-see James's novels alongside or through the prefaces. The New York Edition in many ways alters the entire process of reading James, for when we read the revised edition what is read is in an important sense a "re-reading" of the novels. I refrain from using the term "rewriting" for in the Preface to The Golden Bowl, where James discusses the revision process at length, he makes an important distinction:

To revise is to see, or to look over, again -- which means in the case of a written thing neither more nor less than to re-read it. I had attached to it, in a brooding spirit, the idea of re-writing -- with which it was to have in the event, for my *conscious* play of mind, almost nothing in common... What rewriting might be was to remain -- it has remained for me to this hour -- a mystery. On the other hand the act of revision, the act of seeing it again, caused whatever I looked at on any page to flower before me as into the only terms that honourably expressed it. (GB, lii)

The prefaces provide answers not only to the questions of James's notions of authorship but also to his conception of the reading process.

John Carlos Rowe views James's search in the prefaces for the "germ" of initial suggestion as his "quest for the identity of an author that this reader requires to satisfy his need for meaning" and hence regards James's revisions as the assertion of a final self-determined authorial identity. Rowe argues that "James transforms the author's impotence before the monuments of his previous production into a psychic power: the capacity of his readings to turn the divided persona expressed in these divergent works into the grand image of the Author, The Master, for whom every reader yearns" (1984, 244). Rowe's description of James's revision process as an anxious

kind of "reading for the author" suggests that the exercise is primarily the assertion of a conclusive authorial agency.¹ Such a view ignores the determining concept of revision in James's entire creative process and the crucial role his stance as a reader plays in his own revisions.

Philip Horne's detailed study, which traces the various stages of James's revision, describes the New York Edition as "a single massive project, self-consciously undertaken at a particular point in time as the review of a whole career" (1990, 41). Horne's study makes it clear that whilst the Edition afforded James the chance to reshape his *oeuvre* and to "quietly disown a few things" not all exclusions were of his own choosing (quoted in Horne, 5).² Horne argues that James's writing on the imagination raises important questions of control, freedom, and authorial agency. The discussion in the prefaces of what Horne terms the "creative mysteries" are clear proof of James's sense of "the book's aesthetic independence from him" since "the rhetorical presentation of these agencies as independent suggests that there is a respect in which the whole story is not what he wants to call his" (65).

Ringuette stresses the need to re-examine the place of revision in the theoretical paradigm of literary authority and determine what sense of James's artistic agency it yields. He argues for a logical coherence and shared vision among James's works, suggesting that "the creative process, for James, simply is revision" (1990, 116). Ringuette notes that in both the novels and the prefaces Jamesian revisions are re-readings of self:

James does not set up an ontological hierarchy which cites author as prime mover or sole creator; nor are the works seen as unchanging "originals," as if they existed as the prime or ideal form from which revision departs. The reader is making a fundamental error in assuming there is an "original" text determined univocally by authorial intention, for there is nothing univocal about any subject for James. Not only is there no copy text in this understanding of revision, but there is no real warrant for assuming that James, as intending author, could have produced such a definitive object had he wanted to. The subject, whether author, reader or work, is dispersed within the same matrix of relations in which for instance, we find characters. (1990, 120)

Ringuette comments that James's term of reference for his novels in the prefaces is significant

"because James's reference is not to works that assert, but to 'productions'. This usage implies that more is involved in this principle than any one single point from which agency emanates" (117).

This notion of the event of the novel as a creative production involving author, reader and character is of vital importance to the reading experience in James.

In his final Preface James describes all human activity as a vast and interconnected network: "the whole conduct of life consists of things done, which do other things in their turn" (GB, lx). This conception of doing, in which human "behaviour and its fruits are essentially one and continuous" (GB, lx), is reminiscent of his alternative metaphor for human experience in "The Art of Fiction" as "a kind of huge spider-web", and points to his sense of writing the novels as intimately connected to their reading (TF, 35). As J. Hillis Miller points out: "Doing ... for James, does not stop with the initial act, but goes on doing and causing other things to be done, in an endless chain of consequences" (1987, 102). Significantly, within this realm of doing, the act of writing for James is a doing in itself:

with any capability, we recognise betimes that to "put" things is very exactly and responsibly and interminably to do them. Our expression of them, and the terms on which we understand that, belong as nearly to our conduct and our life as every other feature of our freedom; these things yield in fact some of its most exquisite material to the religion of doing. (GB, lx)

As Miller argues "a play on those words 'do', 'thing', and 'put' forms the transition in James's formulation from doing in general to that particular form of doing which is writing" and, Miller concludes, if a thing is done by being put into words its only legitimate effect is through acts of reading (103-6).

The process of revision described in the prefaces demonstrates James's idea of reading and authorship as indisputably and vitally linked in transactive and continuous creation. Within the interaction between reader and text the acts of doing, writing and reading are intricately and dynamically interfused. These connected acts of authorship and reading, both within the novels and in the reader's relationship to the novels, are what I seek to explore. The notion of "putting"

things as a way of doing them, coupled with James's sense that the expression, understanding and description of human doings is as important in the realm of ethical and responsible conduct as the doings themselves, has important implications for the experiences not only of the author and reader of the novels but also for the characters within them -- confirming the pronouncement that "among our innumerable acts are no arbitrary, no senseless separations" (GB, lx).

What makes the experience of reading a Jamesian novel such a challenging and complex task is the fact that everywhere, even among the characters, the reading process is in an important sense a *shared* and multi-layered activity of interpretation and emotional response. Not only is the text a joint engagement of reader and author, James's use of a centre of consciousness -- what he calls "the impersonal author's concrete deputy or delegate" -- involves another author/reader in the construction of the text: a third player in the game (GB, xli). The central consciousness is not only the author's deputy in the text but in some sense the reader's: a reader within the text who facilitates our own readings without, however, prescribing them or closing them off.

In his essay "The Novels of George Eliot" (1866) James anticipates the ideas of reader-response critics in his assertion that the reader's active involvement plays a vital function in bringing the text to life. James's comments also reveal that his own novels are essentially concerned with eliciting a particular aesthetic response and hence designed to expedite this in the reader by the use of a certain type of character:

In every novel the work is divided between the writer and the reader; but the writer makes the reader very much as he makes his characters. When he makes him ill, that is he makes him indifferent, he does no work; the writer does all. When he makes him well, that is makes him interested, then the reader does quite half the labour. In making such a deduction as I have just indicated, the reader would be doing his share of the task; the grand point is to get him to make it. I hold there is a way. It is perhaps a secret; but until it is found out, I think that the art of story-telling cannot be said to have approached perfection. (TF, 321)

James's use of the word "make" in this essay is important. "Make" implies authorial mastery, a will to power, the need to shape and form; but making the reader in Jamesian terms involves engaging

the reader in a complex critique of the act of reading and authoring itself. To read a Jamesian text is to engage with his reading of a characters' reading of a human situation, and the prefaces in turn are the author's revision of his own readings. If putting is a way of doing, it requires constant revision to obtain a more accurate rendering of reality.

In forming the reader to share the quality of the character's interest in their situation James strives to make his reader an involved participant in the construction of the text by making his characters both readers and authors of their situation. In the Preface to The Golden Bowl James comments on his "habit" for "seeing my story" through "some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it". He recognises on reviewing his works that they tend to be "not [his] impersonal account of the affair in hand", but his "account of someone's impression of it"; a technique which contributes "by some fine little law to the intensification of interest". The comment that he has "constantly inclined to the idea of the particular attaching case *plus* some near individual view of it" highlights that the interest is "enriched" by the operation of the characters' rather than his own authorial agency. He goes on to describe the artistic quality allowed for by the representation of the characters' personal impressions:

that nearness quite having thus to become an imagined observer's, a projected, charmed, painter's or poet's -- however avowed the "minor" quality in the latter -- close and sensitive contact with it. Anything ... I now reflect must always have seemed to me better -- better for the process and the effect of representation, my irrepressible ideal -- than the mere muffled majesty of irresponsible "authorship". (GB, xlii)

What James examines and depicts in his novels is what I shall call the artistry of consciousness.³ Commenting on James's statement that it is art which makes life, Edel notes that "James, in including all life within the scope of the novel, urged on this very account the need to give to this life a shaping form" (1958, 30). In the novels themselves his characters' ways of "putting" things, in attempting to understand and construct the world and its people for

themselves and each other, are essential to James's inquiry into the subtle complexities of human life.

His sense of what constitutes the personal impression is pertinent here. Horne points out that "James finds a complex structure in the word 'impression'", primarily referring to the mental reception of external stimuli but also frequently playing on the technical use of the term in printing" (1990, 51). The polysemic nature of this concept alerts us to James's sense of the artistry of human consciousness as a constant dialectic between the self and the environment which involves both the reception and imposition of personal shaping impressions to create a relation with reality.

In exploring the ordeals of consciousness undergone by the central characters in four Jamesian novels I will draw on Wolfgang Iser's conception of the reading process as an interactive activity in order to underpin and justify James's view that author, character and reader are required to share the activity of responding to and interpreting the complex enigmatic human situations of the text. For Iser "the phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text" (Iser 1972, 279). James's concern with this interaction designs the form and content of his novels -- with his central characters becoming what he terms "a compositional resource ... as well as a value intrinsic" (GB, xliii). James comments that the author "can never be responsible *enough*" and "the appeal to variety, the appeal to incalculability, the appeal to high refinement and a handsome wholeness of effect" will only be brought about by the triad of dynamic interaction his texts make possible (GB, xliii).

The wording of the title of the thesis alludes to Derrida's notion that the critical reading of literature is an activity of creative and intellectual play. It also takes cognizance of the play of the text as central to Wolfgang Iser's reader-focused criticism: "Authors play games with readers and

the text is the playground" (Iser 1989, 250). Iser uses "play" as "an umbrella concept to cover all the ongoing operations of the textual process": a term which "allows the author-text-reader to be conceived as a dynamic interrelationship" (1989, 250). He refrains from using the word "fiction" with reference to the reading process and speaks instead of "fictionalising acts" in the play of the literary text, as these "do not refer to an ontologically given but to an operation, and therefore cannot be identical with what they produce" (1989, 237).

My study of James will examine how author, reader and character are involved in the "fictionalising acts" made possible by the play of the literary text. The essential dialectic between reading and authoring, life and art is an interplay which structures the form and content of James's novels as character, reader and author are involved in the reception and imposition of the impressions of consciousness.⁴

According to Iser there is no literary work of art without a reader. He distinguishes between a work and a text: "the text represents a potential effect that is realised in the reading process" (Iser 1984, ix). In attempting to make sense of the text the reader reacts to its "response-inviting structures" in order to perform a creative reading which infuses the story with a unique and individual force and makes it in some sense his or her own creation (Iser 1989, I). Iser refers to Laurence Sterne's conception of the literary text to explain his own notion of the text as a imaginative play-space

something like an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination. If the reader were given the whole story, and there was nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field. A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself. (Iser 1972, 280)

Such an activity is what Iser views as the reader's co-authoring of the text. In his essay "The reading process: a phenomenological approach" Iser quotes Virginia Woolf's study of Jane Austen to illustrate how the literary text, which Woolf describes as "the unfinished and in the main inferior story", contains within it unwritten, unuttered aspects which stimulate the active

participation or co-authorship of the reader, compelling our attention and artistry by stimulating us to supply what is not there (1972, 280).⁵

Iser points out that an important characteristic of the literary sentence is that it "aims at something beyond what it actually says" (1972, 282). This more complete story resides within the areas of indeterminacy in the text, what he calls the "blanks" or "gaps", which stimulate the reader to construct its unformulated meaning.⁶ Iser adds that "with a literary text we can only picture things which are not there; the written part gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imagination" (1972, 288).

As David Lodge points out: "Iser is less 'mystical', more 'scientific'" than the Geneva school of phenomenological criticism with whom he has affinities, but like Poulet, Gadamer and Ingarden "he privileges the experience of reading literary texts as a uniquely valuable consciousness-raising activity" (Lodge 1993, 211).⁷ Iser asserts for instance that within the reading process

the need to decipher gives us a chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity ... [that is] we bring to the fore an element of our being of which we are not directly conscious. The production of meaning of literary texts ... does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated, which can then be taken over by the active imagination of the reader; it also entails that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness. These are the ways in which reading literature gives us a chance to formulate the unformulated. (1972, 299)

What formulating the unformulated may entail can be elucidated by drawing on an image of revision used by James in the final Preface in which he figures himself as a reader walking across an expanse of snow and placing his feet into the impressions left by his own authorial self. With regard to his recent literary productions James describes the pace and attention of author and reader as easily matched: "Into his footprints, the responsive, the imaginative steps of a docile reader that I consentingly become for him all comfortably sink". With his earlier productions

however he notices "a frequent lapse of harmony between my present mode of action and that to which the existing footprints were due". The process of re-reading becomes for James like walking in the footsteps of another person:

It was ... as if the clear matter being still there, even as a shining expanse of snow spread over a plain, my exploring tread ... had quite unlearned the old pace and found itself naturally falling into another, which might sometimes indeed more or less agree with the original tracks, but might most often, or very nearly, break the surface in other places. What was thus predominantly interesting ... was the high spontaneity of these deviations and differences, which became thus things not of choice, but of immediate and perfect necessity: necessity to the end of dealing with the quantities in question at all.

No march, accordingly, I was soon enough aware, could possibly be more confident and free than this infinitely interesting and amusing *act* of re-appropriation; shaking off all shackles of theory, unattended, as was speedily to appear, with humiliating uncertainities, and almost as enlivening, or a least as momentous, as, to a philosophic mind, a sudden large apprehension of the Absolute. (GB, xlix-l)

The tracks in the snow are easily connected with the words of the text on the white page.

What is most important in this experience of reading for James is how he deviates and differs from the remembered readings in ways which the words of the text still allow. As James gains new impressions he subsequently makes fresh impressions on the snow -- literally and metaphorically breaking new ground -- as he uses his re-reading to enrich and enhance his expression and description of the matter at hand. He talks later in the Preface of the

growth of the immense array of terms, perceptual and expressional, that, after the fashion I have indicated, in sentence, passage and page, simply looked over the heads of the standing terms -- or perhaps rather, like alert winged creatures, perched on those diminished summits and aspired to the clearer air. (GB, lii)

These particular images of revision are important. Reading is figured as treading a snowy expanse, deviating from tracks, aspiring to "clearer air," an experience enabling something akin to "a sudden large apprehension of the Absolute". What is this element within the reading experience of the text which to James has more significance than the words themselves?

In J. Hillis Miller's incisive reading of this Preface (to which my own is indebted), he suggests that what James is describing is an encounter with the element to which the text gives

access. Miller defines "Absolute": "the word means 'unbound,' 'untied,' 'free of any shackles,'" and argues that only difference and deviation from the text can make it possible to distinguish between what the text says and a knowledge of what the text represents -- the "shining matter" which "gives the text whatever authenticity, value or interest it may have, a value and an interest in fact 'infinite'". This encounter is what makes reading "an act which is enlivening and momentous" (1987, 116-117). Miller notes that for James "reading is not of the text as such but of the thing that is latent and gathered within it as a force to determine ... a re-vision of what has been the latent law of the text" (120).⁸

In Iserian terms this passage from the final Preface depicts James the author describing an encounter as reader with the gaps of indeterminacy within his own texts. The Absolute may be read as the absences of meaning within a literary text which signal the presence of unformulated possibilities, the places where life enters the literary text as it is read. In terms of authorship, James's prefaces record what Richard Blackmur has called "the story of a story" (1934, ix). I should like to extend this notion and suggest that James's experience of reading depicted in the prefaces details a search for something more: the story of an unfinished story. His own process of revision is an attempt to more extensively render the situation depicted so that his reader might share this quality of experience and use the text for revisions and possibilities of his or her own.⁹

To read James is to be involved in infinite layers of possible interpretation. Our task as readers and co-authors is akin to James's as revisionist -- to "write in" the story of the unfinished story. The stance of the centre of consciousness as a reader/author makes an Iserian reading of James useful in many ways. An extension of Iser's theories of the reading process can be productive in examining how the characters of the novels act as readers, artists and often co-authors of their own texts so that James effects a crucial doubling of experience between reader and character.¹⁰ Iser's detailed description of the act of reading can elucidate the mental

experiences of the reader of a Jamesian text and the ordeals of consciousness undergone by the characters/readers within the text itself. In the four Jamesian novels explored here the interlinking of the reader's and the characters' fictionalising actions within the text takes an interesting form as the novels depict a struggle amongst the characters themselves for authorial control over the unwritten, unfinished story of their own text.

In each of the four novels the protagonists are involved in the construction of their selves, their reality and the inner reality of "the other" -- an authorial activity which always here entails the discovery of, and subsequent attempt to access, an unspoken, unformulated story. In the reading experience of the characters their "text" takes many forms. A city like Paris, *objets d'art* such as the Golden Bowl or the speech and facial expressions of the other, all may be indirect indications of an unexpressed interior reality and so at first take on the nature of inscrutable documents which must eventually be read, responded to, interpreted and constructed. These texts contain unformulated meanings about the characters' own existence which may powerfully influence their individual relation to their world and its people.

James's novels foreground what Iser describes as "the vital role fictions play in our own lives". Iser refers to Nelson Goodman's suggestions in Ways of Worldmaking that "we do not live in one reality but in many, and each of these realities is the result of processing that cannot be traced back" to "a single underlying world". Fictions then "are not the unreal side of reality" but "rather conditions that enable the production of worlds whose reality, in turn, is not to be doubted" (Iser 1990, 940).

Like Maisie Farange we are born into a prefabricated reality, a world of language, difference and signs. As children our education consists of the fictions or master narratives we are told about the world and ourselves. The first step towards independence in such a world is to take authorial control of our own life-story, an action often prompted (as in Maisie's case) by a sense

of what is absent and unformulated in these necessary fictions and must be formulated by our own imagination. Maisie cannot rely on the established private fictions of her family whose selfish motivations obscure the inner reality of their relations. The tropological use of play in What Maisie Knew is vitally important to the reading experience. Iser points out that in ontogenetic terms play allows the child to engage in a mental action that is quite distinct from what he or she actually perceives. The split between meaning and perception allows a play-space where "a defamiliarised meaning is acted out in a real situation". For Iser the play of the text has similarities with child's play as "it permits real limitations to be overstepped" (1989, 260).

Iser views the literary text as a play-space which allows us to stage who we are, in a reality which presents itself *as if* it were reality, and thereby discover and attempt to grasp what is unknowable about our existence. Due to the gaps of indeterminacy "in the novel ... the real and the possible co-exist" (Iser 1990, 950). As the real world is still present in the world of the text as a point of reference yet co-exists with imaginable possibilities, within the fictionality of the literary text the reader is allowed to experience what Iser calls "the simultaneity of the mutually exclusive" (1989, 239).

When applied to the mental activities of James's characters, Iser's notion of "consistency building" activities, by which a reader strives to create configurations of meaning within a text, reveals how Jamesian texts undermine the search for consistency by foregrounding the indeterminacy of life and the other. Demonstrating what Iser calls "the need for illusion in consistency building" such texts enact "an unmasking of traditional ways of grasping reality" (1984, 125). The "more the reader is drawn into the proceedings by playing the game of the text, the more he or she is played by the text". The staged play of the text does not "unfold like a pageant that the reader merely watches, but is an ongoing event and a happening for the reader, enabling and encouraging direct involvement" (Iser 1989, 258). In The Portrait of a Lady Isabel's quest to construct herself is a young woman's attempt to overstep the restriction of the dominant

narratives in her world, but her efforts at self-creation and the authorial efforts of her cousin Ralph as advocate of her freedom are undermined by the illusory consistency of Isabel's own fictionalising actions which allow her to be trapped as a character in the limiting self-serving fictions of others. She can only be freed from authorial constraint when she recognises the unuttered story in her past, which leads in turn to a reassessment of her present and her self.

Strether too is affected by an unuttered story which seems obscured beneath the glittering surface of Paris and conflicts with the narrow editorial mission he has been sent to enforce. The Ambassadors is perhaps one of James's most life-affirming works as Strether's experience of the unformulated allows a middle-aged man to see his life anew. Strether's search for the truth leads him to use fictionalising -- an action which results in an overstepping of his limited world into a bewildering but liberating world of possibilities.

In the text of The Golden Bowl however, the presence of such possibilities mutates into the threatening plurality of adult knowledge. At the outset of the novel James's complex text is aptly characterised as an intimidating and resistant white fog which shrouds the motives and emotions of the central characters. As the characters of The Golden Bowl struggle to read the unuttered story concealed within their family, the quest for an increasing amplitude of understanding becomes a struggle for authorial agency over a frighteningly mutable reality which seems to require the active (and often collaborative) shaping of a willed fiction one can live within.

Each of these stories contains an unuttered secret but these potent hidden presences within the text should not be misconstrued as fixed entities. To read James's texts in this way would be (as Iser notes in his discussion of this tale) to make the mistake of the critic in "The Figure in the Carpet" in believing that "they are to be extracted from the text as things in themselves" (1984, 5). Yeazell comments that in order to discuss Jamesian novels the critic often needs to "make explicit much that James's characters so carefully conceal from one another". She notes: "Adultery, theft,

deception, betrayal, even the fact of mortality itself -- all go unspoken and unnamed. And for the critic the temptation is strong to make these the crucial subjects of the novels: in proportion as the characters refuse to speak of such things, he longs to do so". As the reader and critic translate James's fictions into their own the danger for misinterpretation is real: "the critic re-writes the novels, makes of them fictions with which he is morally and epistemologically more comfortable" (1976b, 66).

The Jamesian novel offers a critique of the reading process, and what Iser describes as the action of fictionalising; it attempts to represent human efforts to contend with the unknowable aspects of existence. At the outset the reader needs to differentiate conscientiously between James's narrative and the narratives constructed by the characters in order to make sense of their world. In the self-awareness induced by the reading process James is attempting to subvert the construction of closed and comfortable fictions. Paul Armstrong argues that James attempts to manipulate the reader's response to his work "so as to educate them about the processes of construing and creating meaning" (1987, ix).¹¹

Iser asserts that "knowledge of what man is can only come about in the form of play" and in his recent work he suggests that the human need for the fictionalising actions of a text is a part of our anthropological make-up (1989, 245). Fictionalising allows humankind to "gain access to the inaccessible by inventing possibilities" (Iser 1990, 940):

If the borderlines of knowledge give rise to fictionalizing activity we might perceive an economy principle at work: what can be known need not be invented and so fiction always subsidises the unknowable. There are realities in human life which we experience yet cannot know. Love is perhaps the most striking example. ... We know that certain things exist, but we also know that we cannot know them, and this is the point at which our curiosity is aroused and we begin to invent. (1990, 951)

In "The Art of Fiction" James states that a novelist needs to be a sensitive and intelligent observer of life: "One of the people on whom nothing is lost" (TF, 35). In the Jamesian text this description does not fit only the author. In order to access and understand the ubiquitous presence of the

unfinished story which resides within the indeterminacy of the text itself, both reader and character must cultivate an artistic faculty which James describes in "The Art of Fiction" as the author's greatest source of strength, the power of reading: a fictionalising action which allows one to bridge the gaps present in a personal impression of life to access what is essentially unformulated except by an act of imagination:

The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it.... If experience consists of impressions, it must be said that impressions are experience ... they are the very air we breathe. (TF, 35)

The central characters of James's fiction are invariably people with a sensitive and heightened state of mind: intelligent, receptive and aware, they are creative and responsive readers in the face of the variable myriad of impressions that make up life. In sharing the fictionalising activities of these people the reader is implicitly summoned to engage in the same complex yet rewarding exercise of intelligence. James's comments on his choice of characters in the Preface to The Princess Casamassima clarify that their heightened ability to respond is what instigates the reader's response:

But there are degrees of feeling -- the muffled, the faint, the just sufficient, the barely intelligent, as we may say; and the acute, the intense ... -- the power to be finely aware and richly responsible. It is those moved in this latter fashion who "get most" out of all that happens to them and who in so doing enable us, as readers of their record, as participators by a fond attention, also to get most. (AN, 62)

Iser's description of the human need for fictionalising makes it clear that to simply know or discover that certain things exist is inadequate; the opportunity granted by the literary text is to know them as a part of one's own experience.¹² As James's comments in "The Art of Fiction" suggest, reading impressions may become an activity of expanding consciousness if we respond to the difficult demands before us:

What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of

consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue ... when the mind is imaginative it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations.... (TF, 35)

In a Jamesian text the centre of consciousness is the site of the text becoming a work as the imaginative minds of author, reader and character reach into the unformulated to convert the faintest hints of life into revelations. My study of James takes as a structural guide his famous image of consciousness as an ever-expanding web of experience. Though neither "limited" nor "complete" a consciousness develops, the innocence, limits, and hope of childhood continually extend to an encounter with measureless possibilities involving the daunting anxiety of interpretation and composition. A reconsideration of James's stance as artist and reader is vitally important for assessing this shared activity of interpretation, putting and doing things within the novels.

In the revision of his novels for the New York Edition, James asserts that to read is to re-read. Becoming one of those people on whom nothing is lost is to be involved in a constant revision of experience. Horne points out that James's very process of revision "is a test of life's development and requires (and endangers) a trust in the continuing value of what has been done.... to reappropriate something is to resume a relation with it" (1990, 48). Horne notes that "until the New York Edition James regularly claimed that once he had written a book it was dead to him", and he was deeply disturbed in contemplating the revision process "in case on rereading his past works he would not be able to read them at all or would be impelled to rewrite them entirely. Such anxiety anticipated the loss of life in them" (76-83). The fear is articulated in the Preface to Roderick Hudson, in James's sense of the possible disastrous outcome involved in risking re-engagement with his past productions -- that they would be revealed as "too dead to revive" (AN, 11). For James failure as an artist would be confirmed by a discovery that his work was unable to live up to pressure of time and change because his art had failed to make life -- not in the sense of forming it, but in generating it.

In the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady James affirms the need for the novel to be "the result of some direct impression or perception of life":

There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connexion than that of the perfect dependence of the "moral" sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it. The question comes back thus, obviously, to the kind and the degree of the artist's prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs. The quality and capacity of that soil, its ability to "grow" with due freshness and straightness any vision of life, represents, strongly or weakly, the projected morality. (PL, xix)

In the process of revision the "quality and capacity" of James's own authorial "soil" is proved by a relieved and joyous experience during his readings of his own texts -- the story's organic unplanned growth when re-read by its author confirms "his active sense of life" (GB, liii). James's quest in revision is the author's search for the "felt life" produced by his work as the ultimate essence and test of its value. In rereading The Ambassadors "the old intentions bloom and flower again" (TA, 44). In the Preface to The Golden Bowl the "assault of the new reading" produces "a flower that blooms by a beautiful law of its own ... in the very heart of the gathered sheaf". The process of re-reading is one which revives and releases the felt life which the words of the text contain: "it is *there* already", but confirmed by "chances and changes ... arrests and surprises; emotions alike of disappointment and elation" which "couldn't at all [be] forecast" but are felt in the re-reading "all of which means, obviously, that the whole thing is a *living* affair" (GB, lv).

These comments challenge the notion of James as inviolate aesthete or self-determined "Master" of definitive authorial agency at one remove from the experiences of everyday reality, and reveal instead a craftsman concerned with the merger of art and life whose authorial mastery is directed to encourage the reader's active participation in the life of his text. James's revision presents the author as one of "those who passionately cultivate the image of life and the art ... of projecting it" (GB, liii). The descriptions of his own reading experience illustrate that the process of revision for James the author is in an important way linked to the process of putting and doing

his characters and readers go through by way of creatively revising their visions of the world: "the how and the whence and the why these intenser lights of experience come into being and insist on shining.... The 'old ' matter is there ... yet for due testimony, for reassertion of value, perforating as by some strange and fine, some latent and gathered force, a myriad more adequate channels" (GB, liii).

If fiction is understood as a way of world-making, such a notion takes cognizance of the necessity of private and public fictions in our construction of self and reality; but in his novels and prefaces James foregrounds the inadequacy of superficial or final solutions because of what they might neglect to regard. Experience is never limited and never complete -- James's texts assert that the tyranny involved in personal assertions of authorial agency may be avoided only if artistic volition is guided by a responsive openness to elements of the text which revise and re-define reductive configurations of meaning. The search for truth must extend beyond the sense of an anxious treasure hunt for buried certainties. If discovered, the presence of the unformulated within the fictions which make up humankind's reality may bring about a liberating and often terrifying sense of unknowable possibilities. The challenge for both reader and character is to resist the formulation of comfortable fictions in favour of an attention to what James describes in "The Art of Fiction" as "the importance of exactness, of truth of detail" (*sic* TF, 35).

James's forming of the reader therefore is not in pursuit of a didactic moral idea but the reverse of dogma: the "truth of detail". Martha Nussbaum argues that in Jamesian texts the ethical quality of the content is enhanced and complemented by a style which reflects the author's beliefs: "The text itself displays, and is, a high kind of moral activity".¹³ For Nussbaum James's morality grows out of a high attention to the complexity, mutability, nuance and particularity of human life (1992, 161). The text therefore requires a certain quality of mind -- if to read ethically is to read well, the reader should strive to be a person on whom nothing is lost. Moral activity in James

evolves out of the particular experience of reading demanded by the text itself, as James affirms: "its sole condition [is] that I should intelligently attend" (GB, liv).

If author, reader and character are all concerned with fictionalising and the operation of individual authorial agency, the ethical quality of their willed fictions will be measured by the extent of their attention: "the deepest quality of a work of art" produced, as James asserts in "The Art of Fiction", "will always be the quality of mind of the producer" (TF, 43). In his final Preface James asserts that an artistic production "ranks itself as wrong through not being in the 'conditions of life'" (GB, lx). To be "complete" -- the term applied to Madame Merle and equally applicable in various degrees to characters such as Maisie's parents, Gilbert Osmond, Mrs Newsome, Sarah Pocock and finally but ambiguously Maggie Verver -- is to assert an implacable vision of life, a fiction impervious to revision and thereby devoid of "felt life" and morality.

The ideal way of putting things for James himself is the example of Balzac, who as author "re-assaulted by supersessive terms, re-penetrated by finer channels, never had on the one hand seen or said it all or had on the other ceased to press forward" (GB, lvi). What is needed for true freedom and morality in human living and doing is a "reviving and reacting" vision which is constantly revising -- a mode of putting which takes cognizance of possibilities (GB, lvi). Revision demonstrates a sense of the continuity and interlinking of relations and, as I shall argue, the development in James's characters of a revising vision shares important links with the unsettling acts of renunciation which close many of the novels. Horne notes that for James "one of the conditions for the sense of a work of art as finished ('definitive' like James's Edition) is a sense of imaginative life as capable of being extended. You can only feel it properly to cease if it hasn't ceased to feel" (1990, 99). As James states in the Preface to Roderick Hudson:

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so. (AN, 5)

Joseph Conrad called James "the historian of fine consciences" and in Conrad's Gallic

English "conscience" echoes the French "*conscience*" -- "consciousness" (Rogers 1987, 391). The expansive quality that Conrad ascribes to Marlow's brand of story telling in Heart of Darkness is fittingly applicable to James's own:

to him the meaning of the episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of those misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (Conrad 1989, 30)

James's centring of his story within a fine consciousness allows for layers of reading, rendering and expression in an extending amplitude of doing and putting "with experience ... spread round us in a widening, not in a narrowing circle" (AN, 5). Within this circular relation art makes life, and life makes art. As the artistry of consciousness gives shape to life, the moral test James applied to ways of living and putting is the same as that applicable to works of art which he judged by the quality of felt life they were capable of producing. My examination of this process in terms of the characters' reading and authoring experiences will demand and entail a detailed and open attention to the texts in accordance with the requirements of "felt life" -- without prescribing finality or completeness in the process. The difficult challenge facing the critic -- and the reader -- is that only a deep emotional commitment can grant the understanding which permits adequate, though never totalising, analysis. In his essay on "Criticism" (1891), James viewed the role of the literary critic as another form of interconnected doing and putting. The task of the critic is

To lend himself, to project himself, to steep himself, to feel and feel until he understands and to understand so well that he can say. (TF, 320)

Notes

1. In actual fact, the New York Edition has in no way demarcated James's *oeuvre*: early editions of his novels and stories continue to be published and read, as well as being the focus of much critical commentary. The very existence of two versions of the same novel profoundly questions

the insistence on one definitive text. In many cases (for various reasons) the earlier versions are preferred by readers and critics alike.

2. Philip Horne notes that from an early stage in the revision process "James was bothered by the need to be more than critically -- or less than critically -- exclusive. In the writing of his own fiction, the artistic economy that requires an organic function for every element of the work is quite distinct from the commercial economy of the stringent demands of publishers, which threaten to reduce his intentions to senseless brevity" (1990, 13).

3. As John Carlos Rowe comments "it is James's attraction to the representation of mental processes that have made phenomenological readings of his work seem so appropriate" (1984, 228). Paul Armstrong argues for instance that "James's own perspective is essentially phenomenological -- that his understanding of the process of knowing, the art of fiction, and experience as a whole coincides in important ways with the standpoint of phenomenology" (1983, vii). In her recent study Merle Williams draws clear parallels between "the flexible and creative intellectual approach of phenomenology" and James's own notions of being and seeing: "the phenomenologist is consistently concerned with the creative power of consciousness, with its dynamic energy and with its potential for unfolding systems of meaning" (1993, 13). Iser's reception-aesthetic is an approach to the reading process which owes much to the philosophical tradition of phenomenology and attempts to encompass the dualism of reader and text, act and structure in the phenomenological concept of intentionality.

4. The reader-focused work of Wolfgang Iser forms a consistent elaboration of his attempts to describe in detail the processes which involve the reader in the play of text. His two recent books posit and seek to explore the notion of what he calls "literary anthropology". Iser argues that the need for the experiences made possible by the literary text may be sourced and understood as rooted in the human anthropological make-up.

5. There are strong conceptual links between James and Iser in terms of their notion of reading. Iser begins *The Act of Reading* by using James's short story "The Figure in the Carpet" to illustrate his own claims about the meaning of a literary text as "the product of an interaction between the textual signals and the reader's act of comprehension" (Iser 1984, 9). Iser argues that James's title for this story foregrounds the imagistic nature of meaning: "the formulated text, as Vereker and Corvick understand it, represents a pattern, a structured indicator to guide the imagination of the reader; and so the meaning can only be grasped as an image.... The image cannot be related to any such frame [of reference] for it does not represent something that exists; on the contrary, it brings into existence something that is to be found neither outside the book nor on its printed page" (Iser 1984, 9).

6. Iser's conception of the gaps of indeterminacy of a literary text is informed by Roman Ingarden's notion of "sentence thought" which views the text as constructed of "intentional sentence correlatives". Sentences link up differently to form units of meaning but are only component parts of the whole. The reader's task is to reveal the subtle connections between the correlatives and herein lies the text's indeterminate meaning. Once involved in sentence thought each intentional sentence correlative opens up a particular horizon which is modified and sometimes completely changed by successive sentences (Iser 1984, 112-4).

7. In his essay "The Phenomenology of Reading" Georges Poulet views the interaction of reader and text in terms of the merger between two consciousnesses: "I am aware of a rational being, of

a consciousness; the consciousness of another, no different from the one I automatically assume in every human being I encounter, except that in this case the consciousness is open to me, lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me, with un-heard of licence, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels (1986, 351).

8. In speaking of "the Absolute" in this description, James is evoking the type of encounter which might be experienced by a disciple of the Oxford contemporary philosopher F.H. Bradley, author of Appearance and Reality. "The Absolute" is for Bradley the indescribable wordless state of reality without relations that lies behind the "appearance" of reality that our contradictory language describes.

9. Horne describes the manner in which James's publisher James Pinker greatly facilitated the revision process: the original text was cut out and stuck onto larger pages to "afford him a margin for revision, more space into which to expand with a new sense" (1990, 7). For James this put the book, as he described in a letter to Pinker, "into a form it is a joy for me to work on" (quoted in Horne, 6). I would suggest that the image of the pasted pages of revision is an interesting metaphor for the sense of expanding ways of "putting" and "writing in" that inform the reading process of James's novels.

10. Donna Przybylowicz views the characters in late James as phenomenological artists of reality who envision "the transcendental subject as the source and origin of meaning and truth" thus retreating from "spatio-temporal realms" into a false plenitude (1986, 7) which she calls "the ideal logocentric system of art" (68). Przybylowicz suggests that in James's own autobiographical writing he attempts the same pursuit. Her approach tends to obscure the sense of the necessity for a transactive dialectic between self and world foregrounded by the Jamesian text which offers a complex critique of the fictionalising artistry of consciousness as an activity which can cause the dehumanisation or aestheticisation of the other.

11. Paul Armstrong identifies James as one of the writers on the cusp of modernism whose texts "examine self-consciously the processes of meaning, creation and interpretation which most traditional fiction quietly exploits to achieve verisimilitude" (1987, 1).

12. In explaining the human need for fiction Iser quotes a passage from Milan Kundera's The Unbearable Lightness of Being which I include here as it does much to clearly illustrate the type of experiences made possible for authors and readers of fiction who go on reading despite their awareness of the fictionality of the text: "staring impotently across a courtyard, at a loss for what to do ... betraying, yet lacking the will to abandon the glamorous path of betrayal; raising one's fists with the crowds in the Grand March; displaying one's wit before hidden microphones -- I have known all these situations, I have experienced them myself, yet none of them give rise to the person my curriculum vitae and I represent. The characters in my novels are my unrealised possibilities.... Each one has crossed a border that I myself have circumvented. It is that crossed border (the border beyond which my own "I" ends) which attracts me most. For beyond that border begins the secret the novel asks about. The novel ... is an investigation of human life in the trap the world has become" (quoted in Iser 1990, 949).

13. Martha Nussbaum is primarily a philosopher but in her recent inter-disciplinary study, Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature, she is committed to the view that the works of imaginative literature are not simply material for the moral philosopher to work on but ethical reflections in their own right. My analysis owes much to her incisive readings of Jamesian texts.

Chapter One.

Finding Out for Yourself: Knowing Without Being Told in What Maisie Knew.

Maisie is James's youngest protagonist. In presenting her youthful experience James involves the reader in the mental endeavour of a consciousness making sense of an unknown world -- a situation not altogether unlike that of a reader beginning a new text. As a result of this likeness the childhood sensibility is an apt starting point for exploring the question of the reading experience in James's work because his representation of the development of Maisie's incipient consciousness accentuates central concerns and techniques within all his art. Like The Spoils of Poynton, What Maisie Knew was written after James's failure as a playwright, an event which may have forced a reconsideration and re-evaluation of his art; the story of this "patient little girl" is in many ways his celebration of what the novel as an art-form can do, particularly the kinds of experiences his own novels can make accessible to the reader (MK, 15). The difficult questions Jamesian novels pose about ethics, epistemology and behaviour all centre on the operations of human consciousness as the driving force in constituting as well as comprehending the world we exist within. What Maisie Knew marks James's return to and reaffirmation of the experience of reading as a valuable adventure of consciousness.

The demands made on the reader in What Maisie Knew throw into sharp relief the importance of the indirect method James utilises in presenting the action in his novels through a centre of consciousness. Barbara Hardy argues that his use of a spectator produces a subtle "self-contemplating narrative of fiction":

since he so often centres the interest in a spectator he can show and exploit a slight but subtle gap between happening and interpretation: the narrative contains a narrative of what happens counterpointed on a narrative of what seems to be happening or what the spectator tells himself is happening ... Amongst his major themes is the relation between what occurred and what was reported, expected, believed, dreamed and falsified. (Hardy 1975, 20)

Perceptions are the primary events in Jamesian novels, which are always implicitly concerned with

the experience of reading as an action of both interpretation and composition. Because of James's emphasis on the action of consciousness external events become of secondary importance in his novels compared to what may be read into them. In the Preface to What Maisie Knew James makes it clear that what attracts his authorial interest is not the poignancy of the child's situation itself but what the child would make of such a situation: "the ugly facts, so stated or conceived, by no means constituted the whole appeal" (MK, 2). In his notebooks he reminds himself emphatically to take account of her status as spectator and interpreter: "It takes place before Maisie -- EVERYTHING TAKES PLACE BEFORE MAISIE. That is part of the essence of the thing" (NB, 149). In the Preface James states that the contemptible reality of Maisie's parents and guardians holds no interest in and of itself: the essence that absorbs both author and reader is the subjective artistry of Maisie's consciousness. With the transforming power of her innocent "freshness" the ugly facts are "objects embalmed in her wonder" and "become as she deals with them, the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art" (MK, 8).

The first picture presented of Maisie in the novel highlights her status and location as both spectator and player in her parents' antagonistic game. Like the reader Maisie is simultaneously isolated and involved:

Only a drummer boy in a ballad or story could have been so thick in the fight. She was taken into the confidence of passions on which she fixed just the stare she might have had for images bounding across the wall in the slide of a magic lantern. Her little world was phantasmagoric -- strange shadows dancing on a sheet. It was as if the whole performance were given for her -- a mite of a half scared infant in a great dim theatre. (MK, 15)

The detached tone and legal language of the prologue introduce the external facts of the situation, but from the moment the reader enters Maisie's consciousness we must share Maisie's story from Maisie's point of view. Maisie is still a child and her interpretations of the conventions of society and language are necessarily limited: "the infant mind" as James notes in his Preface "would at best leave great gaps and voids" (MK, 5). The narrator in What Maisie Knew has the special

function of explaining what Maisie learns in language she has not yet access to. James explains that at the outset of the novel both narrator and reader know more about her predicament than Maisie can possibly express:

Small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them; their vision is at any moment much richer, their apprehension even constantly stronger, than their prompt, their producible, vocabulary. (MK, 6)

Presenting the reader with a narrator to constantly supplement the gaps in the text with adult knowledge James makes explicit the distinction between event and understanding. In Iserian terms the gaps in Maisie's understanding are points of indeterminacy that kindle the creative involvement of the reader's consciousness with the text. For Iser texts that deliberately exploit the gaps in the narrative drive the reader to become almost exclusively occupied with a search for connections and thereby increasingly conscious of the complex but largely unconscious labour required in constructing meaning from a text. In Jamesian novels a curious doubling occurs with regard to the mental actions of the reader and the central consciousness. The actions of consciousness are portrayed almost in slow motion allowing detailed focus on the elusive intricacies of interpretation: the reader is perpetually made aware of making meaning of the central character's attempts to create meaning. As James comments in the Preface:

our own commentary constantly attends and amplifies.... The difference here is but a shade: it is her relation, her activity of spirit, that determines all our concerns -- we simply take advantage of these things better than she herself. (MK, 6)

Jamesian novels make the reading process an implicit theme: in compelling his readers into a heightened awareness of doing our share of the task of bringing the book to life James highlights our own processes of understanding: what phenomenologists would describe as the action of a consciousness intending a world. Iser's exploration of the reading process draws on the ideas of phenomenology to investigate how it is the merger of the reader's consciousness with the text that creates a realised work of art. In a Jamesian novel the reader observes a centre of consciousness intending its world, whilst simultaneously on his or her part "intending" as it were the world of the

text.

The phenomenological concept of intentionality does not mean desire but denotes an act by which the subject conceptualises or is conscious of an object thereby effectually bringing the object into being, remembering that the intuition of the object simultaneously constitutes the subject as a vessel of consciousness. The subject is thus (in intending the object) paradoxically the origin of all meaning but is also the "effect" of consciousness (Freund 1987, 136-138).

In What Maisie Knew the narrator is the reader's guide, not only to what Maisie knows but to how Maisie knows it. According to phenomenology the two cannot be separated. The title is significant, for in referring to the novel as a whole it confirms that there is no division between knower and knowledge. Maisie's consciousness is both the source of all meaning in her life and its effect. Her knowledge is not a concrete detachable product of her experience. At no point does she wake up suddenly into knowledge; her whole little life is a process of learning and knowing.¹ Maisie's epistemological progress is a process of both step by step accumulation and increasingly sophisticated interpretation. As she grows up Maisie not only gathers more knowledge about the objects and people in her world but constantly needs to modify her interpretations.

From the reader's first entry into Maisie's consciousness, the child's initiation into the business of knowing presents a critique of the human effort to construct reality: James states in the Preface that "The one presented register of the whole complexity would be the play of the child's confused and obscure notation of it" (MK, 5). In "The Art of Fiction" James asserts his conviction of life's immense possibilities: "the measure of reality is very hard to fix -- Humanity is immense and reality has a myriad forms" (TF, 387-388). Because Maisie is a child "she does not have the more nearly fixed perspective of an adult protagonist" (Blackall 1979, 130). Nor is her developing relation to reality allowed much stability. Owing to her periodical shifts from one parent to another Maisie lives with constant uncertainty, her sense of security challenged by the court's literal judgement of Solomon: "She was divided in two and the portions tossed impartially

to the disputants" (MK, 11).

The structuring of the first chapters of the novel duplicates the constant alteration in perspective to which Maisie is subjected: from one chapter to the next Maisie lives with a different parent. This erratic lifestyle leaves her constantly exposed to conflicting narratives as to the truth of her situation. At the outset of the novel both the reader's and Maisie's mental energies are focused towards piecing together the story her mother tells about her father with the contrasting story her father tells about her mother: "These were the opposed principles in which Maisie was to be educated -- she was to fit them together as she might" (MK, 13).

Maisie is primarily useful to her parents as a bearer of tales but her interpreting faculty is not fully developed so she uses language without understanding its meanings. She can bring out the word "compromise" at the age of five to rounds of applause and knows "that a person could be compromised as that someone could be slapped with a hairbrush or left alone in the dark" without understanding the word itself (MK, 129). In Maisie's mind there is still a gap between language and concepts. Her simple mimicry records the facts, faithfully reporting to the spouses what they say about the other without attaching meaning to their words. Indeed as Blackall points out, motivated by a impulse to protect Maisie from the ugliness of her parents' relationship, her nurse Moddle actively discourages interpretation (Blackall 1979, 131):

she found in her mind a collection of images and echoes to which meanings were attachable -- images and echoes kept for her in the childish dusk, the dim closet, the high drawers, like games she wasn't yet big enough to play. The great strain meanwhile was that of carrying by the right end the things her father said about her mother -- things mostly indeed that Moddle, on a glimpse of them, as if they had been complicated toys or difficult books, took out of her hands and put away in the closet ... all tumbled up with the things, shuffled into the same receptacle, that her mother had said about her father. (MK, 17)

Because she does not yet interpret their words Maisie can be used by both her parents as "a messenger of insult" bearing heavily loaded words between her mother and father (20). As Moddle points out Maisie feels "the strain" of such an office without understanding why such

things are burdensome (MK, 17). Maisie carries the words to her parents as if they were weighty, unwieldy toys in a complicated game in which she is not yet old enough to participate. The tropological use of play in What Maisie Knew is very important to James's method; it not only illustrates Maisie's developing perceptions in terms of the objects in her world but blurs the division between the child's world of make-believe and the adult world of interpretation and pretence. In both situations the creative imagination is at play not only revealing meaning but creating it.

The image of words as toys in a game of make-believe recalls the distinctions made by William James about imaginative world construction. William James distinguished reality from truth, which is our belief about reality. He argued that the relation between words and things is fabricated and arbitrary. Reality might be touched but is accessible only through some surrogate already provided by human thinking for our consumption: "If so vulgar expression were allowed us, we might say that wherever we find it, it has already been faked" (WJ, 119-20). In presenting Maisie in the centre of a whirlwind of lies, the novel suggests that her reality has already been fabricated. Maisie is "at the age for which all stories are true and all conceptions are stories" and in their bid to teach her "the stern truth that should be her safeguard against the other" Maisie's consciousness becomes "a boundless receptacle" for the evil her parents "had the gift of thinking or *pretending* to think of each other" (MK, 19, my italics). Story is the very means by which both Maisie and her parents attempt to understand their world.

Maisie's initial experience in the novel suggests that humankind's need for fiction is innate. Conceptions are stories; ideas are fictions which attempt to access or control reality. As Barbara Hardy has noted we live in a world shaped by story, permeated by constant acts of narration and interpretation: "Nature not art makes us all story-tellers". Hardy argues that what she calls the "Narrative Imagination" is a common human possession. The novel does not invent its structures - they should be seen as a primary act of mind transferred to art from life. Narrative form should

not be seen as an aesthetic invention used by artists to control, manipulate and explore the life we tend to separate from art, but rather a heightened use of the narrative formations of ordinary life (Hardy 1975, vii-4).

James's novel itself is thus a narrative about the human use of narrative. Maisie's primary educational resources are stories, both those in books and the fictions, lies and fabrications of reality that throng around her. As a good little listener Maisie absorbs a great deal through narrative: she is simultaneously teller, hearer and participant. Oblivious to any controversy regarding her mother's employment of Miss Overmore Maisie listens spellbound to the story the pretty governess tells of her life: "Maisie didn't know what people meant, but she knew very soon all the names of all the sisters; she could say them off better than she could say the multiplication-table" (MK, 21).

Throughout the novel lessons about life are linked to Maisie's formal education or lack of it. James suggests the world Maisie exists in and learns from is one large text requiring constant interpretation; her governess Mrs Wix's "order was a circle as vast as the untravelled globe" and her besotted preoccupation with Sir Claude turns lesson time into a place of reverie:

there was no moments between them at which the topic could be irrelevant, no subject they were going into, not even the principal dates or the auxiliary verbs, in which it was further off than the turn of the page ... if the truth must be told this edifying interchange constituted for the time the little girl's chief education. (MK, 61)

In Mrs Wix's stories Maisie discovers a shelter from the pain and restrictions of her own life. Together Mrs Wix and Maisie share the "unutterable and inexhaustible little secret" of her dead daughter Clara Matilda and Mrs Wix's realm of story seems to offer Maisie a place that is as safe as Clara Matilda, as removed from everyday life as death itself. Mrs Wix seems to inhabit and offer a reality that is almost entirely fictional:

She took refuge on the firm ground of fiction, through which indeed there curled the blue river of truth. She knew swarms of stories, mostly those of the novels she had read; relating them with a memory that never faltered and a wealth of detail

that was Maisie's delight. They were all about love and beauty and countesses and wickedness. Her conversation was practically an endless narrative, a great garden of romance, with sudden vistas into her own life These were the parts where they most lingered; she made the child take again with her every step of her long, lame course and think it beyond magic or monsters. (MK, 29)

The stories Mrs Wix tells are primarily romantic tales, and the passage demonstrates both the child's pleasure and the distortion of reality involved in such tales. As a young child Maisie relates the absolutes of fairy-tale to the people and emotions in her own life. Her mother's lover Mr Perriam "is quite her idea of a heathen Turk" (MK, 73); her father's Countess lives in a dwelling that seems to spring from the Arabian Nights; Sir Claude's appearance suggests he is as "Mrs Wix, in the long stories she told her pupil, always described the lovers of her distressed beauties -- 'the perfect gentleman and strikingly handsome'"(MK, 52). In the relief Maisie discovers in Sir Claude's company she feels "the wildness of a rescued castaway" and in her determination to protect his relationship with Mrs Beale from her mother she sets "her teeth like an Indian captive" (MK, 57). What is interesting is that in their interpretations of events the adults in the novel seem as childish as Maisie. Their categorical definitions of other people expose such ideas to be equally fictional: her parents are rigid and uncompromising in their belief that the other is thoroughly evil; Mrs Beale laughs at Maisie's suggestion that her mother's young lover might become her "real tutor" because she is "a *real* governess" (MK, 37); and Mrs Wix "clearly on the strength of his charming portrait, made up her mind that Sir Claude promised her a future" (MK, 43).

The simplistic explanations Maisie is offered by Mrs Wix about the transforming power of romantic love are constantly subverted by the transient reality of her parents' affections. When Maisie encounters the Captain in Kensington Gardens she is so deeply affected by his words because he offers her a contradictory narrative: in his praise and affection for Ida "he spoke of her mother as she had never heard anyone speak". The Captain calls her mother "an angel" whilst "brute", the word that characterises Ida in Sir Claude's less flattering description, still hangs in the air. The Captain's descriptions of her mother render Mrs Wix's account of Sir Claude's affection

"as empty ... as the chorus in a children's game" (MK, 117). Maisie's need to be loved induces her belief in the Captain's account of her mother, and it prompts her reliance on the romantic descriptions of Sir Claude offered by the love-struck Mrs Wix and Mrs Beale. Her childish good faith often puts her at risk, as she is co-opted in others' fictions for their own purposes.

Both parents use Maisie to impose definitive restrictions on any interpretation of their own texts. She functions not only as storyteller but as a character in the story they tell themselves and the world of who they are. Beale and Miss Overmore use Maisie as a pretext to live together; Maisie's education is sacrificed in order that she may be kept at home to prevent Ida coming down on them. By "keeping [them] perfectly proper" Maisie's presence allows them to fabricate an appropriate appearance (MK, 37). After they are married Maisie may be discarded because she is no longer "required at home as -- it was Mrs Beale's own amusing word -- a little duenna" (MK, 47). Ida's use of Maisie is just as self-serving. When she brings Mr Perriam to visit Maisie in the schoolroom it is clear she is posturing in society as a wronged and dedicated mother: "I bored him with you darling -- I bore everyone" (MK, 74). Maisie clings to Mrs Wix, perceptive of the auxiliary position she holds in the texts of the other adults: as the door of the schoolroom closes "the parenthesis closed with a prompt click" (MK, 75).

What releases Maisie from the tyranny of what Carren Kaston has called a "parental" house of fiction is the discovery of the existence of a story beneath the one she is told (Kaston 1984, 7). She becomes increasingly adept at accessing this unuttered story by relying on her personal estimations of character and cultivating an ability to read the latent meanings concealed in her situation. Maisie's perceptive abilities develop because of a breakthrough which initiates her disengagement from the vicious circle of lies her parents tell themselves and one another. The "great date in her still small life" in which she both realises and relinquishes the ambassadorial role she has been co-opted by her parents into playing sets her free both to read and author her own story; "the complete vision, private but final, of the strange office she filled" brings about her first

independent gesture: "She puzzled out with imperfect signs that ... everything was bad because she was employed to make it so. Her parted lips locked themselves in a determination to be employed no longer" (MK, 21).

The "moral revolution" in her life occurs with her discovery of another form of language that seems to speak more truth than the manipulative rhetoric her parents use (MK, 19). Maisie's first encounter with this unspoken language occurs with the question she asks Miss Overmore, the first question she asks in the novel: "Does he know he lies?" Instructed by her mother to tell her father "that he lies and he knows he lies" the question six-year old Maisie puts to her pretty governess about her father has deeper ramifications than mere childish misunderstanding (MK, 21). Because she is not conversant with conventional figures of speech Maisie's queries interrogate meanings that to an adult would go without saying and through her questions James both unpicks the subterfuge and punctures the shared fictions and meanings of the adult world.

A lie is commonly understood to be an intentional act of deceit, the self-conscious telling of a fiction, but James uses Maisie's questioning of her mother's emphatic figure of speech to mark an important division in the act of lying. Maisie does not ask whether her father really does lie but whether he knows that he does. Up to this point Maisie herself has been telling her parents what she believes to be the truth. Maisie's questioning of the notion of lying inaugurates an important modification of her understanding of truth: perhaps papa is not speaking the truth about mamma but perhaps he doesn't know it. With the first question his little protagonist asks in the novel, James highlights for the reader that the lines between truth and lies are never clearly drawn; because we can understand our world only by interpreting it, fact and fiction are not polar opposites but interfused elements of human understanding.

The answer Maisie receives to her question leads to "a change in her life" as she recognises for the first time that the truth is not often so much spoken out loud as glimpsed in careful sensitive observation (MK, 21). Miss Overmore addresses her "in the unmistakable

language of a pair of eyes of deep dark grey" which reveal "as distinctly as possible" the confusion of loyalties she faces through having met (and flirted with) Maisie's father in the park: "Somehow in the light of Miss Overmore's lovely eyes that incident came back to Maisie with a charm it hadn't had at the time" (MK, 22).

With a "mere roll of those fine eyes" Miss Overmore sows "the seed of secrecy", not only indicating another story beneath the one the adults emphatically tell Maisie but illustrating that she herself need not continue as a willing teller or participant in that story (MK, 20). Maisie's discovery of an inner self coincides with her discovery of the concealing inner selves possessed by other people. It is significant that the first step towards independence Maisie takes is to lie and to know that she lies. She frees herself from manipulation by constructing a fiction: "the theory of her stupidity" which is eventually embraced by her parents. As a result of her exchange with Miss Overmore the first fiction this intelligent child tells is to pretend to be dull-witted and imperceptive: "She would forget everything, she would repeat nothing, and when, as a tribute to the successful application of her system, she began to be called a little idiot, she tasted a pleasure new and keen" (MK, 20).

With the disturbing image of the dolls that suddenly spring to life with Maisie's awareness James tropologically links her discovery of an unuttered story to a new sense of individuality: "The stiff dolls on the dusky shelves began to move their arms and legs; old forms and phrases began to have a sense that frightened her" (MK, 20-21). Like the fairy-tale Pinocchio Maisie becomes a real girl with the realisation that she possesses an inner self: what Paul Armstrong terms a "Self-for-Self" in contrast to a "Self-for-Others" driven by a need to please (Armstrong 1983, 137).² Maisie finds a place of safety within her precarious situation in silence and the omission of language: "She had a new feeling, the feeling of danger; on which a new remedy rose to meet it, the idea of an inner self or, in other words, concealment" (MK, 20).

For Maisie "concealment had never necessarily meant deception; she had grown up among

things as to which her foremost knowledge was that she was never to ask about them" (MK, 32). Nothing is ever explained to Maisie; Sir Claude and Mrs Wix offer her a sense of assurance because they stand out as the two people "she had met in her life who ever explained" (MK, 105). Nothing at her mother's home seems "explicable with a grave face" and the laughter that Maisie's questions often evokes is a defence mechanism, an exclusionary device that sets up a hierarchy of knowledge which undermines her need to understand (MK, 32). From a very early age Maisie is characterised by a need to know which is consistently thwarted. Open discussion and explanation are not possible in Maisie's world, not only because she is a child but due to the unspeakable nature of her parents' affairs: "Everything had something behind it: life was like a long, long corridor with rows of closed doors. She had learned that at these doors it was wise not to knock - - this seemed to produce from within such sounds of derision" (MK, 33). Maisie's thirst for information and knowledge is a combination of natural childlike curiosity and the desperate insecurity that is a product of her unstable position: "her sense of freedom to make things out for herself ... was helped by an emotion far from intrinsically sweet -- the increase of the alarm that had most haunted her meditations" (MK, 79).

What quickens Maisie's perceptions is the consistent threat of abandonment; the need to preempt and predict the hour when "with two fathers, two mothers and two homes, six protections in all, she shouldn't know 'wherever' to go" (MK, 79). Her detection of an unspoken language she can read and interpret is the singular lesson of her childhood; to allay fear and uncertainty Maisie learns to know without being told: "questions were almost always improper; but she learned on the other hand soon to recognise how at last, sometimes, patient little silences and intelligent little looks could be rewarded with delightful little glimpses" (MK, 124). "Find out for yourself!" are the words with which her mother dismissively greets her inquiries. Finding out for herself is how Maisie learns to know, repeating these words to her doll Lisette with whom she acts out the game of concealment she needs to play in order to survive. In her games with Lisette

in which she "often imitated the shrieking ladies" Maisie can alleviate her own bewildering sense of the unknown, projecting the "darkness" of ignorance onto her French doll: "She could only pass on her lessons and study to produce on Lisette the impression of having mysteries in her life, wondering the while whether she succeeded in the air of shading off, like her mother, into the unknowable" (MK, 33).

In the necessity of finding out for herself Maisie learns to be an able interpreter of signs, and a great deal of the humour in the novel is a result of Maisie's ability to read a wealth of hidden meaning into the kinesics of her family -- her father's empty grins, Sir Claude's blows on his pretty moustache and her mother's low cut bosom: "the lower her bosom was cut the more it was to be gathered she was wanted elsewhere" (MK, 70). She soon learns to translate the meanings implied in physical contact and distinguish the shrieks and tugs of demonstration from real affection: "from the first, such pats and pulls had struck her as the steps and signs of other people's business and even a little as the wriggle and overflow of their difficulties" (MK, 152). Maisie determines how to read her parent's words in the same way as she learns to "master what 'it said' on the papers" of the "games in boxes with printed directions" which Sir Claude brings her as gifts (MK, 59-60).

The love-affair between Sir Claude and Mrs Beale is in many ways induced by Maisie herself. James describes in the Preface how his interest is prompted by the irony involved in "the child becoming a centre and pretext for a fresh system of misbehaviour" (MK, 3). In the development of the relationship between her step-parents, Maisie feels the conscious operation of her artistic will. Maisie functions as a pretext in Sir Claude's developing relationship with Mrs Beale but there is a sense of genuine affection between them. Maisie takes Mrs Beale's description of Ida and Beale as "a pretty pair of parents" quite literally; it "presently left her free to catch at the pleasant possibility, in connection with herself, of a relationship much happier as between Mrs Beale and Sir Claude than as between mamma and papa" (MK, 51). With her step-parents Maisie

seeks a way to rewrite her story, and redress the lack of filial love in her life. The variable repetitions of the phrase "I've brought you and her together!" are reminiscent of many allusions to children's games in the novel and illustrate that for all three characters being together is a collaboration in a fictitious picture of happiness (MK, 55). Demonstrating her recall of conversations Maisie aids Sir Claude's memory of the occasion in a determination to make their words a reality:

"Don't you remember she said so?"....

"And you said so" he retorted as if they were playing a game. (MK, 67)

Maisie learns to play the game so well that she can finally play to her own advantage, leaving the reader alone to feel "the small strange pathos on the child's part of an innocence so saturated with knowledge and so directed to diplomacy" (MK, 139). A great deal of critical debate has focused on what Maisie knows, and especially on the development of her moral sense and whether she is finally pure or corrupt.³ My purpose in this chapter is not to enter the critical debate about the nature of Maisie's knowledge, but demonstrate that the debate over Maisie's final decision necessarily arises precisely because Maisie's knowledge is not made plain to the reader in the novel's conclusion but deliberately obscured. Appropriately so, for, like Maisie, the reader must learn to read and judge for herself.

In terms of the reading process, a significant change occurs in the novel with the passage to France. As Maisie leaves what she has known behind, so does the reader. The reader's focus shifts from reading with Maisie the unuttered story of the motivations and mental events in her guardians' lives, to attempting to read the unuttered story of Maisie herself. She seems to grow gradually opaque, leaving the reader to feel what Maisie senses her father feels: "Maisie had the sense ... of her having grown for him ... by increase of year and of inches if by nothing else, much more of a little person to reckon with" (MK, 137). Being unknowable is a means of having power in her world and Maisie's increasing unknowability asserts her independence from any constraining

text.

Freedom is an important motivation behind the journey to France: "you're free -- you're free" Maisie echoes to Sir Claude on the eve of their departure (MK, 173). But it is Maisie herself who seems truly liberated as she leaves the bounds of her everyday reality and James makes this apparent to the reader by changing the stance of his narrator. The office of the narrator up to this point has been by means of free indirect discourse to quietly fill in Maisie's knowledge for the reader, but with the development in the child of adequate language he constantly intervenes, making his presence more definite than it has been hitherto:

Maisie had known all along a great deal, but never so much as she was to know from this moment on and as she learned in particular during the couple of days that she was to hang in the air, as it were, over the sea which represented ... a crossing of more spaces than the Channel. It was granted her at this time to arrive at divinations so ample that I shall have no room for the goal if I attempt to trace the stages; as to which therefore I must be content to say that the fullest expression we may give to Sir Claude's conduct is a poor and pale copy of the picture it presented to our young friend. (MK, 153)

The intervention occurs with a definite shift in the narrator's status: he seems no longer able to explain definitely how Maisie knows; he can only implore us to believe that she imperceptibly understands that the workings of Mrs Wix's "deep narrow passion" to save Maisie and Sir Claude from Mrs Beale is the force behind the journey: "It sounds, no doubt too penetrating, but it was not all as an effect of Sir Claude's betrayals that Maisie was able to piece together the beauty of the special influence" (MK, 155). The narrator indeed seems unable to assert anything definite about Maisie's perception of the unseen communication between Sir Claude and Mrs Wix over the issue of Mrs Beale. The narrator's language itself -- including its entirely appropriate double negative here -- attests to the elusive, inexplicable quality of Maisie's enigmatic knowledge: "I may not even answer for it that Maisie was not aware of how in this Mrs Beale failed to share his all but insurmountable distaste for their allowing their little charge to breathe the air of their gross irregularity" (MK, 155). Early in the novel the narrator tells the reader: "We have already learned

that she had come to like people's liking her to 'know'" (MK, 111), but as she leaves for France he himself seems overwhelmed by Maisie's insight and entreats the reader simply to accept it without explanation: "Oh decidedly I shall never get you to believe the number of things she saw and the number of secrets she discovered" (MK, 155).

The shift in the narrator's vision radically alters the perspective of the reader. We are no longer in the position of filling in the gaps in Maisie's maturing understanding with our own knowledge; instead we are in the position of the other characters. Maisie's changing status as regards the characters in the novel applies equally to the reader. Maisie is a bearer of tales, a character in a text and a text herself. With Mrs Wix, Sir Claude and Mrs Beale we need to finally take Maisie on as an other, an equal with an elusive unreadable inner self.⁴ The question is no longer how she knows but what knowledge she possesses that leads to her final decision.

Maisie's hidden agenda becomes the central focus of the novel with the passage to France. With Maisie on the brink of adolescence as she leaves England, there is something of a sea-change in the channel crossing: "the past was so changed and the circle it had formed already so overstepped" (MK, 175). The passage to France contains the elements of boundary crossing which distinguish the fictive encounter for Iser: "Boundary crossing may be viewed as the hallmark of fictionalising.... In literary fictions existing worlds are overstepped, and although they are still individually recognisable, they are set in a context that defamiliarises them" (Iser 1990, 939). In France Maisie can overstep the boundaries of known reality and so access new visions or re-visions of that reality. This means that France functions as a play-space allowing Maisie to step beyond the limits of her immediate reality:

she gave herself up to it, responded to it, in the bright air, with the instant certitude of a vocation ... she had grown older in five minutes.... the place and the people were all a picture together, a picture that, when they went down to the wide sands, shimmered in a thousand tints.... (MK, 174)

The events in this new country thus constitute a text within a text, but this time a text Maisie feels

free enough to write herself. However in her still partial immaturity, this promising bright scene must give way to darker realities. Her first lesson of authorship tells her she has more to learn.

Maisie's story illustrates a startling similarity in the actions of author, character and reader. As the reader enters James's text, which is primarily concerned with the texts composed by the characters' consciousnesses, we also create our own unique version of the text as we read. Through the story of "a young person with a sharpened sense for latent meanings" who learns through stories to read and write a text for herself, James demonstrates by means of his central consciousness that the positive value of reading flows from the filling in of the negative spaces: the sites of indeterminacy that prompt the reader to find out for themselves (MK, 182).

We know what Maisie wants, because she tells us when she tells Mrs Wix -- she wants Sir Claude alone or nobody:

"Him alone or nobody."

"Not even *me*?" cried Mrs Wix.

Maisie looked at her a moment.... "Oh you're nobody." (MK, 229)

What we are not told is why she relinquishes the dream she has come to France to catch and decides instead to return to England with Mrs Wix. Maisie finally chooses nobody. The effort on the reader's part is to understand why Maisie makes this final renunciation. We need to access the knowledge on the basis of which she makes her choice.

Through the narrator's aid we are told a great deal of what Maisie gleans about her family's untold story. Her final encounters with her parents demonstrate her deep understanding of their natures: what she knows without needing to be told. Her deep-seated fear of her parents is gradually annulled as she glimpses a knowledge of what they are to themselves. In the two final encounters Maisie has with her parents, which James sets up as parallels, Ida and Beale wish to renounce their daughter, but without her knowing it. What is important about these encounters is that Maisie wishes to do exactly the same: she succeeds by reading their unuttered communication correctly. She shares with her father an "extraordinary mute passage between her vision of this

vision of his, his vision of her vision, and her vision of his vision of her vision" (MK, 138) and watches her mother posture "to her utmost before the last little triangle of cracked glass to which so many fractures had reduced the polished plate of filial superstition" (MK, 164). Wishing to nullify their bond and relinquish their filial responsibility both her parents ask Maisie's help in absolving them of blame. Realising that they wish to be let off "with all the honours" Maisie collaborates in both fictions, reflecting back the narcissistic vision they require (MK, 142). She has a hidden agenda of her own that gives impetus to her collusion:

The great effort of their encounter had been to confirm her sense of being launched with Sir Claude, to make it rich and full beyond anything she had dreamed, and everything now conspired to suggest that a single soft touch of her small hand would complete the good work ... as to leave the great seaway clear for tomorrow. (MK, 167)

She seems willing to let her parents go, not only on the basis of beginning a life with Sir Claude but because she rejects any further participation in their reality. Her father's relation with the Countess reveals something of the base and mercantile motivations to his actions. Maisie's clarity of understanding reveals itself in her answer to Mrs Wix's question about her inward adjustments. Mrs Wix asks how the Countess's being "frightful" makes Maisie's daily accommodation to her step-parents' illicit affair any better: "Their living with me? Why for the Countess -- and for her whiskers! -- he has put me off on them. I understood him" (MK, 204). Maisie judges her father on the qualities of the Countess herself. For an ugly woman with money he renounces his own daughter.

In her final encounter with her mother Maisie glimpses a frightening self-destructive impulse behind Ida's actions. Maisie colludes in seeming to accept Ida's selfish burden of guilt but when her mother lets her know that she has broken with the Captain, Maisie feels "the first flare of anger" she has ever known. In deliberating what it would mean for Ida to have renounced the Captain, whose dedication had reminded her of Mrs Wix, Maisie's "filial hope" fails her as she

seems to perceive Ida's inner soul: "there rose in her a fear, a pain, a vision ominous, precocious, of what it might mean for her mother's fate to have forfeited such a loyalty as that. There was literally an instant in which Maisie fully saw -- saw madness and desolation, saw ruin and darkness and death" (MK, 169).

With the shift in the narrator's stance however, it is more difficult to trace Maisie's full insight into her relation with Mrs Beale and Sir Claude. Her knowledge is hard to pin down because of the changeable nature of her relationship with Sir Claude: as she matures it is a "more than filial gaze" she turns in his direction (MK, 196). Maisie's perspective is increasingly difficult to discern because she comes to exist in the half-world between childhood and adulthood: the operations of her artistic will begin to stem not only from the needs of a neglected child for caretakers but the first desires of a young woman for love. In discovering with Maisie the unuttered motivations that drive Sir Claude, Mrs Beale and Mrs Wix, the reader must attempt to understand for him or her self the often carefully concealed motivation behind Maisie's renunciation of a life with her step-parents.

With Maisie on the brink of adult cognition the narrator can no longer offer simple elucidation of her knowledge:

I so despair of courting her noiseless mental footsteps here that I must crudely give you my word for its being from this time a picture literally present to her She judged that if her whole history, for Mrs Wix, had been the successive stages of her knowledge, so the very climax of the concatenation would, in the same view, be the stage at which knowledge should overflow. As she was condemned to know more and more, how could it logically stop before she should know Most? It came to her in fact as they sat there on the sands that she was distinctly on the road to know Everything. She had not had governesses for nothing: what in the world had she ever done but learn and learn? She looked at the pink sky with a placid foreboding that she soon should have learnt All. (MK, 208-9)

This strange passage seems at first glance the comical parody of an epiphany. The capitalising of words such as "Most", "Everything" and "All" hints at a childish misunderstanding of her growing knowledge as a simple accumulation. But the narrator's intervention, once again focusing on his

own failure to trace the growth of her knowledge, reveals that such inadequate words are the nearest possible he (and indeed Mrs Wix) can come to explaining what she *does* know. As I have suggested, the cue to this situation is originally given when Maisie herself realises that in attempting to understand the unspeakable affairs of her step-parents "what she had essentially done, these days, was to read the unspoken into the spoken" (MK, 200). The unspoken, however, retains some traces of its original unspeakability. Maisie's fullest knowledge of the unspoken relations of her family is not complete but is itself inexpressible in words. With the withdrawal of the narrator's guiding words, the reader's task in understanding the text is to write the unwritten as a locus of pure possibility only: the point of indeterminacy in the text becomes the unknowability of Maisie's knowledge itself.

Like Isabel Archer, when Maisie matures to the extent of writing her own story and repudiating her subordinate role as a mere character in the narratives of others, she symbolically eludes the narrator of our narrative too. James acknowledges her creative freedom as an independent individual by rendering her opaque even to himself. This is her right as "reader" turned "author". There is an Oedipal element in this: James is her parent as much as Ida and her father, in a different sense. Her maturation is signalled by independence from them all, and her renunciation of her immediate family is symbolic of this.

Her trials however are not yet over. Unlike Isabel Archer's radical case, there is still a phase of her liberation to be attained, which suggests that Maisie is not yet quite as all-knowing as she imagines. All through the novel Maisie has been at the apex of intersecting love triangles and in France we witness a heightened clash of the issues she has experienced. From an early age happiness with Sir Claude has been the dream Mrs Wix has desired for herself and the child: "It hung before Maisie, Mrs Wix's way, like a glittering picture, and she clasped her hands in ecstasy" (MK, 81). France is the space where numerous attempts are made to transform such a fictive picture into a tangible reality. Maisie is the centre of the conflict because she functions as a cipher

of desire: a means with which to fulfil conflicting pictures of happiness. She is seen as the means for Mrs Wix and Mrs Beale to be with Sir Claude but given the opposition between Mrs Beale and Mrs Wix Maisie is made aware that she will have to choose between them. Her solution that all four might live together is rejected as soon as it is voiced and as Maisie learns more her final refusal seems motivated by her dawning conviction that not only Mrs Beale but Mrs Wix desire Sir Claude as she herself does. Mrs Wix's self-righteous obsession with Maisie's moral sense is undercut by her own ulterior motives: "Maisie could scarcely believe her eyes as she saw the good lady with whom she had associated no faintest shade of the art of provocation give Sir Claude a great giggling insinuating naughty slap" (MK, 191). With Mrs Wix's demonstration of what James ironically terms her "infinite variety" Maisie feels an increasing need to protect from suspicion (especially Mrs Wix's) "the particular phenomenon that had she felt the need of words for it, she might have called her personal relation to knowledge" (MK, 199).

Maisie demonstrates her mature understanding of the situation in the test she puts to Sir Claude. When Sir Claude asks her to give up Mrs Wix, she asks him to give up Mrs Beale in return. Early on in the novel Sir Claude asks Maisie about her affection for Mrs Beale. Maisie's reply is interesting: she questions Mrs Beale's loyalty to her because as she explains to Sir Claude, "I'm not every bit Mrs Beale has" (MK, 64). It is made clear by Mrs Beale's actions in France that Sir Claude is "every bit" for Mrs Beale. Maisie finally asks Sir Claude to be "a low sneak", not to sacrifice the person in the world who is dearest to him, but instead the person in the world to whom he is the most precious. To be a "low sneak" is what Maisie recognises Mrs Wix demands of her in her righteous determination to be rid of Mrs Beale, and Sir Claude likewise asks Maisie to be one in giving up Mrs Wix, the person in the world who has nothing but herself to cling to:

denuded and disinherited as we have seen her, there still lingered in her life an echo of parental influence ... there were things papa called mamma and mamma called papa a low sneak for doing or not doing. (MK, 201)

The climactic ending to the novel is the game which ends all the games in the novel. As she is thrust from one person to another in the white hotel salon Maisie plays the part she has always played, a little shuttlecock who can keep the game of rivalry and deceit going: she is "placed ... again in the centre of the room, the cynosphere of every eye and not knowing which way to turn" (MK, 263). Maisie embodies or gives access to what the characters want, a fact Mrs Beale asserts vehemently in her words to Mrs Wix: "What in the world's our connexion but the love of a child who's our duty and our life and who holds us together as closely as she originally brought us?" Like an enlightened author however, Maisie opts out of the game because she cannot have what she wants: "What helped the child was that she knew what she wanted. All her learning and learning had made her at last learn that" (MK, 263).

As Maisie has matured she has developed her own infinite possibilities of motivation and response. Maisie's rejection of Mrs Beale seems double sided. Mrs Beale's words expose that Maisie's attempting to rewrite her life anew has ended in failure because it simply repeats the abuse and manipulation of her parents: " We're representative, you know, of Mr Farange and his former wife" (MK, 266). As a child in need of love Maisie recognises that, like her mother, her step-mother does not truly care for her and she will simply remain a character in a text, a means as before to keep Mrs Beale perfectly proper. But as a young woman Mrs Beale has become a rival in Maisie's desire for Sir Claude. Her final tears are the tears that she held down at the station, tears that have "nothing -- no, distinctly nothing to do with her moral sense" but stem from Sir Claude's rejection of Maisie's offer to run away to Paris together (MK, 261). Her repetitive statements, as J.Hillis Miller argues, heighten the undecidability of the text in highlighting her double-sided love for Sir Claude, as both a child and an adult: "I love Sir Claude -- I love *him*" (MK, 265). The way we choose to read Maisie's final decision depends on our own decision to see Maisie as a child or a girl on the brink of womanhood (Miller 1990, 59).

James's technique provokes the reader to do what the child has spent the novel mastering:

we must know without being told. Maisie becomes real for us as she matures because there is finally something inaccessible to her, an unuttered story we must find out for ourselves. In the final shift of perspective in the novel, the reader is left sharing not Maisie's perspective, but Mrs Wix's: "Mrs Wix gave a sidelong look. She still had room for wonder at what Maisie knew" (MK, 268).

"Wonder" is an important word in James's Preface to the novel, but on the final page it is Maisie who becomes an object embalmed in wonder for the reader. Our attempt to discover what Maisie knew transforms the child's story into "the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art" as Maisie is transformed into a real girl by the operation of the reader's wonder (MK, 7-8). Maisie is the central character in our texts just as she is a central character in the texts the characters themselves wish to write. With Maisie's increasing unknowability a curious doubling occurs: Maisie becomes a site of desire for the reader as she is for the characters. With the close of the novel the reader loses all access to Maisie, she opts out of the game of imagination we are playing and is ultimately no longer a character in anyone's text. Her attempt to rewrite her life coincides with the realisation that she can depend on no-one but herself. In addition, her first lesson in the authorship is a corresponding need for renunciation in art she has not suspected, despite her trials. The tricky relations of art and life hide a lesson for aestheticism. Authorship entails one moral responsibility at least: to know when art and life must after all be differentiated. Or rather that there is a higher state of art which transcends boundaries with life. Like her author, Maisie must finally step back and allow her characters to be themselves: that is to allow the dimension of life to alleviate the potential claustrophobia of art. This additional aspect thus brings us back to an important necessity in James's ideas of authorship: the vital presence of the element of indeterminacy in any true work's core.

What Maisie has practised with her doll Lisette has become an actuality for Maisie and for

the reader. Maisie finally shades off into the unknowable. The text of What Maisie Knew becomes the unfinished and in the main inferior story: exactly what Maisie knew is what the readers must find out for themselves. Maisie becomes a site of desire for the reader because of what she gives us access to. The reader's attempt is similar to Maisie's attempts to discover the story behind her parents' lives: "she discovered a little but she never discovered all" (MK, 33). In attempting to answer what Maisie knew, the reader must face difficult questions about the nature of knowledge and how what we know prompts the actions and decisions in our lives. James's title What Maisie Knew refers to what the reader must access: the unrealised possibilities of the text.

In confronting Maisie's unknowability the reader finally must recognise what J.Hillis Miller has argued:

the impossibility of knowing, for author, narrator, protagonist or reader, whether we are in the presence of an accurate reading or of a reading into ... what the reader reaches by way of the text, and therefore what he has most obligation to honour, is not the text itself but that to which the text gives the reader access the saying of something that otherwise cannot be said at all. (Miller 1990, 78)

Miller argues that if Maisie "is finally unknowable and unspeakable, except by the narrator's silence" and if she "disappears from the author's, the narrator's and the reader's ken", even though all three need to know her from within to render a judgement on what she does, then all three are left on their own, as she was. This is what makes possible not "an ascertainable and verifiable interpretation" but something more valuable: "a productive reading into" for which the reader must take responsibility (Miller 1990, 78-80).

In this way James demonstrates how reading is inextricably involved with questions of ethics and epistemology. Maisie is what Juliet Mitchell describes as "the portrait of an artist as a young girl" (Mitchell 1972, 168). Her proud little chant over the operation of her artistic will eventually applies to the reader: "I've brought you together" she says. Maisie has brought the reader together with the unrealised possibilities of the text. For Iser the fictive encounter is valuable because in the realm of the fictive we encounter the unknowable: therefore fiction gives

us access to the unrealised possibilities of existence. The most important lesson Maisie learns in reading the unspoken is what the reader finally learns: we must find out for ourselves. It is this that transforms reading from a passive experience to an active creative engagement with possibilities of meaning and significance.

Notes

1. In his discussion of Maisie's knowledge Paul Armstrong notes: "Instead of asking 'What did Maisie know and was she moral?' we should turn to the more fundamental problems that make such questions possible. That is we should ask 'How can Maisie know? and how does her initiation into the activity of knowing involve her in struggles where the stakes are her freedom and her relation with others'" (1983, 9).
2. Paul Armstrong notes that many of the personal relations in Henry James's fiction are informed by the insuperable gap between the "Self-for-Self" and the "Self-for-Others". He states: "the Self and Other are not transparent but opaque to each other because I can never experience what I am to myself. Furthermore, according to Sartre, I can never completely understand my "Self-for-Others"; and the object that I am for myself" (1983, 137).
3. Edward Wasiolek interrogates the debate over whether Maisie is pure or corrupt stating the "dialectic of these terms is, in their static formulation, too unrefined to express James's narrative habits of subtle qualification of moral changes.... Maisie is neither 'pure' nor 'corrupt'. Neither exploration does justice to James's sensitive reflection in his works of the subtle mutations of character" (1960, 167).
4. J.Hillis Miller comments that "Maisie's name, like that of Shakespeare's Miranda, tells her nature. The pun on 'amazed' primarily defines her as a wandering spectator, though there may be a secondary suggestion that she is lost in a maze of all the strange signs from the adult world she has to learn to read" (1990, 53). I would like to extend this notion to suggest that Maisie's inner self is a labyrinth within which the reader has finally to find his or her own way.

Chapter Two.

Painting the Fictive Picture: Ideation and Revision in The Portrait of a Lady

Jamesian novels make the reading process an implicit theme. The prime activities undertaken in the text of The Portrait of a Lady are the readings performed upon its central character. James states in the Preface to the novel that his text is centred on the artistic creation and apprehension of his "vivid individual" (PL, xxxi). The title to the novel seems to promise the depiction of a central character with James as the artist of her portrait. Yet the action of the novel undercuts the simplicity of this relation by foregrounding the reading and creation of character as an important thematic concern. The portrait of Isabel Archer is the product of a dynamic and interactive process which involves the creative powers not only of the author but of his reader, the other central characters of the novel and the heroine herself.

At a pivotal moment in the centre of the novel Isabel's character appears trapped within the confines of a static portrait. As Ned Rosier encounters Mrs Osmond within the shadowy rooms of the Palazzo Roccanera he is startled by the great change which has taken hold of the free-spirited young girl:

She had lost something of that quick eagerness to which her husband had privately taken exception -- she had more of the air of being able to wait. Now, at all events, framed in the gilded doorway, she struck our young man as the picture of a gracious lady. (PL, 398)

Rosier's impression of Mrs Osmond is the reader's first encounter with Isabel Archer since her marriage. She has become "a gracious lady": the formal picture of Isabel dressed in black velvet as she stands in the gold frame of the doorway are the words of the novel's title embodied. What is notable is that Isabel appears to be inanimate; rather than the word made flesh, she seems to embody a frighteningly ominous depiction of life annulled and arrested by art.

The immobile portrait at the centre of the novel is critical to James's concern with the readerly construction and apprehension of character. Osmond's reduction of Isabel within the

frame of an immutable portrait is a significant image in a novel concerned with the authorial power involved in an exercise which little Pansy innocently describes as making pictures (PL, 323). My purpose in this chapter is to explore the tropological use of art in The Portrait of a Lady as the means by which James foregrounds the readerly construction of the figures in his text, one in which the characters of the novel themselves perform as artists, readers and authors but using life and other people as their medium. This analysis of the novel draws impetus from the Iserian notion of reading as an "ideational activity" which involves the reader in making pictures from the words of the text (1984, 36).

"Ideation" is a concept derived from Husserl which Iser employs to describe the process by which a text is transferred and transformed by the reader from the words on the page into a virtual reality existing in an extra-textual space. One of the most fundamental tenets of Iser's theory of the act of reading is the suggestion that a literary work of art cannot be identical with the reality of the printed text or with the mind of the reader but instead is situated between the two, and is "virtual in character". Iser describes the meaning of a text "as something that happens". In his conception the reading process involves not only the reception and interpretation but also in some sense the *creation* of a work of art: "the reader 'receives' it by composing it" (1984, 21-22). What is most exciting about such a view is Iser's suggestion that as the interaction between the reader and the words on the page infuses the text with life it "brings into the world something that did not exist before" (1984, 22):

it is something that has to be ideated in the mind of the reader. A reality that has no existence of its own can only come into being by way of ideation and so the structure of a text sets off a sequence of mental images which leads to the text translating itself into the reader's consciousness. (Iser 1984, 38)

According to Iser the text additionally relies on its own indeterminacy, on the areas of negation which he identifies as "blanks" or "gaps" which leave connections open and so free the process of communication by forcing the reader's active participation. Paradoxically, the reader can only fully experience the aesthetic dimension of the text by ideating its content. In the Preface to The Portrait James uses the term "the fictive picture" to describe the novel as an



art-form, and I believe this conception indicates an understanding of the reading process very similar to Iser's theory of reading as an ideational activity -- whereby a reader's interaction with the text creates a virtual reality that exists beyond the words on the page (PL, xxvii). In addition, James's concern with the reading and creation of character in this novel underscores his belief that "it is art that makes life": the processes used to make meaning from a text are an intensification of the everyday activity of imaginative world construction. The ideation of character is the central activity in the novel which undertakes a complex exploration of the human capacity to compose "the fictive picture" from reality. But the necessary confluence of fact and fiction inevitably brings problems and ambiguities, sometimes unrecognised, in its wake.

In his theory of fiction James often links the art of writing to that of painting. In "The Art of Fiction" the two are inextricably compared. The novelist "works step by step, like his brother of the brush, of whom we may say that he has painted his picture in the manner best known to himself" (TF, 33). The centrality of the reading process in The Portrait of a Lady suggests that the painting and composing of fictive pictures is the process by which we all -- not just the novelists -- access, control and thereby author our lives and often the lives of others. In accordance with such a notion the characters in Portrait not only live in a world enriched with works of art: art is the principal means by which they translate their world into meaning. The novel is replete with references to both visual and literary art, an abundance of allusion which is of vital importance thematically since the creation, appreciation and attitude to art is figuratively linked throughout to what Paul Armstrong has called "the composing powers of consciousness" (1987, 2).

In our interaction with and construction of the text the reader joins every character in the novel in the enterprise of composing character. Ideation and interpretation of character as text are the principal events for both reader and character because the novel is concerned with imaginative projections and the transformation of mental images into virtual reality. The novel

itself can be considered as James's own transformation of his mental "grasp of a single character" (PL, xxxi). The opening chapters of the novel in which Isabel is discovered in the dusky back-room of the house in Albany and planted in the fertile soil of Gardencourt share an overlap of imagery with the Preface which is richly suggestive of James's concern as a novelist with the transformation of ideas. In the Preface James describes handing Isabel over to the consciousness of the reader as a necessary risk. In order to transform his idea into a virtual reality he must commit Isabel to others and in so doing remove his "rare little piece" from his own consciousness which he figures as the "dusky ... back-shop of the mind" where his imagination "detains it, preserves it, protects it and enjoys it" (PL, xxxi). He makes it clear that for his idea of an interesting young woman to live she must be liberated from the author's control, given relations, a setting, and then released to the reader as text.

James's description of this transferral of idea from one consciousness to another illustrates the interactive relation of art and life so central to the novelist. The Portrait of a Lady is character made text for the author, and for the reader the novel is text made character. In positing a theory of readable character Steven Cohan draws on Iser's theory to suggest that "character is readable when the text and its reader work together to promote the representational figure's transformation into a virtual existent" (1983, 5). The reader's active participation in the ideation of a text allows "the virtual existence of character [which] results from the construction of the figure as subject-as-object in the reader's own imaginative space" (5). Character is readable, "not as a representation, but as a coherently perceived figure existing, during the reading act, in the imaginative space produced in the reader's mind" by the interaction of the reader with the text's coded instructions which inform the perception of character (5). The reader's engagement with the human figure requires that he bring to bear upon the text a variety of imaginative and interpretative resources in order to experience the figure and the world of its text as a virtual reality which exists beyond the realm of discourse (11).

In The Portrait of a Lady the concept of character as the virtual existent of a text resonates throughout and is emphasised by means of an interesting pattern of metaphor: the principal illustration of character used in the novel is figurative comparison to a text. The question of how one should read and determine character is highlighted in this tropological use of text as the novel seeks to "dramatize the act of interpretation as a process of composition" (Armstrong 1987, 6). Throughout the novel the textual characters have textual characteristics as the metaphor of text is used to characterise ways of being. Mrs Touchett's telegraphic style for example denotes a mind which omits clouding detail and edits life to the bare facts. Ralph's illness prevents a true engagement with life: "living as he now lived was like reading a good book in a poor translation" (PL, 40). Madame Merle's carefully easy conversational style which obscures a less than candid nature is captured in Ralph's private assessment that she is "almost as universally 'liked' as some new volume of smooth twaddle" (PL, 271). The Countess Gemini with her arranged marriage and soiled reputation has "been written over in a variety of hands ... a number of unmistakeable blots were to be seen on her surface" (PL, 301). In comparison Henrietta Stackpole "probably had no misprint" and Ralph's first impression characterises the journalist's bracing manner and forthright attitude: "she was as crisp and new and comprehensive as a first issue before the folding" (PL, 88).

The first mention of Isabel Archer is in the form of a text -- one of Mrs Touchett's inscrutable telegrams. Letters and telegrams often operate in James's novels as signifiers of the polysemantic possibilities which the written word creates due to a multiplicity of readings.¹ Over Mrs Touchett's telegram Ralph comments "my father and I have scarcely stopped puzzling; it seems to admit of so many interpretations" (PL, 10). At the root of the puzzle is the essential nature of Isabel herself. In reference to his mother's telegram Ralph asks: "But who's 'quite independent,' and in what sense is the term used? -- that point's not yet settled ... and is it used in a moral or in a financial sense?" (PL, 10). "Independence" is a word with mutable significance in the novel and is used in reference to the freedom of spirit as well as to

the financial prosperity with which Isabel is eventually endowed. When Isabel appears it is clear she is both interesting and independent, in fact one of the most interesting things about her is her determination to appear so. She makes it clear to Ralph that Mrs Touchett's benevolence should not be misconstrued as control as she states, "with a certain visible eagerness to be explicit, 'I'm very fond of my liberty'"(PL, 18). Much of the tension in the novel results from differing readings of Isabel's independence and her liberty is constantly qualified by the interference of other characters as they seek to become authors of Isabel's character. Isabel's struggle for independence in the novel is to achieve and maintain imaginative possession over her own life.

The ideation of a figure from the discourse of the text into a virtual existent is accentuated at the outset of the novel as the woman introduced in the form of a telegram steps into the lives of the characters. When Isabel Archer steps onto the lawn at Gardencourt she steps as it were into the "reality" of the text and is presented as embodying the idea of an interesting subject: "You wished a while ago to see my idea of an interesting woman", comments Lord Warburton. "There it is!" (PL, 18). Instead of the more expected "there she is", James uses this curious turn of phrase to place emphasis on the notion that as a character Isabel represents an idea which requires actualization through a reading. Isabel as imagined figure is not only the subject of the novel but a subject-as-object. From the first Isabel is an object of perception and the reader's realisation of Isabel Archer is constantly negotiated through her ideation by the other characters. These dissimilar conceptions shape the conflicting plots of a novel in which the main events are actions of consciousness.

What makes Isabel interesting to the other characters is her potential; she seems to be an original unfamiliar entity which requires actualization in doing. Ralph notes that his cousin is "a very brilliant girl" but to understand her clearly will take "a good deal of knowing":

She was intelligent and generous; it was a fine free nature; but what was she going to do with herself? This question was irregular, for with most women one had no occasion to ask it. Most women did with themselves nothing at all; they waited, in attitudes more or less passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a

destiny. Isabel's originality was that she gave one the impression of having intentions of her own. (PL, 66)

Isabel's conception of independence makes it possible, as Millicent Bell argues, to see Isabel "as a character in search of a plot" -- as one "who profoundly explores the policy of resistance to social and narrational expectations -- the conventions of character which culture would impose upon her, the role which life, as well as literature, seems to insist must be the outcome of her selfhood" (1995, 748). In the Preface James's compares his initial conception of Isabel and "the intensity of suggestion that may reside in the stray figure" to one of Turgenev's *disposables* for whom the "right relations" and the "situations most favourable and useful to the sense of the creatures themselves" must be found in order to bring out their essential nature (PL, xxvii). Bell links this conception of Isabel as "an unattached character" to her determinedly detached status within the novel itself (PL, xvii). The "germ" of James's idea for the novel stems

not at all in any conceit of a plot, nefarious word ... but altogether in the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to which all the usual elements of a "subject," certainly of a setting, were to be superadded. (PL, xvii)

The opening chapters are a process in which Isabel has at least the perfect initial setting and relations she needs "superadded". On her arrival in England, Isabel herself appears to have stepped into her own fictive picture. If she embodies the ideal of an interesting subject for her companions, Gardencourt seems an ideal manifestation of her view of the world; she has never seen anything so beautiful and to her delight the composition acquires a perfection in its inclusion of a dashing English lord: "Oh I hoped there would be a lord; it's just like a novel!" (PL, 14) The picture does what Madame Merle will later remark that so few things do, it satisfies the imagination: "a picture made real ... the rich perfection of Gardencourt at once revealed a world and gratified a need" (PL, 56). Isabel's whimsical response reveals the quality of her own imagination. Isabel has "a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action" (PL, 52). The narrator's description of the

"fixed" determined nature of Isabel's conception of the world discloses both her self-deception and her will to individual artistic mastery of reality. In her personal fiction the world is a setting where all the wishes of an independent heroine may be met.

Involved in the act of self-creation Isabel is engaged in devising a plot for her life in a desire to meet the requirements of her own imagination. Like an author at work on a character she is "always planning out her development, desiring her perfection, observing her progress" and is determined to defend her character's liberty and originality by refusing to submit to conventional forms of experience (PL, 55). Bell points out that in James's description of Isabel "affronting her destiny" he did not mean "simply that she confronted or faced up to it but that she hostilely defied it, slapped it in the face" (1995, 748). Isabel's determined impetus towards the actualization of an original independent selfhood has an interesting link with Iser's conception of the reading process. In attempting to actualise her character's text as a unique reality, Isabel in a sense is attempting to bring into the world something that has not existed before. Her favourite theory of herself is that she is "fortunate in being independent, and that she ought to make some very enlightened use of that state" (PL, 53). As the narrator presents a wry synopsis of some of her theories, which Isabel believes with all the romantic certainty of a youthful untried mind, it is clear that her ideas about herself and life itself are primarily theoretical and not yet tested by lived experience: "Her thoughts were a tangle of vague outlines.... In matters of opinion she had had her own way, and it had led her in a thousand ridiculous zigzags" (PL, 52). The question of what course her potential character should take in life involves the authorial actions of every character in the novel.

As the author James himself defends Isabel's potential character from the narrow imposition of an individual artistic will by co-opting both reader and character into designing her realisation. In the Preface James intimates that his relation with the other characters in the novel is essentially one of co-authorship.² He recounts that in the process of writing the novel they appeared in response to the "primary question" about Isabel's character:

"Well, what will she do?" Their answer seemed to be that if I would trust them they would show me; on which, with an urgent appeal to them to make it at least as interesting as they could, I trusted them. (PL, xxxviii)

In truth, the portrait painted of Isabel seems less a collaboration than a competition for the upper hand. "Interest" is a keyword in the novel signifying the benefit gained imaginatively and financially by interference.³ The major challenge James describes in the Preface is the treatment of his "mere slim shade of an intelligent but presumptuous girl" in a manner that would go some way to transferring the concentrated vivacity of his authorial interest in Isabel to his reader (PL, xxxii). A great deal of reader interest in Isabel is created in an extraordinary way, as James compels the reader to choose between the different readings of Isabel performed by other characters. In the ideation of the world of The Portrait of a Lady the reader is simultaneously constructing and being constructed by such fictionalising acts.

In answering Ralph's demands as to what she plans to do with Isabel, Mrs Touchett's response questions the objectifying nature of authorial agency: "Do with her? You talk as if she were a yard of calico" (PL, 45). New dresses in Paris and four European countries are all Mrs Touchett has planned for her niece: "I never meddle" she asserts (PL, 362). Mrs Touchett's authority begins and ends with bringing Isabel to Europe. If her plans seem rather dry and unimaginative to her son, Mrs Touchett trusts the growth of the outcome to the fertilising quality of Isabel's mind: "You can leave Isabel alone to water it! She is as good as summer rain any day" (PL, 42). Clear-sighted and practical, there is "nothing flighty" about Mrs Touchett (PL, 27). She warns her son not to cherish too many theories about Isabel: "You won't in any way be easily right about her" (PL, 44). This advice fittingly applies to most of the characters: "I never saw a person judge things on such theoretic grounds" Warburton says impatiently of Henrietta, but his description could well fit every character in the novel (PL, 141). Theories are the means by which we incorporate the world into our own imaginations. As Iser demonstrates, such illusions are configurations of meaning essential for the apprehension of the unfamiliar (1984, 125-126). Isabel's unreadability and her desire for

more than one single interpretation of her life is demonstrated in her simple-minded brother-in-law's characterisation of the heroine as an enigmatic text: "I don't like originals, I like translations ... Isabel's written in a foreign tongue. I can't make her out" (PL, 30).

The frequency of ideation within the novel foregrounds the necessity for fiction in human life. Iser argues that fiction's basis is anthropological because fiction always answers to the human need to bridge the gaps between the self and the world. Fictionalising is an everyday act that supplements what is known and seen with what is essentially unformulated except through an act of imagination. In Jamesian novels the reader is required to share in the same activity as the characters, as both engage in acts of fictionalising which allow access to the unknown, the unfamiliar, and most importantly the other. When little Maisie learns to know without being told, she achieves admission to and understanding of the obscure enigmatic adult world through the connecting artistry of her own imagination. In The Portrait of a Lady James describes such an activity as "the imagination that communes with the unseen" (PL, 424). If such fictionalising actions can lead to heightened seeing however they can also lead, as Paul Armstrong points out, to a solipsistic reinforcement of illusory ideas (1987, 7). The fictive pictures composed in The Portrait of a Lady are often less an attempt to access truth than a bid to fix the world and the other in configurations that meet the requirements of the character's own imagination. The designs projected onto Isabel's character by what James calls her "relations", are often made on the basis of their personal theories about her originality and independence (PL, xvii).

Thinking in pictures is a practice that both Mrs Touchett and Henrietta distrust and the risk involved in a detachment from the grounding reality of experience is made clear early in the novel by Henrietta whose career as a reporter is indicative of her function as the *ficelle* of the text. Henrietta views Isabel's desire for independence from the restrictions of reality as a yearning for a false condition of plenitude which finally imperils the promised wealth of experience:

The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your dreams. You're not enough in contact with reality -- with the toiling, striving, I may even say sinning, world that surrounds you.... You think you can lead a romantic life.... You'll find you're mistaken. Whatever life you lead you must put your soul in it ... and the moment you do that it ceases to be romance, I assure you: it becomes grim reality! (PL, 233)

As a journalist however Henrietta is not only *ficelle* but represents the voice of America, with its insistence on univocal readings. Isabel's wishes for independence contradict Henrietta's own fictive picture of Isabel's future which insists on marriage to an American suitor. Her chosen mate for Isabel as a "new woman" is Caspar Goodwood, the virile but imaginatively wooden hero of the new industrial age. Caspar is presented as aggressively masculine and stubbornly insistent that his own emotions are reason enough for marriage.⁴ Isabel's treatment of him is often unexpectedly cruel and in her continued rejections she relishes the exercise of power as an opportunity to prove her own independence. What she says however is true -- "It is no kindness to a woman to press her so hard ... I can't marry you simply to please you" (PL, 167). Isabel will not marry Lord Warburton either, although she likes him a great deal. Isabel may wish her life to be just like a novel but with his heroine's rejection of the English nobleman's proposal James asserts his character's originality and overturns reader expectation by countering the plot demands for the closure of a traditional love plot.⁵ Isabel's rejection of Warburton's "settled seat of ... existence" demonstrates that for Isabel, Warburton (like Caspar) is characterised by his place of origin, a product of traditions and social context which Isabel sees as a hindrance to her affronting plans (PL, 125).⁶ Metaphorically Isabel's refusal reveals a resistance to being grounded in actuality as she perceives his offer as threatening her desire for a limitless field of experience.⁷ Isabel's marriage to Osmond fulfils her criteria for such experience. She is almost proud of her family's disapproval and feels "herself disjoined from every one she had ever known before" (PL, 378). Osmond is without reputation, title, honours, land or position but Isabel declares that it is the "total absence of these things" which pleases her (PL, 376).

Isabel's acceptance of Osmond however exposes her appetite for independence from

social and economic contexts as less the desire to actively author an alternative narrative than a negation of doing and being. Her marriage is the renunciation of "the free exploration of life" which she adamantly rejected Warburton for and which both the reader and the other characters expected to see her to embrace (PL, 117). But the cup of experience is for Isabel "a poisoned drink" (PL, 160). Her refusal of lived experience is akin to the aspiration for romance which James describes in the Preface to The American as "experience disengaged, disembroided, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions we usually know to attach to it" (AN, 34).⁸ Marrying what she describes as "a perfect nonentity" Isabel espouses what she regards as absence and possibility but the choices she makes as the configurations of reality that seem to hold out the greatest promise of freedom harden into the exact opposite (PL, 356). In the application of Isabel's theories the bright free expanse of Gardencourt closes and dims to the dark suffocation of the Palazzo Roccanera:

She had taken all the first steps in purest confidence, and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. (PL, 461)

The sense of Isabel's promising trajectory metaphorically hitting a brick wall is significant. Bell comments that James's use of the word "nefarious" to describe plot in the Preface has important implications for the plots imposed on Isabel in the novel: "As he recalls the way his novel grew from its 'germ' of character, how he sought out its plot, as the imagined person herself would do, James seems to think of plot as threatening as well as promising fulfilment of that first conception" (1995, 749). The reader follows Isabel into a textual labyrinth which "instead of leading to the high places of happiness" plunges "downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression" and the characters' interconnected plots are the metaphorical house of fiction which is steadily built up around her (PL, 461). In the Preface James describes "the large building of The Portrait of a Lady" as "a square and spacious house ... put up round my young woman while she stood there in perfect isolation" (PL, xxxii). Throughout the Preface James uses architectural metaphors to describe

the process of writing the novel. The characters that interact with Isabel are an essential part of the treatment of his subject -- part of the "house of fiction" built around her to bring out her essence (PL, xxx).

The characters' essential interest in Isabel Archer provokes a desire to influence and control the path of her life and Isabel's theoretical notions make her vulnerable to being co-opted as a character into others' fictions. Isabel is determined not to prove an "easy victim" in the marriage market, but ironically she rejects the marriage plot only to be caught up in a plot that is far more pernicious; her own responsive imagination turns her into easy prey, as Mr Touchett feared, for the fortune hunters. In one of the novel's linguistic patterns the narrator comments that Isabel "would be an easy victim of scientific criticism if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender and expectant" (PL, 53). Isabel's idea that she might exist without the usual human plots and her refusal to take authorial control in actively plotting her own alternative narrative leads to the exercise of external control in which ironically she is "ground in the very mill of the conventional" (PL, 629). Due to her passivity Isabel is "plotted against -- in the sense of the word that is certainly 'nefarious'. She is the victim of narrative ideas of what she will be and do, which others seek to impose on her" (Bell 1995, 753).

The plot of James's novel ensues from a succession of plotted schemes in which Isabel's rejection of Warburton provokes subsequent plottings of her own character. In Ralph's financial bequest he seeks to become the sponsoring author of Isabel's independent freedom by liberating her from the usual demands of a woman for the financial support of a spouse. His gift of independence ironically induces the malevolent assertion of Merle's and Osmond's plot to trap Isabel into marriage. In fear of the real freedom that the money grants her, Isabel bestows on Osmond the identical gift of independence that Ralph has granted her and for the same misguided reasons.

The novel's power stems from the fact that more often than not the reader is

imaginatively involved in the characters' ideations of one another, fictive pictures which seem to demand actualization in the action of a narrative form. James's sense of the interconnectedness of doing is essential in this novel, for one ideation or way of "putting" Isabel's character is a doing which causes other acts of authorship to be done in their turn. Bell links Isabel's eventual restriction to the narratives effected on her character:

In showing us how such a narrative is a menace to a "free" character, James gives us reason to reflect on the cause of that ambiguity in language which makes us look with suspicion on the very act of structuring implied in the general sense of "plot", essential though such structuring may be to human thought. One is reminded that such words as "design" and "scheme" and "contrive" carry, also, the suggestion of malicious intent. (Bell 1995, 753)

James's own plot is an attempt to avoid such restrictions. In entering into the textual structure of the novel the reader is paradoxically the origin of all meaning but also the effect of the text -- our consciousness is subject to James's control as he strives to form us into the ideal subject -- one as involved and interested in Isabel as the characters and the author himself. In his creation of the reader as well as the characters in The Portrait of a Lady James gives us the same privilege of independence: he forms us well, for we do our share of the task of creating Isabel in having our own ideas about what she should do. Foolish, misguided and romantic as we may find her reverence for her "personal independence" we are often moved to support her because of the general notion shared by the other characters "of knowing better what was good for her than she knew herself" (PL, 165). The presentation of Isabel through the consciousness of various characters is an indication of the values inherent in the content of the text; the multifarious viewpoints deny the fixed determinacy of univocal mastery and evolve from a concern with the necessity of forming the reader by exercising the type of authorial control that provokes co-authorship of the text.

In re-reading his story James declares himself pleased with the "architectural competence" of his structure with regard to his "creation of an interest" in the reader for his central character (PL, xxxvi). The multifarious views of Isabel offered to the reader by the different characters of the novel are comparable to the many "apertures, of dissimilar size and

shape" in James's famous metaphor of the house of fiction. In his extended metaphor literary form is the shaping force of the various windows "pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of individual vision and the pressure of the individual will" from which each individual artist looks out to gain "an impression distinct from every other" (PL, xxx).

The myriad pictures framed by the different windows of the house are important in terms of the novel's concern with the literary "fictive picture" and the individual framing of imaginative and emotive perceptions which link us with the world. In the novel the acts of describing and fictive picturing foreground central Jamesian concerns. For both reader and character, the creation of imaginative fictive pictures is a means of understanding the unseen truths and possibilities in others and is presented as an activity akin to the creation of a work of art. The mental pictures the characters produce are like art in that they are a figurative reaching after truth in which the emotive and cognitive component cannot be reduced to a merely rational logic.⁹ Even if none of it can be easily codified, this is not however art without morality. The activity in question is presented as one for which it is necessary to take responsibility as it can have far-reaching consequences. The apprehension of reality and the creation of works of art are constantly linked in Jamesian novels as he demonstrates that living well demands the application of the same standards required of the production of great art (Nussbaum 1992, 152). Both the creation of fictive pictures and literary works of art involve a moral aspect and James critiques the morality of his characters' various portraits in terms of his test in the Preface -- the amount of "felt life" which is concerned in producing them (PL, xxix).

James makes "felt life" central to his acceptance of a purely personal morality because it marks the limits and preconditions of personal imaginative freedom for both the artist and the individual who is a creative interpreter of life. "Felt life" means life experienced, suffered and touched in response to something outside one's self which breaks the bounds of our potentially solipsistic confinement within individual points of view. The activity of fictive picturing is vital to incorporating the world into one's imagination but the novel suggests that

the tendency to abstract aesthetic ideas from the grounding of human reality has serious ethical implications. J. Hillis Miller argues that in Jamesian terms "between conduct in the ordinary sense and the act of writing there are differences but no separations". Writing, reading, describing and picturing as James describes them are an ethical activity because they are a type of doing, a doing that allows other things to be done in their turn (Miller 1987, 102-3).

The presentation of Osmond's dehumanising aestheticisation of his wife and daughter may be read as James's attack on art that denies an ethical component to the activities of the aesthetic imagination.¹⁰ As the antithesis to James's project for his character the portrait of the gracious lady is the negation of the hope and promise personified by the idea of Isabel Archer. The reduction of "a keenly glancing, quickly-moving, completely animated young woman" into the formal portrait of Mrs Osmond stultifies Isabel as it leaves her "nothing of her own but her pretty appearance" (PL, 465). Once under Osmond's control Isabel, in terms of Cohan's discussion of readable character, becomes a static representation rather than a unique and mutable reality. In Iserian terms, the life and dynamism of the text are to be found in the gaps of indeterminacy and he suggests that when the text's "possibilities are narrowed down to one complete and immutable picture, the imagination is put out of action" (Iser 1972, 288). Isabel as Mrs Osmond is inert and lifeless because she is imprisoned and dehumanised within the limits of Osmond's distorted and inadequate aesthetic perception. The operation of Osmond's mind denies the potential and possibility of her individual human subjectivity: "she lived with it, she had lived in it almost -- it appeared to have become her habitation" (PL, 465).

One of the most chilling examples in the novel of making immutable pictures of human beings is Osmond's "little sketch" of his idea to send Pansy back to the convent: "His tone, however, was that of a man not so much offering an explanation as putting a thing into words -- almost into pictures -- to see, himself, how it might look. He considered a while the picture he evoked and seemed greatly pleased with it". In this instance Isabel pays particular attention to her husband's sinister practice of "playing theoretic tricks on the delicate organism of his

daughter" but Osmond's "elaborate mystification" is the extreme manifestation of an activity shared by all the characters in varying degrees (PL, 579).

Marianna Torgovnick suggests that the characters of The Portrait of a Lady have "formed the habit of thinking in pictures" and the action of the novel suggests that "the visual arts and the act of thinking in pictures have sinister or at least delusory qualities" (1985, 160). Iser's notion of fictionalising as a means of accessing the unknown and unseen demonstrates however that the fictive picturing is a necessary human activity. The selection of a personal framed reality is an essential means of ordering the flux and chaos of reality, but such ideated compositions of reality become "sinister" when they fail to find a balance between art and life which excludes neither. The readings of character performed in the novel often not only mislead the perceiver but trap the perceived within a fictional construct which qualifies his or her human reality. Henrietta's rebuke of Ralph's ideas for Isabel highlights the risk of tyranny involved in seeing the other only as a construct of one's own imagination: "I'm not talking about imaginary characters; I'm talking about Isabel. Isabel's intensely real" (PL, 127).

James's claim for the intense reality of his own imaginary characters is written into the structure of the novel: "We see our lives from our own point of view" Isabel says to Warburton; "that is the privilege of the weakest and humblest of us" (PL, 125). The presentation of events through the shifting viewpoint of different characters ensures that the reader's ideation of character in the novel is both dependent on but independent of -- since a broader composite than -- such ideas. Such a fluid structure discourages the demand for a univocal perspective by subtly insisting that the imposition of, and absolute insistence on the correctness of, personal fictive pictures is a denial of the reality of otherness.

As we enter the consciousness of character after character in the novel, James's controlling consciousness guides the reader's configuration of the text by means of an elegantly patterned series of echoes and imagistic repetitions which increase in force as the novel unfolds. The free expanse of Gardencourt evolves into the dark constriction of the

Palazzo Roccanera in a dialectic between liberation and stasis which governs the dynamic composition of a fictive picture. As the characters struggle to shape the textual structure of Isabel's life, Ralph and Gardencourt illustrate the fusion of form and indeterminacy which allows for the felt life of great art but in the initial exercise of his artistic will Ralph shares disturbing links with Osmond's omnipotent and stultifying mastery.

The magic of influence which Ralph asserts in the novel is best described in terms of the artist-figure to whom Henrietta likens him. Though she remains ignorant of Ralph's bequest Henrietta recognises that Ralph's role in Isabel's life is comparable to that of the magician Prospero. Aware that Isabel is "not the same as she once so beautifully was" Henrietta's suggestion highlights the transformations effected on Isabel's character by others. Ralph replies:

"Do you want to change her back again?"

"Of course I do, and I want you to help me."

"Ah," said Ralph, "I'm only Caliban; I'm not Prospero."

"You were Prospero enough to make her what she has become. You've acted on Isabel Archer since she came here, Mr Touchett." (PL, 127)

Henrietta's notion of Ralph's interest is revealing of both their characters. As the *ficelle* figure Henrietta discloses Ralph's desire to author Isabel's character. Her accusations as a reporter are a point of reference but her own sense that Isabel's text should not be altered hints at a tendency to simplify confusingly complex realities by an insistence on one text and a definitive reading. Henrietta's response is that of a journalist whereas Ralph is the artist-figure of the novel.

In terms of the reader's apprehension of character Ralph is perhaps the most difficult figure in the novel to assess. As an author-figure Ralph shares certain qualities not only with Prospero but with James. His mutable position as both artist-figure and reader resists simple definition for in attempting to protect Isabel from limitation and adversity Ralph ironically becomes "the beneficent author of infinite woe" (PL, 464). As a character Ralph resembles Prospero in his guise as a problematic artist-figure with regard both to his insights and his

limitations. Comparable to the magus figure of The Tempest Ralph abjures the world and in the operation of his artistic influence over the formation of Isabel's character his great intelligence is perpetual, ubiquitous and unseen. As a reader of character it is Ralph who best understands Isabel's courage and imagination but her capacity for both is earned only through the suffering which his own authorial plot for her life precipitates. The assertion of his artistry instigates great torment for Isabel but his capacity to understand and imagine engenders forgiveness and renewal. Prospero must "drown" his "book" before the end of the play; Ralph must acknowledge and abjure his authorial control (V, I .57).

For both Ralph and Osmond, Isabel's rejection of Lord Warburton is a gesture which sets in motion the operation of their own artistry as it confirms Isabel's status as an "original". Ralph feels that to accept would be "a little prosaic" for a character from whom he expects "a grand example" of the rare and "unexpected" (PL, 159). Osmond's appetite for acquisition is whetted when he learns of Isabel's refusal:

We know he was fond of originals, of rarities, of the superior and the exquisite ... he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by declining so noble a hand.... He had never forgiven his star for not appointing him to an English dukedom, and he could measure the unexpectedness of such conduct as Isabel's. It would be proper that the woman he might marry should have done something of that sort. (PL, 328)

The use of the same vocabulary for each project is significant in terms of James's notion of putting as a way of doing. The similarities in Ralph's and Osmond's way of describing Isabel indicate a shared attitude in their relation to her. Ralph and Osmond share a detachment from life which is the source of their interest in Isabel. In the exercise of their artistry on the heroine Ralph and Osmond each look to Isabel to engage in the activity of life (to use Osmond's terms "she would do the thing for him") whilst both seek to remain essentially passive themselves (PL, 331).

Ralph's illness has led to a detached passivity in which he savours the independence to indulge in a "boundless liberty of appreciation" and Ralph's ideas about Isabel are influential

because his stance seems to mirror a reader's relationship to the life of the novel (PL, 38). Like the reader, Ralph attempts to envision what Isabel will make of herself as he anticipates "the thrill of seeing what a young lady does who won't marry Lord Warburton" (PL, 159). Ralph refuses to consider marriage to Isabel himself, instead restricting his emotions to those comparable to a solicitous reader: "the imagination of loving -- as distinguished from that of being loved" (PL, 41). Ralph characterises himself as a reader "restricted to mere spectatorship at the game of life" and the money he gives Isabel is the high priced "ticket" he has paid to live vicariously through his cousin (PL, 158). Ralph's endowment of Isabel with riches is a characteristic act of "the desiring consciousness" which "seeks to save the object from life's poverty and finitude by loading it with a rich, multiplicitous, potentially infinite value that is ultimately in excess of its limited reality" (McWhirter 1989, 6).

Though Ralph's self-image is that of an interested reader his actions characterise him as a particular type of artist. Ralph's gift of prosperity which severs Isabel from the financial and communal necessities which govern human lives is dangerously romanticised by his vivid imagination. When Isabel becomes the wealthy woman he has made her, Ralph's beautiful facility with language takes the form of quite self-indulgent picturing: "Don't try so much to form your character.... Spread your wings; rise above the ground". Isabel's reply highlights the accountability Ralph will face for granting Isabel's character the excessive freedom of romance: "I wonder if you appreciate what you say. If you do, you take a great responsibility" (PL, 240).

In James's famous metaphor in the Preface to The American he describes romance as separating art from the felt life that informs it:

The balloon of experience is in fact of course tied to the earth, and under that necessity we swing, thanks to a rope of remarkable length, in the more or less commodious car of the imagination; but it is by the rope we know where we are, and from the moment the cable is cut we are at large and unrelated.... The art of the romancer is, "for the fun of it," insidiously to cut the cable, to cut it without our detecting him. (AN, 32-3)

Ralph's gift of money to Isabel is interestingly analogous to the irresponsible artistry of the

romancer. Financial benefaction is the means by which Ralph exerts his power by imposing his own fictive picture of his cousin and his action is morally questionable for it cuts Isabel free from the grounding of felt experience. In the gesture which puts "a little wind in her sails" Ralph ("for the fun of it") cuts the cable that ties Isabel to earth and by making Isabel rich enough to be "able to meet the requirements" of her imagination he grants her an independence that sets her dangerously adrift, at large and unrelated to the demands of reality (PL, 196). Mr Touchett challenges the idea of a large bequest in lieu of a more human commitment and questions the ethics of exercising this kind of influence for the sake of "mere amusement" (PL, 197). Ralph's action undercuts the perception of the reader as detached spectator motivated only by the thrill of seeing in illustrating that ideation is a participation in the text and thereby an act of authorship.

There is a disturbing element of authorial possession in the pleasure Ralph takes in observing his cousin. As they sit together on an evening in London, he savours an illusion of his mastery: "He liked immensely being alone with her in the thickening dusk ... it made her seem to depend on him and be in his power" (PL, 155). Ralph's mistake is to give undue credit to Isabel's romantic ideas about herself as this exchange with Isabel illustrates. Ralph declares:

"You've told me the great thing: that the world interests you and that you want to throw yourself into it".

Her silvery eyes shone a moment in the dusk. "I never said that."

"I think you meant it. Don't repudiate it. It's so fine!"

"I don't know what you're trying to fasten upon me, for I'm not in the least an adventurous spirit." (PL, 161)

Throughout the novel James suggests that fastening the other within a conception that fits a private fiction is a type of tyranny as the characters' interest in others is prompted by a desire to satisfy the requirements of their own imaginations. Ralph expects a return on his investment and his comment to his father exposes the private gain he hopes to reap in setting Isabel free from life's ordinary limits:

I shall get just the good I said a few moments ago I wished to put in Isabel's

reach -- that of having met the requirements of my imagination. But it's scandalous, the way I've taken advantage of you. (PL, 199)

Taking advantage of the other for one's own ends is a central concern in The Portrait. Osmond is also attracted to Isabel as an idea requiring actualization. It is significant that Isabel first appears to Osmond in the verbal picture which Madame Merle sets before him as a bait to his imagination. James alerts the reader's consciousness to the resemblance of Merle's project for Isabel to Ralph's by means of language which is strikingly similar: "It will amuse you" Merle tells Osmond. Countering Osmond's detailed list of the conditions of character that will make Isabel worth his effort, Merle's reply is a reminder of what Ralph stood to gain: "Miss Archer isn't dingy; she's as bright as the morning. She corresponds with your description.... She fills all your requirements" (PL, 258).

Osmond shares Ralph's passivity and his interest in Isabel but in indicating these resemblances I do not wish to argue that Ralph's project is the same as Osmond's; it is clearly the opposite, for Osmond "wished her to have no freedom of mind, and he knew perfectly well that Ralph was an apostle of freedom" (PL, 503). Yet the resemblances between the two men are important as the repetition of the project to shape Isabel into a creature who will fulfil imaginative requirements dramatically interrogates the concept of authorial agency. The patterning of the novel in which similar ideas are skilfully restated with significant modifications involves the reader in a series of creative reassessments not only of the characters' ideas but of their own authorial position. Ideation of character is the fundamental concern in the novel but the reader's ideational activity is constantly released from sharing any inert properties with the central, formal portrait of Isabel by means of the frequent revisions that the text encourages.

One such instance of revision is James's use of an identical activity to clarify the characters of Ralph and Osmond. Both men are collectors and on encountering Isabel each displays his collection. The picture presented of each man's mind evolves from and requires a comparison of the two events as the same activity exposes strikingly dissimilar perceptions.

Isabel is the main focus of Ralph's gaze which turns appreciatively from art to life: "bending his eyes much less upon the pictures than on her presence. He lost nothing ... by these wandering glances, for she was better worth looking at than most works of art" (PL, 47). Ralph's perceptive gaze performs a creative reading as he uses art to appreciate Isabel's human reality. When Osmond presents his collection, the switch in the narrator's focus compels a reassessment of such an enterprise, as both Isabel's and Osmond's use of art illustrates a disturbing aestheticisation of human beings. In Isabel's response to the beguiling fictive picture of himself which Osmond strives to represent he figures as the prize "specimen" in her gaze. His words and actions are directed to sounding a "note of rarity" which is the lure to the collector's instinct in her own imagination (PL, 282).

As Ralph realises, "under the guise of caring only for intrinsic values" Osmond lives "exclusively for the world ... the degree of its attention was his only measure of success ... everything he did was *pose* -- *pose* so subtly considered that if one were not on the lookout for it one mistook it for impulse" (PL, 427). As Osmond's pose acts on Isabel's imagination he becomes "the man to whose deep art she had succumbed" and the previous scene is revisited with an important amendment of vision (PL, 366):

Ralph had something of this same quality, this appearance of thinking that life was a matter of connoisseurship; but in Ralph it was an anomaly, a kind of humorous excrescence; whereas in Mr Osmond it was the keynote, and everything was in harmony with it. (PL, 282)

The difference in attitude to art is indicative of widely disparate personalities. Ralph's delight is aroused by an intuitive appreciation of Isabel's intrinsic qualities which prompts an authorial interest noticeably similar to James's description of Isabel in the Preface. Ralph's bequest sets Isabel free to enjoy the thrill of seeing her imagination in action:

"A character like that," he said to himself -- "a real little passionate force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It's finer than the finest work of art." (PL, 65)

Osmond's interest is not appreciation of imagination but appropriation: "his egotism had never taken the crude form of desiring a dull wife; this lady's intelligence was to be a silver plate" to

reflect and represent his own ideas "on a polished, elegant surface" (PL, 379). This image of appropriation is chilling but Isabel is less a passive victim than an active agent in her fate as she too imposes her own imaginative projections on reality. Whilst Osmond requires Isabel's imagination and money to display his own deluded perception of grandeur, Isabel chooses Osmond to fit her lofty conception of her own worth: "Ralph remembered what he had said to his father about wishing to put it into her power to meet the requirements of her imagination.... the girl had taken full advantage of the luxury" (PL, 377).

Recognition for Osmond is based on style and he succeeds with Isabel where other suitors have failed because as Torgovnick suggests "Isabel's seduction by Osmond is simultaneously a seduction by art.... Osmond courts by offering the accumulated beauties of the visual arts" (1985, 162). In a novel in which most of the characters are represented by comparison to a text, James sets Osmond distinctively apart by connecting him not with literary but with visual art. In the private fiction of Osmond's self-image he figures himself as a priceless but unrecognised painting by one of the great masters:

If an anonymous drawing on a museum wall had been conscious and watchful it might have known this peculiar pleasure of being at last and all of a sudden identified -- as from the hand of a great master -- by the so high and so unnoticed fact of style. His "style" was what the girl had discovered with a little help; and now, beside herself enjoying it, she should publish it to the world without his having any of the trouble. She should do the thing *for* him, and he would not have waited in vain. (PL, 330-331)

The disturbing and uncanny sense of being fixed in the moving gaze of a static picture is an apt characterisation for Osmond. Isabel does not wish "to touch the cup of experience" and her flight from the active passion that Warburton and Goodwood display implies a fearful resistance to true intercourse with life. It is Madame Merle who actively woos Isabel for Osmond and her exertion allows him to remain as passive as an enticing picture. Osmond's stance answers to what Ralph describes as Isabel's wish "to see but not to feel" (PL, 160). Isabel's reply to Ralph's assertion is a telling comment on the construction of reality: "I don't think if one is a sentient being one can make that distinction" (PL, 160). The ideational activity

of the novel suggests that perception necessarily involves an intricate network of cognitive and imaginative response unique to every individual.

Ralph and Isabel share a marked proclivity for thinking in pictures but their ability for genuine imaginative discernment is constantly qualified by deluded ideations of actualities. Mrs Touchett's sense that her son has "such a fanciful, pictorial way of saying things that he might as well address her in the deaf-mute's alphabet" indicates that Ralph's approach obscures lucidity (PL, 296). Ralph's misguided idea of Isabel's detached romantic life convinces him that she is not at risk. Mrs Touchett who, as the narrator observes, "had not the imagination that communes with the unseen", does not attempt to picture Isabel's inner reality (PL, 424) and she warns her son that "if Isabel wants to marry Mr Osmond she will in spite of all your comparisons" (PL, 296).

Isabel marries Osmond because she makes romantic comparisons of her own. The first person Isabel fictively pictures is her "handsome, much-loved father who always had such an aversion" to the unpleasantness of reality (PL, 32). Isabel displays the same traits, and in her romanticised reading of her childhood she remains quite deliberately misinformed of Mr Archer's indifferent negligence and the gambling habit that squandered his fortune. Her notion of her own father has interesting ramifications for her reading of Osmond who appears primarily as the father of a little girl in her romantic picturing:

She had carried away an image from her visit to his hill-top which her subsequent knowledge of him did nothing to efface ... the image of a quiet, sensitive, distinguished man, strolling on the moss-grown terrace above the sweet Val d'Arno and holding by the hand a little girl whose bell-like clearness gave a new grace to childhood. (PL, 299)

In the first half of the novel such ideations of character form the primary incidents as James critiques the imagination which seeks to impose a static and picturesque theory over mutable reality. Ralph's dismay over Isabel's fanciful picture of Osmond applies equally well to his own framing of the heroine:

she was wrong but she believed; she was deluded but dismally consistent. It was wonderfully characteristic of her that, having invented a fine theory about

Gilbert Osmond, she loved him not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed up as honours. (PL, 377)

Ralph's words to Isabel before her marriage demonstrate his hurt surprise that she has chosen Osmond and exposes the fixed nature of his own fictive picture of Isabel. Ralph initially believes he is setting Isabel free by giving her the money. His mistake is to assume that the consequent ends are predictable to the extent of satisfying his conceptions of her freedom. His theory of Isabel denies her the "felt life" of changeable selfhood. Only lived experience is sensitive and responsive to felt life; theories are destined to fall flat.¹¹ In critiquing his own tendency to write a romance for the story of his hero in The American James states "I had dug in my path, alas, a hole into which I was destined to fall" (AN, 35). He seems to transform his own experience into fiction with Ralph's designs for Isabel:

I had treated myself to a charming vision of your future ... I had amused myself with planning out a high destiny for you. There was to be nothing of this sort in it. You were not to come down so easily or so soon.... You seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue -- to be sailing in the bright light over the heads of men.... It hurts me ... hurts me as if I had fallen myself. (PL, 373)

Much of the reader empathy for Ralph stems from the fact that we share his sorrow, for like Ralph we have had too much faith in Isabel. In the conspicuous discrepancies of interpretation that arise in the first half of the novel James interrogates the very nature of Isabel's character. Not only does Isabel misread, but she is misread. Her perverse and enigmatic acceptance of Osmond after her refusals of Warburton and Goodwood shocks and bewilders the reader as much as it horrifies her friends. Unlike the other characters the reader is not permitted to misconstrue Osmond's character as access is granted early in the novel to the design he plots with Merle for Isabel's future but Isabel herself is easy to misread and indeed the novel's effect on the reader hinges in part on whether we do.

For both reader and character our misreadings are not sharply right or wrong but an imaginative reaching after the unseen truth that frequently misses the mark. Isabel's marriage to Osmond prompts a reassessment of our own reading of the intrinsic unknowable aspects of Isabel's character and a questioning of the qualities which satisfy her imagination. The novel

exposes the reader's own flaws in judgement by frustrating our desire to envision the portrait of Isabel as we would wish. For both reader and character the ideated picture of Isabel is dependent on our individual imagination and yet she remains persistently independent of our control. Her marriage causes a rupture in our created illusion: as an ideated figure she cannot be made to fit the requirements of our imaginations.

James seems to be arguing for the given existence of a "real" as the romantic dreams of the first half of the novel are gradually corrected by the assertion of grim reality; but the novel is a highly complex engagement with the operation of the imagination rather than a simple polarisation of fiction versus reality. It is important to recognise that for James "romance" as a genre obscured the way things usually happen but "the romantic" was the term he applied to what he perceived as the unknowable aspects of existence:

the real represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly *not* know sooner or later, in one way or another.... The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that, with all the facilities in the world ... and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure ... we never *can* directly know; the things that reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire. (AN, 31-32)

As the novel's concern with thinking in pictures intensifies and evolves into the conception of making pictures which reflect and represent the mind of the artist, what frees Isabel from the trap of Osmond's fictive picture is a reconnection with the real and the romantic. The ideations of the first half of the novel are not simply overturned; instead the introduction of the solid actuality of "the real" is a means whereby the character's link to "the romantic" in life is reassessed and revised. The "romantic" in this sense is of vital importance. It is comparable to the Iserian gaps of indeterminate meaning in the text. Iser argues that it is our reactions to our created illusions that involve us in the text: "the result is a dialectic -- brought about by the reader himself -- between illusion-forming and illusion-breaking" (Iser 1984, 127-8). This interchange ensures the text's dynamic virtual reality as the reader responds to the unformulated elements in the text that resist integration into the configured illusion and so prompt reassessment. The plot of The Portrait derives from reading and misapprehension of

character and in depicting the process by which the central portrait of Isabel is firstly configured and finally disrupted James highlights the central dialectic of ideation and revision which informs the reading process.

Rosier's encounter with the novel's heroine illustrates the triumph of Gilbert Osmond's portrait of Isabel, a picture in conflict with his (and the reader's) vivid memory of a lively young woman. The reader is not witness to the process of Osmond's triumph of authorship. James encourages the reader's communion with this unuttered and unseen process by creating a vast dark gap of indeterminacy within the text: the three-year break in the time sequence of the narrative. On the occasion of Osmond's proposal Isabel sees her future as "a last vague space ... a dusky, uncertain tract" that she has yet to cross (PL, 337). The reader does not cross it with her and next encounters her from the outside, cut off from access to her consciousness; appropriately, since Osmond has denied Isabel "a mind of her own" (PL, 469).

The reader is left to discern what has happened to Isabel through the readings of her appearance performed by other characters. Ralph feels on encountering Isabel that her true identity is hidden behind a mask:

it completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity painted on it; it was not an expression, Ralph said -- it was a representation, it was even an advertisement. (PL, 425)

In the "daily proceedings of Mr and Mrs Osmond" Ralph discerns the unseen but all-controlling "hand of the master" (PL, 426). For Osmond the material of life exists for nothing more than to be appropriated into a form that represents his own mind: "the motive was as vulgar as the art was great" (PL, 427). After her marriage Isabel's originality is nullified; she is referred to only as "Mrs Osmond" and has become nothing more than a signifier representing her husband:

The free, keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something. What did Isabel represent? Ralph asked himself; and he could only answer by saying that she represented Gilbert Osmond. He recognised Osmond ... at every turn, how he kept all things within limits; how he adjusted, regulated, animated their manner of life. (PL, 427)

Isabel seems an anaesthetized version of her vital self as she strives to be the wife that Osmond expects. Her marriage has fixed Isabel within the confines of her own fictive picture with the result that she is trapped within Osmond's frame of reference. Beneath a painted mask of indifference Isabel is reduced to attempting to project an image that both satisfies and protects her from Osmond and the caring but prying eyes of her friends. Her dismissive reaction to Rosier's love for Pansy indicates the extent of Osmond's exacting control. His invidious passivity requires that Isabel perform his bidding in managing the marriage of Pansy to Warburton just as Madame Merle arranged his own.

Pansy's story is less a sub-plot than a review of the story of the novel's central character.¹² It explicitly and implicitly induces comparisons with the first half of the novel as Pansy like Isabel is subject to the manipulative designs of Madame Merle and Osmond who wish to oversee her marriage as they did Isabel's. Osmond's idea for Pansy will be the similar imposition of a personal fictive picture motivated by financial and imaginative gain and this is made distinct by the reintroduction of the same phrases used earlier in connection with such pursuits. Merle says to Isabel:

"I had set my heart on that marriage; the idea did what so few things do -- it satisfied the imagination."

"Your imagination, yes. But not that of the persons concerned." (PL, 561)

Pansy's suitor is also Warburton, a man whom she rejects as Isabel has done, in favour of a man she loves. Rosier is a collector but with an important difference: in contrast to Osmond he has an "instinct for authenticity" -- a love of felt life that his "devotion to brittle wares had still not disqualified him to recognise" (PL, 398). In setting a vision of the past and present side by side the scheme to marry Pansy constitutes a re-reading of Isabel's story in which the similarities and differences serve both to revise and reform Isabel's character. More importantly the repetition instigates Isabel's freedom as it allows the performance of a creative renewal: through "the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of ... thought" the force of felt life returns to her text (AN, 32).

The renewed perception granted Isabel is made clear in her "extraordinary meditative vigil" in the novel's famous Chapter Forty Two. James describes the chapter in the Preface as a "representation simply of her motionlessly seeing.... It is ... the best thing in the book but it is only a supreme illustration of the general plan" (PL, xl). James's revision of his own works for the New York Edition is a project which indicates his concern with the act of reading as he repeatedly adopts "the stance of the reader, as well as author of his works. In doing so James advances a view of the fictional form as inexorably bound to the re-vision that proceeds from the changing contingent influences of author, reader and work" (Ringuette 1990, 115). James's statement in the Preface that the chapter is an "attempt to make the mere still lucidity of her act as 'interesting' as the surprise of a caravan or the identification of a pirate" (PL, xl) demonstrates his essential conviction that the activity of human consciousness constitutes "a drama in its own right" (Armstrong 1987, 6). The central undertaking in James's art is the depiction of the art of consciousness which he views as the complex human capacity to construct and revise perceptions of reality by communing imaginatively with the unseen -- in the sense of imaginative possibility. As a simultaneous generation of ideation and revision, Chapter Forty Two is best understood as an illustration of the reading process required by the novel itself. "Revision for character, author and reader is a developmental principle revealing an expanding consciousness, constantly realising growing relations ... James demonstrates by his own example, self cannot but constantly revise and 're-see' self" (Ringuette 1990, 119).

For Isabel the vigil is a re-reading of her story and therefore a revision of self. The path to the truth is not linear but achieved by an ordeal of reflection and interpretation which requires going back over the same experience with new vision. For the reader the chapter allows a disturbing communion with the unseen. As Isabel re-lives her experience of marriage to Osmond the reader travels with her over the missing element of her story: the three-year break which has transfigured the heroine, during which "a gulf" opens between Osmond and Isabel "over which they looked at each other with eyes that were on each side a declaration of

the deception suffered" (PL, 461). Isabel's growing self-knowledge leads her to admit that in the first year of her marriage she had striven to meet the requirements of her husband's imagination:

if she had not deceived him in intention she understood how completely she must have done so in fact. She had effaced herself when he first knew her; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was. It was because she had been under the extraordinary charm that he, on his side, had taken pains to put forth. (PL, 462-3)

In her reassessment of the composition of her fictive picture Isabel recognises the partial and therefore mistaken nature of her own and her husband's reading of each other. As she finally confronts "the whole man" Isabel's vigil of consciousness gradually reveals that her rich imaginative faculties have mislead her in her conception of Osmond's individuality:

But she had only seen half his nature then ... she had mistaken the part for the whole ... she had imagined a world of things that had no substance.... fed by charmed senses and oh such stirred fancy! -- *she had not read him right....* Isabel's cheek burned when she asked herself if she had really married on a factitious theory. (PL, 463-464, my italics)

The marriage sours as Isabel begins to see Osmond's aesthetic values as the antithesis to life or freedom: "When she saw this rigid system close about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, that sense of darkness and suffocation ... took possession of her; she seemed shut up with the odour of mould and decay" (PL, 469). Her attempt to resist the deathly imprisonment of Osmond's mind and assert an individuality that counters his own is what releases the full force of Osmond's hatred: "it was then that her husband's personality, touched as it had never been, stepped forth and stood erect" (PL, 469).¹³

Isabel's attempt to see her life whole due to the renewed awareness of her partial knowledge is prompted by "a remembered vision" which conveys a hitherto unseen aspect of her husband's character (PL, 473). The tableau before the fire in which Osmond sits whilst Merle stands is a fleeting impression which is dispelled when Isabel enters the room but as fictive picture it remains in her memory evoking a sense of a relation between Madame Merle and Osmond that she has "not seen or at least not noticed" until encountering in the positions

of the two friends an element which strikes her "as something detected" (PL, 442-443). The image is one which Iser would describe as an "alien association": an element in a text which signals a discrepancy in interpretation and so challenges the stable consistency of the configured illusion (Iser 1972, 290). It is significant that Isabel's thoughts are set into "livelier motion" as the image prompts a re-examination of her reading of life (PL, 460). Although she does not realise it, what Isabel sees in the impression of Merle and Osmond is a picture of how she was married and as she sits up "trying to persuade herself that there was no reason why Pansy shouldn't be married as you would put a letter in the post-office" Isabel's conscious engagement with the control of Pansy's text undoes the stasis of the design imposed on her own life (PL, 473).

The first indication of Osmond's tyranny is given in Isabel's initial visit to his chill, sterile world of style and form. Madame Merle's statement "I don't pretend to know what people are meant for ... I only know what I can do with them" is placed in reference to a vivid illustration of the implications of such a project: the figure of Osmond's doll-like daughter whose forced seclusion from the world renders her no different from one of the pictures of his collection (PL, 259). Pansy's remark on one of Osmond's copied sketches is an interesting commentary on his nature:

"It's very pretty, papa. Did you make it yourself?"
 "Certainly I made it. Don't you think I'm clever?"
 "Yes, papa, very clever; I have also learnt to make pictures."
 And she turned round and showed a small, fair face painted
 with a fixed and intensely sweet smile.
 "You should have brought me a specimen of your powers."
 (PL, 247)

Osmond copies, he does not create -- the sketches he produces as mimetic reflections of his own power are analogous with his project to fix both Isabel and Pansy into meticulous pictorial representations of his self-gratifying aesthetic ideals.

In not being allowed to leave the limits of her father's house Pansy like Isabel is trapped within Osmond's consciousness: "the mansion of his own habitation.... It was the

house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air" (PL, 466). Osmond's malignant life-denying authorial control of his wife and daughter originates in his disavowal of their humanity: "The real offence, as [Isabel] perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his -- attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park. He would rake the soil gently and water the flowers; he would weed the beds and gather the occasional nose-gay. It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching" (PL, 469).

The picture of Osmond as a proprietor of both house and garden is significant in terms of the two central tropes of authorship James uses in the Preface. Carren Kaston in discussing the imagery of houses and organic growth in the *Portrait's* Preface comments that "in these two groups of metaphors, James implicitly debates how much control the artist should exert over his material" (1984, 8). The two distinct images do not conflict in the Preface but instead seem to fortify each other. In the novel itself the name Gardencourt merges into one word the image of house and garden: becoming a touchstone in a pattern of imagery that is threaded through the story of Isabel's life. In reading the novel the reader enters James's house of fiction. Yet set against the architectural metaphors in which James describes the authorial control of his bricks/words of the text is the image for the development of the story in the creative imagination. In seeming contrast the growth of the story is described in terms of indeterminate organic flowering:

These are the fascinations of the fabulist's art, these lurking forces of expansion, these necessities of upspringing in the seed, these beautiful determinations, on the part of the idea entertained, to grow as tall as possible, to push into the light and the air and thickly flower there.... (PL, xvii)

Describing his own process of re-reading his novels for the New York Edition James's positioning of himself as a reader of his own texts provides important commentary on the concerns that governed his own authorial role. In the Preface to *The Awkward Age* what delights James as a reader of his texts is not the realisation of their authorial mastery but what seems to be shared by his "group of productions ... which have in common, to their author's

eye, the endearing sign that they asserted in each case an unforeseen principle of growth" (AN, 99). Ringuette comments that the phrase "unforeseen principle of growth" is one frequently cited by Jamesian critics in connection with such concepts as organicism and romanticism but notes that viewed in terms of literary authority and agency the phrase has an important significance:

For an artist who all his creative life placed such emphasis on the powers of observation, and who continues to do so in the Prefaces, the admission of any part of the creative process as being *unforeseen* is striking. Being "unforeseen," unexpected, this "principle of growth" cannot possibly be an assertion of the artist -- it is not to be found in simply artistic volition.... The "production", isolated neither in the work's assertion nor in the will of the artist, can only be found in the relation between work and reader, that is in re-reading, revision... [therefore] the unforeseen principle of growth is manifested in the act of revision. (Ringuette 1990, 116-7)

Such natural growth is not permitted in the dark, claustrophobic world of Osmond's fictional constructions -- his systematic subjugation extends to the organic where the activities of raking and weeding are indications of his diabolic control. Isabel notes his life-denying "faculty for making everything wither that he touched" (PL, 461). Yet Isabel's re-reading of her life is set in motion by her engagement with Pansy -- and as the little flower in the dark house of Osmond's consciousness Pansy has an important function in a novel in which gardens and houses contrast and combine as tropes of authorship. Her name stems etymologically from the French term *pensee* for thought and ultimately Pansy is not a simple indication of Osmond's mastery but rather an intimation of its limits -- in the reformation of Isabel's character Pansy operates as an "unforeseen principle of growth" manifested by an act of revision.¹⁴ Whether Pansy herself is ever free of Osmond's control is unresolved by the novel's close but it is clear that the revision of Isabel's narrative through its repetition in the story of Pansy is what sets the character of Isabel free from every constraint of authorial control to which she has been subject.¹⁵

In a continuation of the tropological use of text in the novel Isabel's image of Pansy's character is critical. She sees little Pansy as "a blank sheet of white paper -- the ideal *jeune*

fille of foreign fiction" and hopes that "so fair and smooth a page would be covered with an edifying text" (PL, 301). In Isabel's initial reading of her step-daughter she interprets such immaculate purity as bland, innocuous vulnerability; her image of Pansy as written and posted like a letter signals Osmond's complete authorial control of his daughter's character. Isabel's midnight vigil however, induces a re-evaluation of Pansy. Isabel's gradual realisation of "the depths of perception of which this submissive little person was capable" establishes that Pansy's blankness belies an extraordinary vitality (PL, 513).

Isabel realises that she has misjudged her step-daughter's capacity for original thought, and discerns in Pansy's conviction that Warburton will not propose that the girl possesses "a sufficient illumination of her own" (PL, 514). Isabel's constant revisions of the characters in her life is a practice whereby James demonstrates that revision is a necessary element in permeating the stasis of the fictive picture with life. In the Preface to The Awkward Age he describes how in the process of revising his own works he "almost throbs with ecstasy, when on an anxious review, the flush of life reappears" in the text through the act of reading (AN, 99).

I began this chapter with a discussion of Iser's notion that it is the gaps or blanks in a text that allow its realisation in the reader's mind as a dynamic virtual existent. In Isabel's story the blank page of Pansy's life is a site for such dynamism to re-occur.¹⁶ Within the resolute stasis of Osmond's determined text Pansy is a space in which original thought and active creative engagement may once again imbue Isabel's character with felt life. Osmond has suppressed her spirit but he has not succeeded in completely authoring Isabel and her mask of indifference begins to drop as she realises the extent of his control over Pansy. Before her marriage Isabel is "impressed by Osmond's artistic, the plastic view, as it somehow appeared, of Pansy's innocence" but contrasts "her own appreciation of it [as] being more anxiously moral" (PL, 383). Ralph intuitively points to the ethical concern that will animate Isabel from the spiritual death that Osmond's art imposes: "It's an interesting question -- how far her

fondness for Pansy will carry her" (PL, 434). Her desire to save Pansy from the machinations of Osmond's control alerts Isabel to the occult workings of Merle and Osmond in designing her own marriage.

Appalled by her husband's determination to coerce her into an act of dehumanising co-authorship Isabel's growing concern for Pansy's welfare allows a connection with the real as she begins to encounter the truth that her own romantic imagination and the deception of others has kept from her. Her own powerful capacity to imagine allows Isabel to detect a pattern of influence over her own life in Merle's interest over Pansy's marriage. The narrator alerts the reader to Isabel's increasingly successful figurative reaching for the truth of her situation:

Isabel heard a cold, mocking voice proceed from she knew not where, in the dim void that surrounded her, and declare this bright, strong, definite worldly woman ... was a powerful agent in her destiny.... Madame Merle had been unwilling to interfere, certainly, but only so long as there was nothing to interfere with. It will perhaps seem to the reader that Isabel went fast in casting doubt, on mere suspicion.... She moved quickly indeed ... for a strange truth was filtering into her soul. Madame Merle's interest was identical to Osmond's: that was enough. (PL, 560-561)

Isabel's struggle to free Pansy alerts her to and liberates her from the deceptions that have trapped her in a picture that is not entirely of her own creation. Her questions to Madame Merle -- "Who are you -- what are you.... What do you have to do with my husband.... What have you to do with me?" -- are answered by Merle's emphatic reply "Everything", and Isabel finally perceives the process in which she has been constructed by the authorial powers of others: "It had come over her like a high-surfing wave that Mrs Touchett was right. Madame Merle had married her" (PL, 563).

Isabel is finally empowered with the unuttered story of her life by the Countess Gemini -- such secret knowledge is appalling, yet the sense that her fictive picture has been finally released from its enslaving stasis is emphasised in Isabel's reaction to seeing Madame Merle at the convent where she visits Pansy before leaving for Gardencourt: "the effect was strange, for Madame Merle was already so present to her vision that her appearance in the flesh was like

suddenly and rather awfully seeing a painted picture move" (PL, 600). As Merle completes Isabel's story in informing her that Ralph is the source of the bequest which has made her a rich woman and a victim, Isabel's startled reply: "He made me --?.... I believed it was you I had to thank" alerts the reader to the layers of authorial interest that have gone into the composition of Isabel's portrait (PL, 610). Ralph's deathbed confession, "I believe I ruined you", mirrors the self-knowledge that magician/author Prospero must face when he acknowledges his responsibility for "this thing of darkness" as his own creation (PL 628).¹⁷ But the deathbed scene is an affirmation of both life and love -- there is an absence of blame and of deceit, for what is most important to the two friends is that together they can see the story whole: "nothing mattered now but the only knowledge that was not pure anguish -- the knowledge that they were looking at the truth together" (PL, 628).

As the novel nears its close the sense that the central character's existence is constantly constructed by means of the reading process is emphasised in Isabel's vision of her knowledge. Her possession of a more complete truth adopts the recurrent architectural metaphors James uses to describe the novel itself: "Now that she was in the secret, now that she knew something that so much concerned her and the eclipse of which had made life resemble an attempt to play whist with an imperfect pack of cards, the truth of things, their mutual relations, their meaning, and for the most part their horror, rose before her with a kind of architectural greatness" (PL, 611). Despite such structural images however the idea of Isabel's life as complete or immutably constructed is quietly discarded on her return to Gardencourt when she revisits the gallery of pictures. In her despair Isabel envies "the security of valuable 'pieces' which change by no hair's breadth, only grow in value, while their owners lose inch by inch youth, happiness, beauty" (PL, 620). Torgovinick notes that the comparison asserts the necessity for change, flux and uncertainty in human existence (1985, 164). The novel itself is without closure. Isabel's final gesture as a character is to leave for Rome to engage once again in the life she has reassessed. Deep in Isabel's soul is "the sense that life would be her business

for a long time to come". This deep conviction of a continued life varies from "a sometimes inspiring, almost enlivening conviction" to a sense of "the quick, vague shadow of a long future. She would never escape; she should last until the end. Then the middle years wrapped her about again..." (PL, 612-3).

The ending of the novel contains this conflicting sense of Isabel's liberation yet continuing entrapment: "She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path" (PL, 644). Where does the straight path lead? Paradoxically it seems, in two conflicting directions. James's comments on the conclusion to his novel in his notebooks are illuminating in assessing Isabel's status at the end of the novel:

the obvious criticism will be that it is not finished -- that I have not seen the heroine to end of her situation -- that I have left her *en l'air* -- this is both true and false. The *whole* of anything is never told; you can only take what groups together. What I have done has that unity -- it groups together. It is complete in itself -- and the rest, may be taken up or not, later. (NB, 15)

In seeing Isabel to the open-ended end of her situation James makes his final comment on her status as imagined figure and on the reader's role in her realisation. Isabel Archer as character is not the product of the assertion of an individual artist's will -- she comes into existence only in the relation between the text and the reader. Part of the narrative of The Portrait of a Lady is a debate about the rival claims of life and art; what escapes art has a sufficient and enlivening reality for James hence the importance of Isabel's defection. In this supreme gesture of liberation the completion of the story is placed entirely in the reader's mind yet our very lack of certainty as to Isabel's future compels us to recognise the limits to our own authorial power as we attempt to commune with the unseen. Like James himself, Ralph has learnt Isabel's essential freedom -- the gaps in the text he cannot and (morally) must not fill. This is the lesson for the reader too. Isabel as imagined figure remains an unknowable other who exists within the world we construct and renew by the action of fictionalising.

If Isabel always remains with Pansy and Osmond she has learnt to put her soul into her story. She cannot remain in the garden, or escape with Caspar to a new life, especially as she

senses something anarchic in his request. His passionate appeal: "We've nothing to do with all that; we're quite out of it.... We can do absolutely as we please" hints at a life that is unconcerned with the felt experience which has matured Isabel (PL, 643). Isabel returns to Rome: the city which provided comfort to her own sorrow. Rome is endowed with centuries of art and life -- permeated with a history of life touched, suffered and experienced. Yet she also re-enters the house of darkness and suffocation. James seems to be suggesting that for reader and character an active engagement with life prohibits escape from the realities we create for ourselves and like Isabel we must live forever in the houses of our fictions. Her portrait is finally a self-portrait and her re-entry into the narrative she has helped create suggests her maturity in making a committed connection to the grim reality of responsibility: the responsibility conditioned by a "felt" not simply imagined life.

James's assertion that "the *whole* of anything is never told" is enacted in his final authorial gesture which sets Isabel free from the confines of his discourse: as she lifts the latch she leaves the frame of the narrative and is liberated from the multi-layered authorial control that has delineated her character (NB, 15). Isabel as imagined figure exists beyond the discourse of the text in the mind of the reader but paradoxically exists potentially within the printed text of the novel. Her continued existence in both these realms once the novel is read will be manifested in the reader in a series of revisions, remembered visions or re-readings of the previous ideation, all of which continue to extend the concerns of the novel itself. The open-ended close assures the intermingling of life and art for the possibility and potentiality of Isabel's character to continue. Isabel "survives" all the determinations which have oppressed her, even her author's; but in a sense here we are all both readers and authors at this threshold. To read is to step outside ourselves into an encounter as much as it is to construct the world according to our inevitable points of view. The co-operative nature of reading is the guarantee that life should be "felt", not prescribed; this feeling can only be done organically as it cannot be premeditated or conceptually determined. For James, the acceptance of "life" into "art"

happens just at this point of freedom -- the point where Isabel escapes the novel.

Perhaps as a reader my figurative reaching after the truth of the relation of art and life in this novel is best expressed in terms of my own fictive picture, an ideation guided by the words of James's Preface: the novel is a Gardencourt which comes into existence as it is read. Its beauty stems from its extraordinary composition, for the words are not held down by mortar but connected by a rich quantity of organic life. In the gaps between the stones flower the forces for expansion -- the pansies: the thoughts of the reader which continue to infuse the text with renewed and renewable "unforeseen" principles for growth.

Notes

1. The letters and telegrams in James's novels hold within their few phrases a world of polysemic significance, often creating an anxiety of interest on the part of the characters. The telegram is also symbolic of the "condensation" or foreshortening that James saw as integral to written art. In the Preface to The Tragic Muse James describes the "rich density of the successfully foreshortened thing" possessing "a compactness into which the imagination may cut thick" (TF, 193).
2. That James was indeed deeply interested in the possibilities of co-authorship is suggested by his participation in 1908 in a project of collaborative novel-writing, The Whole Family: A Novel by Twelve Authors (Kaston 1984, 14).
3. Craig Howard White traces the word "interest" and its variants in the Portrait: "The novel's nearly obsessive use of the term ... develops aesthetic and psychological attention in homologous terms with commercial investments" (1991, 192).
4. Isabel sees Caspar as hard and warrior-like: his eyes "seemed to shine through the vizard of a helmet" and though his nature is responsive to pain, he seems as inexhaustible in his efforts as one of his machines: "he was naturally plated and steeled, armed essentially for aggression" (PL, 165). Caspar's final kiss contains "each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her" (PL, 644).
5. Roslyn Jolly suggests that "the first fourteen chapters of the novel are spent outlining and then rejecting a romance plot" but she argues that "Isabel has not rejected romance outright but has merely substituted one kind of romance for another" (1993, 48).
6. The international theme in James's novels illustrates that readings are a product of place as much as of temperament: readings often depend on geographical as well as personal co-

ordinates. America as the beginning of Isabel's story is presented as the place of univocal assumptions and readings. Henrietta is intensely American in her outlook, as is Caspar. Ralph's status as a European American makes him difficult to classify and his readings original. Osmond and Isabel's de-nationalised (as well as *declassé*) status has a bearing on their freedom of choice.

7. Isabel fixes Warburton's unique human reality solely in novelistic terms as "a hero of romance" (PL, 69). As a member of the landed gentry Warburton is grounded by land, heritage and social responsibility but when Isabel meets the nobleman it is significant that he is in the process of reviewing and reconsidering the implications of his traditional position. In Isabel's fictive picture of Warburton however, she does not regard his existence as offering real possibilities.

8. Michael Davitt Bell argues that for James romance "is less a label of a form or genre than a kind of experience". Bell notes that "James characterises romance as a radical lack of integration between the actual and the imaginary" which as an art form palms off "a spurious facsimile of experience" on the reader (1980, 8).

9. I owe this insight to Martha Nussbaum's commentary on Jamesian novels in Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature. Nussbaum argues for the reassessment of literature as a type of moral philosophy as some truths can only be understood through an emotional engagement with a richly particular and specific human situation. She argues that Jamesian novels offer "a paradigm of moral activity" as the actions of describing and picturing are critical "actions in their own right [which] have a moral value that is not reducible to that of the overt acts they engender" (1992, 148-153).

10. Johnathan Freedman explores James's relation to the aesthetic movement and views The Portrait of a Lady as a complex satire and commentary on the ubiquity of aestheticism which is manifested in Isabel and Ralph as well as Osmond. Freedman argues that whilst James's "goal is not hyperbolically to delineate the moral deficiencies of aestheticism" he firmly "reminds the reader of the values that Osmond's reifying aestheticism ignores: a respect for the fundamentally mysterious otherness of human beings" (1990, 166).

11. In a letter to Hugh Walpole (1913) James affirmed his belief in felt experience as necessary to art: "We must know, as much as possible, in our beautiful art, yours and mine, what we are talking about -- and the only way to know is to have lived and loved and cursed and floundered and enjoyed and suffered" (TF, 68).

12. Pansy's story is vital to the novel's structure. In his Notebooks James expresses his concern that "the success of the whole story greatly depends upon this portion being well conducted or not" (NB, 13).

13. Marianna Torgovnick points out that Isabel realises "Osmond too has been victimised by their marriage; that he expected a patron and got instead a critic" (1985, 162).

14. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines the etymology of pansy as follows: LME [(O)Fr. *pensee* thought, pansy, f. *penser* think f. Latin *pensare* weigh, consider, (in Proto-Romance) think.]

15. Iser's comments on re-reading clarify James's purpose in presenting a repetition of Isabel's story in Pansy's: "It is common enough for a person to say that on a second reading he noticed things he had missed when he read the book for the first time, but this is scarcely surprising in view of the fact that the second time he is looking at the book from a different perspective....

this first reading cannot possibly be repeated on a second reading and this unrepeatability is bound to result in modifications of his reading experience.... Thus even on repeated viewings a text allows and, indeed, induces innovative readings (Iser 1972, 286).

16. Pansy's function in the text is similar to the blank pages Laurence Sterne inserts in lieu of printed text into Tristram Shandy. In asking the reader to fill the blank pages with his or her own ideas of a character Sterne overtly asks the reader to do what other texts implicitly insist on. In The Portrait of a Lady James makes use of Pansy symbolically, indicating that such blank gaps are the spaces permitting the reader's active imaginative engagement with the text.

17. In the final act of the Tempest Prospero states his accountability for Caliban: "These two fellows you must know and own; this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (V, I.275).

Chapter Three.

Stepping through the Looking-Glass: the Importance of "Double Consciousness" in The Ambassadors.

The Ambassadors was Henry James's favourite of his own works; he referred to it as "frankly quite the best, 'all round' of my productions" (TA, 35). It is a novel which testifies to the power of life itself and the novel as an art form. The readily apparent nature of these two ideas belies the crucial way in which both concerns are fundamentally linked to the experience of reading as structured, required and attained by this text. The Ambassadors does not so much tell a fiction as illustrate the human need for the experience of fiction -- especially in the form of "the Novel", which Henry James called "the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms" (TA, 51).

With The Ambassadors James moves into what many critics have called his "major phase". The productions of the major phase are characterised by a heightened use of language in a style which is a superior extension and intensification of the techniques which inform James's art. The prose is exacting, intricate and challenging and seems to require a certain quality of reader. The implicit claim of the language itself is that only a person endowed with various qualities -- intelligence, a capacity for rigorous attention to detail, a deftness with language and the subtleties of its interpretation, as well as patience, humour and an acute sensitivity to the inner lives of others -- can adequately respond to the challenges it presents.¹ In the apprehension of the complex and demanding human situation depicted in The Ambassadors this combination of rare qualities is manifested where it might be least expected -- in the readings of Paris performed by Lambert Strether, the humble, self-effacing editor of the *Woollett Review*.

In directing the reader's response to what James calls "my demonstration of this process of vision", his text demands the same qualities from the reader as displayed by the central consciousness (TA, 34). An awareness of this doubling of experience in character and reader can

bring about an appreciation of the value in human terms of the cognitive experiences not only depicted but made possible by the very act of reading the novel itself. The ambassadorial motif which structures the relations of the characters in the novel significantly designs the reader's relationship to the text's central character. Although the formidable Mrs Newsome might be quite disconcerted to discover it, Strether is the reader's ambassador first and foremost as his adventure in Europe provokes and resembles the reader's enterprise in the text -- an experience which extends beyond the interpretative search for meaning to a relation with life itself.

In the novel's Preface James declares that "nothing is more easy than to state the subject of The Ambassadors", as it resides in Strether's "irrepressible outbreak to Little Bilham" in Gloriani's garden: "the remarks to which he thus gives utterance contain the essence of The Ambassadors, his fingers close, before he has done, round the stem of the full-blown flower" (TA, 33). Strether's interrogation of the situation in Paris brings him to what James in the Preface calls "a crisis" as to how he has lived and how one should live -- the subject of the novel itself (TA, 33):

Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what *have* you had? This place and these impressions -- mild as you may find them to wind a man up so; all my impressions of Chad and of people I've seen at *his* place -- well, have had their abundant message for me, have just dropped *that* into my mind. I see it now. I haven't done so enough before. (TA, 215)

As the place and its people crowd Strether's mind with vivid impressions his adventure of perception reveals to him that he has not lived. In Paris Strether has clearly seen or understood something about living which has eluded him before. Yet his outbreak to Little Bilham raises more questions than it answers. What precisely does it mean to "live all you can"? What does it exactly entail to "have your life"? In attempting to answer these questions it is necessary to explore the particular nature of Strether's experience and the way in which the type of reading demanded by the novel itself is critically linked to living in the special way in which Strether comes to understand it.

Strether's experience in The Ambassadors is James's exploration of the process of making meaning in an unknown world. Like Maisie and Isabel, Strether acts as a reader of a text, using what Iser terms "fictionalizing acts" to gain an understanding of a world which requires imagination and intelligence to grasp in all its complexity (Iser 1993, 3). His process of vision is akin to authorship. In Paris Strether's only means of understanding is to guess the unseen from the seen and the unknown from the known by inventing fictions about the characters with whom he comes into contact.

The first example of such an authorial activity however is the story both Strether and the reader are primed with at the outset of the novel. Woollett knows nothing of Paris and Chad's continued failure to return home is explained away by means of Mrs Newsome's simplistic narrative. In Mrs Newsome's version of the story her only son Chad has fallen into the clutches of a morally corrupt Parisian enchantress. Strether is co-opted into this narrative as Mrs Newsome's stand-in, and his "mission", should he accept it, is to rescue Chad and to bring him "home in triumph as a sort of wedding-present to Mother" (TA, 166). Mrs Newsome sends Strether instead of herself, confident that in Europe as in Woollett, he will continue in the role he has always played so well; that of her ambassador. Early in the novel it is revealed that Strether is a man with no inner identity of his own. He does not seem to possess what Paul Armstrong calls a "Self-for-Self"; instead he manifests only a "Self-for-Others" (Armstrong 1983, 137).²

Strether is, but he does not have, himself. Iser views such a predicament as the "decentered state" of humankind in which "our existence is incontestable, but at the same time inaccessible to us" (Iser 1990, 123). In his theory of aesthetic response Iser explores the process of interaction between the text and the reader but his focus on the reader's response raises the questions posed in his latest work which he describes as both "an underpinning and an offshoot of reader-response criticism" (1989, ii). Iser has turned increasingly to anthropology in order to explore the human need for the particular medium of fiction. Iser argues that "the anthropological

significance of fiction becomes unmistakable in relation to the many unknowable realities permeating human life" (1990, 951). He refers to social anthropologist Helmuth Plessner's dictum "I am but I do not have myself" as a means of asking why human beings need fiction (quoted in Iser 1990, 950). Iser's description of the contribution fictionalising makes to the human sense of existence has interesting implications for Strether's experience of living in The Ambassadors: "'Have' means knowing what it is to be, which would require a transcendental stance in order to grasp the self-evident certainty of our existence with all its implications, significance and indeed meaning. If we wish to have what remains impenetrable, we are driven beyond ourselves ... we resort to fictionalising." (1990, 950).

Iser points out that if a literary text does something to its readers it also reveals something about them and suggests that the human need for literature, for a make-believe that we know to be make-believe, is a need to experience what he calls the "fictive" (1993, xiv). Iser's theory of aesthetic response describes a game of the imagination played between text and reader: an interchange which creates a virtual reality which has not existed before. His recent questioning of why we need to play this game highlights the human need for a particular mode of consciousness. Iser characterises the "fictive" as "an operational mode of consciousness" experienced in the playground of the text which allows the reader to open up the determinacy of the real world to the unrealised possibilities of oneself and one's existence (1993, xv).

The reading experience required by The Ambassadors is a vivid example of the liberating and expansive effect of the literary text on the human consciousness as James brings us to a heightened awareness for the human need for fiction as an experience of the "fictive". James states in the Preface that Paris "is a mere symbol for more things than had been dreamt of in the philosophy of Woollett" and in the novel Paris and its enigmatic characters play the part of the unrealised possibilities of existence (TA, 42). Once Strether enters the text of Paris as the reader's ambassador, the master narrative of Woollett begins to break down in the presence of other

versions of the story.

When Strether steps off the boat in Europe he has undergone what Harry Levin describes as "a sea-change". The "physical transit also proved to be a psychological transition" (1986, 10). As Strether leaves Woollett behind he and the reader enter an open-ended text where meanings are not given but must be conscientiously configured with interest and intelligence. Woollett is James's metaphor for what Iser would describe as "a closed system". This system, in contrast to the artist's need for an exploratory outlook, displays the

overriding concern that whatever existed -- even if it eluded perception -- should be translated into something tangible. When the closed system is punctured and replaced by open-endedness, the mimetic component of representation declines and the performative one comes to the fore. The process then no longer entails reading behind appearances in order to grasp an intelligible world ... but turns into a way of world-making. (1989, 249)

At the outset of the novel Strether is very much the product of Woollett's closed system. James describes Strether in the Preface as a man who possesses "imagination galore", but crushed by a system concerned with product rather than process, he sees himself as a failure (TA, 36)³. When Maria Gostrey asks Strether what he does in Woollett, Strether admits that he does not touch the Newsome's "big bouncing business" but edits the *Woollett Review*:

"The Review? -- you have a Review?"

"Certainly. Woollett has a Review -- which Mrs Newsome, for the most part magnificently pays for and which I, not at all magnificently, edit. My name's on the cover," Strether pursued....

"And what kind of a Review is it?"

.... "Well it's green."

"Do you mean in political colour as they say here -- in thought?"

"No; I mean the cover's green -- of the most lovely shade."

"And with Mrs Newsome's name on it too?"

He waited a little. "Oh as for that you must judge if she peeps out. She's behind the whole thing; but she's of a delicacy and a discretion-- !"

Miss Gostrey took it all. "I'm sure. She would be." (TA, 100)

Maria's perceptive reaction to this information is to decide that Strether effaces himself as she judges correctly that the Review symbolises the man. It is as "green" as Strether himself, and

though both man and Review bear Strether's name, Mrs Newsome is the author of the content within.⁴ Strether admits that the *Woollett Review* is what he has been "reduced to doing" for himself: "It seems to rescue a little you see, from the wreck of hopes and ambitions ... my one presentable little scrap of identity" (TA, 100-101).

As Mrs Newsome's editor, Strether has come to do the most important editing job of his life, the text this time being Chadwick Newsome. He has been dispatched to reconstruct Chad by carefully editing from the account of this young man's life "the wicked woman" with whom he is entangled and whose existence threatens not only Chad's moral status but the "high hopes" placed on him as heir to the Newsome fortunes (TA, 93).

In engaging our fortunes implicitly with Strether, the reader supports him in his quest. But a curious thing happens to both Strether and the reader from the moment the first "note of Europe" is struck (TA, 55). From the very first sentence of the novel, the story does not unfold according to the rigid Woollett plan -- the closed system has been punctured and Strether is "not wholly disconcerted" by this eventuality (TA, 55). In his first encounter with the fictive he is instead conscious of a wonderful state of being: "of personal freedom as he hadn't known for years; such a deep taste of change and of having above all nobody and nothing to consider" (TA, 55).

For perhaps the first time in his life Strether can be himself for himself. The failure of his friend Waymarsh to arrive on time leaves Strether alone in a new world, not so much of Europe as the world of his own individual possibilities. It is a treasure he has quite forgotten he possessed:

He was like a man who, elatedly finding in his pocket more money than usual, handles it a while and idly and pleasantly chinks it before addressing himself to the business of spending. (TA, 56)

Strether's entrance to Europe is a curious reading experience in so far as it is so self-consciously staged by James. From the first paragraph of the novel "we are in the presence of self-

consciousness, rather than presented with things and events as they are, Strether's mixed feelings even further qualify any direct sense of things" (McKee 1988, 253). Nothing highlights the text's status as make-believe more than the appearance of Maria Gostrey. As the two characters converse, the reader has the peculiar experience that they talk, at times, as if they know they are characters in a novel. What Iser calls the "self-disclosed fictionality" of fiction is at work as they attempt to find a valid reason for their meeting in such a way (Iser 1989, 238):

"It's falling thus in twenty minutes so utterly into your hands. I dare say," Strether continued, "it's a sort of thing you're thoroughly familiar with; but nothing more extraordinary has ever happened to me."
 She watched him with all her kindness. "That means simply that you've recognised me -- which *is* rather beautiful and rare. You see what I am. I'm a general guide - to 'Europe', don't you know? I wait for people ... I'm a companion at large." (TA, 65)

James comically tears off Maria's "mask" in the Preface proclaiming her as "an enrolled, a direct, aid to lucidity", but in the passage above she seems to remove the mask herself and reveal her *ficelle* function to the reader (TA, 47). Iser states that if the literary text reveals itself to be "staged discourse", it asks only that the world it represents should be taken "as if" it were a real world:

then the recipient has to suspend his or her natural attitude to the thing represented ... the natural attitude is not transcended, for it is still present as a virtualised background against which comparisons may be made and new attitudes may take their shape. (Iser 1989, 238)

The text is a place where the real and the imaginary co-exist; the real world is still present in the text as a point of reference. Strether disembarks with what we might call "The World According to Mrs Newsome" composing the most important part of his baggage. Yet the first indication that Strether's experience will differ radically from Mrs Newsome's obdurate conception of his task is his awareness of a complicating doubling of his perceptions:

these things, it is to be conceived, were early signs in him that his relation to his actual errand might prove none the simplest. He was burdened, poor Strether -- it had better be confessed at the outset -- with the oddity of a double consciousness.

There was detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference. (TA, 56)

The reader is invited to share Strether's "double consciousness": the detached involvement which Iser describes as "the simultaneity of the mutually exclusive" as we carry the world from which we have been separated into the world of the text (Iser 1989, 239). As Paul Armstrong notes: "Iser claims that all reading requires both immersion and observation as we alternate between inhabiting a fictional world and criticising the perspectives within it" (Armstrong 1983, 14-15). The failure of Woollett is, as Maria states, "the failure to enjoy" and this is just how Mrs Newsome would have it (TA, 64). The enjoyment of immersion is contrary to the methodology of the closed system whose survival depends on a uncompromising imposition of set standards and rules when encountering the unknown. Mrs Newsome's injunctions apply to her ambassador as much as to his quarry, Chad. The very nature of Strether's mission forbids him from gaining anything for himself. As in the case of the Review, Strether is simply the name on the cover; Mrs Newsome is "behind the whole thing" (TA, 100). As Woollett's editor in Paris Strether is not "there to dip, to consume -- he [is] there to reconstruct" (TA, 122).

With Strether's latent openness to experience however it is he himself who is reconstructed: as the very qualities which comprise failure in Woollett constitute success in Paris he begins to see himself and life anew. As the narrator comments: "he was not a man to neglect any good chance for reflexion" (TA, 119). Maria, the unmasked *ficelle*, stands in "the drafty wings with her shawl and her smelling salts" waiting to revive Strether and initiate a new way of seeing (TA, 48). In this she acts in art's capacity. The Russian formalist Victor Shlovsky states that "art exists that one might recover the sensation of life, it exists to make one feel things" and so remove the film of "habitualization" which "devours" life so that it is reckoned as nothing (quoted in Lodge 1993, 20).

Shlovsky states: "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make the forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an

aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (quoted in Lodge 1993, 20). This is the process of perception in The Ambassadors which takes the form of a series of creative reassessments. The opening chapters are characterised by a sense of timeless leisure, open-endedness and delay coupled with an increasing sense of complexity as Maria's first task as "reader's friend" (TA, 47) is to draw from Strether his "past in one great lump" (TA, 84). Waymarsh does not meet Strether as planned, and Maria Gostrey seems to become an ambassador from the other side as she perceptively distils the essence of the situation Strether has been sent to rectify.

Maria's questions about Strether's mission playfully present him with alternative interpretations to the textbook morality of Woollett. She speaks in characteristic Jamesian style, in which talk itself opens up rather than settles debates: "If you're satisfied, that's all that's required. I mean if you're sure you *are* sure: sure it won't do" (TA, 93). A repetition is always a question in James's style; here the repeated use of "sure" undermines the word completely, widening the gap between the signifier and what Strether claims to be so sure about. Chad may be refined, not brutalised; his life may be charming. As Strether mouths the Woollett-judgement "base, venal -- out of the streets" Maria quietly reminds Strether and the reader not to make up their minds, that one can never know; "One never does -- does one? -- beforehand" (TA, 93). In her first conversations with Strether on his role as editor Maria conducts a review of Woollett itself which anticipates the impending effects and necessity of "a supreme general adjustment to opportunities and conditions" (TA, 141).

As Strether and his reader encounter the curious pleasurable uncertainty which the opening chapters of a Jamesian text provoke whatever aspects of a Woollett world-view we might have brought to the text are quietly intimated to be a snare and a self-protective cocoon and most importantly, a barrier to perception. "The world we live in is an interpreted world", notes Iser, and "we are conditioned by world-pictures and organisations that, because of their successful operations we take for reality itself" (Iser 1989, 210). They offer only what Strether proposes to

offer Chad: "the general safety of being anchored by a strong chain" (TA, 105). As Strether talks with Maria he gradually relinquishes what he terms "the very secret of the prison-house" and the allusion to Hamlet indicates that what Woollett offers Chad and Strether is the inversion of life (TA, 102).⁵ In being "protected ... from life" the people of Woollett close off something which by its very nature is open: accepting only one interpretation of reality amongst myriad possibilities (TA, 105).

Maria's humorous confession that her job is to bring about "such a complexity of relations" in her charges indicates the influence she has in ensuring such limited perceptions are transcended (TA, 78). When Strether indicates that she sees so much more in his situation than he himself her reply, "of course I see *you* in it", is a gentle hint at his own extensive imaginative capacities (TA, 103). In the "slow reiterated ramble" of the opening chapters Strether's imposing sense of duty and necessity is quietly subverted by the enjoyment of and immersion in new sensory and mental impressions (TA, 79). On the walks he takes with Maria he is described as "floating" (TA, 81) in a current of impressions where the very "smallest things so arrested and amused him" (TA, 80).

Strether's process of vision is a characteristic Jamesian exercise in revision in which all he has experienced before both in Europe and America is relived with new insight:

Too deep almost for words was the delight of these things to Strether; yet as deeply mixed with it were certain images of his inward picture. He had trod this walk in the far off time, at twenty-five; but that, instead of spoiling it, only enriched it for the present feeling and marked his renewal as a thing substantial enough to share. (TA, 64)

The evening Strether spends with Maria in London demonstrates this heightened awareness as it is an occasion of "conscientious wonder" with moments "filled to the brim" with the "apprehension of the interesting" (TA, 89). Strether's perceptions are constantly doubled as each new experience contains the imposing mental presence of Mrs Newsome which constantly serves to "complicate, as he now almost felt, his vision". The red velvet band around Maria's neck as she

sits opposite Strether at dinner is the catalyst for an hour "given over to uncontrollable perceptions" (TA, 90). As Strether takes in the little detail of the neckband it operates as signifier which initiates another creative review of his own relationships in the world of Woollett as it becomes

a starting point for fresh backward, fresh forward, fresh lateral flights. The manner in which Mrs Newsome's throat *was* encircled suddenly represented for him, in an alien order, almost as many things as the manner in which Miss Gostrey's was. (TA, 90)

Strether's doubled and increasingly complex impressions are a result of entering what Iser calls the "fictive" which is

an act of boundary crossing which causes the recipient's natural attitude to be doubled by a new one that is demanded [by the world of the text] ... while the world of the text is doubled by that from which it has been bracketed off. (Iser 1989, 272)

The fictive allows "the coexistence of what is mutually exclusive" as actual experience and what can be imagined intertwine (Iser 1993, xv).

The constant doubling of Strether's perceptions creates in the reader an awareness of the process of interpretation and forces a recognition of the many possibilities of meaning that our own interpretation lacks. Graham Falconer suggests that James's style requires "some kind of bifocal attention" (Falconer 1987, 5) from the reader, obliging the reader to read in two mutually exclusive ways; to be both naïve and critical (12). His style is an invitation to the reader "to set up, alongside the narrator's story, a revised version of his own" (8). Maria's questions highlight the fact that the reader's collaboration in the construction of meaning in the text transforms the "superficial univocity into self-conscious duplicity, forcing us to read between the lines, against the grain of the text" (8).

The play Strether attends with Maria conveys the suggestion of this dynamic interrelation between art and life as Strether senses "a connexion above all in which the figures and faces in the stalls were interchangeable with those on the stage" (TA, 92). James uses the incident to comment

with gentle humour on Woollett's misconceptions of art as a mere mimetic reflector of reality, as Strether sees his own story, the Woollett view of the situation in Paris, on the stage:

It befell that in the drama precisely there was a bad woman in a yellow frock who made a pleasant weak good-looking man in perpetual evening dress do the most dreadful things.... Would Chad also be in perpetual evening dress? He somehow rather hoped it. (TA, 92)

Maria's questions to Strether after the play demonstrate that she too has sensed an echo. Yet for Maria the work of art does not present the whole story but instead initiates the active participation of the reader's imagination to imbue it with meaning and significance. The play's resemblance to Strether's mission provokes her renewed participation and inquiry: "You've accepted the mission of separating him from the wicked woman. Are you quite sure she's very bad for him?" (TA, 93).

As the reader steps with Strether into "the playhouse" of the text we realise that "the play of the text is actually a staged play enacted for the reader, who is given a role" (Iser 1989, 258).⁶ Both the style of James's language itself and the use of free indirect discourse induce the reader not only to share Strether's experience of increasingly complex perceptions but also to critique them. A recognition of a lack or incompleteness in the original story is a vital component of the reading experience depicted and shared in the text. In Julie Rivkin's reading of the novel she uses Derrida's representational "logic of supplementarity" to trace what she calls "the logic of delegation" in *The Ambassadors*: "the paradoxical logic of supplementarity is that what adds onto also subtracts from, or reveals a lack in the original" (Rivkin 1986, 820). Strether is Mrs Newsome's "stand-in, supposed to alter nothing". But the very "existence of an addition implies that the original is incomplete and in need of supplementation" (Rivkin 1986, 820).

The constant necessity to supplement and review the incompleteness in the original text is what gradually transforms Strether and the reader from the position of mere editor, desperate for "some idea that would simplify", into an actively participating co-author of the text (TA, 114).

Whilst Strether must write the unuttered truth between the lines of Mrs Newsome's limited story

the reader is constantly required to supplement, question and review Strether's interpretations and reassessments. To experience fully the power of art to extend perception so that the hidden and as yet unknown aspects of ourselves can be encountered, the reader will in the course of the novel journey with Strether to Paris. The impact of this city on Strether's imagination is metaphorically linked to the transforming power of art.

In his Preface James regrets that his novel should have to be set in Paris at all because of "the dreadful little old tradition" that people's moral schemes do break down there. He comically paints a picture of the hundreds of thousands who visit the place "for the sake of the probable catastrophe" (TA, 41). Despite the geographical details we are given in the novel however the Paris of *The Ambassadors* is, as James asserts in the Preface, not a backdrop but a symbol -- a place where art and life combine thus allowing the mode of consciousness Iser would describe as the "fictive". In *Prospecting*, Iser advocates discarding the time honoured but frozen opposition of "fiction versus reality" altogether in view of their interpenetration. He suggests considering "the fictive as a means of overstepping the given, which is bound to cause a transformation of what is" (Iser 1989, 268). Rather than simply contributing a sense of place to the novel the effect and influence on Strether's perception of the "great hum" of Paris is immense; here "the imagination reacted before one could stop it" (TA, 123). Paris is a medium in which the air itself "had a taste of something mixed with art, something that presented nature as a white-capped master-chef" (TA, 111). Strether feels "an extraordinary sense of escape" (TA, 112). It is not a freedom from reality (James links "art" to "nature") but an escape from the limits of his personal relation to reality as his mind is set "freely at play -- the play under which in Paris indeed it so often winces like a touched nerve". In Paris Strether begins to experience the power of his own artistry, as the operation of his perception initially takes the form of filling "out spaces with dim symbols of scenes" (TA, 111).

The endless possibilities of perception Paris presents to Strether seem to threaten the completion of his mission from the first. The vast hum of life in the foreign city overwhelms in its very mutable variety the imposition of the rigid moral authority Strether feels his task to demand and reveals his own inability for any accurate or complete interpretation:

His greatest uneasiness seemed to peep at him out of the imminent impression that almost any acceptance of Paris might give one's authority away. It hung before him this morning, the vast bright Babylon, like some iridescent jewel brilliant and hard, in which parts were not to be discriminated nor differences comfortably marked. It twinkled and trembled and melted together, and what seemed all surface one moment seemed all depth the next. It was a place of which, unmistakably, Chad was fond; wherefore if he, Strether, should like it too much, what on earth, with such a bond, would become of either of them? (TA, 118)

As the city begins to affect him Strether delays reading the imposing letters from home and enjoys immersion in the beautiful Paris morning, where the elements "all sunnily 'composed' together". In the medium of art Strether passes "an hour in which the cup of his impressions seemed truly to overflow" as he is provoked into a dialogue with his own identity (TA, 112). Strether views himself in relation to a type of text as his identity seems fixed and figured by Mrs Newsome's letters and the *Woollett Review*. His reflections in the Luxembourg gardens are once again prompted by the double consciousness of new impressions around him viewed against the impact of Mrs Newsome. The immense force and effect of Mrs Newsome's resolute tone on Strether is registered in his perception after reading her letters that he "had to come this distance to get its full carrying quality" (TA, 112).

Despite their impact however the letters from home instill and affirm "his consciousness of difference". The "difference that was so much greater than he had dreamed it would be... the strange logic of finding himself so free" prompts a subsequent review of his own life: "he felt it in a manner his duty to think out his state, to approve the process.... He had never expected -- that was the truth of it -- again to find himself so young" (TA, 112-3). The disparity in Mrs Newsome's effect on her editor within the rich Parisian air is striking; whilst affirming his sense of

duty her letters and well-known resolute tone "struck him at the same time as the hum of vain things" and Strether's reflections continue to double as he recollects his first trip to Paris as a young man, and his relations with a very different type of text -- the lemon-coloured volumes representative of his relation to art and life (TA, 113).

As he recalls his "hungry gazes though clear plates behind which lemon-coloured volumes were as fresh as fruit on the tree" Strether's drama of consciousness focuses finally on two conflicting impressions: who he is, and who he once hoped he might be (TA, 116). The lemon-coloured volumes reside behind a glass barrier which like Strether's own "eternal nippers" seems to render him a mere spectator of the game of life. He realises with a deadening finality that as Maria had guessed from the first, his identity is effaced and negated by his relation to the *Woollett*

Review:

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. (TA, 115)

The lemon-coloured volumes he had brought back from Paris "were still somewhere at home.... stale, soiled and never sent to the binder"; they seem to reproach him as he realises that the *Woollett Review* as his only present relation to art and literature is no more than a "specious shell" (TA, 116-7). The initial barrier which kept "a relation with higher culture" just beyond his reach now seems an irrevocable gap. He has "in the great desert of years" broken "the vow of his youth" and watching the young Frenchmen's skilful manipulations of the uncut volumes is "but a listening at closed doors" (TA, 122).

Strether's reflections in the penny-chair in the Luxembourg gardens seem to nullify his life and his relation to art as he relinquishes his very right to spectatorship: "if the playhouse wasn't closed his seat had at least fallen to somebody else" (TA, 118). His submissive renunciation which Iser would describe as a reader's "consistent gestalt" is broken down however as Strether walks to Chad's apartment (Iser 1984, 121). As he looks up at Chad's magnificent residence he gains the

sudden impression of Little Bilham on the balcony which is up on a level "that he found himself at the end of another moment rejoicing to think he might reach" (TA, 125). As the two men observe one another it becomes apparent that within the fictive consciousness which the text evokes nothing is final or certain. Strether is still very much part of the playhouse and the cognitive leap of faith from the street to the hidden interior behind the balcony will bridge the irrevocable gap which he sees as his failure to live. In making the jump, our ambassador initiates a bid to become the most important player in the game:

He had known nothing and nobody as he stood in the street; but hadn't his view now taken a bound in the direction of everyone and of everything? (TA, 136)

Strether discovers the most important lesson Paris has to offer in his first visit to Chad's apartment. The humorous emphasis on a leisurely sense of gathering impressions in his report of his visit to Waymarsh belies the profundity of Strether's real discovery:

I stayed, I dawdled, I trifled; above all I looked round. I saw, in fine; and -- I don't know what to call it -- I sniffed. (TA, 130)

Strether's description importantly comprises the essence of his perceptive adventure. In Paris Strether slowly learns "the common unattainable art of taking things as they came": the complex impressions of life require time, perceptive energy, sensitivity and the scrupulous abstention from rash judgement to encounter and process in detail (TA, 114). When Waymarsh asks what Strether has actually uncovered he repeatedly replies "I don't know". Instead of the vigilant detection of hard facts the effort Strether makes in his initial visit is to accrue more impressions which require interpretation. Whilst for Waymarsh Strether's description of his progress is disappointing and irritatingly inadequate Strether's attitude is clearly demonstrated as superior to the Woollett viewpoint as it allows for the existence of alternatives:

"Then what the devil *do* you know"?

"Well," said Strether almost gaily, "I guess I don't know anything!" His gaiety might have been a tribute to the fact that the state he had been reduced to did for him again what had been done by his talk of the matter with Miss Gostrey.... It was somewhat enlarging and the air of amplitude was doubtless more or less -- and all

for Waymarsh to feel -- in his further response. "That's what I found out from the young man."

"But I thought you said you found out nothing."

"Nothing but that -- that I don't know anything." (TA, 131)

In the progress through the textual labyrinth towards a more complete vision of "everyone and everything" Strether's first step is to recognize that he knows nothing. Such a realisation leads necessarily to conscientiously refraining from the imposition of predetermined judgements.⁷

Significantly Little Bilham, whom Strether describes as "a little artist man", and who is clearly the artist figure of the novel, is Strether's teacher in this instance (TA, 132). In greeting Strether as Chad's "intimate and deputy" Little Bilham acts as Maria Gostrey does, as an ambassador for Paris and in effect art itself (TA, 137). As Maria Gostrey notes "he's one of *us*" (TA, 145).

As the combination of art and life subverts the givens of his reality, Strether's relationship with Paris and its people as the reader's ambassador suggests that art and life will only have an effect if we cultivate an active reciprocal relationship with the experiences offered and encountered in reading. Georges Poulet describes such effects as an extension of the reader's own possibilities for thought:

I am someone who happens to have as objects of [his] own thought, thoughts which are part of the book I am reading, and which are therefore the cognitions of another.... Because of this strange invasion.... I am a self who is granted the experience of thinking thoughts foreign to [him]. (Poulet 1986, 352-353)⁸

One of the important effects of Jamesian fiction is the reader's experience of another mind thinking. Poulet's term "invasion" is perhaps too strong a word however as the act of reading is less a passive reception than an operation of consciousness that may involve the creation of or resistance to new ideas. The reader will accept "the cognitions of another" as his or her own only through an active acknowledgment which allows the new attitudes experienced to reside beside their own individual perceptions.

In the figure of Waymarsh, James presents a foil to Strether: a reader who remains resistant to the force of art and refuses the double consciousness required by the fictive. On his

arrival in Europe Waymarsh sits "wilfully uncomfortable" in the "glare of the gas" in a "posture of prolonged impermanence" which he hopes will inure him to "the ordeal of Europe" (TA, 71).

Waymarsh refuses to allow the "sharp spell" of Paris to intoxicate his mind and instead obsessively visits the Rue Scribe (TA, 135):

he wanted to see the papers, and he had spent ... a succession of hours with the papers. He spoke of the establishment with emphasis, as a post of superior observation... Europe was best described, to his mind, as an elaborate machine for disassociating the confined American from that indispensable knowledge, and was accordingly only rendered bearable by these occasional stations of relief, traps for the arrest of wandering western airs. (TA, 110)

Waymarsh dare not relax his hold on the papers: the texts that confine his reality. Strether steps beyond the confines of the known from his first direct engagement with Chad's life and admits to Waymarsh that he risks his own existence "when I so freely take my chance of the possibility, the danger, of being influenced in a sense counter to Mrs Newsome's own feelings" (TA, 135).

Strether's recognition that he is "in the presence of new measures, other standards, a different scale of relations" increases his awareness of the need constantly to adjust his own world-picture to perceive in a new way (TA, 137). As he attempts to make sense of a world and a people "alien, alien to Woollett" (TA, 201) Strether sweeps "away by a last brave brush, his usual landmarks and terms" and "had the consciousness of opening to it ... all the windows of his mind, of letting this rather grey interior drink in for once the sun of a clime not marked in his old geography" (TA, 199).

James points out that Waymarsh, in contrast to Strether, "wore no glasses" (TA, 70). Metaphorically he has never been forced to admit the "double consciousness" of myopic vision "that brushed the picture over and blurred everything but the near" when the aid to sight is removed; a constant reminder that the discrimination of the individual lens is only one way of viewing the vast world "where elements float together on the best of terms" (TA, 312). In the novel glasses are aids not only to physical seeing, but to insight and perceptiveness. "Art deals

with what we see," James states in his Preface (TA, 37), and Strether's "eternal nippers" (at a time, as Harry Levin states, "when eye-glasses were normally reserved for occasions of reading and inspection") are frequently referred to; they are "cited periodically like an epithet in an epic" (Levin 1986, 17).⁹ Strether, Maria Gostrey, Miss Barrace, and the artist Gloriani -- whose gaze gives Strether "the deepest intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed" -- all use such aids to sight (TA, 200). Miss Barrace's wonderful "convex Parisian eyes" peer through a "glass with a remarkably long tortoise-shell handle" (TA, 136). In contact with such insightful people, exposed to the glorious phenomenon of Paris, and the young lovers who become his tribute to youth, Strether learns to see. There is a moral quality attached to this skill: seeing is only acquired at a cost and is a considerable inner achievement. It is an active and creative as well as a receptive process.

Like Maisie and Isabel, Strether recognises that in framing the truth he is best served by a decision "to see exactly for myself" (TA, 133). His first encounter with Little Bilham reveals the elusive nature of knowledge: "You can't make out over here what people do know" (TA, 133) he tells Waymarsh; but in acknowledging this he also recognises his own fluctuating and inconclusive sense of the truth: "he was in fact so often at sea that his sense of the range of reference was merely general and that he on several different occasions guessed and interpreted only to doubt" (TA, 139).

James often presents his centres of consciousness in positions from which their knowledge of a situation is necessarily partial. Paul Armstrong comments on "Maisie's accustomed position of 'hanging over banisters' and wondering what is happening downstairs. Her standpoint as an observer grants her an extremely limited perspective on the situation at hand, with more sides hidden than disclosed" (Armstrong 1983, 12). Strether is presented initially as looking upwards to a balcony to hypothesise, a characteristic stance encompassing both his self-effacing nature and his relation to the spectacle of Paris as a work of art. Strether's stance as he looks up at the

balcony will recur later in his mental imagery in which Madame de Vionnet and Chad are figured as consummate actors who arrange "every move in the game" (TA, 151) whilst Strether allies himself with "we poor people who watch the play from the pit" (TA, 428). In his first encounter with Chad Strether is so astounded by the change he perceives in his appearance that he delays open communication; though "he stuck there like a schoolboy not wishing to miss a minute of the show" he fixes his eyes less on the play in front of him than on the presence of Chad (TA, 155).

Strether has constantly fictionalised Chad's life as a means of grasping it. He has followed his travels in Europe in terms of "young men in fiction" (TA, 119) and he likens Chad to the portrait of "one of the splendid young Titans" he views in the Louvre with Little Bilham (TA, 145). Although his imagined idea of Chad's youthful time in Paris may be more accurate than Mrs Newsome's, once he is in renewed contact with Chad Strether continues to make the same error he makes in his first meeting with the young man -- he mistakes his partial knowledge for the whole truth. The astounding fact of Chad's transformation overwhelms Strether; his grey hair in which there was "so very much more than he could have said" (TA, 158), acts as an Iserian "alien association" ¹⁰ which breaks down the picture of a "wretched boy" and replaces him with "a man of the world" (TA, 166). Aware that such a description is equally limited in terms of Chad's human reality Maria repeats her advice: "Don't make up your mind....You haven't seen him all" (TA, 180).

In the course of the novel Strether continues to make up his mind, and change it. In this he acts like a reader engaged in what Iser describes as "gestalt-forming" which is a necessary way of grasping the text (Iser 1984, 127). The reactions of the centre of consciousness to their own created illusions involve both reader and character in the construction and revision of the text. Strether's experience is a similar but more prolonged form of Isabel's process of vision as one of "illusion-forming and illusion-breaking" (Iser 1984, 127-8). Such a dialectic subverts the

imposition of a closed system of understanding as Strether becomes an increasingly flexible reader and author of the situation.

After meeting Chad the narrator comments that "our friend was to go over it afterwards again and again" (TA, 153). This conscious and constant revision of Strether's impressions is the method of reading invited by the text itself. Strether's sense of Maria's "easy movement through the maze he had but begun to tread" illustrates his mystified perceptions and the danger of wandering astray (TA, 142). The metaphor of the text as labyrinth is important, indicating not only the bewildered perception involved in the lack of a linear path of interpretation but the interconnected multi-directional route the reader is required to travel.¹¹ The cognizance of the role of reader as creative interpreter provokes a sense of what may be missed in an initial reading and encourages the development of a double consciousness requiring the forward and backward flights of imagination on which Strether embarks, in which more than one picture of the situation may be seen simultaneously. In filling in the gaps in his knowledge Strether will build a bridge from the actual to the possible enlarging his own consciousness and therefore his world.

James's narrative technique allows the reader the freedom to both share and critique the perceptive decisions of the centre of consciousness but the effect of the reading process often centres on the difficulty in ascertaining what precisely Strether himself knows and how far such knowledge is a fictional construct of his imagination: "Strether knew that he knew almost immediately what she meant, and took it as still another sign that he had got the job in hand.... He wouldn't have known even the day before what she meant -- that is if she meant, what he assumed" (TA, 145). In foregrounding this difficulty in construing meaning the novel asserts that human knowledge is always and necessarily a construct, formed by the very process of hypothesis and reassessment in which the novel itself is read. As the reader shares Strether's "sense of moving in a maze of mystic closed allusions" and joins Strether in his imaginative hypothesising, our ambassador's efforts to discover the truth about Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship

resemble James's own description of the process of authorship in the Preface (TA, 262):

the thrill of a game of difficulty breathlessly played ... this business of looking for the unseen and the occult in a scheme half-grasped.... (TA, 37)

The interlinking of the reader's, character's and author's experience confirms James's view of the constructive artistry of consciousness and the dynamic interconnectedness between art and life.

Iser believes that fiction "objectifies something inherent" in the human disposition:

What makes literature so fascinating and so relevant today is the discovery that all our activities are permeated by acts of interpretation -- indeed, that we live by interpretation.... Man is an interpreting animal and in this respect literature is an integral part of our make-up. It may be nothing but a game, yet as a game it allows us to simulate an inexhaustible variety of trial runs. (Iser 1989, 208)

Strether's adventures in Paris may strike the reader as quite an exhausting series of trial runs. James paints a vivid picture of the fluid and protean nature of Strether's gestalt-forming in his Preface:

He had come with a view that might have been figured by a clear green liquid, say, in a neat glass phial; and the liquid, once poured into the open cup of *application*, once exposed to the action of another air, had begun to turn from green to red, or whatever, and might for all he knew, be on its way to purple, to black, to yellow. (TA, 39-40)

Significantly, the first colour is that of Strether's little magazine; the last is that of his vision of the Parisian volumes behind glass. Strether's relationship to the lemon-coloured volumes is symbolic of the force of life and art which overtakes and transforms his limited and limiting role as editor. The act of editing has denied appreciation of the multifold possibilities of life which on finally encountering he fears as largely lost for himself. The dramatically reduced meaning of his life is aptly described by Michael Wutz as Strether's squeezing of his multi-faceted identity between two pieces of cardboard, an envelope which becomes literalised in his correspondence with Mrs Newsome (Wutz 1991,95).

In the ambiguous aesthetic air of Paris however Mrs Newsome's "theory of the horrible" is slowly replaced by Strether's own fictionalising of the situation (TA, 449). The letters he

constantly sends home as progress reports slowly evolve into his own version of the story, one he is perturbed to realise deviates significantly from the original Newsome text. In his mind's eye Strether imaginatively views the reaction to such divergence from the dominant narrative:

This echo -- as distant over there in the dry thin air as some shrill heading over a column of print -- seemed to reach him even as he wrote. "He says there is no woman," he could hear Mrs Newsome report, in capitals almost of newspaper size, to Mrs Pocock; and he could focus in Mrs Pocock the response of the reader of the journal.... and catch the full scepticism of her but slightly delayed "What is there then?".... that she didn't believe *he* would find the woman had been written in her look. (TA, 177)

Strether does find the woman, but his mistake in Mrs Newsome's eyes is that he does not find her "as she imagined her" (TA, 449). The newspaper headlines in the above passage are important -- Strether is not an editor at heart and in Paris he uses the artistry of his consciousness to become what James describes in "The Art of Fiction" as "one of the people on whom nothing is lost" (TF, 35). The development of this rare quality is essential to living all one can as it is the only way to experience the bewildering, expansive possibilities of existence. Strether has stifled this capacity as Mrs Newsome's editor but he renounces this role as he encounters Madame de Vionnet in Gloriani's garden. She seems to provoke his fervid outbreak to Little Bilham, who recognises that what Strether fears lost in himself has been only unutilized. Strether is truly what he jokingly describes himself as: a "specimen of the rococo" whose mind is as rich with ornate detail as the artistic style (TA, 203).

Maria encourages Strether to see Madame de Vionnet herself as an artist whom he should judge only by her creation: Chad. Merely an hour with the transformed Chad is sufficient to suggest to the insightful Maria that his "sudden unnatural goodness" is evidence that somebody has already achieved the reconstruction of the text Strether was sent to alter: "What else but such a somebody can such a miracle be?" (TA, 179).

In taking Maria's advice to judge Madame de Vionnet on her creation alone, Strether,

"booked" by Mrs Newsome's "extraordinarily intense" vision to discover the "horrors" she has imagined, is uncomfortably aware that the result will not "suit her book" (TA, 449). Ironically the story Strether writes of Madame de Vionnet evolves to suit his own. As Susan Griffin notes:

"What the Jamesian eye sees is always in the interest of the Jamesian 'I'". Griffin suggests that

Strether survives in his world by seeing what he needs to see. His perceptual pictures are always self interested -- even when they seem self-sacrificing.... He constructs a series of pictures of Marie de Vionnet that portray a lady in mild, romantic distress and thus in need of noble, yet limited saving. These pictures permit Strether to become safely, disinterestedly involved with her. (Griffin 1991, 44)

In encountering Madame de Vionnet Strether's illusion-building begins in earnest as the flawed but only viable way of accessing her individuality. His constant relation of Madame de Vionnet to a character in fiction demonstrates how much of the reader's individual nature is instilled in the version of the story we create of the text:

She reminded our friend -- since it was the way of nine-tenths of his current impressions to act as recalls of things imagined -- of some fine firm concentrated heroine of an old story, something he had heard, read, something that, had he had a hand for drama, he might himself have written, renewing her courage, renewing her clearness, in splendidly protected meditation.... She was romantic for him beyond what she could have guessed, and he again found his small comfort in the conviction that, subtle though she was, his impression must remain a secret from her. (TA, 273-5)

In the characterisation of Madame de Vionnet, James skilfully uses Strether's illusion-building to play on the reader's own literary experiences, provoking comparison with the rare women we have "heard of, read of, and thought of" thereby instigating the creation in the reader's own mind of a character "half mythological and half conventional" (TA, 256). Such intertextual echoes provoke a double consciousness in the reader. Drawing on other texts to help us script our own, is part of the intertextual doubling Iser points to as a facet of the play of the text (Iser 1989, 251):

He could have compared her to a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud, or to sea-nymph waist-high in the summer surge. Above all she suggested to him the *femme du monde* -- in these finest developments of the type -- was like Cleopatra in the play, indeed various and multifold. She had aspects, characters, days, nights -- or had them at least, showed them by a mysterious law of her

own.... She was an obscure person, a muffled person one day, and a showy person, an uncovered person the next.... she had taken all his categories by surprise. (TA, 256)

Strether's response is a tribute to his imagination and his sense of a morality which transcends Woollett. Importantly the reference to Cleopatra as the second allusion to Shakespeare in the novel signals Strether's move through art from "the prison house" of the Woollett world-view to his sense of what is referred to in Antony and Cleopatra as the "infinite variety" of life present in one individual (II, ii, 235). Mrs Newsome's adamant, predetermined assessments which Maria describes as "intensity with ignorance" only obscure and distort Madame de Vionnet's human reality (TA, 449).

Through his developing relationship with Madame de Vionnet Strether encounters what James esteemed the essential "felt life" of the text wherein lies the morality of a work of art (PL, xxix). In his deepening attachment to the woman he has been sent to track down Strether responds to Madame de Vionnet as an individual human other whose essential, mutable nature cannot be so easily configured as Mrs Newsome would wish:

she was so odd a mixture of lucidity and mystery. She fell in at moments with the theory about her he most cherished, and seemed at others to blow it into air. She spoke now as if her art were all an innocence and then again as if her innocence were all an art. (TA, 354)

The theory Strether most cherishes of the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet is encompassed as most stories are, in an image -- that of the "virtuous attachment" which Little Bilham presents him with by perceptively playing into Strether's own fictionalising of the relationship (TA, 187). It is significant that it is the artist figure Little Bilham who uses this description to explain the lovers to Strether. He uses a benign lie, a fiction to win Strether over replacing Mrs Newsome's narrative with one which works in the interest of the Parisians but still appeals to Strether's needs. Aware of the limits of Woollett's conventional morality, the Parisians sustain this fiction in the hope that it will be, as James describes in his notebooks, the influence

that makes Strether "accept on the spot, with a *volte-face*, a wholly different inspiration" (NB, 142).

In contradicting the "theory of the horrible" the theory of the virtuous attachment is a fiction which allows Strether to change the story to suit his own needs (TA, 449). This description bestows on the lovers the splendour, nobility and pathos Strether would like to attribute to them and he willingly falls under its poignant spell. There is an element of the errant knight in the personality of the man from Woollett; sent to save Chad, Strether's fictionalising actions lead him to a belief that it is the beautiful Madame de Vionnet who needs saving. James and most readers would agree.

Leland S. Person states that Marie defines Strether's "chivalrous role" for him, by playing a role she knows will win him over (Person 1987, 30). Beyond any sense of her performance however is extraordinary sadness and a human vulnerability the sincerity of which affects like "a cold breath in the face" (TA, 239). Strether's story is superior to the narrow textbook morality which informs the Woollett narrative in being more intelligent, more human and recognising the subtle complexities of human interaction. It is also closer to reality -- however romantic Strether's fictional constructions of Madame de Vionnet may be, they remain less fictitious than the Pockocks' bigoted vision. Nevertheless his sense of her character is coloured by Strether's own vision of what he wishes from reality.

Paul Armstrong claims that James's "narrative experiments challenge our sense of reality and lead us on a journey of discovery into the mysteries of how we create and construe meaning" (1987, 1). Armstrong highlights James as one of the authors who helped "inaugurate the self-consciousness of modern fiction about signs and interpretation" (1987, 1). James himself stresses the importance of Strether, and by analogy the reader, finding his own "more or less groping" way in the maze of the text (TA, 43). In contrast to Mrs Newsome's restrictions on her "reader", the Parisians and James regard Strether as free to make his own choices despite their attempts at

influence. In Miss Barrace's cheerful banter is the truth of the situation: "We know you as the hero of the drama, and we're gathered to see what you'll do" (TA, 402).

As he allows Madame de Vionnet to take "all his categories by surprise" (TA, 256)

Strether's active commitment to her fate prompts him to discern and express to Maria the limits of Mrs Newsome's vision:

"That's just her difficulty -- that she doesn't admit surprises. It's a fact that, I think, describes and represents her ... she's all, as I've called it, fine cold thought. She had, to her own mind, worked the whole thing out in advance, and worked it out for me as well as for herself ... Whenever she has done that, you see, there's no room left, no margin as it were, for any alteration. She's filled as full, packed as tight as she'll hold, and if you wish to get anything more or different either out or in --"

"You've got to make over altogether the woman herself?"

"What it comes to," said Strether, "is that you've got morally and intellectually to get rid of her." (TA, 447)

As all "fine cold thought" the Pococks and Mrs Newsome lack Strether's imagination and his responsive willingness to be bewildered by the unknown and the unexplained. The Pococks are like the readers James describes in his "London Notes" who "limit their surrender in advance" (TF, 322). They therefore fail to see that it is what Iser would call the "indeterminacies" or gaps in the text which imbue it with value, for they are the sites of alternative possibilities. The fictional text is not univocal and thereby a static mirror image of reality but a dynamic performance, an interactive process involving the reader in the creation of new worlds and the expansion of human possibilities.

As author-figure of Strether's mission however Mrs Newsome is not a woman to sit paring her fingernails! Alarmed by the deviant reading of the story that she finds with regularity in her postbox she dispatches the Pococks to right the "wrong" she sees "in any change of her composition" (TA, 447). Sarah Pocock is Strether's replacement as Mrs Newsome's ambassador and his encounter with her mean, stupid and singular vision vividly demonstrates the extraordinary expansion of perception made possible by the double consciousness the novel invites. Though

Strether anxiously awaits a sign, the POCOcks demonstrate no recognition of the change Madame de Vionnet has wrought in Chad:

it all suddenly bounced back to their being either stupid or wilful ... they would make the best of what was before them, but their observation would fail; it would be beyond them; they simply wouldn't understand. Of what use would it be they had come -- if they weren't to be intelligent up to *that* point? (TA, 328)

Strether's encounter with the POCOcks is an important confirmation of his observations and his position as firmly on the side of Paris and Madame de Vionnet. As the POCOcks ignore Chad's improvement Strether wonders if he himself is "utterly deluded and extravagant" and severely questions the very methods of observant hypothesising he has used: "Did he live in a false world, a world that had grown simply to suit him.... Was this contribution of the real possibly the mission of the POCOcks?... Had they come in short to be sane where ... he himself had only been silly?" (TA, 328). In the revision of his progress that the POCOcks provoke however Strether realises that his construction of the situation has been a process of joint authorship:

he would have been silly, in this case, with Maria Gostrey and little Bilham, with Madame de Vionnet and little Jeanne, with Lambert Strether, in fine, and above all with Chad Newsome himself. Wouldn't it be found to have made more for reality to be silly with these persons than sane with Sarah and Jim? (TA, 328)

As Strether argues with Sarah he recognises ruefully that she remains wilfully inured to the intricacy of the situation: "It was so much, so much; and she treated it, poor lady, as so little" (TA, 419). The doubled perception the literary text requires is what Sarah stubbornly blocks from view, as Strether points out to her: "It's as if you had some motive in not recognising all she has done for your brother, and so shut your eyes to each side of the matter, in order, whichever side comes up, to get rid of the other" (TA, 421).

The altercation Strether has with Sarah is an important backward flight for the reader. Sarah's narrow view of Chad's life as "hideous" (TA, 421) and her insulted incredulity that Strether should consider Madame de Vionnet "even an apology for a decent woman" are

reminiscent of the formulaic responses Strether had given Maria in London (TA, 419). Sarah asserts Mrs Newsome's sense of dignity and the duty she feels Strether to have flagrantly betrayed, and he feels that "Mrs Pocock accordingly spoke to this extent by book" (TA, 420). Strether's words to Sarah are an indication of how far he himself has come since Maria gently unsettled his own fixed vision:

Everything has come as a sort of indistinguishable part of everything else. Your coming out belonged closely to my having come before you, and my having come was a result of our general state of mind. Our general state of mind had proceeded, on its side, from our queer ignorance, our queer misconceptions and confusions -- from which since then an inexorable tide of light seems to have floated us into our perhaps still queerer knowledge. (TA, 418)

Restricting life and freedom by limiting its multitudinous possibilities constitutes immorality for James. As Martha Nussbaum argues: "what it comes to is that the people of Woollett cannot, will not, live, in the present moment, confronting the things that come their way in all their newness and particularity. They come to a situation determined that it should not touch them, holding their abstract principles fast and firm" (Nussbaum 1992, 179). Strether's "resolute rupture" with Sarah Pocock and all that her wilful narrowness represents grants him the freedom to finally live in the way Paris has shown him is possible (TA, 422). In his horrible confrontation with Mrs Pocock Strether sweeps away the "whole moral and intellectual being or block" she has been sent to Paris to give him "at the point of the bayonet" (TA, 448). He finds himself accordingly in a wonderful position, in direct relation with all he felt he had lost. As he waits alone in Chad's apartment, "Strether found himself in possession as he had never yet been." He sits alone "in the mellowest lamplight", in "the easiest chair" and "within reach, within touch", now that the barriers to his perceptions have been removed, is the lemon-coloured volume representative of the world of the imaginary he was cut off from in life, but has accessed again through the rediscovery of the possibilities of consciousness:

The novel half-uncut, the novel lemon-coloured and tender, with the ivory knife athwart it like the dagger in a *contadina's* hair, had been pushed within the soft

circle... (TA, 425)

As we have seen, Iser states that in fiction, the actual and the possible co-exist in a "halfway house" where the real and the imaginary intertwine (Iser 1989, 232). Standing on the balcony, the level he has reached through his use of fictionalising actions -- his leaps of faith in the direction of everything and everybody -- Strether experiences his own lost youth, the other of himself. He fails to recapture the impression the apartment had made on him just three months before, and takes this as "the proof of all the change in himself":

That was what it became for him at this singular time, the youth he had long ago missed -- a queer concrete presence, full of mystery, yet full of reality, which he could handle, taste, smell, the deep breathing of which he could positively hear. It was in the outside air as well as within; it was in the long watch, from the balcony, in the summer night, of the wide late life of Paris... (TA, 426)

Through the experience of the fictive, the absent has become present for Strether as his adventure has led to the inaccessible facets of himself being accessed and validated. Strether finally connects with the unrealised possibilities of his own life through the medium of fiction and as the novel draws to a close it is through the experience of what James called "another actual" that he will ultimately connect with the unrecognised possibilities of the other (TF, 323).

The intense awareness of the possibilities of existence in which the given co-exists with the imagined is an experience which James believes to be a vital part of life and one he depicts with increasing intensity in his later novels. In *The Ambassadors* he dramatically presents the reader with a representation of the fictive in the recognition scene which occurs in the French countryside. In the recognition scene James presents a picture within a picture, a text within a text, to demonstrate the recognitions made possible by the looking-glass world of art. Judith Ryan notes that the important thing about Alice's looking-glass world is that

it is not a pallid imitation of the real world; it is in its own way equally real -- a valid (though other) version of the world we know. The very idea of stepping into the looking-glass world marks a significant turning point in the conceptualisation of the mirror, whose image had been regarded up to that point as in some sense "unreal". (Ryan 1988, 305)

In leaving Paris for an excursion in the country, Strether does not escape his reality, but instead steps into a picture to re-discover that reality presented in new terms.

Strether is determined that he is removed from his situation in Paris and feels a great sense of escape in the countryside. He enters another time and space as he imagines himself stepping into and walking about in the Lambinet painting he recalls from his first trip to Paris. In his imagination he composes the painting from the elements of the landscape:

it was what he wanted ... it was Lambinet. Moreover he was freely walking about in it. He did this last, for an hour, to his heart's content, making for the shady woody horizon and boring so deep into his impression and his idleness that he might fairly have gone through them again and reached the maroon coloured wall.
(TA, 453)

In this imaginary immersion in the picture Strether enters "the land of fancy ... the background of fiction" (TA, 452). He has stepped into the looking-glass world of art, a world bracketed from his own but just as real where he can move beyond his usual frames of reference, for in the fictive there are no limits: "the frame had drawn itself out for him, as much as you please" (TA, 457).

With the "sharp fantastic crisis" on the river bank "that popped up as if in a dream" James discards the fiction/reality dichotomy with a view to their merger (TA, 462). When the lovers first sail into view they appear to Strether as figures in a delightful impressionist painting -- strangers disassociated from Strether's reality:

What he saw was exactly the right thing -- a boat advancing round the bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady at the stern, with a pink parasol. It was suddenly as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted more or less all day, and had now drifted into sight, with the slow current, on purpose to fill up the measure. (TA, 461)

But as the lovers sail closer and closer they will not remain in the fictive picture in which Strether has cast them. To his horror he recognises the lovers as they reveal themselves to be the reality he believes he has escaped from. What is acknowledged in the recognition scene is not only that the lovers in the picture are Chad and Madame de Vionnet, but that the scene in the picture represents the process with which the entire novel is involved: "He saw they would show nothing if they

could feel sure he hadn't made them out; so that he had before him ... his own hesitation.... They were thus, on either side, trying the other side" (TA, 462). Strether's "sign of surprise and joy" which brings the lovers towards him on the bank, mirrors his delighted response to the beautiful life of Paris, but he cannot banish the idea that the lovers would have gone on, "not seeing and not knowing" had his reaction been any different (TA, 463).

James brackets off the recognition scene to demonstrate the recognitions made possible only by the looking-glass world of art. The recognition scene is just as real as, but is also a curious doubling of the text itself as James represents and re-presents all that has happened in the body of the novel. There is nothing in it that is not "somehow a syllable of the text" (TA, 458). The beautifully evoked drama that unfolds in the French countryside also foregrounds what has been happening to the reader. The double consciousness of the real world and the novel are doubled in the recognition scene: oscillating between immersion and observation the reader moves between the real world and the text, the text and the recognition scene, and finally between the recognition scene and Strether's recollection of it as he sits blushing in the dark of his hotel bedroom in Paris at the truth he determinedly refused to acknowledge: "the deep, deep truth of the intimacy revealed" (TA, 468).¹² He finally acknowledges his own version of the story to be a naïve self-indulgent lie: "he had dressed the possibility in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll.... He recognised at last that he had really been trying all along to suppose nothing" (TA, 468).

James's staging of the recognition scene within "the little oblong window of the picture frame" highlights that it is only by stepping into the picture that Strether can discover the secrets concealed in the world from which it has been bracketed (TA, 452). It is the fictive world of the picture that allows Strether to access the possible and in Judith Ryan's words to walk across "a bridge that isn't there" (Ryan 1988, 309). In being forced by "art" to recognise what he had

refused to suppose in life, Strether bridges the gap between the real and the imaginary, the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown, the self and the other.

According to Iser from such numerous and irreconcilable gaps arises the human need for fiction. Iser states that the need for representation is "the need for images to bridge the unbridgeable" (Iser 1989, 213). Strether returns to Paris with new knowledge. In a make-believe world he has uncovered the make-believe in his own unique relationship to things and the "quantity of make-believe involved" in the image Madame de Vionnet and Chad have been anxious to present to him (TA, 468). His connection with the lovers on the river bank allows for a greater affinity and understanding with them both in his return to Paris as his excursion into the fictive has grounded him more firmly to the others' individual reality.

What has happened to Strether accords with Iser's account of the human need for the fictive encounter: "Through the changing images of fantasy, which stage who we are, fiction enables us to overcome our own duality" (Iser 1989, 213). In the recognition scene James represents what he believes is the gift of every novel:

they offer us another world, another consciousness, an experience that, effective as the dentist's ether, muffles the ache of the actual and, by helping us to an interval, tides us over and makes us face, in return to the inevitable, a combination that may at least have changed. What we get of course, in proportion as the picture lives, is simply another actual -- the actual of other people; and I no more than any one else pretend to say why that should be a relief.... We meet in this question, I think, the eternal mystery -- the mystery that sends us back simply to the queer constitution of man.... The anodyne is not the particular picture, it is our own act of surrender.... (TF, 323)

Paul Armstrong remarks that the words of James's famous letter to H.G. Wells -- "it is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance, makes consideration"-- could stand as an epigraph to the chapter where Strether undertakes his rural excursion (Armstrong 1987, 92). For it is art that returns us, after an interval in another world, to a greater understanding of our own, as we are allowed to transcend the limits of our own perceptions. The recognition scene sets Strether straight by presenting him with what Iser would call an "alien association" which does

not accord with his theory of the virtuous attachment. The picture of the lovers breaks down his fictional image and exposes the limits of his reaching after the truth of the situation.

The scene on the river is the most climactic "alien association" Strether confronts. As he relives the encounter in his hotel room he blushes in the darkness as he imagines Maria's reaction to his discovery: "What on earth -- that's what I want to know now -- had you then supposed?" (TA, 468). As Armstrong notes however "even the discovery of undeniable facts" does not always "have the power to end conflicting readings (1987, 7). Strether revises his conception of the "virtuous attachment" to incorporate what he has learnt in the country-side but the assertion of this refined understanding is overwhelmed by the narrative acts of the other characters. Despite what James describes as Strether's complete "*volte-face*" (NB, 142) in discovering the hidden truth of intimacy beneath the "performance" given by Chad and Madame de Vionnet, the unuttered story he has uncovered does not have the power to overturn the dominant narrative (TA, 466). Chad's restlessness signals his readiness to return home and forsake the woman who loves him. Strether's original mission, much against his will, seems destined to prevail as Mrs Newsome's and Chad's narrative control of the situation ultimately asserts itself over the story Strether would now wish to write.

Strether's authorial agency is restrained ironically by the amplitude of his own imaginative capacity which actively acknowledges individual otherness thereby perceiving the attempt to completely author the life of another human being as a form of oppression. As Maria states: "there's nothing so magnificent -- for making others feel you -- as to have no imagination" and both friends agree that Chad "has none" (TA, 448). Throughout the novel Strether constantly admires Chad because of his belief that Chad knows how to live but he ultimately recognises that Chad's erudition is simply the subtle imposition of his own will. Chad's dull protest that he is not "tired" of Madame de Vionnet is not worthy of the woman the reader has come to know through Strether's fictionalising, and sounds the first note of definite doom for the woman Strether has

aborted his own authorial mission to save. Madame de Vionnet as Maria points out "has softly bewildered a saner man" and Strether remains true to the experiences she has made possible for him by remaining her advocate (TA, 440). He ruefully recognises however that in contrast Chad will give his lover up for the prosperity of a certain future in Woollett: "he spoke of being tired of her almost as he might have spoken of being tired of roast mutton for supper" (TA, 502). Chad's narrow capacity to imagine the inner lives of other human beings indicates an inability to sensitively fictionalise others as Strether has done in order to grasp a sense of their inner experience. This unenlightened stance grants Chad the power to subject others to his will and in this instance "he has after all something in common with his mother" (TA, 448).

In his final meeting with the woman Strether has fictionalised he continues to allow for double consciousness, pictured for him in the doubled image of Madame de Vionnet in the polished floor of her rooms where "his last impression was more and more so a mixed one" (TA, 481). The process of oscillation between the real world and the text continues as he mentally compares her to the executed French revolutionary Madame Roland but the allusion to this figure does not obscure Strether's recognition of her common vulnerable humanity:

She was older for him to-night, visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him in all his years, to meet; and yet he could see her as vulgarly troubled, in very truth, as a maidservant crying for her young man. (TA, 483)

Despite Madame de Vionnet's artistry Little Bilham's description of Chad as "the new edition of an old book" (TA, 185) signals a "less sweeping editorial change" than Strether initially perceives but he disregards this advice and tends to view Chad uncritically (Hoopole 1988, 416-432). As he confronts Madame de Vionnet for the last time Strether finally revises his view of Chad and of Madame de Vionnet's art as he recognises the limits of her (and by implication his own) authorial power:

For at the end of all things they *were* mysterious: she had but made Chad what he was -- so why could she think she had made him infinite? She had made him better,

she had made him best, she had made him anything one would; but it came to our friend with supreme queerness that he was none the less only Chad. Strether had a sense that *he*, a little, had made him too; his high appreciation had, as it were, consecrated her work. The work, however admirable was nevertheless of the strict human order.... (TA, 482)

Strether recognises Chad's human limitations will lead the young man to return to Woollett. In his final meeting with Chad he is "as grave, as distinct, as a demonstrator before the blackboard" and his words to Chad emphatically demonstrate his commitment to Madame de Vionnet: "It's not a question of advising you not to go ... but of absolutely preventing you, if possible, from so much as thinking it. Let me accordingly appeal to you by all you hold sacred" (TA, 501). Strether feels "he had given all he had to give; he was as depleted as if he had spent his last sou" but having done what he can for Madame de Vionnet he cannot force Chad to comply with his wishes -- to do so would be to act in the coercive manner Mrs Newsome had emphatically required (TA, 504).

If Strether has learnt to have his own life he also recognises the imagination required to allow others the freedom equally to have their own. Such an attitude is coupled with great personal cost and Strether leaves Madame de Vionnet "afraid for [her] life" (TA, 483). However vulnerable such a stance might leave one however it is a truer way of experiencing existence -- as Martha Nussbaum argues: "The women of Woollett, unlike Madame de Vionnet in her love for an irreplaceable particular person, are able to triumph over life and to avoid becoming its victims. But that's just it, they triumph over life, they don't *live*" (Nussbaum 1992, 179). Strether's renunciation of Paris and his personal mission to save Madame de Vionnet signals how the lessons of Paris have led to an acknowledgment of the limits of his own authorial agency.

There is not "a grain of certainty" in the last pages of the novel, except for Strether's conviction that he must leave Paris as he renounces all control over the people whose lives he had been sent to change (TA, 485). The characters' regret that he cannot stay on in Paris mirrors the reader's own regret at what James describes as "the return to the inevitable" (TF, 323). As the

reader takes leave of the text, however we might creatively hypothesise about the futures of the characters, what happens after the last word of the text must remain an open-ended possibility. In depicting Strether taking his leave of Maria, James suggests that to find a "haven of rest" at the end of this twisting narrative labyrinth would be itself to shelter from the achieved open-endedness in yet another protective cocoon. Strether resists the temptation, though "it built him softly round, it roofed him warmly over, it rested all so firm, on selection" (TA, 512). In this James suggests that his art is only one selection, one representation of life. Our experience of a text is necessarily temporary, as Patricia McKee states: "No work of art is permanently absorbing" (McKee 1988, 292). Other texts are needed as is the real world itself which the reader enters with Strether with the words: "Then there we are!" (TA, 512).

As we leave the textual labyrinth of The Ambassadors where have Strether and the reader really "come out?" We had "so assumed it was to be in some wonderful place" (TA, 509). Strether's renunciation of Maria and Paris frustrates reader expectation yet complies with Strether's "only logic. Not out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself" (TA, 512). The eschewing of any tangible gain or fixed meaning in lieu of "wonderful impressions" may seem an inconsequential return on Strether's emotional investment in the life of Paris but it signals the expansive value of his complete experience (TA, 512). As Iser suggests:

This very diversification of meaning makes dubious the assumption that meaning is the be-all and end-all of the literary text.... It follows then that the ultimate dimension of the text cannot be semantic. It is what we might call the imaginary -- a term that harks back to the origins of fictional discourse. (Iser 1989, 232)

Strether as the reader's ambassador in the text has led us through his use of fictionalising actions to an experience of what Iser calls the imaginary. His own creative revision of Mrs Newsome's fixed instructions in his vigorous co-authoring of the text have allowed a transcendence of the boundaries of his perceptions and an innovative revision of his own identity. He must however return home because Woollett is the real world. In returning to the closed system Strether

acknowledges that his adventure will mean the inevitable experience of a heightened sense of restriction; he returns as Maria points out to a "great difference" but he has taken authorial command of his own life -- his name is on the cover of his text because he is Lambert Strether (TA, 511).

At an early stage in the novel Strether asks Madame de Vionnet what he should tell Mrs Newsome about the situation in Paris. Her answer is that he should simply tell the truth:

"Tell her the simple truth" Madame de Vionnet again pleaded.
 "But what *is* the simple truth? The simple truth is exactly what I'm trying to discover." (TA, 242)

Strether's fictionalising demonstrates that only in making believe can we move closer to the truth and it is never simple. The reader's journey into the fictive world of The Ambassadors is one of discovery. In the special mode of consciousness which literary fiction evokes we can begin to access what James has called the eternal mysteries of our existence. "The success of a work of art" for James was to "be measured by the degree to which it produces a certain illusion"; which would make it appear for us "that we had lived another life -- that we have had a miraculous enlargement of experience" (TF, 93).

An Iserian reading of the text demonstrates that for James the moral force of "felt life" espoused in the content of his novel is intertwined with the very experience of reading the text. In actively sharing Strether's reading experience the reader is moved closer to the force and truth of life itself. Martha Nussbaum argues that in both style and content The Ambassadors is a work of moral philosophy which asks the Socratic question "How should one live?" (Nussbaum 1992, 173). One of the answers the novel provides is in demonstrating the need to open ourselves to the stories of other inner lives and hence augment our existence by giving the imaginary possibilities in our own lives a place to become manifest. In doing this we move closer to what Strether perceives as living all one can.

One way to describe what is gained in the fictive encounter is to quote E.M. Forster's description of truth in Howard's End: "truth, being alive, was not half-way between anything. It was only to be found by continuous excursions into either realm." (Forster 1973, 192). In the present case, "either realm" refers to the real and the fictional: dimensions James places within the covers of a book, just as readily as they exist in the relations of his novels and their readers, to illustrate what is gained by their merger.

Notes

1. Judith Woolf describes and explains the difficulty of James's late prose style: "there is another kind of difficulty, that of the mathematical expression which is difficult because it formulates precisely a concept which could not otherwise be accurately expressed. To find fitting words for concepts of that order of difficulty but made shifting and changeful as well by the myriad colourings of human life is a task that imposes its own constraints" (1991, 1).
2. In The Phenomenology of Henry James, Paul Armstrong discusses how many of the personal relations in Henry James's fiction are informed by the "insuperable gap" between the "Self-for-Self" and the "Self-for-Others" (1983, 137).
3. Strether, as Harry Levin notes in his introduction to The Ambassadors, "is a closer persona than any of his other fictitious surrogates" and may have been for James a picture of his own fate had he remained in America (1986, 14).
4. Michael Wutz comments that the green colour of the cover also signals Strether's "dollar dependency" on Mrs Newsome; "for it is she who is backing him with her green-backs" (1991, 89-103).
5. James subtly condemns Woollett in his allusion to Hamlet's father's description of hell: "But that I am forbid / to tell the secrets of my prison house, / I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul..." (I, v, ll. 13-16).
6. James's definition of "play" is strikingly close to Iser's, as an excerpt from Fred Kaplan's biography demonstrates: "In London he could work. He could play as well, in the special social way in which he defined play. He could observe a world that had interest and variety. He could be with agreeable and sometimes interesting people" (1992, 183).
7. Maria Gostrey's attitude to the unnameable product made by Woollett is illustrative of the lesson she teaches Strether: "her attitude to the question converted itself into a positive cultivation of ignorance. In ignorance she could humour her fancy, and that proved a useful freedom" (TA, 98). The object Strether shrinks from naming becomes an Iserian gap of indeterminacy prompting

the reader's own fictionalising of Woollett.

8. Iser's theory of reception aesthetics owes much to phenomenology, and has close affinities with George Poulet and the so-called Geneva school of phenomenological criticism.

9. George Bishop explores the uses of glasses as a trope in reference to James's short story, "Glasses". Bishop notes that "Glasses -- spectacles -- are devices for seeing out, giving a clearer vision of the outer, other world. They involve an acknowledgement of that other world, of seeing, of decay, and the passage of time. Thus spectacles one sees through become spectacles others look at, glasses looking out become looking-glasses in, mirrored and mirroring back the reader" (1985, 350).

10. In his description of consistency-building and breaking in The Act of Reading, Iser uses "alien associations": Walter Pater's term to describe "all those elements that cannot be integrated into the pattern of the moment" (Iser 1984, 126).

11. In The Challenge of Bewilderment, Paul Armstrong notes that to be bewildered according to Samuel Johnson's definition, is to be "lost in pathless places, at a loss for one's way" and "confound[ed] for want of a plain road". Armstrong argues that for James however "the experience of bewilderment has not a negative but a positive value because it can call into question our confidence in the "roads" that make up "reality". It reveals that the "real" is not simply there for judgement to uncover but is, rather, a collection of constructs ... paths we chart ourselves in projecting interpretations based on personal assumptions and expectations" (1987, 2-3). James states: "It seems probable that if we were never bewildered there would never be a story to tell about us (AN, 63).

12. Paul Armstrong comments on the recognition scene's "doubled temporality": "James holds two pictures against each other simultaneously -- Strether's encounter with Chad and Madame de Vionnet, and the hero lost in thought on his bedroom sofa until the early hours of the following morning" (1987, 94).

Chapter Four.

"Certain words instead of certain others": The Unuttered Story of The Golden Bowl.

...so much of the unuttered and unutterable, of the constantly and unmistakably implied.... (GB, 473)

In the drama that The Golden Bowl depicts the characters and the reader share the common experience of grappling with the ever-present but inscrutably hidden life of the other. For their parts, the characters must reckon with the barely fathomable motives that propel their counterparts; for the reader the most important other of all is the text itself. Whereas we joined Strether in being "softly bewildered" by the excursion into the text of Paris, The Golden Bowl holds no such gentle perplexities (TA, 440). The terrifying journey into the unfamiliar we take with the characters of this novel is dramatically figured in the resistant white fog Amerigo feels himself sailing into at the outset of the novel: "concealing as darkness conceals, yet of the colour of milk or of snow" (GB, 17). In this particular case, the mist evokes Amerigo's unease as to the unknown nature of his new family: a vivid portrayal of the ominous latent power of unuttered possibilities: "the motives of such people were obscure -- a little alarmingly so" (GB, 17).

Alongside Amerigo's quest as readers we are involved with the characters in staking an individual claim to the unformulated white space in the text. As readers and co-authors we personally shape and colour its indeterminate unuttered possibilities in an exercise which Iser terms "consistency building" (Iser 1984, 125). Iser argues that "in reading we think the thoughts of another person and these represent an unfamiliar experience containing elements which ... must be partially inaccessible to us". Building patterns of consistency, which Iser terms the "gestalt" or "configured meaning" of the text, is the "indispensable basis" for all acts directed towards comprehension of the unfamiliar. Configuring meaning is based primarily on a selection process which is guided by those parts of the experience which seem familiar. Selection influences the

gestalt we form but means that the process of consistency building also "carries in its wake all those elements that cannot be integrated into the pattern of the moment. We will tend to leave out of the account a number of other possibilities which our selective decisions ... have left on the fringes". These "possibilities do not disappear but remain to cast their shadow over the gestalt that has relegated them" (Iser 1984, 125-126).

In The Golden Bowl, confronting and configuring the opacity of the other is an effort made sinister by the ubiquitous quality of concealment. The most disturbing effects of the novel are rooted in the sense that the text contains something hidden and unutterable: "the horror of the thing hideously *behind*" (GB, 471). Yeazell comments that in the late James the unutterable element of the story "makes itself intensely felt, a hidden pressure which the reader feels so intensely just because it is hidden" (1976b, 66). To reach between the lines for the unuttered story is to enter a vast white mist of possibility: an epistemological wilderness in which there is no right way to see and no right word to describe, and to be goaded through such uncertainty into a bewildered awareness: a "vision of alternatives" (GB, 217).

In every powerful scene of The Golden Bowl, despite the existence of a central characterising perspective, the possibilities of what others are thinking constantly intervene. James's concern is to alert the reader to these unconfigurable possibilities; throughout the novel the actual and the possible co-exist. The Golden Bowl takes as its theme this idea of competing texts and competing interpretations. In the battle the novel depicts the action of reading and interpreting is directly related to that of assuming authorial control. An emotionally charged moment in Book Two clearly illustrates this: as the struggle between Charlotte and Maggie gathers momentum they confront each other on the terrace at Fawns. From where she stands out of view, Maggie observes the rest of the party playing cards. But when Charlotte joins her, she is made to look again on the same scene with different eyes:

Side by side, for three minutes, they fixed this picture of quiet harmonies, the

positive charm of it and, as might have been said, the full significance -- which as was now brought home to Maggie, could be no more, after all, than a matter of interpretation, differing always with a different interpreter. As she herself had hovered in sight of it a quarter of an hour before, it would have been a thing for her to show Charlotte -- to show in righteous irony, in reproach too stern for anything but silence. But now it was she who was being shown it, and shown it by Charlotte.... (GB, 476)

Charlotte's unuttered version of the scene silently undercuts Maggie's interpretation, subverting her seemingly irrefutable reading. Implied in the competing visions of the two young women are the novel's other interpreters: the Prince, Adam Verver and the Assinghams. As we read this story, we become increasingly aware that we must keep a number of perspectives before us. Such competing perspectives are, like the most famous critical interpretations of the novel, often conflicting and violently opposed. Is Maggie a witch or a sainted heroine? Is the final scene a victory for redemptive love or a sordid commodification of human beings into *objets d'art*?¹ The finding of a middle line between conflicting perspectives seems a paltry solution. Yet such opposed views to the novel may be understood by looking at what is demanded from the reader of this remarkable text.

James's study of the individual's struggle for the authorship of their own story reaches its height in his last and greatest novel. In this, the harshest of his social critiques, James demonstrates that life is a matter of competing authorial designs. Adam Verver comments: "We move in a selfish mass. You see we want always the same thing", the triumph of our own story (GB, 368). The world of The Golden Bowl is a modern commodified universe in which its characters are driven by "the egoism of their passions" (GB, 303). In the conflict of these passions, the successful authorship of a vision of happiness often depends on the control and suppression of other people's stories. In The Golden Bowl "certain characters seem to be trying to compose their own novel ... according to who they are and what is happening" (Llewellyn-Smith, viii). In an almost equivalent way, the reader must configure the text around the characters and attempt to construct a suitable narrative from their different claims.

In terms of the reader's task, an important event happens halfway through the story of The Golden Bowl; as Book Two begins, one of the characters wakes up and begins to live. Maggie's coming to consciousness has immense consequences for the reading process because for the reader of The Golden Bowl the "birth" of Maggie Verver's consciousness means we awake inside another text. Without access to Maggie's consciousness her story has remained cut off from the reader until this moment when it begins finally to will itself into being (GB, 302).

Like the Sleeping Beauty of the fairy-tale, Maggie awakens to the fact that what she wants is to be the Princess: "Maggie had forgotten, had neglected, had declined, to be the little Princess on anything like the scale open to her" (GB, 350). In order to become a Princess, one must have a Prince and Maggie realises she must oust the woman who has taken her place: "she had a plan", we are told, "and she rejoiced in her plan" (GB, 315). Book One ends with the renewal of Charlotte's and Amerigo's relationship and the Assinghams prepare the reader for Maggie's assertion of authorial power in Book Two. Fanny is the *ficelle* figure of the text: as reader and guide to the reader her effort to understand the situation of the four main characters mirrors our own. James frequently spikes his labyrinth with the Assingham's portentous, melodramatic chats and in her conversations with the Colonel, Fanny's words function as frank, funny, sometimes terrifying "You are Here" pointers for the reader: "She got up, on the words, very much as if they were the blue daylight towards which, through a darksome tunnel, she had been pushing her way" (GB, 57). The Assinghams' struggle is often comic as the Colonel attempts to edit, simplify or paraphrase Fanny's effusively detailed chronicle but through them James highlights the bewildering and destabilising effects of the reading experience. Their running commentary contributes significantly to the novel as it frequently questions or thoroughly revises previously held conceptions. In the last chapter of Book One, Fanny anticipates Maggie's imminent control of the text: "I needn't torment myself. She has taken them over". "Don't pity her.... she has begun to live" Fanny tells us: "The way it comes to me is that she *will* live. The way it comes to me is

that she'll triumph" (GB, 280-1). Book Two is Maggie's triumph, her reading and rewriting of Book One.

In Book Two the reader is allowed suddenly to view the events from an angle of vision that has been obscured; as this access is granted we are simultaneously denied access to the minds of the other characters and forced to become outsiders in a story we have felt and seen. The bewildering effect of The Golden Bowl hinges on this changing of perspectives and the suppression of the story of Book One is thematically significant. As Maggie becomes an author-figure in Book Two the reader is already party to the knowledge that Maggie struggles to gain, but, through Maggie's consciousness we encounter a new vision of the story. James notes in his Preface that "we see the same persons and things again but as Maggie's interest" (GB, xlv). Such a project is elucidated by Philip Horne's suggestion that the idea of rewriting and revision is to be found everywhere in James's work:

Revision ... involves the existence of two "visions" of the same object or situation - one in the present and one in the past. These two visions may or may not be embodied in different texts or bits of text; but either implicitly or explicitly they invite a comparison between them. (1989, 358)

Book Two is an act of revision for the reader as Maggie engages in a rewriting of the story of The Golden Bowl. As Maggie realises that Charlotte and Amerigo's way of "*treating*" her is directed "by a plan that was an exact counterpart of her own" the novel becomes not a story but a fight for a possible story: the imposition of one plan over another (GB, 328).² In a parody of a fairy-tale, what develops is a duel to be Princess of the kingdom: a contest between two characters who want the "same thing", the same role (GB, 368). Part Third of Book One opens with a vision of Charlotte "crowned" with "unsurpassed diamonds": a Princess awaiting her Prince at the top of the "monumental staircase", relishing "the perfections of aspect and arrangement that had made her personal scheme a success, the *proved* private theory that materials to work with had been all she required" (GB, 179-80). Charlotte's design triumphs in the romantic trip to

Gloucester as the lovers conceive that their "so special situation" allows them to "enjoy together extraordinary freedom" (GB, 210-227). But their scheme is gradually rearranged by Maggie's authorial control in Book Two. As Maggie takes them over "there was no limit to her conceived design of not letting them escape" (GB, 334).

The characters' contest over designs is subtly written into the novel's structure. Although Book One is entitled "The Prince" it contains a variety of viewpoints. Whilst both books contain the *ficelle* function of the Assinghams' conversations, Book One offers the opportunity for the reader to enter the mind of Adam and of Charlotte, as well as that of the Italian Prince. The novel's consequent effect on the reader can be seen in terms of James's famous metaphor of the house of fiction. As Book One progresses, each of the three parts opens inside another mind. Though the Prince is the primary consciousness, at the outset of each section we are moved from one perspective of the situation to another, quite as if we were moved by force to a different window of the house, a different authorial outlook. Book Two however, aside from Fanny's, allows entry to one single viewpoint: Maggie's.

Through this denial of access James seeks to prompt the writerly activities of the reader by stimulating us to supply what is not there. From the outset of Book Two, the reader will continue to share with the central consciousness the task of hypothesising as to the unuttered thoughts and emotions of the rest of the quartet, but the length and range of the novel's second book will heighten the magnitude of such a pursuit. Maggie's vision of her family is all we are finally entitled to share, but unlike Maggie we have formerly entered their texts, and we need to keep the remembered view from their windows in front of us. James's design, in allowing us to read what Maggie wants to know, ensures that as Maggie takes over as central consciousness of Book Two, the actual and the possible, Book Two and Book One, the uttered and the unuttered, co-exist for the reader. The experience of reading The Golden Bowl does for one's emotional and intellectual perspectives what viewing an optical illusion such as the figure-ground phenomenon does for

one's eyes. In the figure-ground phenomenon two pictures are possible. From one vision two side-profiles of faces can be seen; we might call them the Prince and the Princess (the names given to the two parts of the novel). And when we look again -- there's a vase. Or in this case the Golden Bowl. The most important fact about this golden bowl is that it has a crack, and, because of this, as the Prince points out, it tells a story. The constant effort demanded of the reader is to keep both visions before us at once: the faces and the vase, the people and the *objet d'art* that symbolises their story. Comparable to the famous optical illusion, the novel itself challenges our accepted ways of viewing the world as it is not one story but multifarious layers of story. The attempt to read these entangled stories with any clarity exposes how easily we may be deceived: "it was a situation with such different sides ... and to none of which one could, in justice, be blind" (GB, 52). The reader may alternate between the different characters' views, but the question as to which one the novel presents as final is erroneous; we need only to blink to view the situation differently.³ The challenge of reading this novel is to try to become as James advised "one of the people on whom nothing is lost" as he attempts to provoke the reader into a new way of seeing, in which the actual and the possible co-exist (TF, 35).

The novel bears testimony to what Paul Armstrong has called the multiple existence of a work of art. He regards a literary text as "heteronomous": "neither dependent on nor autonomous of interpretation but paradoxically both at once" (1986, 321). In the curious state of affairs depicted in The Golden Bowl, the situation is both at once, crucially dependent on interpretation and yet somehow mysteriously beyond such efforts. The impossibility of certainty is infused into the very language used. Most of the conversations are exercises in what Maggie calls humbugging, lying to and for people till as Fanny says "we're black in the face" (GB, 389). Because nothing can be taken at face value, both characters and readers suffer from an "anxiety of intelligence", so aware of what might be hidden behind the words that we are forced to reckon with a myriad possibilities (GB, 187). The anxiety of interpretation is foregrounded every step of

the way as reader and character struggle to expose and understand the real story that is written in invisible ink between the bare bones of what Maggie calls "act" and "fact" (GB, 384). For in terms of plain factual plot, The Golden Bowl is as Daniel Brudney describes:

a quintessential Jamesian novel. Almost nothing happens. In the course of more than five hundred pages there are two marriages, one affair, and a single act of violence, the smashing of the golden bowl. The rest is reflection, nuance, detail: the creation and preservation of a brilliant perfect surface. (1990, 397)

The tension in the novel arises from what Brudney calls "this stress on surface and silence" (397). Every character has something to hide from the others, so communication becomes a frightening exercise in pretence.

The card game Maggie watches at Fawns is an important metaphor for the action of the novel. Winning the game by imposing an authorial design becomes a matter of bluffing the other characters to play into your hands. Ostensibly the hidden horror of the text would seem to be what Maggie Verver begins to awaken to at the commencement of the second book of the novel: the liaison between her husband and her father's wife. What is significant is that once dug up, the affair is never exposed or acknowledged as an event. By the close of the novel, whatever is hidden behind the words is something far more appalling than adultery, it is the unutterable truth about the tyranny of human relations.

The idea of social censorship and necessary exclusion is everywhere tacitly acknowledged by the protagonists as unuttered words and inappropriate communications are suppressed from the very beginning of the story. Visiting Fanny Assingham before his marriage, the Prince is aware that he must keep part of his story suppressed:

He looked about, to put himself more in relation with the place; then after hesitation, seemed to speak certain words instead of certain others. (GB, 21)

Such a sentence highlights the co-existence of the actual and the possible. To James art was a way of ordering life: "Life being all inclusion and confusion and art being all discrimination and selection" (AN, 120). The Prince's caution is a demonstration of human artistic will, a way of

controlling life through authorial activity. The characters select their words with the consideration and prudence of authors because the stability of their world relies on a tissue of lies and carefully maintained fictions which necessitate every communication being "visibly shaped ... in the interest of the highest considerations" (GB, 187).⁴ Based on maintaining untruth, communication in the novel becomes fictional, what Iser would describe as "staged discourse": "what is said ... should only be taken *as if* it were referring to something, whereas in actual fact all the references are bracketed and only serve as guidelines for what is to be imagined" (1990, 942). In this sophisticated world of articulate, cultured creatures, what matters is not what is said, but what they manage *not* to say. Smouldering beneath the words by which the characters communicate to each other lurks the "unuttered and unutterable" story of their relations (GB, 473). What is articulated hides an underworld of "hypothetical utterance" which is vividly envisaged yet repressed with an increasing violence (Wilson 1981, 25).⁵ The bland, innocuous white mist of Edwardian civility which cloaks every interaction conceals a story that is a primitive, terrible struggle for power, possession and control. Tension is created by the clash between the forces compelling revelation and repression of this unuttered story. Victory for Maggie becomes "a question of not, by a hair's-breadth, deflecting into the truth" and of stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth to cover the anguished cries of betrayal (GB, 481). In managing to keep silent when she could scream, and indeed when she inwardly hears in Charlotte's quavering voice "the shriek of a soul in pain", Maggie manages to keep the unuttered story that The Golden Bowl tells under her control, and thereby author a version which falls in line with her vision of reality alone (GB, 512).

Carren Kaston argues that "living in James is an act of authorship, because it consists of competing authorial designs: each character tries to possess the material of life in a version of his or her own making" (1984, 6). Many of James's centres of consciousness liberate themselves when they set themselves free from another's fiction. Maisie, Isabel, and Strether all struggle to

break free from what Kaston describes as "parental" houses of fiction. The impetus to take "imaginative possession of their own lives often implicitly coincides with the unfinished psychological business of growing up" (7).

In each of these three novels, an unuttered story is discovered and in each case it is an illicit affair. Maisie in France, Isabel in Chapter Forty Two, and Strether on the bank of a glorious river are all confronted with a vision of reality they had not allowed themselves to recognise before. Although this unuttered truth does not in any case have the power to completely overturn the dominant narrative, it revises their vision, changes their minds, and allows a certain amount of freedom. More than any other consequence, it sharply demonstrates the provisional nature of all such life narratives. The course of events follows the same path in The Golden Bowl, with one important change in direction: Maggie's uncovering of the truth becomes secondary to the impulse to keep it buried. Her fight against the "funny form" her family's life has taken becomes a battle to impose her own chosen form upon it (GB, 316). When prevarication becomes the only token of communication, and lying to someone becomes a means of protecting them or trapping them within their own misrepresentation, the survivors of such a situation will simply be the best of storytellers. Maggie triumphs because she lies. In order to assert her authorial design throughout the action of Book Two she must maintain a fiction: that she is innocent and ignorant of any wrong done to her.

Fanny, whose guilt brings her onto Maggie's side, sums up neatly for the Colonel and the reader the actions necessary to the assertion of Maggie's design:

It will consist just as much of lying to the others too: to the Prince about one's belief in *him*; to Charlotte about one's belief in *her*; to Mr Verver, dear sweet man, about one's belief in everyone. (GB, 389)

How should the reader respond to Maggie's successful authoring of the story that wins the day?

At the end of the novel Maggie wins her Prince, breaks from the parental house of fiction,

reasserting herself as a married woman instead of a devoted daughter, but at what cost to herself

and the other characters?

The critical heritage of The Golden Bowl reveals startling discrepancies of opinion as to Maggie's final victory. In his study of The Golden Bowl, R.B.J. Wilson notes that "for several generations of critics, [Maggie] has been identified with an alleged didactic expression of conventional moral stance which must strike many as having very little to do with this novel or with the documented interest of James's later years" (1981, 17). Among the critics who unremittingly support Maggie there is an assumption that James's choice of her as central consciousness implies an acquiescence in her fairy-tale ending which crowns the novel she has written in Book Two. James's remarks on closure in "The Art of Fiction" should alert us to the limitations of such a notion. In his famous essay on his art form, James summarily dismisses the endings of many popular nineteenth century novels as "a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs and cheerful remarks" (TF, 32). This powerfully suggests that to read the novel's conclusion as a welcome "Hollywood ending" in which an Italian prince only has eyes for his American wife is to take the scene merely at face value. Maggie's journey takes her into the ethical and epistemological wilderness behind the conventional structures which aid the domestication of human reality: "there were yet other possibilities, as it seemed to Maggie; there were always too many, and all of them things of evil [which] left one in a darkness of prowling dangers that was like the predicament of a night watcher in a beast-haunted land who has no more means for a fire" (GB, 517). Despite interesting parallels, Maggie's quest is not an excursion to the woods on a summer's evening which finally allows everyone to pair up with the correct partner. The novel itself partakes of the tragic rather than the comic tradition and whilst Maggie strives to author a comic ending, her own responses at the novel's conclusion are "pity and dread" -- emotions reminiscent of the qualities of "pity and fear" Aristotle said tragedy was designed to elicit from an audience (GB, 567).⁶

Dissatisfaction and horror has informed many of the critical responses to The Golden

Bowl. These are appropriate responses yet to simply condemn Maggie for her achievement of final control over Charlotte and Amerigo is to fail to give adequate attention to the disruptive elements which disturb Maggie's own final vision. To a discussion of the reading experience of the novel such various and contradictory readings are crucial and I have attempted to include many of the conflicting arguments in the notes. My purpose in this chapter however is not to reiterate the debate but to suggest that the debate itself has arisen from James's complex and carefully detailed depiction of the bewildering co-existence of the actual and the possible in the literary text.

In his theories of aesthetic response Iser asserts that reading is a form of authorship. The fictionalising actions required in the attempt to fill in the gaps or absences of a literary text engage the reader in completing the unfinished story and writing in the unuttered text of a novel. In this way, Iser argues, fiction links the actual and the possible as it allows make-believe, what might be, to supplement what is (Iser 1989, 123). The continued critical interest in characters finally excluded from the role of conscious reflector gives a clue to James's technique in The Golden Bowl.

Significantly the first name tentatively given to the projected novel was "Charlotte" (Edel 1972, 572). James certainly considered her as a potential centre of reflection and the fact that for many readers Charlotte's practically untold story threatens to overwhelm the words on the printed page signals one of the magnificent achievements of the novel.⁷ Wilson reflects that had James chosen Charlotte as the controlling consciousness of the second book, "he would have no chance of making room for, much less keeping a balanced interest in, all three of the others" (1981, 65). The novel's haunting effect is instead to alert the reader's attention to the ubiquitous unuttered story of the text towards which Maggie directs all her intelligence and energy: the horror story "hideously *behind*" the gilded surface of the final scene (GB, 471). The reader's continued concern for the other three characters signifies James's prompting of the reader to write the unwritten text of the novel and so do "his share of the task" of bringing the book to life (TF, 321).

Part of the critical endeavour is to uncover the unuttered story of a text. Critical interpretation seeks to reach behind the language of the literary text to articulate what is being stated in different terms because, as Iser argues, fictional language is a carrier of a latent meaning (Iser 1990, 943). In The Golden Bowl the characters' communications contain a latent meaning which the others must read and interpret correctly in order to survive. With increasing frequency, conversational exchanges contain mute communications beneath or instead of spoken words: "her uttered words, meanwhile, were different enough from those he might have inserted between the lines of her already-spoken" (GB, 437). Failure to read these unspoken words correctly is dangerous for misinterpretation of the unuttered communications means "paying with one's life" (GB, 300). James seems to equate both reader and character together in the labour: "their course would demand of them the most anxious study and the most independent, not to say original, interpretation of signs" (GB, 211). Both readers and characters must constantly go below the surface to read and author the story it hides, and this is demonstrated in the most important image of the novel: the Golden Bowl itself.

Under the novel's perfect gilded surface lies a deep fissure into the unknown. The cracked golden bowl, a vase "cut out of a single crystal" and covered with gilt "by some very fine old worker and by some beautiful process" is the overriding metaphor of the entire tale (GB, 85). The golden bowl -- to return to my figure-ground phenomenon analogy -- exists in the picture even when we are not aware of it, and at moments it rises to the foreground to assert its presence, "vivid and definite in its domination of the scene" (GB, 420). A vortex of possible meanings is contained within the bowl. It sits between the two faces, indeed it is created by them. Far more than an allegorical symbol, the golden bowl is best understood in comparison to the allegorical symbols of Hawthorne's fiction. Hawthorne's allegorical mode is not didactically generated by his efforts to tell us what his symbols denote or what abstract notions they picture forth; his stories grow instead out of the characters' efforts to find out what the symbols mean, or at all events to

make them mean something. Michael Davitt Bell comments: "it is his characters who turn life into a picture language by making it illustrate ideas about life" (1980, 133-136).⁸ Such is the case with the golden bowl which is made into a signifier charged with symbolic properties by the characters themselves.

In the picture language of The Golden Bowl, humankind's relationship to life is necessarily at one remove from absolute truth, entailing instead the constant interpretation of a system of signs. In the language his characters use to conceal their unuttered stories James shows that language, even at its most basic, is always a metaphor for something else. And as we enter each consciousness, the images evoked (the white fog for instance) are not the explanatory metaphors of an omniscient narrator but produced by the characters themselves. In the language of fiction "once the manifest meaning is released from what it designates it becomes free for other uses. If it is now taken for a metaphor, bringing a hidden reality to light, then a play space opens up between the manifest and the latent meaning [which] makes it a matrix for generating meaning" (Iser 1990, 942-944). The play-spaces in literary language are places of indeterminacy within texts that make them somehow incomplete, but these sites of incompleteness should in no way be regarded as a lack. The sites of indeterminacy are what give the work its dynamism, stimulating the active participation and co-authoring activities of the reader. The merger of a reader's imagination with a text produces a realised work, endowed with far greater significance than it might seem to possess on its own. This is because of the interactive nature of reading. Unlike any other art-form "the text happens to us" (Gardener-Smith 1982, 6). It "renders the reader spellbound, lost in a labyrinth with unwinding print for a clue.... The thin line of words is the way in and the only way out" (5). The metaphorical language of the text "is always a bridge opening onto the unknown because of the vacuity at its centre" (15). Like a labyrinth which cannot be experienced until we enter it and are required to find our way, the text can have no real significance for the reader until we become engaged in the process of making meaning by filling

the creative negative spaces.

The Golden Bowl happens to us only when we begin to reach beneath the words on the page for the unuttered story they contain. For the characters of the novel, the antiquario's golden vase becomes important to them *only* once they discover it contains a crack which becomes the domain of indeterminacy and a play-space for making meaning. The Prince's words could stand as an epigram for the entire novel: "Why it has a crack.... It told its story" (GB, 89). The bowl without the characters' intervention, is an object. It sits in its box beneath the shop counter awaiting discovery. In the same way, Georges Poulet describes books:

Books are objects ... made of paper and ink they lie where they are put, until the moment someone shows an interest in them. They wait. Are they aware that an act of man might suddenly transform their existence.... No, books are not just objects among others. This feeling they give me -- I sometimes have it with other objects ... statues make me want to circle around them, vases make me want to turn them in my hands. I wonder why. Isn't it because they give me the illusion that there is something in them which from a different angle, I might be able to see? Neither vase nor statue seems fully revealed by the unbroken perimeter of its surfaces ... it must have an interior. What this interior might be, that is what intrigues me and makes me circle around them as though looking for an entrance to a secret chamber. But there is no such entrance ... so the vase and statue are closed. They oblige me to remain outside. (Poulet 1986, 351)

This is not the case with the vase in the Bloomsbury shop. The flaw beneath the surface transforms object into metaphor and due to this gate-way to the unknown we are not obliged to remain outside. The Golden Bowl is not closed off, but opens, like the book it gives its name to, to a plethora of possible meanings. The situation is wonderfully similar to what Poulet describes between readers and books when barriers of object and subject fall away: "there is no longer either outside or inside" (351). When James presents his Golden Bowl to his readers there is no longer any division: the bowl is in the book and the book is in the bowl.

The discovery of the crack is akin to the discovery of a secret chamber for the characters and reader which allows entry and engagement: no longer objective outsiders, we become both readers of and authors of the story of the bowl. The antiquario's question -- "what is the matter

with it?" is rhetorical. The crack in the bowl is not a "weak place" but the very source of its strength (GB, 88). There is nothing the matter with sites of indeterminacy within texts, for they are what makes art, to use Charlotte's word, "exquisite" (GB, 89). "No tale can ever be told in its entirety" Iser asserts; "indeed it is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism ... the opportunity is given to us to bring to play our own faculty for making connections -- for filling in the gaps left by the text itself" (1972, 284-285).

As the little antiquario introduces the bowl to the lovers, the literary language describing the moment splits like gilded crystal: "On lines and by laws of its own" as James undertakes a subtle examination of what this bowl actually is (GB, 87). The manifest meaning becomes metaphorical, a carrier for latent meanings and alternative possibilities:

He placed the box on the counter, pushed back a pair of small hooks, lifted the lid and removed from its nest a drinking-vessel, larger than a common cup, yet not of exorbitant size, and formed to appearance, either of old fine gold or of some material once richly gilt. He handled it with tenderness, with *ceremony*, making a place for it on a small, satin mat. "My Golden Bowl," he observed -- and it sounded on his lips, *as if it said everything*. He left the important object -- *for as "important" it did somehow present itself* -- to produce its certain effect. Simple, but singularly elegant ... and, though not of singular depth, it justified its title by the charm of its shape as well as the tone of its surface ... it seemed indeed to ward off the prudent admirer. (GB, 85, my italics)

The beautiful play of words in this passage, coupled with the conversation the antiquario has with Charlotte, transforms a simple shopping expedition into an episode in which the artist figure presents his own work of art to his reader and characters. James pictured himself as such a figure in his Preface to The Portrait of a Lady.⁹ The little antiquario of The Golden Bowl is a man with "an extraordinary pair of eyes" (GB, 78). His fingers play over his art-works "as those of a chess player at rest, a few seconds, over the board, on a figure he thinks he may move and then may not" (GB, 80). Being a master of fiction he is adept at reaching below surface meaning. He understands the language of the lovers: listens to "their intimate conversation" despite "the foreign tongue [that] covered what they said" and speaking it himself, addresses Charlotte by "her

possible, her impossible, title" (GB, 83-84). The antiquario's relation to the characters and the bowl that symbolises their story is characteristically Jamesian. He resembles an author-figure: "He was clearly the master, and devoted to his business -- the essence of which, in his conception, might precisely have been this particular secret that he possessed for worrying the customer so little that it fairly made for their relations a sort of solemnity" (GB, 78). James does not assert a didactic authorial voice, but simply offers us his Golden Bowl to make of it what we choose.

The bowl becomes, to use Armstrong's term, a "heteronomous" artwork, both beyond and subject to interpretation. What we witness and become caught up in is a process of making meaning. As James presents his four characters he allows the reader to enter each consciousness, to be both insider and outsider. The four characterising perspectives demonstrate that character is vision. The "ambiguous" words of the Prince's telegram to Charlotte that may be "read ... in more lights than one" are an important clue to understanding the novel: "*A la guerre comme à la guerre then We must lead our lives as we see them; but I am charmed by your courage and almost surprised at my own*" (GB, 212). The surface meaning of the words is less important than what they may be made to mean. With imagery and subtle allusion James reveals that how each of the characters views their world is intricately infused with who they are: we read our lives as we see them. Life is a battle not only to reveal meaning but to create it. The authorial designs the characters seek to impose on their lives are significantly related to their reading of the Golden Bowl. It is through this method that the novel becomes a fight for story, as the characters are seen as struggling to write The Golden Bowl itself.

For Charlotte, the cracked golden bowl is an apt wedding present for her interest is made "tenderer and stranger" with her discovery that the bowl contains an imperfection (GB, 89). It symbolises that the Prince who has renounced her for a gilded future is not as perfect as he would like the Ververs to believe. From the outset Charlotte is associated with the unuttered story the golden bowl tells and the flaw in the bowl. The first action of silence in the novel occurs during

the Prince's visit to Fanny; in his awareness of her uncustomary agitation the Prince feels that "the unspoken had come up" only to discover moments later that Charlotte Stant is in London (GB, 25).

Charlotte is the Prince's unspoken story and a man of "so much more surface than depth" he reads into the crack of the golden bowl an omen for his happiness, his safety, his marriage -- for everything (GB, 74). Charlotte risks the imperfections and contradictions of life, what she calls "the rifts in the lute", in order to be free to love (GB, 264). As she says to the Prince when they renew their relationship in Gloucester: "Don't you think too much of 'cracks', and aren't you too afraid of them? I risk the cracks" (GB, 264). She risks returning to London for one last hour with the man she loves under the pretext of buying him a gift. A superb actress, her tone and attitude are always "as far removed as necessary from the truth of her situation" (GB, 39). But in a book full of lies, Charlotte is the only person to speak "the truth that was *her* truth" as she tells the Prince in Hyde Park: "I don't want to pretend, and I can't pretend a moment longer ... I came back for this ... I had to take the risk" (GB, 67-73). She asks nothing of the Prince, not that he will "know [or] understand" but simply that he will "hear" as she speaks of the emotions they have so carefully concealed. The Prince hears only the sub-text: "he clutched ... at what he could best clutch at -- the fact that she let him off, definitely let him off. She let him off, it seemed, even from so much as answering". As Charlotte utters the unutterable the Prince's artistic facility with words fails him and unable to gloss over the cracks with golden phrases "the moment" is the one "in his life at which he had had the least to say" (GB, 74).

The Prince dislikes imperfections, seeking to be the "pure and perfect crystal" his father-in-law praises him for being: "if I'm a crystal I'm delighted that I'm a perfect one, for I believe they sometimes have cracks and flaws -- in which case they're to be had very cheap!" (GB, 102). In describing the Prince's reply, the narrator openly invites the reader to notice the connections, fill in the unspoken gaps in his comment: "The promptitude of his answer, *we may in fact well surmise,*

had sprung not a little from a particular kindled remembrance" (GB, 103, my italics). Charlotte is the unuttered subject of his words. The cracked crystal vase that embodies her gift of love is too "cheap" for his liking. Not wanting to be a "pauper" in love, he hands over the "poetry" of his "old Roman life" with Charlotte for the security of "a bottomless bag of solid shining British sovereigns" (GB, 244). Comfortably aware that he has become part of Adam's "collection", he renounces the complexities of life embodied in the bowl for the smooth perfection of surface given him by Verver's Midas touch: "these golden drops evenly flowed over it. They caught in no interstice, they gathered in no concavity" (GB, 102).

Adam Verver does not distinguish the people in his world from *objets d'art*. The flow of his "human connection" with Maggie, "daughter of his very own though she was", is "fairly interrupted" by his sense of her similarity to a nymph-like statue (GB, 139). James presents Adam's authorial design on life as a gross misreading by drawing attention to his misinterpretation of Keats's sonnet. Adam sets himself the task of conquering the last frontier of possibility, the world of Art. In striking contrast to Keats however Adam's wanderings in the "realms of gold" will not entail wonder and freedom but appropriation and collection.¹⁰ The need to collect art reflects a Utopian view of what reality should be. Infused into Verver's attitude is his need to escape from reality. For Verver, art is the realm of freedom, his chance for transcendence. The American City is his way of concretizing this self-aggrandizement.¹¹

Art's power lies in its relation to reality. To collect art is to force it to be subservient to man: removed from context, stripped of connection, art is denied life.¹² Such abstraction becomes deathly appropriation when human beings are seen as figures in a collection. The fact that Adam never encounters the antiquario's Golden Bowl is important because for him there is no unspoken story to Charlotte and Amerigo: they are not people but "great finds", museum pieces for the grander glory of his collection. As Adam prepares to propose to Charlotte, James, in one of his narrator's rare interventions, shrewdly links Adam's life-denying appropriation of the golden bowl

and the unuttered story it contains by means of startlingly similar imagery:

Nothing might affect us as queerer, had we time to look into it, than this application of the same measure of value to such different pieces of property as old Persian carpets, say, and new human acquisitions ... he was, as a taster of life, economically constructed. He put into his one little glass everything he raised to his lips, and it was as if he had always carried in his pocket, like a tool of his trade, this receptacle, a little glass cut with a fineness of which the art had long since been lost, and kept in an old morocco case stamped in ineffaceable gilt.... (GB, 145)

In Book One Maggie both shares and is subject to her father's attitude, in fact in her relation to him, her otherness is no more than an abstract notion. Adam gives merely "theoretic respect for her present right to personal reserves and mysteries" (GB, 131). Her father has bought her a Prince, and Maggie is concerned only with knowing his external history, his credentials, the part of him that everyone can get at and she has been with Fanny to look up his family history in the British Museum. Content with the beautiful surface of her highly priced "*morceau de musée*" she knows nothing of the inner man (GB, 10). Refusal to see is as Maggie coyly admits: "just what makes everything nice for us" (GB, 9).

Maggie and Adam constantly take refuge from the shocks of confronting other people's inner realities and their settled married lives are designed around a romantic vision of living in an unfallen world surrounded "by everything in it that *is* beautiful" (GB, 9). But in Book Two Maggie's interest in the art-works that stand so picturesquely in the Edenic garden of her life undergoes a radical change.

As the reader enters Maggie's consciousness for the first time, we shift our position in relation to the other characters. Book Two places the reader in Maggie's position: as an outsider, looking for a way in. In Maggie's mind the strange metaphor of the "wonderful, beautiful but outlandish pagoda" occupies "the very centre of the garden of her life":

She had walked round and round it -- that was what she felt, she had carried on her existence in the space left her for circulation ... but never quite making out, as yet, where she might have entered had she wished. She had not wished till now -- such was the odd case ... though her raised eyes seemed to distinguish places that must serve, from within, and especially from aloft, as apertures and outlooks, no

door appeared to give access from her convenient garden level. The great decorated surface had remained consistently impenetrable and inscrutable. (GB, 299)

The pagoda is Maggie's own metaphor and the beautiful ivory tower figures her perfect life: "the arrangement ... by which, so strikingly, she had been able to marry without breaking ... with her past ... she had not ... given up her father the least little bit" (GB, 300-301). The pagoda "may represent our young woman's consciousness of a recent change in her life ... why she ceased to take comfort in the sight of it represented accordingly a lapse from that ideal consistency on which her moral comfort almost at any time depended" (GB, 301). We become interested in Maggie once she begins to take an interest and to be confused by unrecognised possibilities that question the consistency of her world-view and cause her to move "for the first time in her life as in the darkening shadow of a false position" (GB, 301).

We are shut off from Maggie in Book One because, as Fanny says, she shuts out the real world so that her essential characteristic is a lack of vision: "It was as if her imagination had been closed to it, her sense altogether sealed". As Book Two begins Fanny's predictions are borne out: "That therefore ... is what will now *have* to happen. Her sense will have to open" (GB, 282). What Maggie first begins to see is that she has not seen. With her image of circling the pagoda which she cannot enter, her imagination awakens to a situation that is obscured beyond her comprehension or intervention.

Maggie is the centre of consciousness of Book Two because through her James can demonstrate the rupture of innocence by experience. Charlotte is very much alive and an active participant in her reality -- both Amerigo and Adam notice the particularity and range of her attention to human detail.¹³ Driven by her unshakeable passion for the Prince and her need for the financial and emotional security of marriage Charlotte's motivations are complex as she constantly grapples with the difficult ambiguity of life.¹⁴ In contrast Maggie is her father's little girl with no story of her own.

Maggie can only become co-author of the story of The Golden Bowl once her consciousness becomes engaged with the text and "the flower of participation" begins to bloom (GB, 316). Her desperate circling of the pagoda illustrates her new need to enter into and take part in the story of the golden bowl, and Book Two illustrates that to be alive is a matter of constant and difficult interpretation. The process mirrors Poulet's description of the miracle of reading: Charlotte and Amerigo transform from objects in Maggie's world into centres of consciousness with which she must engage. Once she is no longer an outsider the text begins to happen to Maggie and she steps inside the labyrinth to be lost "in the glimmering passages of a gold-mine" where she begins to take authorial control in reading and rewriting the novel of her life (GB, 351). The first half of the novel depicts Charlotte's reign and triumph as the Prince's consort, but her radiance dims to the torment of the deserted Ariadne in the second half as the Prince shifts his loyalty to Maggie who has followed him into his text: "Hadn't she fairly got into his labyrinth with him? -- wasn't she indeed in the very act of placing herself there, for him, at its centre and core, whence ... by an instinct all her own, she might securely guide him out of it?" (GB, 436).

As Maggie begins to live she becomes actress, author, and reader. The "mere dose of alarm" which gives Maggie's senses a "shaking" as Fanny calls it, is the repercussion following "the first surprise" to which Maggie ever treats Amerigo: "her trifle, her small breach with custom" is to sit by her own fireside awaiting her husband's return (GB, 305-9). The entire episode is a performance on Maggie's part, from her stiff little frock to her interest in "making Charlotte in particular ... the subject of endless inquiry" as she asks the Prince to relate the details of their visit to Matcham (GB, 316). Maggie's request signals her first entry into the lovers' text and for her own success she needs "to miss as little as possible of Charlotte's story" (GB, 321). As her ability to perceive develops, she begins to make connections. In asking for Fanny's advice, she sees something familiar in the older woman's expression:

Maggie sometimes felt reminded of other looks on other faces; of two strangely

unobliterated impressions above all, the physiognomic light that had played out in her husband at the shock -- she had come at last to talk to herself of the "shock" -- of his first vision of her on his return from Matcham and Gloucester, and the wonder of Charlotte's beautiful bold wavering gaze when, the next morning in Eaton Square, this old friend had turned from the window to begin to deal with her. (GB, 374)

The identical "visibly uncertain" (GB, 208) expressions on their faces alerts Maggie's sense that they are functioning "in consequence of some required process of their own" (GB, 330). Ironically Charlotte's advice to the Prince that they "must act in concert" is the lovers' undoing (GB, 226). What Maggie encounters in the two expressions is what Iser would describe as an "alien assumption". As the reader seeks to assert a consistent pattern on the text, other impulses are encountered "which cannot be immediately integrated or will even resist final integration. Thus the semantic possibilities of the text will always remain far richer than any configurative meaning formed whilst reading" (Iser 1972, 290). In reading as in life itself, illusions of consistency are formed. Such illusions are essential for the apprehension of the unfamiliar for by building necessary illusions we can incorporate the world into our imagination, yet in the process we reduce its polysemantic nature to a single interpretation in keeping with the expectations aroused. At the outset of Book Two Maggie is shocked by Charlotte and Amerigo, but they too are shocked by her actions and two configurations of perfection are simultaneously broken down by surprise. James demonstrates that perfection is a dangerous illusion; the maintenance of flawless configurations of meaning is impossible and reductive because other people are the indeterminacies in life. The refusal to acknowledge otherness is a failure of vision and a type of stupidity. Fanny's comment, "stupidity pushed to a certain point *is*, you know immorality ... what is morality but high intelligence?", highlights a characteristic Jamesian concern (GB, 66).

Adam and Maggie share the stupidity of denying Charlotte and Amerigo an interior life of their own. Adam's amusing over-reaction to Mrs Rance foregrounds his fear of other people as the intrusion of an unwanted reality into a carefully "achieved isolation" from the world (GB, 92).

In the arrangement of the two marriages James demonstrates that the Ververs grossest failure of vision is their refusal to see Charlotte and Amerigo as experiencing their own separate human reality: "What do they really suppose" Charlotte asks, "becomes of one? -- not so much sentimentally or morally ... but even just physically, materially, as a mere wandering woman: as a decent harmless wife" (GB, 223).

Charlotte's auxiliary position in the Verver household is due to the unnatural bond between father and daughter. Maggie's excessive devotion to her father prevents the necessary cleaving to her husband and their collaborative fiction that they may continue to live in undisturbed filial bliss as they have always done is what precipitates the adultery. Maggie later realises that in proposing to her father that he marry Charlotte, "she had proposed to him that they should 'call in' Charlotte -- call her in as a specialist might be summoned to an invalid's chair" (GB, 451). Charlotte's role is to maintain the Ververs as they are, to prevent interference from the threat to their relations that Maggie and her father perceive in the figure of Mrs Rance. After Charlotte has married Adam, James asserts the unnaturalness of the bond: "No-one could try to marry him now" (GB, 368). Charlotte is still as alone and adrift after her marriage and significantly she is still repeatedly called by her maiden name. She does try to make her marriage work, but sadly she tells the Prince that even the possibility of having a child is denied her. Adam's sterile immutable existence is revealed in his impotence. If Charlotte is brought in as a buffer to the perceived threat of invasive "others", the Prince is simply an exotic, virile sperm-donor who can give Adam and Maggie a child. Like everything else in his life Adam sees his grandson as a work of art: "the grand climax of their recent American period" which he collects and appropriates as his own (GB, 109). The Principino is another of Adam's "favourite things" and serves to further deepen his bond with his daughter (GB, 149). As Charlotte notes, it would take "more than ten children of mine, could I have had them -- to keep our *sposi* apart" (GB, 225).

In appropriating Charlotte and Amerigo "to do the worldly for them" (GB, 233), the

Ververs' crucial mistake is a denial that they have let in the "others" they feared; others who have their own ideas about an "opportunity for happiness" (GB, 180). Their filial devotion allows Charlotte to claim her impossible title, to become the "*signora principessa*" (GB, 83). The Ververs' continuation within marriage of "make-believe renewals of their old life" exhibits what Charlotte views as the childish imposition of a fictional world. They are "like children playing at paying visits, playing at 'Mr Thompson' and 'Mrs Fane' each hoping the other would really stay to tea" (GB, 185). Left alone and together, Charlotte and Amerigo renew their adult carnal relation.

For many critics of The Golden Bowl, this affair makes the lovers evil, especially Charlotte because of the role she plays in its initiation.¹⁵ The complex entanglement of adultery and incestuous love however raises serious ethical questions for both reader and character: the apportioning of blame according to pat solutions or clear rules of moral conduct is rendered inadequate as notions of good and evil, especially "Evil with a capital E", are not so easily delineated (GB, 282). Fanny's recognition of the adultery causes her to rebuke Charlotte: "You ought to be absolutely happy. You live with such good people". Charlotte's response: "Does one ever put into words anything so fatuously rash?" undercuts the traditional associations of good and highlights James's notion of linguistic expression as intimately tied up with doing (GB, 188). As Maggie takes on a exacting challenge of reading and rewriting her own story she revises what it means to live and to put such things into words.

Charlotte and Amerigo have an affair because they are not perfect. I do not mean this in any clichéd or dismissive sense -- in their imperfection is something deeply profound. The planned perfection of the Ververs' constructed fiction is a type of death and to live with "such good people" as the Ververs is, as Maggie begins to realise, "not living at all" (GB, 314). Charlotte articulates the suffocation she feels when she says to the Prince: "I can't put myself into Maggie's skin -- I can't, as I say. It's not my fit -- I shouldn't be able, as I see it, to breathe in it" (GB, 228).

The golden bowl symbolises that the art-works Maggie and her father have purchased are imperfect. In the crystal underneath the gilded exterior runs a jagged crack: an unuttered story which involved love, loss, and something that the Ververs have never reckoned with, negotiating the confusion, contrary passions and imperfections of existence. The crack in the Golden Bowl is the site of alternative possibilities and life itself.

At the end of Book One the unuttered story so long dormant powerfully asserts itself. When the affair between Charlotte and the Prince becomes a reality there is a sense of splitting surfaces and broken silences: inappropriate communication and emotion wills itself to the foreground as life and the unuttered breaks through the gilt facade. In his first dealing with the Ververs, the Prince notices several elements of life that "couldn't be gone into" in any significant manner. They are unable or unwilling to have "any serious discussion of veracity" (GB, 12). The Prince realises that deceit joins with love as subjects which must be shied away from or can only be raised in jest. But in the two conversations Fanny has with the lovers, at the "great official party in the full flush of the London spring-time", such subjects push themselves forward (GB, 179). With dazzling verbal skill the lovers all but admit to their scheme. Disturbed by the sensation that life and the unspoken truth is breaking through the fissures, Fanny's insatiable curiosity is restrained by a fear of knowing too much of the story. Charlotte's candid words disconcert Fanny who decides it is safer to pretend not to know the unutterable truth:

Discussion had of itself, to her sense, become danger -- such light, as from open crevices it let in: and the overt recognition of danger was worse than anything else. (GB, 200)

Fanny's encounter with the Prince is also overwhelmed by the presence of the unuttered. She is aware of another text "written on the Prince's own face *beneath* what he was saying" (GB, 209). Alarmed that "something strange and subtle and at variance with his words, something that *gave them away*, glimmered deep down ... a hint of possibility of their *really* treating the subject", Fanny's terror is palpable; the light in his eyes seems as threatening as "the head-light of an

approaching train seen through the length of a tunnel" (GB, 198). The discovery of the unutterable takes all Fanny's neat assumptions by surprise and she returns home to find the "snug laboratory of her afterthought" contaminated by dread -- in her panic the usual chemical detachment of her analysis breaks down into inarticulate sentences (GB, 198). For Fanny, risking the cracks means giving way to chaos and confusion. Nowhere is this breaking of settled categories and neat forms more vivid in the novel than in the language which describes the lovers' kiss. As the lovers reunite, the world that the Ververs sought to hold back with neat, unassailable "water-tight compartments" (GB, 11) rushes in:

Then of a sudden, through this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled. Their lips sought their lips, their pressure their response and their response their pressure; with a violence that sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillnesses they passionately sealed their pledge. (GB, 229)

Water imagery is prevalent throughout the novel, frequently signifying sexual passion, imaginative responsiveness and the mutable forces of life. In Book One Charlotte is often associated with rain. The poignant truth she speaks to the Prince in the Park is linked to its moist morning beauty, still damp from the night's heavy downfall: "a wholesome smell of irrigation, purging the place of dust and of odours less acceptable, rose from the earth" (GB, 67). Later she bursts in on her lover's loneliness on a wet afternoon presenting him with "a vision of alternatives" in her "handsome rain-freshened face" (GB, 218). But such regenerative and life-giving associations mutate into Maggie's sense that the lovers have her helplessly trapped like an invalid in "a bath of benevolence artfully prepared for her" (GB, 330). Such mutation of imagery is significant: James does not involve the reader in a sharply didactic scheme of the lovers' freedom versus the Ververs' constriction, of passion versus perfection; but instead he illustrates within a complex pattern of tropes -- in which artifice obscures the natural, containment threatens freedom, and benevolence is a means of domination -- that all four of the characters are concerned with taking authorial control of their situation. The selfish egoism of their schemes fix human

beings as one-dimensional characters in a plot for happiness.

Freedom for both the lovers and the Ververs depends on curtailing their *sposi* within a fixed design, a "plotted freedom" that in both cases is an illusion of changeless perfection (GB, 413). Charlotte presents her plan to Amerigo as an opportunity that places them "face to face in a freedom that partook, extraordinarily, of perfection" (GB, 218). The consummation of Charlotte's desire to be the Princess depends on the Ververs' scheme for her as she begins to realise that all she needs to do to have her Prince is work within the secure frame of the Ververs' immutable filial dependence: "the great thing is as they say, to 'know' one's place" she tells Fanny (GB, 189).

The brilliance of James's scheme depicts Charlotte's responsive life and passion gradually stultified by perfection. Like Isabel Archer turned Mrs Osmond, Charlotte becomes fixed within the frame of her own fictive picture. In each case James repeatedly refers to the young woman by her married name; Charlotte Stant becomes Mrs Verver, bedecked with diamonds instead of dew. Charlotte's "slightly hard radiance" stems from her confidence in the perfection of her situation (GB, 188). To be the Princess she needs only to become Mrs Verver and play the role that name implies: to "[hold] the field and [brave] the weather", allowing Maggie and her father to remain at home undisturbed; "the complications of life kept down" (GB, 313). The reader may share the Prince's disbelief at the "grotesque theory" that he is merely expected to "go about at such a rate with such a person as Mrs Verver in a state of childlike innocence, the state of our primitive parents before the Fall" (GB, 246). Maggie and her father are childish, they play at life; the Prince's opinion of them is very easy to share: "They were good children, bless their hearts, and the children of good children; so that, verily, the Principino himself, as less consistently of that descent, might figure to the fancy as the ripest genius of the trio" (GB, 245).

The Prince's reading of the Ververs is an accurate but partial picture. The Ververs' stupidity causes the adultery -- but like their *sposi*, the lovers share a failure of vision and a similar refusal to acknowledge otherness. If Charlotte is "stupid", as the Prince in perhaps his worst

betrayal calls her, her crucial mistake is the belief that there is nothing to the Ververs but what she patronisingly calls their "sweet simplicity" (GB, 228). Her inability to put herself into Maggie's skin demonstrates a failure of imagination in which she is unable to view the world through Maggie's eyes. Paradoxically the lovers' pledge of deceit becomes a collaborative fiction of their "sacred" duty to trap the Ververs in their own fictional world by protecting them from reality like children or invalids in their "conscious care". "At night all cats are grey" the Prince states, refusing to differentiate between them (GB, 228). When Maggie shows her true colours such dismissive disregard rings hollow. For the reader too it is easy to underestimate the Ververs: Judith Woolf points out that "in fact James takes pains to make sure we do. It is only in the second half that we get inside Maggie's mind and begin to understand its extraordinary workings" (Woolf, 135).

In Book Two James forces the reader beyond the viewpoint of Maggie's father and the lovers into a position where we must acknowledge her otherness. Her silence and absence as a focaliser in Book One can be deceptively indicative of an absence of personality, but Book Two revises that idea. She is a complex human being and Book Two allows us to see this: "they thought of everything" says Maggie, "except that I would think" (GB, 432).

Maggie's first sense of real love for her husband alters the story of The Golden Bowl forever. Maggie's change and growth has various stages of development and the workings of her mind are illustrated in a complex picture language.¹⁶ Her understanding of the situation is not a process of logical computation but a mysterious growth process which is described in language akin to James's elucidations on the undetermined flowerings of his own novels: her realisation that Charlotte and the Prince are working together in a scheme of their own is "a great flower grown in the night" (GB, 328). At the outset of Book Two it is often very difficult for the reader to maintain the story of Book One as a detailed emotional and cognitive memory. But Maggie's idea of Charlotte needs to be differentiated from James's Charlotte. The complex woman the reader knows is initially transformed in Maggie's mind into the quintessential wicked stepmother.

Maggie, not James, foists a dualistic vision of evil versus innocence onto the story for in the immature workings of her imagination, Maggie does not acknowledge her own responsibility for the situation. Haunted by a sense that Charlotte and Amerigo are working together against her, Maggie's projection of anger demonises the lovers. As her father and Maggie are greeted by Charlotte and Amerigo from the balcony of Portland Place, Maggie looks up at "the great black house" as at "the peopled battlements of a castle" besieged by an enemy force "there to take them over again as punctually as possible" (GB, 371).

Maggie views her quest to win the Prince back as a battle to be won only by utilising her own artistic skills. In the contest for authorial dominance Maggie's increased mastery over the story of her life is presented in terms of her acquisition of the central *objet d'art* of the novel: the Golden Bowl. Maggie's first unspoken communication to the Prince is her initial encounter with authoring the unuttered: her desire to author and alter her world resonates with verbal echoes evoking the image of the golden bowl:

I perfectly see how beautiful it is, all round; but there comes a day when something snaps, when the full cup, filled to the very brim begins to flow over. That's what's happened to my need of you -- the cup, all day, has been too full to carry. So here I am with it, spilling it over to you. (GB, 310)

The Prince uses the same image of bountiful emotion in Gloucester with Charlotte: "I feel the day like a great gold cup we must somehow drain together" (GB, 263). As "an occasion" Maggie's greeting of her husband, like the planned perfection of the trip to Gloucester, is "also cracked" and Maggie's actions on discovering that her cup of love is flawed will shatter every perfect fictional design the characters have sought to impose (GB, 263).

Maggie's discovery of the golden bowl and the secret it hides within its interior is a pivotal event in Book Two and the conversations surrounding it are loaded with latent meanings: "the coincidence is extraordinary -- the sort of thing that happens mainly in novels and plays" (GB, 442). In foregrounding the oddity of the situation, James once again alerts the reader to the

function of the golden bowl as a text, a heteronomous artwork requiring interpretation; he refers to the bowl as a "document" and Fanny asserts to Maggie, "I must take time, truly, to understand out what it means" (GB, 420).

James believed that a writer created interested readers to the degree he created interested characters and that his reader's participation in the novel is stimulated by involvement in the interpretative struggles of the characters. Living, in Jamesian terms, means grappling with making meaning and becoming conscious of one's own powers of consciousness to form the world one inhabits. Maggie begins to live for the reader when she begins to live for herself and articulate the reading by which she may finally author her own version of The Golden Bowl. In Maggie's encounter with his partial surrogate, the shopkeeper, James makes it clear that her developing ability is one granted by the author himself: "the little man in the shop ... did more for me than he knew -- I owe it to him. He took an interest in me I inspired him with sympathy" (GB, 443)¹⁷. Significantly the first person to share in Maggie's discovery of the bowl is Fanny, who is James's parody of a reader and whose intense interest in the quartet mirrors our own. Maggie seems to comment on her own change of status as a character when she admonishes Fanny, and by implication the reader, for not caring as much "for me as you cared for Amerigo and for Charlotte. They were much more interesting -- it was perfectly natural" (GB, 425). James allows the reader to share an interest in Maggie once she begins to artistically order the force of fuller experience which has entered her world.

Maggie reads the cracked bowl as a tangible verification of her husband's liaison with Charlotte: "They were intimate you see. Intimate ... That bowl ... is, so strangely -- too strangely, almost, to believe at this time of day -- the proof" (GB, 416-417). What is interesting is that the proof comes directly from the artist figure himself. As the antiquario visits the house to tell Maggie that the perfect crystal bowl she wishes to give to her father as a gift contains a flaw, he points to the photographs of Charlotte and Amerigo and tells their story. Charlotte's prophetic

declaration to her Prince is borne out: "he'll remember us he had ideas about us. Well I should think people might; we're beautiful -- aren't we? -- and he knows" (GB, 80). As the artist's words identify the lovers, the photographs become corporeal embodiments of Maggie's "remembrance of a kinship of expression in the two faces" -- a visual memory which had frozen in her mind's eye as the first hint of imperfection (GB, 323).

Through James's interest in Maggie the story of Book One is placed in Maggie's grasp and the reader's interest intensifies as we watch her read the story of the three characters we have read, much as she attempts to piece back together the three fragments of the golden bowl itself; "as there was naturally nothing to hold them together but Maggie's hands" (GB, 433). Fanny's shattering of the golden bowl is a charged symbolic moment -- smashing forever the strange form their lives have taken: "she *knew* and her broken bowl was proof that she knew" (GB, 433). For Maggie, her knowledge requires that she "re-establish the violated order" and impose an authorial form of her own (GB, 458). The family's retreat to the country takes on theatrical implications, with Maggie's sense of control manifested in her vision of the characters as figures in a play "of which she herself was the author" and of Fawns as the theatre:

Spacious and splendid, like a stage again awaiting a drama, it was a scene she might people, by the press of her spring, either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins, things as ugly as those formless fragments of her golden bowl she was trying so hard to pick up. (GB, 470)

Taking as she says the "pieces with [her] to Fawns" Maggie faces difficult choices. The knowledge that her perfect little world is nothing more than a careful arrangement of lies condemns her to "the responsibility of freedom" in which she may make of her circumstances whatever she wishes (GB, 435).

James asks searching questions concerning the human faculty to create meanings in our own lives in describing what Maggie Verver makes of her freedom. Maggie stands out from most Jamesian centres of consciousness for in contrast to characters such as Maisie, Ralph, Isabel, and

Strether, Maggie is characterised not by renunciation but by concrete gain.¹⁸ Maggie does not relinquish her own desires in favour of gaining what James called in *The Ambassadors* Strether's "treasures of imagination" because her vision of happiness is actualised by the exercise of her artistry and her rewriting of the story of the Golden Bowl (TA, 449).

In Part Two the reader shares Maggie's characterising perspective and yet is granted the responsibility of freedom, the choice of acquiescence or of rebellion. To a large extent the critical heritage of *The Golden Bowl* can be viewed in terms of the choice critics have made: two camps armed with an artillery of appropriate quotations. In a novel where the notion of competing texts and interpretations is a major concern, the claim that James means the reader to support only Maggie's reading is dubious -- when even Fanny Assingham feels compelled to make her own meaning of the Golden Bowl, and "found herself in fact eyeing it as if, by her dim solicitation, to draw its secret from it rather than suffer the imposition of Maggie's knowledge" (GB, 421). Instead James calls on the reader to examine the consequences of Maggie's exercise of authorial control by placing us in the same situation as the characters she manipulates. As we view the world through Maggie's eyes James fits his readers into Maggie's skin and we may share Charlotte's horrified vision of the experience, finding the tightly constructed boundaries of Maggie's fictional form too tight to live and breathe in.

The little man in the Bloomsbury shop expressly tells Maggie that the bowl has a crack which is a site of alternative possibilities. The crack however is precisely what Maggie steadfastly refuses to see. For Maggie, her possession of the bowl means her possession of the whole truth. To Fanny's suggestion that the bowl is merely a "new complication thrust up before you unexplained" Maggie replies: "Unexplained my dear? Quite the contrary -- explained: fully, intensely, admirably explained, with nothing really to add" (GB, 420). Maggie's interpretation that the bowl exhibits absolute truth excludes all variables, and with it the lovers are as fixed as the portraits of their uncertain faces with which she toys in her imaginary medallion: "the miniatures

were back to back, but she saw them for ever face to face" (GB, 324). In the image of the medallion James presents a horrible sense of Maggie's unquestioned authorial mastery: the idea of display-glass suggests her complicity in her father's power of collection, whereby she once again reduces the human lovers to static images "suspended round her neck by a gold chain of a firm fineness that no effort would ever snap" (GB, 324).

Maggie's exchange with the Prince on discovering the bowl and her confident sense that he has not told Charlotte of her knowledge but instead is "keeping the sharer of his guilt in the dark" leads Maggie to feel assured of her husband's collusion with her authorial design (464):

"But the point for me is that he understands."

"Yes" Fanny Assingham cooed, "he understands --"

"Well, what I want. I want a happiness without a hole in it big enough for you to poke in your finger."

"A brilliant perfect surface -- to begin with at least. I see."

"The golden bowl -- as it *was* to have been.... The bowl with all the happiness in it. The bowl without the crack." (GB, 456)

Like the Prince, Maggie is afraid to risk the cracks and the torments of pretence which she imposes on herself and the others are means that justify her end. She exercises the artistry of consciousness to form her life as she feels it should have been -- pure, perfect and flawless¹⁹. Once assured of the Prince's help what she sets out to achieve is a rewriting of the story which will put love back into her Golden bowl.

Blake's epigram to "The Book of Thel" has often been linked to James's novel. Thel's Motto raises issues of perception and containment:

Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?

Or wilt thou go ask the Mole?

Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?

Or Love in golden bowl?

(Blake, 127)

Love in a Golden Bowl is not love. Such a vision of happiness is impossible for to force love and wisdom into such structures is surely to nullify their very essence. The end towards which Maggie so stealthily works is unsatisfactory and ultimately life-denying because in its claims for "splendid

effect and general harmony" (GB, 560) it is stamped all over with "her small still passion for order and symmetry" (GB, 411). James is very clear about Maggie: "She had but one rule of art -- to keep within bounds and not lose her head" (GB, 322). The formal happy ending Maggie imposes seeks to write a fictional completeness we know to be false, and out of which we struggle because we have seen this world through other eyes. As Kaston comments: "what we initially applaud in Maggie as an act of psychological and artistic maturity long in coming ... ends up as an act of tyranny" (1984, 10). The girl who "flapped her little wings" in a struggle for freedom finally asserts her own insidious form (GB, 330). Skilfully manipulating her family without causing a visible ripple of disruption Maggie keeps them in the bounds of her Golden Bowl: the "steel hoop of intimacy" of a traditional marriage plot with all other possibilities excluded (GB, 384).²⁰

As Maggie's plan takes shape what we witness is the progressive exclusion of the unuttered story she has uncovered. In the tableau of her fine things which appears in the last chapter of Book Two there is a sickening sense that the felt life in Charlotte and Amerigo has been killed off and in their places are the silent wax-work characters of Maggie's stage-set: Mrs Verver and the Prince. The formality of their titles is horribly loaded and their doom will be always to arrange appearances:

Mrs Verver and the Prince fairly 'placed' themselves, however unwittingly, as high expressions of the kind of human furniture required, aesthetically, by such a scene ... sitting as still ... as a pair of effigies of the contemporary great on one of the platforms of Madame Tussaud. (GB, 561)

In this final scene Maggie's plan becomes a concrete reality with the "whole scene having crystallised" into a vision of happiness in which the contradictions of life are nailed down and the flaws are sealed up (GB, 559). The tableau demonstrates the reduction of Amerigo and Charlotte once again to objects in her collection; "important pieces", "cleared" of "any betrayal, any slightest value, of consciousness" and they are without any sense of the complex interior life we witness in Book One (GB, 559).

Love in a Golden Bowl: Maggie wins her Prince. Wisdom in a silver rod: Adam punishes his adulterous wife.²¹ On the brilliant perfect surface this seems to be the story that wins as Maggie finally peoples her stage with "serenities, and decencies and dignities" (GB, 470). But to be a reader on whom nothing is lost is to be torn to pieces, not happily satisfied by the moral order imposed at the conclusion to The Golden Bowl. To "a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded" Maggie's carefully structured picture of happiness is radically threatened and she is well aware of the fact (GB, 561).

Ultimately Maggie's "whole idea" as Fanny observed "has a crack" (GB, 429). As Yeazell comments: "What we really witness here is less a closed fiction than a character struggling to will such a fiction" (1976, 125). The Golden Bowl rewards a penetrating view by sternly attesting to the power of a literary text to utter something different from what it actually says. James's text deconstructs Maggie's fairy-tale tableau of right relations even as it is being formed and to the last page, the unuttered story which Maggie has sought to erase from her life lurks "hideously behind" threatening to rend the harmony asunder (GB, 471). Maggie may have succeeded in completely rewriting the story of the Golden Bowl, but her active involvement in the narrative structures which compose human reality alerts her mind to forces which undermine the successful imposition of closed fictional forms.

By involving the reader in Maggie's attempt to assert a form on her text, James's text affirms the experience of reading as one that links the actual to the realm of possibility and awakens our awareness of the unuttered and the unseen. James's conclusion radically questions the human use of narrative and subverts the "splendid" crystallisation of perfect fictional closure for what looms threateningly in the depths is not the rounded form of the bowl, but the vision of people face to face in continuous confrontation with the other's indeterminate unuttered story (GB, 567).

To assert her design this "much thinking little person" has learnt to go behind the surface

actualities of existence and to read other people's outward signs in terms of their inner thought processes (GB, 312). Maggie's reading has enabled her to get what she wants but she must finally reckon with her heightened sense of her family's unuttered inner lives. Her awakening to the "realities looming through the golden mist" exposes the very possibility of perfect fulfilment for a mere charade (GB, 320). She is therefore unnerved by a perception of all four characters' authorial complicity in the creation of the fragile facade: "the note was struck indeed; the note of that strange finality of relation, as from couple to couple, which almost escaped awkwardness only by not attempting a gloss ... the four of them in the upper air, united in the firmest absention from pressure" (GB, 561). When the pressure of a penetrating view is applied the characters' carefully cultivated personas tumble like the cardboard cutouts of a child's miniature theatre, and Maggie's sense of victory is qualified by the undeniable and crippling knowledge that the final scene is a tenuous lie spun from the protective "silver tissue of decorum" to conceal its ugly reality (GB, 325).

As Maggie talks to her father on the balcony, the four break up for the last time into their original pairings, but Maggie is conscious of the palpable difference in their affinity:

she felt once more how impossible such a passage would have been to them, how it would have torn them to pieces, if they had so much as suffered its suppressed relations to peep out of their eyes. (GB, 562)

In seeking to escape from her father's house of fiction and assert her own conception of reality, Maggie's success depends on not waking Adam as she herself was woken, and on avoiding "any alteration of his consciousness, even in the possible sense of enlivenment" that "would make their equilibrium waver" (GB, 310). The concealment of her real agenda from her beloved father fundamentally destroys their filial love as the deceit Maggie requires to sacrifice her father "without his dreaming what it may be for" transforms their relation from a marriage of two minds to a situation of mutual humbugging (GB, 359). The quality of their "transmuted union" is clearly depicted in the scene where father and daughter return to the same bench at Fawns where Maggie

had first suggested Charlotte as partner for Adam (498). Charlotte is now the essential unuttered subject of their conversation and because each is aware of the situation but seeks to conceal it from the other their communication is laden with intense vertiginous moments in which the unspoken truth threatens to erupt into their relation. The "process of mutual vigilance" involves father and daughter in keeping the "exquisite tissue" of mutual deceit stretched between them: "the thin wall might be pierced by the lightest wrong touch" (GB, 493). Adam's first hint that he will arrange to take Charlotte to the American City alerts Maggie to the fact that her father is not innocent of the situation. His passive awareness is a disturbing warning which supplies her with a sense of her father's inner life "which had never been so intense or so almost admonitory" (GB, 498).

The necessity of dealing, for the first time in her life, with her father as an other, leads Maggie to finally fear and distrust the man she loved and believed in more than anyone. Although she collaborates in the fiction of mutual familial belief to the end it is significant that she ultimately shares Amerigo's sense of Adam as a powerful man whose inner motivations seem permanently concealed within a sinister "white curtain" of mist (GB, 17). Maggie's disturbed reaction to Adam's motionless awareness as he sits beside the sleeping Principino in the nursery at Fawns alerts the reader to her developing sense of something monstrous in "the unfathomable heart folded in the constant flawless freshness of the white waistcoat that could always receive in its armholes the firm prehensile thumbs" (GB, 522).²²

In her recognition that the bland peacefulness of Adam's unchanging exterior belies a sly conniving, what Maggie discovers for herself is the extent of her father's own authorial manipulations: in "his so marked peculiarity of seeming on no occasion to have an attitude ... she felt him still simply weave his web and play out his long fine cord" (GB, 559). Maggie's "horror of finding evil seated all at its ease, where she had only dreamed of good" includes the discovery of the evil her beloved father is capable of exercising (GB, 471). What makes Adam so unfathomable

is that James's complex text forces us to try and read him whole. James notes in the Preface: "We see very few persons in The Golden Bowl but the scheme of the book ... is that we really see about as much of them as a coherent literary form permits" (GB, xlv). The reader knows Adam as a shrewd business man who uses his wealth to become a voracious collector; through Maggie's eyes we see a loved and devoted father but we also share her sense of a possessive authoritarian whose retributive control of the wife he has never wanted or loved makes him abusive: "The thing that never failed now as an item in the picture" of her father that Maggie has psychologically envisaged is the "gleam of the silken noose, his wife's immaterial tether" (GB, 539).

Maggie's recognition of her father's possessive control is problematic. Although appalled and frightened by what his punitive actions reveal about her father she allows his punishment to continue because it aids her own authorial exercise. When Maggie encounters Adam's carefully concealed power, she begins to realise that as his cherished daughter she may draw strength from it:

There was his idea, the clearness of which for an instant almost dazzled her. It was a blur of light, in the midst of which she saw Charlotte like some object marked, by contrast, in blackness, saw her waver in a field of vision, saw her removed, transported, doomed. And he had named Charlotte, named her again, and she had *made* him -- which was all she needed more: it was as if she had held a blank letter to the fire and the writing had come out still larger than she had hoped. (GB, 496-497)

Adam's strength is, as Michiel Heyns argues, "the power of the rich peoples" within a community in which economic and social prowess grants the prerogative to author and create the world to one's own choosing (1994, 48).²³ Heyns's position makes it clear that Adam's power of purchase sponsors Maggie's fiction. The Ververs' triumphant "last look" at their possessions confirms Maggie's application of the authorial mastery derived from Adam's opulence in actualising her own visions of happiness. Charlotte's and Amerigo's acquiescent demeanours are "concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase" (GB, 561). Maggie's wealth is what enables her to utilise what is described early in the novel as the "lost art" of gilding: to pour golden gilt over the ugly

"formless fragments" of her shattered world (GB, 470).²⁴ Maggie seals up the flaw in her Golden Bowl with the help of her devoted wealthy father and her compliant husband as she buries Charlotte alive behind a wall of silence and sends her into exile. By using Charlotte as the scapegoat for the collective sins of the community Maggie achieves the reassertion of a traditional moral order, the continued existence of which depends upon arranging for "the sacrifice of the least fortunate" (GB, 469).²⁵ If Adam remains unfathomable and impenetrably secure it is because Maggie finally shields her eyes from fully acknowledging her father's inner reality. Maggie's recognition -- "So many things her father knew that she even yet didn't!" -- intimates that Adam may indeed be the ablest manipulator in the game, the king of the fairy-tale and ultimately the victorious author figure (GB, 540).

When Maggie utters the words "It's success, father" a paradoxical sense of loss and fear informs her words. She is lying to and for Adam and "in the felt sincerity of her words" she is colluding in his undiminished sense of authorial control in order to assert her own chosen narrative form. Maggie is aware that they are parting on the shared fiction of "Charlotte's *value*" (GB, 564-565). As Heyns points out: "Charlotte is used as moral justification: as long as they can all pretend to love and admire her, no uncomfortable qualms need arise" (1994, 264). The terms used to describe Charlotte -- "great" and "beautiful" -- "snap shut ... as they get used to their new basis -- the fiction that is to sustain them" in ignoring the fact that Adam "is deporting his wife to get her away from his son-in-law" (262). As Maggie searches for the right note in this final conversation with her father their tacit agreement is to make Charlotte's relation with Adam the reason for parting.

Maggie's final pretence with her father is guided by the knowledge that this fiction has also been Charlotte's face-saving lie. Maggie's final altercation with Charlotte is constructed solely on lies. The narrator wryly comments that Charlotte "might truly have been believing in her passionate parade" when she tells Maggie of her need for Adam: "I want really to possess him. I

happen also to feel that he's worth it" (GB, 530). Maggie colludes in this pretence, as she does in her father's, because it suits her own design:

"You want to take my father *from* me?"
The sharp, successful, almost primitive wail in it made Charlotte turn ... [Maggie]
was ready to lie again if her companion would but give her the opening. (GB, 530)

Maggie's misrepresentation that Charlotte has succeeded in robbing her of her father traps Charlotte in her own falsehood and forever in Maggie's fictional form. With that final lie Maggie tastes victory: "Yes, she had done all" (GB, 530).

And as all four characters collude together the precious equilibrium of the final scene tenuously persists. Without the financial or social power to plot an alternative fiction Charlotte is reduced to taking emotional refuge in "the deep, arched recess of some coloured and gilded image" in the knowledge that she is shortly to be incarcerated forever in the American City (GB, 558). What she really feels is left to Maggie's, and the reader's imagination. As Maggie's moment of victory arrives, a sense of terror and doubt accompanies the Prince's reappearance:

She knew at last really why ... it had been for the sake of this end. Here it was, then, the moment, the golden fruit that had shone from afar; only what *were* these things ... when tested, when tasted -- what were they as a reward? (GB, 566)

The Prince, a consummate actor returns to the room to turn on the "unfailing magic" of his sensuality but Maggie's reunion with her husband is haunted by the sense that he too is merely playing his part to perfection (GB, 339):

He tried, too clearly, to please her -- to meet her in her own way; but with the result that, close to her, her face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders, his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: "'See'? I see nothing but *you*.' And the truth of it had, with this force, after a moment, so strangely lighted his eyes that, as for pity and dread of them, she buried her own in his breast. (GB, 567)

The Prince acknowledges the victor and exhibits his willing submission to being a "kept" man, or a pliable character in a fiction sustained by the social and economic power he has always sought. His agreement to see only Maggie reveals his acquiescence to the enclosing but gilded

cage that his own words help to construct. In her knowledge that the Prince neither sees nor cares to recognise Charlotte's pain, Maggie at last confronts the man who warned Charlotte he would never risk the cracks for love and who "simply, insistently ... lied" to protect his own position (GB, 457). Maggie's "pity and dread" stems from a realisation that the golden fruit of marital harmony will be based on servitude and prevarication. The man she loves is collaborating in her fiction due to motives of his own and thereby mouthing the lines of her script that he has agreed to speak. They are certain words instead of certain others, and they are chosen lies.²⁶

Maggie's tragedy is in her awareness that her triumph is a delusion: "The cage was the deluded condition, and Maggie having known delusion ... understood the nature of cages" (GB, 466). Behind her husband's glib affirmations are other words, to Maggie's dread as "the unheard chorus swelled" (GB, 566). For what she and the reader cannot fail to hear is Charlotte's unforgettable unutterable story that we have for so long listened to as "in her mind's ear, Maggie heard" (GB, 362).

In probing act and fact for the unheard and unseen truth, Maggie has become a person on whom nothing is lost. If she has followed her Prince into the "sinister circular passages" of the labyrinth, if "her imagination had tracked him down", she follows Charlotte there too:

she breathed Charlotte's cold air -- turned away from him in it with her, turned with her, in growing compassion, this way and that, hovered behind her whilst she felt her ask herself where then she should rest. Marvellous the manner in which, under such imaginations, Maggie thus circled and lingered -- quite as if she were, materially, following her unseen. (GB, 504-5)

In this description James characterises Maggie as a reader invisibly following the actions and emotions of a character's text and sharing the world through another's perspective. In their astonishing confrontation in the garden at Fawns Maggie's words to Charlotte are significantly symbolic of her authorial success: "you've got the wrong volume and I've brought you out the right" (GB, 526). Maggie has read the first volume of the story; it is placed into her hands by the author himself. As her imaginative ability matures, Maggie is able to perceive the world and her

father through the eyes of her husband and his lover, to read the unuttered stories written in each consciousness, and "by way of a fantastic flight of divination" to listen unseen to their frantic conversations (GB, 504). Confronting the threatening perpetually humming figure of her father "weaving his spell" Maggie's "attention ... found itself arrested for certain passages during which she absolutely looked with Charlotte's grave eyes" (GB, 505-6). Instead of lifeless statues, Charlotte and Amerigo become for Maggie what they are for the reader in Book One -- open books. The crack in the Golden Bowl is "the gap in her experience" and becomes her gate of entry into the "felt life" of their unknown secret interiors (GB, 417).

As Maggie's journey is shared by the reader, we too awaken to mystery and fault ourselves for a facile reading of the text. If James prompts us to shift our sympathies to Maggie at the outset of Book Two, he also makes it difficult for us to remain entirely complicit with her conception of this fictional world and impossible for us to join the Prince's empty pledge of allegiance. We cannot afford to see nothing but Maggie, because through Maggie's eyes we have experienced the unutterable story and seen the unconfigurable reality of Charlotte's pain. Ironically the warning that her happiness with the Prince is threatened comes from her rival, the woman whose story she has silenced and controlled by allowing Adam to place her forever behind the glass of a museum case in the American City. All that remains of Charlotte's story is a tap from behind Maggie's confining glass:

Behind the glass lurked the *whole* history of the relation she had so fairly flattened her nose against it to penetrate -- the glass Mrs Verver might, at this stage, have been frantically tapping, from within, by way of supreme, irrepressible entreaty.... She could thus have translated Mrs Verver's tap against the glass, as I have called it, into fifty forms; could perhaps have translated it most into the form of a reminder that would pierce deep. "You don't know what it is to have been loved and broken with. You haven't been broken with, because in *your* relation what can there have been, worth speaking of, to break? Ours was everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness; and if it was to have no meaning, no better meaning than that such a creature as you could breathe upon it, at your hour, for blight, why was I myself dealt with all for deception?" (GB, 538)

In a book full of lies the only truth to be found is in the hypothetical discourse. The cry of

misery, abandonment and betrayal in Charlotte's hypothetical words and the explicit descriptions Maggie psychologically hears in Adam's tyrannical possession are the unutterable story of The Golden Bowl:

Yes, you see -- I lead her now by the neck, I lead her to her doom ... she has a fear of it in her heart which, if you had the chances to apply your ear there that I, as a husband, have, you would hear thump and thump and thump. She thinks it *may* be, her doom, the awful place over there -- awful for *her*, but she's afraid to ask don't you see? just as she's afraid of not asking, just as she's afraid of so many things that she sees multiplied round her now ... She'll know, however -- when she does know. (GB, 508)

In hearing the tap of felt life trapped behind glass Maggie must shamefully acknowledge the grotesque reality of what she has achieved. Her refusal to risk the cracks has created a world devoid of life or freedom where love will never survive. Her fictional form asserted, she is finally to be paid in full "too monstrously, at the expense of Charlotte ... she would be ashamed to listen to the uttered word" (GB, 567).

Henry James's final novel is an exploration of the process to which he devoted a lifetime, the process of reading and authorship. In the inclusion and confusion of life, living becomes an act of authorship because without the artistic will to select and exclude, life would be meaningless. It is art that *makes* life; we must choose certain words instead of certain others because we can never say all. In selecting her Prince, Maggie has chosen a necessary fiction and authored a narrative as a way to survive but the experience of the unuttered story of life will haunt her. Sensing both "pity and dread" she will bury her eyes for the whole truth about her story is simply too much to bear. Armed with a will to live and a vision of happiness she must choose stupidity or die of the roar from the unutterable unheard chorus. Maggie's final experience in The Golden Bowl contains echoes of the words of George Eliot in Middlemarch:

If we had a keen vision and feeling for all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar that lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity. (226)

To read Maggie's actions as the heroic construction of a necessary or saving lie which rescues her family from a disastrous abyss however is to reduce not only the pain and horror depicted in this work but James's radical inquiry into the human use of the artistry of consciousness.²⁷ How do we choose which human lie is salvific? In the case of the novel, only a conservative application of moral values would assert that Maggie's final fiction only redeems and heals whilst other lies (the lovers' sacred pledge to lie to their *sposi* for instance) only damn and wound. In the closure of The Golden Bowl there is no release of the kind experienced by the reader as James sets Maisie, Isabel or Strether free from the confines of his text. The open-ended nature of those conclusions is replaced by the continued suffocation of competing and willed fiction: the confinement of Maggie's characters in the "tightened circle" of her Golden Bowl (GB, 229). In refusing to adequately respond to Charlotte's pain by revising her own text finally Maggie too is trapped within the confines of her willed fiction whilst painfully recognising that it is no more than a lie.

The Prince's claim that "everything's terrible ... in the heart of man" intimates that it is selfish blindness that allows us to impose our authorial conceptions onto the world (GB, 553). Maggie by her own admission is "frozen stiff with selfishness" which allows her to assert her authority in a situation in which Isabel or Strether would renounce personal gain in favour of deeper understanding (GB, 492). The Golden Bowl is perhaps James's most terrifying work because Maggie's victory unearths unanswerable questions about the tyranny involved in the human triumphs of authorship over reality. What are these things, if questioned, as a reward? Does our happiness depend on the sacrifice of the least fortunate? Are our relationships simply an agreement to collaborate in a shared fiction? Are our understandings of life no more than a failure to perceive in others their unutterable story? Maggie's ordeal presents her with the opportunity to live and experience fully the dynamic complexity of making meaning of a universe in flux. Such a process demands constant and intelligent reassessment of one's self and reality. There is nothing

so "stupid" in James's world as having it all worked out from the beginning. Life cannot go on without prescription but Maggie's horror at her own victory finally validates not the lies which order human reality but the life-affirming importance of continually revising those structures.

Maggie's response to her shattered world however is not to revise and thereby renew an inadequate understanding but instead to finally and completely rewrite her life. The distinction is important: in his own exercise of revision for the New York Edition James understood rewriting as an assertion of the univocal authorial control which limits the open-ended possibilities of the text. Ringuette comments on the importance of this distinction: "re-writing, which James all but rejects -- would invite extraordinary pressure by drawing all attention to the writer alone. Re-writing invokes the traditional sense of a self driven by volition, basically existing unrelated" (1990, 120). With the "abiding principle of revision" however James underscores "the interpenetrating influences of an individual's experience", the environment in which one moves, and the language that encompasses both (Ringuette 1990, 120).

The terms used to define types of revision in the final Preface are helpful in reaching a clearer understanding of Maggie's authorial enterprise in comparison to other Jamesian characters. Maisie, Isabel and Strether may be understood as finally aspiring to a revising vision in which the human authorial agency is informed by sensitive, responsive and renewable readings which often entail the renouncement of control over other people's lives. Sarah Pocock of The Ambassadors is an apt example of what James called "the actual non-revisionists" who have "in advance and on system stopped their ears, their eyes and even their very noses ... their faith is great, their lot serene, their peace ... undisturbed" (GB, lvi). What makes Maggie's character so difficult to assess is the fact that she does initially revise but she only goes part of the way. She presents what James described in his Preface as

the tantalising image of the revisionist who isn't one, the partial, the piecemeal revisionist, inconsequent and insincere.... why assume we *have* to believe in him before we are absolutely forced? (GB, lvi)

Maggie views her responsibility to her family and her own happiness as one which requires the articulation of another vision of immutably flawless perfection. All Maggie's revisions are piecemeal as they are ultimately directed towards the actualisation of her own closed fictional form. What is lost in Maggie's victory draws attention to what is gained by characters whose revisions lead to an renouncement of authorial agency. Because of the partial and insincere nature of her reassessment Maggie must bury her face and choose stupidity and willful blindness rather than the freedom and possibility allowed for by a revising vision which acknowledges human reality as constructed and therefore requiring constant renewal and reassessment.

If the reader is uncertain, bewildered and confused as to our own "reading" of The Golden Bowl I believe that is how James would want it. Like the characters the reader has attempted to fill in the gaps in the text only to discover in the process that a search for consistency breeds discrepancies. Any version of this story, no matter how carefully argued, will always be undercut by cracks in the depths which we have failed to incorporate into our final interpretation. Such sites of indeterminacy provoke endless revisions and the critical debate which continues over this novel can only be its finest tribute.²⁸

What saves literature from being simply a lie is its heteronomous nature which is created by the entrances into open-ended possibility generated by every sentence of the text. James commented in "The Art of Fiction" that "the good health of an art which undertakes so immediately to reproduce life must demand that it is perfectly free. It lives upon exercise and the very meaning of exercise is freedom" (TF, 33). In a letter James wrote to the students of literature at the Deerfield Summer School he articulated perhaps the most important principle that sustained his artistic career: "I have only two little words for the matter remotely approaching rule or doctrine; one is life and the other freedom...." (SLHJ, 93). In his final magnificent novel, James presents this idea in a powerful metaphor: what is most important in his story is the crack in the Golden Bowl. By making us risk the cracks James liberates the reader from dogma and grants us

life and freedom: the prerogative to read his novels as we see them and make our own meanings of his beautiful forms. What we discover in the gaps left by the text itself is what James once called "the dim underworld of fiction" (TF, 85). In this realm on the other side of silence, "We can never be ideally sure of anything", for as Fanny Assingham comments, "There are always possibilities" (GB, 65).

Notes

1. Walter Wright makes a valid point in his article "Maggie Verver: Neither Saint nor Witch" by drawing attention to the fact that the early critical debate over Maggie (and Adam) often divided into "two types of oversimplification of the novel, depending on the dominant myth or literary convention chosen by the interpreters" (1957, 60). At one extreme Quentin Anderson views Adam as an emblem of wisdom and father of the American Redeemer and Maggie as Christ-like (1946, 557-8); for Blackmur Maggie is a Beatrice figure (1952, xx-xxi). In contrast J.J. Firebaugh's attack on the Ververs describes Maggie as "a heartless Machiavellian absolutist" and Adam as "cold, inhuman and inadequate" (1954, 406). Other critics have seen Adam as James's demonstration of the corrupting power of acquisitive life, an American machine (Fredrick C. Crews 1957, 89-92). Matthiessen and Nuhn condemn Maggie as essentially selfish and manipulative in regard to her treatment of Charlotte (Matthiessen 1944, 91; Nuhn 1942, 136). Leavis states "Actually if our sympathies are anywhere they are with Charlotte and (a little) with the Prince" (1948, 160). Dorothea Krook attempts to resolve the debate in two contrasting chapters on The Golden Bowl. Though seeing Maggie essentially as a force for redemption and restoration in the first, Krook concedes in her second chapter that it is possible to view the novel completely differently in terms of the Verver's "vulgar acquisitiveness"; and by focusing on James's technique and "Jamesian ambiguity" sees the novel as an experience of the "permanent inseparable fusion" of both blessedness and bitterness rather than as a question of "alternative meanings" (1962, 280-324).

2. The "treatment" of a subject is an important word in James's vocabulary of authorship. In his essay on "The New Novel" he refers to writing as "the treatment of a theme" (TF, 160). In the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady he talks at length on the "treating" of his subject: "'Treating' that of The Portrait amounted to never forgetting, by any lapse, that the thing was under special obligation to be amusing" (PL, xli).

3. In her article on "Validating the Possible: Thoughts and Things in James, Rilke and Musil" Judith Ryan discusses how the actual and the possible are related to each other in a special way in which one does not exclude the other: "For William James ... the possible did not transcend the actual experiences of finite beings ... thoughts were no pallid reflections of factual reality:

thoughts and things had the same status" (Ryan 1988, 306). She relates this new way of seeing to the figure-ground phenomenon: "Depending on one's mental set, one can make the picture seem to represent faces or a goblet, but never both at once. One can only alternate between the two visions: the question of which one the picture represents is an invalid one" (307-308). She suggests that in *The Spoils of Poynton*, Henry James seems to refer almost directly to the figure-ground phenomenon: "It seemed to Fleda not difficult to know what the other was thinking -- to know indeed that they had in common two alternating visions.... This one was fixed; the other filled at times the whole space and then was shouldered away" (quoted in Ryan, 308). I believe James uses the idea of figure-ground phenomenon as one of the informing images behind the structure and content of *The Golden Bowl*.

4. Merle Williams comments on the peculiar nature of the conversations in the novel: "as the characters talk about the world in which they move, they seem to be re-making their circumstances through their speech -- even though their style of expression is, conversely, shaped by those circumstances in which they are so intimately involved" (1993, 178).

5. Barbara Hardy calls attention to the importance of this unspoken communication, which she calls the "remarkable short cut" of "intuition ... exaggerated into telepathic communications between all kinds of people and in all kinds of circumstance" (1964, 20-50).

6. In Aristotle's *Poetics* he states: "A perfect tragedy should, as we have seen, be arranged not on the simple but on the complex plan. It should, moreover, imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of the tragic imitation" (Aristotle, quoted in Hazard 1971, 55).

7. Matthiessen criticises James for the treatment of Charlotte at Adam's hands: "James's neglect of the cruelty in such a cord, silken though it may be is nothing short of obscene". The Ververs' relationship led Matthiessen to question "James's grasp of psychology" (1944, 91-100). Ferner Nuhn, irritated by what she sees as James's lack of attention to other characters and the "undealt-with matters that lie off stage", posits a possible hypothesis of what this novel might have been like if recorded from Charlotte's point of view (1942, 136). In "Henry James's Last Portrait of a Lady" Jean Kimball views Charlotte as the heroine of the text.

8. Michael Davitt Bell suggests that Hawthorne's concern is with signifying practices, with the relationships between objects and what they come to signify (A Birthmark, a Black Veil, a Scarlet Letter). Hawthorne's stories abound with allegorical settings, characters and symbols, but he is a particularly aloof sort of allegorist. Hawthorne is not concerned with what reality means but with the ways his characters attribute meaning to reality or impose meaning on it (Bell 1980, 133-136).

9. In the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, James likens himself to an art dealer, in "the dusky, crowded heterogeneous, back shop of the mind, very much as a wary dealer in precious odds and ends", wanting to jealously guard his precious object indefinitely "rather than commit it, no matter what the price, to vulgar hands" (PL, xxxi-xxxii). The shop in *The Golden Bowl* is pictured in identical terms: it is "dusky"; "his array was heterogenous and not at all imposing, still it differed agreeably from what they had hitherto seen" (GB, 79). The antiquario's desire to give his Golden Bowl to the right people is one of his most definitive characteristics; interestingly, the bowl is prevented from ever falling into Adam Verver's hands.

10. The reference is to Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer". In the first line of the poem: "Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold" Keats evokes an engagement with the realm of poetry and rich imagination (Keats 1990, 32). For Adam Verver however his reading of the

poem signals that "a world was left to him to conquer and that he may conquer it if he tried.... To rifle the Golden Isles had, on the spot, become the business of his future" (GB, 104).

11. Michiel Heyns draws interesting links between Conrad's Heart of Darkness and The Golden Bowl and suggests that "the impulse to power is a common element underlying, in James's novel as in Conrad's, the 'horror' at its centre" (1994, 233). He notes that "American City is the Unreal City of this Wasteland, as the Sepulchral City of Brussels looms at the Heart of Darkness" (231).

12. In Prospecting Iser looks at the use of the "typically nineteenth century institution, the museum", as a means of providing a concrete idea of what autonomous Art meant. "Art had advanced to the level of a religion because after the period of the Enlightenment such an intramundane transcendence of reality could only come about through Art". If art was to lead man to true humanity -- because it transcended rival world pictures as attempts to penetrate the truth of reality -- then "the mere impulse of abstracting Art from the given world was not enough to convey an image of its autonomy". So works of art were removed from their sacred or profane settings and placed in the museum (1989, 204-205).

13. Charlotte's attention to the particularity and detail of life is an important characteristic and it allows her to recognise the importance of the antiquario: "Charlotte had more than once, from other days, noted, for his advantage, her consciousness of how, below a certain social plane he [the Prince] never *saw*. One kind of shopman was just like another to him.... Her own vision acted for every relation -- this he had seen for himself: she remarked beggars, she remembered servants, she recognised cabmen; she had often distinguished beauty, when out with him, in dirty children, she had admired 'type' in the faces at hucksters stalls. Therefore on this occasion she found the antiquario interesting" (GB, 79). Adam recognises a usefulness in the fact that "Charlotte noticed everything, as from the habit of a person finding her account at any time, according to a wisdom well learned of life.... It came home to her friend on the spot that this free range of observation ... would verily henceforth make a different thing for him of the customary hunt ... the inquisitive play of his accepted monomania" (GB, 157).

14. The question of why Charlotte marries Adam is a difficult one. Merle Williams's balanced analysis highlights Charlotte's lack of "sound practical or financial resources ... her isolation from any close family circle ... the poignancy of her loneliness and vulnerability". Williams describes Adam's proposal as Charlotte's "richest chance of escaping into the realm of enticing possibility and fulfilment". In her discussion of the moment of proposal Williams notes that Charlotte's "reluctance to commit herself to the projected marriage ... suggests her perception of the ideal structure of a human relationship. Static security is insufficient for her imaginative drive". Williams sees the "detached" and "business-like tone" of the proposal and the "dry inadequacy of Adam's statement that Charlotte wants 'to be taken care of'" as "the antithesis of Charlotte's intense private reunion with the Prince when a deep physical and psychological communion is established" (1993, 180-182).

15. To critics who unquestioningly support the imposition of Maggie's form, the underlying assumption is that Charlotte is a proud, adulterous voracious woman who must be controlled and punished. Krook simplifies Charlotte (and James) by viewing her as a "a modern allegorical figure of the deadly sin of Pride (1962, 302). Krook feels that what is most dangerous about the bond Amerigo and Charlotte share is "their free play of mind" (247). Fogel's rigid moral categories regard Maggie as awakening to a moral universe and strengthened by her experience of Charlotte's evil. He sees Charlotte as "chief author of sin in their lives ... virtually the avatar of the

evil seated all at its ease" (1981, 127). Fogel claims: "what James seems to be emphasising is not so much the cruelty of Adam as the tragic necessity of subjecting a creature as unregenerate as Charlotte to the discipline symbolised by the leash" (105). Elizabeth Owen sees Maggie as "blind innocence" taking up arms against evil. Owen views Charlotte as "clever, dangerous and brilliantly evil" and argues that "without a clear realisation of this, the image of her being led about on a cord is intolerably painful; with it, we can only be glad she is tamed (1963, 373).

16. In the picture language of Book Two mutation of imagery is used to demonstrate the changing patterns of dominance and control. A few examples to illustrate my point: Maggie's sense that she and her father's royal coach is being pulled willingly by Charlotte and Amerigo (GB, 313), mutates into her sense of the Ververs trapped in "a pair of labelled boxes" on a train (GB, 348). She relishes a sense of her own authorial mastery in her sense that she might live to drive them around like sheep (GB, 336) only to feel that the lovers are running her father and herself in "compact formation" (GB, 352). Her father then becomes her precious spotless sacrificial lamb (GB, 359) and the idea of sacrifice finally becomes one of the scapegoat. As a wronged wife Maggie takes the idea of scapegoat onto herself (GB, 469) but finally Charlotte plays this role. The metaphor of the labyrinth also gradually evolves, from Maggie's sense that she is set apart from her family as if left on a "strange shore" (GB, 328), to her vision of Charlotte as the deserted Ariadne (GB, 523). She envisages both herself (GB, 331), the Prince, and Charlotte variously imprisoned or enclosed but her sense is finally of the Prince's acceptance of his captivity (GB, 544) in contrast to Charlotte's frantic horror at her own (GB, 466).

17. The notion of the shopkeeper as James's surrogate within the text was first suggested by Laurence Holland.

18. Kaston links renunciation in James to the negative space in painting: "Negative space, in the context of fiction, refers to the shadow a plot throws, the countershape it projects, or the turn that events in the fiction are responsible for making the reader wish the fiction had taken" (1984, 2). I would link such negative spaces with Iserian gaps in the text. Jamesian renunciation then allows a reader freedom to gain what renouncing characters gain, a swelling of consciousness rather than the main prize or moral to the story.

19. Highlighting Maggie's moral simplicity to explain her actions, Martha Nussbaum comments: "She wants, this woman, to have a perfect life" (1983, 25). *The Golden Bowl* became the focus of a debate on literature as moral philosophy in a volume of *New Literary History* (15.(1) 1983) which produced some of the most balanced and incisive readings of the novel.

20. Joseph A. Boone draws on Tony Tanner's notion of the contract of marriage as "the structure that maintains the Structure" to discuss the connection of gender and genre in the novel. He notes: "James's restless probing into the literary conventions underlying the Anglo-American myth of romantic wedlock was to involve him in a profound troubling scrutiny of the ways in which social structures of belief are translated into narrative structures that encode and perpetuate such beliefs". Boone argues that in *The Golden Bowl* James "methodically explodes the premise of the traditional love plot" by "juxtaposing his formal innovations with the conservative writerly efforts of Maggie Verver ... to inscribe the narrative of her shaky marriage within a traditional novelistic pattern" (1986, 374-375). It is interesting in the light of Boone's suggestions to compare the manner in which traditional moral structures are often inscribed into critical readings of the novel. For instance John Bayley comments that "The love of Charlotte and the Prince does not and cannot survive Was it then not really love, or not the right kind of love? Being in love

originally should they have got married, despite their impecunious state, for only thus ... can real love develop, the love that parallels on a still higher plane the natural love of blood relations" (1961, 222).

21. Fogel structures The Golden Bowl into a spiral of upward moral development. He links this spiritual development to Thel's Motto claiming: "If Adam's relation with Charlotte seems finally harsher than Maggie's with the Prince, it is because his way is the way of Wisdom, his daughter's the way of Love" (1981, 105). But surely such cruelty cannot be "Wisdom". Judith Woolf suggests that true wisdom is found in forgiveness -- the act of Prospero breaking his staff and abjuring his magic -- something Adam Verver cannot and will not do: "his eyes ... are full of strange tears.... He understands, just as Maggie does, the full cruelty of what he is doing to Charlotte and he will never relent" (1991, 151).

22. Strether notices the same stance in Chad as the young man prepares to forsake Paris and Madame de Vionnet: "Chad had thrown back his light coat and thrust each of his thumbs into an armhole of his waistcoat; in which position his fingers played up and down". In Chad's final conviction that "the right man must take hold" of the advertising which "in the hands of a master" may be a useful art-form he demonstrates his allegiance to the mercantile concerns of Woollett and the American way of life (TA, 505). The attention to the "prehensile" thumbs has connotations of evolution and seems to hint at the primal struggle for survival driving civilized human beings.

23. Drawing a comparison between Heart of Darkness and The Golden Bowl Heyns suggests that "the grin with which the overseer extends 'partnership in his exalted trust' to Marlow is strangely similar to the smile of complicity Adam directs at his daughter", and Maggie's disturbed reaction is similar to "Marlow's noting of his own part in these proceedings" (1994, 233). Heyns argues that "Adam's benevolence of aspect, far from militating against the potency of his influence, is one of the signs of his power; his mildness is an effect of his sublime confidence in his own dominance". Heyns suggests that "beguiled by the apparent benevolence of this power, all the characters pursue their various courses on the blithe assumption of their own freedom of action". If the reader absorbs the characters' assumptions whilst sharing their points of view "it may take us as long as it takes them to discover the illusory nature of their freedom, the limits of their silken halters" (243).

24. Social and economic forces play a significant role in The Golden Bowl. Colonel Assingham's practical outlook alerts the reader to the fact that whatever else Maggie may be, "she is a young woman who has a million a year" (GB, 58).

25. Paul Armstrong sees Charlotte as the scapegoat figure but argues: "The scape-goat is indeed an uneasy, hardly felicitous compromise between conflict and care.... As an attempt to build harmony on a foundation of antagonism, it announces that people can be with one another in reciprocity only by joining in opposition to someone else" (1983, 184). Michiel Heyns's reading of the novel views Charlotte as the scapegoat in Maggie's text, which is controlled by the expelled force which it refuses to acknowledge. But Heyns notes that in James's text however the scapegoat effect operates as "a hidden structural principle" and the begetter of an alternate narrative which "refuses to validate Maggie's rewriting of the novel ... and the moral vocabulary by which society seeks to justify its actions" (1994, 268).

26. Virginia Llewellyn Smith points out that "Maggie has begun to doubt the Prince, and -- so it seems -- less on account of some obvious consideration like 'If he can stop loving Charlotte will he stop loving me?' than because he seems unwilling to extend to Charlotte an imaginative sympathy, as Maggie now does" (1991, xxix).

27. Stephen Donadio argues that James's final position is a Nietzschean one: morality like fiction is what we impose on reality to make life possible and acceptable: "the ultimate goal of art is the redemption of all experience" (1978, 223). The view that human lies are finally salvific is quite common in readings of The Golden Bowl. Leon Edel supports the view that The Golden Bowl finally affirms "the lies by which civilization can be held together" (1972, 221). J. A. Ward argues that though Charlotte is no more guilty than any one "there must be those who suffer and pay for the evil of all". He argues that "Maggie seeks to preserve the appearance of society and James is sympathetic with her goal" (1961, 154-5). For Gabriel Pearson "The lie in James is sanctified by what it salvages and the disaster it postpones" (1972, 302). He links Maggie's design to James's and argues that James's novel "invents, as its last expedient, a female hero who assumes the burden of the structure, lying gloriously to preserve the lie" (361). Mackenzie argues that the Verver's lies finally make "all amazingly true again" (1976, 180). My own reading of this question is indebted to Heyns who points out that such views wrongly equate James's perspective with Maggie's (1994, 266). Heyns takes issue with the notion that The Golden Bowl "though perfectly aware of the lies on which its society are based, ultimately condones that lie in the interest of the civilization that it tries to protect and preserve". Heyns argues that the novel in its own self-consciousness "exposes the coercive and manipulative potential of ... the moral structures a society erects for its own protection and the exclusion of threats to its power" (1994, 48).

28. In a letter to Scribners who were about to publish his novel James apologised for its length but stated: "The best work of my life has, however, I think gone into the G.B." (quoted in Horne 1990, 18).

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