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UNNATURAL QUESTIONS: THE OTHERWORLD OF HENRY JAMES

by

DAVID WOLF

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1995

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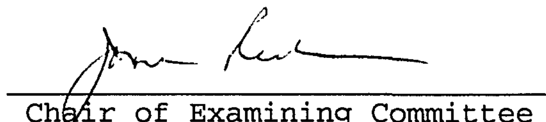

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Abstract

UNNATURAL QUESTIONS: THE OTHERWORLD OF HENRY JAMES

by

David Wolf

Adviser: Professor Joan Richardson

Examining the residue of classical epic narrative in the novels of Henry James's "Major Phase", this study offers a micro-reading of The Ambassadors revealing James's invocations and revivifying of epic conventions and ideology. James deems the ideology of epic (replete with the sense of the distant past, the improvisations of a moral aristocracy, and the historicity of the heroic) of value to his American characters. It is the ideology of what Georg Lukács conceives as a pre-philosophical culture characterized by the legibility of all experience. Such a culture is always "at home". This old order ideology proves to be vestigially present to the consciousness of Lambert Strether as the network of visual and lexical signs in the European landscape. European signification registers as an otherworld of shades. Jamesian otherworldliness consists of the painterly and literary mediums of the European

aesthetic, a vestigial data codified in the crucial Lambinet landscape painting. James invests the American quest to retrieve the lost epic consciousness with special urgency, creating American characters who travel in "Europe" like epic adventurers drifting through the world of the dead. His brand of modernism thus describes a shadow-existence where the alien ideals of the bygone epic world return James's American characters "homeward" by allowing them a hybrid linguistic experience that mediates between the European past and the American present, the European epic and the American novel.

Chapters 1 through 3 explore James's literary heritage, the spatial complexities of Jamesian otherworldliness, and the role of the guide, drawing comparisons between the epic guide (the Cumaen Sybil, Dante's Virgil) and the Jamesian *ficelle*, and arguing that ambassadorship is itself a reconceiving of the role of the guide in the epic otherworld. Chapters 4 and 5 critique Jamesian perception in terms of the model of epic shades in the underworld, explicating the analogy between painterly shades and the shades of the epic dead. Chapter six addresses epic homecoming, comparing the epiphanies of the Lamb of God in the revelation epics of Dante and Milton with Strether's vision of the lovers at the *Cheval Blanc*.

Acknowledgments

One only learns what patience really is upon undertaking a Ph.d. dissertation; he is then shown it by teachers and friends.

Many were indispensable to my completion of this project. The members of the faculty at the Graduate Center who taught me and guided me have my greatest thanks. Floyd Horowitz and Norman Kelvin, one of my oral examiners, provided useful feedback and grounding. Mary Ann Caws and Louis Menand, my dissertation readers, were prompt and precise in their responses to my work. My thanks go to Professor Morton Cohen for the Morton Cohen dissertation research award that allowed me to pursue my topic with research trips to the Houghton Library, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the British Library. Joseph Wittreich, the program's executive officer, was kind enough to lobby the Graduate Center for an increase in the Cohen award; I thank him for that along with the many other kindnesses he has shown and lessons he has proffered since I entered the program six years ago.

Two faculty members merit my deepest thanks as mentors who repeatedly steadied me on my way. To Patrick Cullen, whose dissertation workshop served me as an invaluable laboratory, the debt is great. He provided shrewd counsel repeatedly, interjected humor when it was much needed, and somehow managed to infect me with his enthusiasm for growing roses along the way. Joan Richardson, my dissertation adviser, taught me the meaning of establishing a scholarly collaboration. This dissertation would not have materialized without her constant aid. In gratitude I express my admiration for her integrity, her ingenuity, her verve, and her patience (hers is the nearest there is to a bottomless store).

To Richard C. Friedman I need only echo the thanks I have expressed many times. We have travelled a long way.

To my friends ... Jung Chun, Victoria King, Claudia Rankine, Antonella Ruggiu, Daniel Schecter, and Rene Tursi -- all of whom were supportive and insightful during difficult times -- you have my affection and my trust.

My final thanks go to my parents, my step mother, and my brothers, Steven and Christopher Wolf, for their love and for the many forms it took.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I shall examine The Ambassadors to establish the epic and supra-nationalist character of Jamesian consciousness. Henry James's lifelong obsessions with "Europe" will be shown to assume the archetypal character of an otherworld quest narrative. James, himself, and Lambert Strether, the hero he termed "a man of imagination", become Odyssean adventurers in heroic quest of their "home" -- their national identity. They fashion this identity by engaging with their European otherworld. The Ambassadors (and somewhat less so The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl) thus reads best as a modernist epic. Bakhtin has called "genres" the "great heroes" of "literature and language" (8). Analyzing Jamesian consciousness by focusing on genre will demonstrate how the consummate international novelist revitalized the epic in conceiving his portrait of the American mind at the turn of the twentieth century.

This introduction will introduce four ideas to be explored in the body of this project: 1) Recognizable epic traits and evocations persist in James's novelistic method and archetypal modes of cognizing experience. 2) "Europe" constitutes an American otherworld which Americans must explore to acquire (like Odysseus, Aeneas, and Dante's pilgrim) knowledge of how to get "home". In James, this

knowledge consists of the aesthetic objects and aestheticizing devices permeating the old world consciousness. 3) Otherworldliness is the chief epistemological source of the composing Jamesian self. 4) The Jamesian self is the historical scene of the late Jamesian narrative. The drama of otherworldliness probed and assimilated plays out in this self.

Let us begin with the epic resonances in the Jamesian novel. I will be discussing seven criteria of epic narrative that I find applicable to The Ambassadors, James's Autobiography, The American Scene, the late short story "The Jolly Corner" and, to varying degrees, the other novels from the *major phase* -- The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl. My seven characteristics of Jamesian epic consciousness are:

I. Nationalistic orientation.

II. Investment in capturing a vanished (what Bakhtin terms "absolute") past and tradition by establishing a "zone of contact" (Bakhtin's term) between the lost order and the novel's hero's present moment.

III. Narrative development dependent on the hero's relation to an otherworld.

IV. Confrontation of cultural otherness, involving mutual cultural reconstructions and supranational syntheses.

V. Intersubjectivity.

VI. Expansiveness.

VII. Interest in immensity as an object of contemplation.

These seven characteristics will be taken up in the order presented above. The first epic trait involves the portrayal of national identity. In The American Scene, James writes that "One's supreme relation, as one had always put it, was one's relation to one's country -- a conception made up so largely of one's countrymen and one's countrywomen" (Collected Travel Writings, 427). Throughout his career, James reformulates this relation, portraying the American spirit in all its ambiguity. His "great labor", as Ezra Pound writes, was "a labor of translation, of making America intelligible, of making it possible for individuals to meet across national borders" (Pound, 296). Pound claims that "half the American idiom is recorded in Henry James's writing, and whole decades of American life that otherwise would have been utterly lost, wasted, rotting in unhermetic jars of bad writing, of inaccurate writing". The American constructs his national self by exploring his European otherworld. Lambert Strether has to go to "Europe" to reconceive his Americanism just as Henry James had to live abroad for twenty years nursing the capacity to return to his native land and produce The American Scene.

Discussing Paradise Lost, Northrop Frye called the writing of epic a "patriotic act" (The Return of Eden, 7); considering James's claims of his "supreme relation" and Pound's celebration of the Jamesian idioms, the author of

The Ambassadors can be said to make a patriotic gesture. Throughout the novel, Strether is depicted getting "in relation" ("He had wanted to put himself in relation, and he would be hanged if he were *not* in relation") with an object the author leaves vague. The object would seem to be "Europe" -- the landscape of the Jamesian American exile; in epic otherworld narrative, the exile puts himself in relation with his otherworldly environment in order to reconceive relations with his homeland and assure for his homecoming (Raymond Clark argues, as I will show in my chapter on homecomings, that the purpose of Odysseus's journey to the Greek underworld is to learn how to get home to Ithaca). In that sense, the experience of otherworldly relation -- for Strether, as for James -- contributes to defining one's "supreme relation" to one's country.

In reading the Hawthorne-James relation as a case of influence and rebellion, John Carlos Rowe sees James reinterpreting Hawthorne's literary legacy in refashioning the image of the national consciousness: "James wants to complete Hawthorne by transforming his 'morbid national consciousness' into a healthy, committed, and *social* national consciousness, but realizes that to accomplish this task he would have to deny the very terms by which he has defined the American consciousness as full of 'mistrust and suspicion of society'. In short, James understands that he can redeem such nationality only by transforming it into an

international consciousness"; Rowe adds that, "such a completion would cancel rather than translate the terms James has used to define Hawthorne and American society" (Rowe, 50). This cancellation is allowed to occur because James has chosen another cultural and literary source which he can translate: the "Europe" of the Revue des Deux Mondes, Balzac, and Notre Dame, what Waymarsh regards as the "enemy, the monster of the bulging eyes and far-reaching quivering groping tentacles ... exactly society, exactly the multiplication of shibboleths, exactly the discrimination of types and tone, exactly the wicked old Rows of Chester, rank with feudalism; exactly in short Europe" (I, iii, 38). In The Ambassadors, James dramatizes the translation and transformation of Walter Benjamin's amphora -- the cultural construct in which a certain European essence is immanent, to paraphrase Georg Lukács -- and the reconfiguration of European forms in an American language (a mould "(re)rounded from within", like Lukács's essential epic consciousness).

Lukács reads the history of civilization in the aftermath of the true epic era of the Greeks to be characterized by a "transcendental homelessness", the predicament of the philosopher who, quoting Novalis, has "the urge to be at home everywhere" (Lukács, 29). The effort is frequently stifled by a general rivening of human experience as epic spiritual immanence is superseded by the ironic state of psychological estrangement. For example, the

Greek can no longer know what in his culture is essentially Greek. He experiences the abysses of his own self and the dichotomy between external and internal experience. He loses his sense of "home": while the "mind's attitude" within the "home" of the truly epic age is a "passively visionary acceptance of ready-made, present meaning" (32) where the "world of meaning can be grasped", the post-epic phases of literary culture are characterized by vainly groping for shadows. James documents the predicament of an "America" that cannot find itself and whose citizens must make reclamation pilgrimages by engaging the lost epic order vestigially accessible in "Europe". Jamesian epic action evinces the American establishing a "zone of contact" with the vestigial European traditions that serve collectively as a repository of values absent in and necessary to the American consciousness.

The Jamesian American tries to incorporate the traces of "Europe", the cultural "shadow-types" that Lukács pessimistically reads as the poor remnants of the bourgeois consciousness: "The 'should be' kills life, and an epic hero constructed out of what 'should be' will always be but a shadow of the living epic man of historical reality, his shadow but never his original image, and his given world of experience and adventure can only be a watered down copy of reality, never its core and essence" (48). One of the principal epic characteristics of the nineteenth and

twentieth century novel is the effort at retrieving the past that has become divorced from contemporary historical consciousness. Bakhtin points out that the epic is characterized by the "reliance on tradition immanent in its very form". In his treatments of the American predicament, James shows his compatriotic creations reclaiming the very tradition he laments as lacking in The American Scene. This tradition is the source of "interest", that most Jamesian of desiderata.

In his description of epic, Bakhtin emphasizes that an "absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is, from the time in which the singer (the author and his audience) lives" (Bakhtin, 13). In his description of the novel, he stresses "the new zone opened by the novel for structuring literary images, namely the zone of maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all its openendedness" (11). In my discussion of the Jamesian novel, I will explore how James fuses epic and novelistic characteristics in retrieving the absolute epic past to complicate the novel's zone of contact with the present. In its effort to revive lost traditions, the Jamesian novel shows its hero striving in quest of the impossible: his uncompromised linguistic anatomizing of the "absolute past". This gesture of reclamation is thus partly undercut by disappointments. By his attempt, however, James succeeds in complicating the

"zone of contact" between the work and contemporary reality, the "open" present. The retrieval of tradition further reveals this zone of contact, endowing the present with greater nuance. The gesture of reclamation turns the past into a usable heritage, a psychological currency. Out of its magnified sense of the past, the Jamesian self envisions its "home", its national identity.

In his Autobiography, James documents his assorted efforts to incorporate the European past in a personal American consciousness. In Notes of a Son and Brother, he describes his "passionate need" as a teenager "for gathering and saving" objects of the European landscape as he and his family prepared to return to the United States so that brother William could study with the painter William Morris Hunt and the entire James corps could, much to Henry's skeptical chagrin, "learn to paint". James describes his final vision of the "sculptured and storied facade of the new Louvre" as though he were an otherworld pilgrim confronted with the shades of the epic dead. He wakes from his "cushioned sleep" and embraces the vision as though still in the midst of an impassioned dream.

> Over against us on the great palace wall, as I make out -- if not for that occasion then for some other -- were statues of heroes, Napoleon's young generals, Hoche, Marceau, Desaix or whoever, such a galaxy as never was or should ever be again for splendid monumental reference; and what it somehow came to was that here massed itself the shining second Empire, over which they stood straight aloft and on guard, like archangels of the sword, and that the whole thing was a high-pitched wonder

> and splendour, which we had already, in our small gaping way, got into a sort of relation with and which would have ever so much more ever so thrillingly to give us. (273)

We know from the famous deathbed dictations which James signed with the emperor's name (spelling it Napoleone, in the Corsican manner) the extent to which he identified Napoleon's aims with his own ambitions for a masterful literary style and encompassing world view; "sheer monumental reference" would seem the operative term. James was obsessed with probing the immense field of the imaginable, the "otherworld" which, according to R. P. Blackmur, "has as substance what for us is merely hoped for" (70). Blackmur defines this Jamesian otherworld as "a whole territory of human relations hitherto untouched or unarticulated" (139); these relations are hitherto unarticulated by Americans who lack exposure to "Europe", precisely what James and his family ("in our small gaping way") obtain through their sojourning and what Strether comes to appreciate through analyzing relations between Chad and Madame de Vionnet. The Jamesian American can articulate this "whole territory" of relations by entering into and empathizing with the points of view of the Europeans who belong to the other culture. "Europe" is what for Americans remains unarticulated until ventured as the far side of the American self and translated as the text of the present American moment.

"I'm a general guide -- to 'Europe', don't you know"?

Strether is both told and asked by Maria Gostrey (I, ii, 26). Her assertion/question exemplifies beautifully how "Europe", the Jamesian otherworld, functions for Strether. It is always telling him something about himself by asking him something about himself. This "Europe" is, historically speaking, a world of shadows existing in the aftertime of the celebrated Greek era when, according to Lukacs, the "Greek knew only answers but no questions, only solutions (even if enigmatic ones) but no riddles" (31). In the Jamesian era of the emergent American empire, the Emersonian credence in contradiction obtains as every answer doubles as a question, every narrative form as a closure that opens up and out.

"Speak what you think now in hard words," writes Emerson in "Self-Reliance", "and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today" (153). In late James, this faith in contradiction accords with the principle that every thought imbalances its predecessor. Every assertion contains some uncertainty. For example, at the end of The Ambassadors, Strether's last words to Maria are "Then there we are"! (XII, v, 345) The assertion has finality according to the logic of the narrative, since Strether's "only logic" is that he take nothing for himself. And yet the assertion continues to imply a host of interrogatives. These questions, latent in the final declaration, underscore the

complexities of Strether's fate. Where is he headed? Where will his "home" -- his verbal-visual frame of historical reference -- be tomorrow? How will this home be extended in time and language? Where will it end?

The Jamesian otherworld, "Europe", is a world of shades in the manner of the Homeric and Virgilian underworlds and the Dantesque otherworld. It is a text of cultural signifiers referring to a valued, useful past and enunciating difference (the difference of the dead, of -- in culturally relative terms -- the Europeans) with prophetic effect. However, there is no historical design in Jamesian narrative, no definitive *telos* as in Christian epic; rather, there is historical improvisation -- a code of conduct where every act and answer is inflected with the interrogative.

In his lecture on "Dreams and Occultism", Freud writes that the words "mysticism" and "occultism" "refer to some sort of 'other world', lying beyond the bright world governed by relentless laws which has been constructed for us by science" (New Introductory Lectures, 38). This definition compares with Blackmur's definition of the Jamesian otherworld: what scientific knowledge has failed to colonize remains "unarticulated", the undeciphered silence of a potentially new language and consciousness. Here again the unarticulated, standing "beyond" the bright world of positivism and progressivism associated with American culture by the turn of the twentieth century, is "other", a

fertile if threatening world of other.

As Edward Said reiterates in a recent essay evaluating the polemical effects of and critical responses to his Orientalism, every culture is defined in opposition to the dialectical other it requires in constituting itself. Cultures, like identities, are constructions necessitating "opposites" and "others" "whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of what their differences from 'us' consist in" (Said, 35). Culture is a function of exchange and selfhood emerges through the reading of the other. These "others" (our epic shades) become the optical vocabulary which the cultural perceiver, journeying (to evoke the classic Jamesian hero) like "a painter in a strange land", appropriates and translates.

> Each age and society re-creates its Others. Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of other is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies. (Said, 35)

Said calls these "processes" "urgent social contests" including "immigration laws, the legislation of personal conduct, the constitution of orthodoxy, the legitimization of violence and insurrection, the character and content of education, and the direction of foreign land"; he adds that "the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness". Said advocates the construction of a constellar identity based on a manifold

cultural perspective. He disavows a "gloating and uncritical nationalism" and argues for the principle of "communities of interpretation that [with respect to the discourse of Orientalism would] exist within and outside the Islamic world, communicating with each other in a dialogue of equals" (42). The formation of such "communities of interpretation" is literally what Henry James provides in his creation of Americans and Europeans reconstructing themselves as a function of reading each other. These acts of reading and re-reading produce Homi Bhabha's "liminal moment" when national identity is "opened up and held together" (305) and contrasted cultures negotiate supra-national idioms and identities.

In <u>The Ambassadors</u>, Strether and Madame de Vionnet form a community of interpretation through their intimate conversations. Strether reasons that to talk with such a woman is to "arrive at" (like joined wayfarers on a Dantean *cammin*) "a new tone" and he relishes fantasies of "all the tones she might make possible if one were to try her" (XI, iii, 304). The new tone incarnates European tradition in an American interpretation. Like Shakespeare's "incorporate conclusion" (<u>Othello</u>, II, i, 257), it consummates the eroticized verbal and epistemological union between French Countess and the American Ambassador to the Past. In Strether's proto-pragmatist gesture, epic essence is revitalized and incorporated into the time and experience of the American exile. The new

"tone" implies an identity forged from multiple perspectives -- the American delegate studied from the European point of view, European tradition fathomed by the American questioner, Marie's "vielle sagesse" interpreted through Strether's "habit of sorrow". The identities of "America" and "Europe" evolve through the verbal interaction between human beings -- an Anglo-French female speaking and an American male appreciating her "charming slightly strange English", a "language" (indeed "a special shade of speech") that is uniquely this woman's. James provides what Said requests: an epistemological stance that corrects a self-serving, myopic nationalism and explores the hazards and rewards of a cultural dialectic.

I have resorted to a survey of pertinent theorists in order to contextualize my arguments in current literary criticism. The advantage of this mode of presentation lies in showing the congruence of my findings with those of scholars relying on different methodologies, among them post-colonial and anthropological. Carrying the survey slightly further establishes how the thesis of my genre study overlaps with that of a recent anthropologically-derived literary study by James Buzzard. In his discussion of European tourism, Buzzard justifiably corrects post-colonial critics who, critiquing Western constructions of otherness, for example "the Orient", reify the Western entity in the very manner they themselves object to. "The

other", says Buzzard, "may exist in 'Europe', and parts of "the West" may produce a useful other from different parts" (42). He points out that "one can tendentiously 'other' parts of one's own nation or city by casting those parts as repositories and representations of the society's true (but neglected or violated character)" (43). Focusing on the European guidebook penchant for encouraging "picturesque" seeing, Buzzard provocatively asks, "Can the other speak in the discourse that constructs it?" (40) He explores the ways James, while persisting in his picturesque idealizations of European sights, kept cognizant of the violent blindnesses inhering in such a vantage point. It is this blindness that Strether is in the act of overcoming as he reconceives his Lambinet from a picturesque opiate to a vertiginous portrait of his times. Strether recomposes the landscape by allowing the "other" (Madame de Vionnet and her European heritage) to alter the discourse he uses to construct it. The other speaks symphonically like a host of otherworldly shades, interrupting and revising the American discourse in which it (Blackmur's "territory" of the "unarticulated") is articulated.

James and his American protagonists turn otherworldliness into an epistemological resource. James provides an example of this in The American Scene when he narrates his return to the Greenwich Village of his childhood (the section is headed "New York Revisited"). Frustrated by his

native environment, James can only return "home" by digressing into European aesthetic otherworldliness. In the episode, "home" represents a conscious state James is frustrated from experiencing on native ground, a mental condition he can realize only through European terms. In "Europe" he keeps a thwarted epic appointment with historical significance and inserts himself within the temporality of his reconstructed homeland. This epic appointment, a temporal homecoming, is preceded and, indeed, set up and occasioned by James's earlier disappointed quest to settle himself in his native landscape.

It is best to consider the episode in two stages: an epistemological *disappointment* closely followed by a rectifying *appointment* -- the latter the intersection of the self with its historical tradition. First there is James's bewildering disappointment. Casting himself as the "revisiting spirit", he returns to lower Manhattan, source of "the unquenchable intensity of the impressions received in childhood". He makes an "excursion of memory", effects the "artful evasion of the actual" (Manhattan's skyscraper culture), and navigates a "precious stretch of space" between Fourteenth Street and Washington Square which *counts* for "tone", providing the compositional appeal of the evocatively historical setting (428-429). James imaginatively feeds off Fifth Avenue's architecture -- "this comparatively unimpaired morsel" -- as off a "heritage" that replaces him in

relation to the meaningful past. He dramatizes his mind communing with objects that render it familiar to itself. To stroll down lower Fifth Avenue is for James to re-trace not merely the landscape where he matured but also the process of his self-constitution by his engaging this landscape. "The privilege [of James's attention] had been offered since to millions of other objects that had made nothing of it" (430); here, every element of the arrayed scene speaks to him. James entertains the "fond theory that nothing hereabouts was changed", relishing the "exquisite" sense of "connection". He stares across at a former school house on Waverly Place and "live[s] again into the queer medieval costume" he wore for his lessons. The scene "composes in a dozen delicacies of composition and tone". The living canvas of memory pulsates with the present tense.

And then, suddenly, James's revery is interrupted, his captivating "picture" smudged over. The disappointment occurs when Henry returns to the site of his "birth-house" in Greenwich Village's Washington Square only to find it "ruthlessly supressed", torn down along with the "more or less 'hallowed' University building", "vanished from the earth" and supplanted by a "high square impersonal structure" (431). James feels "amputated of half [his] history". His sense of lost history is personal and cultural. On a visit to Ellis Island, James speculated about the future of a Babel-like Manhattan dominated by its profuse immigrants.

He decided to escape the rapid cultural and linguistic metamorphoses engineered by the "ubiquitous alien" by retreating "into the past" (428). Now his past is cut off. James's complex picture of "home", sustained through association and imagination, is suddenly erased. In James, one's "home" is the aesthetic refuge of the past where one can elaborate and reconstitute the self.

"The object of memory", says William James, "is only an object imagined in the past (usually very completely imagined there) to which the emotion of belief adheres" (Principles of Psychology, I, 652). His birthplace destroyed, Henry James suffers a crisis of faith in his past, signifying a crisis of faith in himself. He struggles to find the object which will supply referential confirmation. But shortly thereafter, James overcomes his foiled return "home" by experiencing the cognitive supplements of European otherworldliness.

The rectifying pilgrimage takes place in the episcopal Church of the Ascension, a few blocks from the "birth-house". The Ascension provides James an otherworld of reference with which to supplement the sudden deficiency of objects he associates with "home". The church visit redeems him from a state of self-abandonment owing to the hasty American way of sacrificing its evocative, defining objects to "economic convenience" (432). As the quarry of otherness, the Ascension stands for what "the gregarious American

ideal" -- "a huge continuous fifty floored conspiracy against the idea of the ancient graces" -- tends to obliterate: the past, the spell of the old world. James contemplates the church's altar fresco, by his former mentor in all things European, John La Farge. The fresco instills in him an aesthetic lifeblood. "Penetrating into the Ascension, at chosen noon, and [keeping his appointment] standing for the first time in presence of the noble work of John La Farge [depicting Christ's ascension]" James revives his faith in "the operation of values". Being in the "charming and considerably dim 'old' church, hushed to admiration before a great religious picture" alleviates his disorientation and relieves him of contempt for New York's ignorance of its heritage.

> the sensation, for the moment, upset so all the facts. The hot light, outside, might have been that of an Italian *piazzetta*; the cool shade, within, with the important work of art shining through it, seemed part of some other-world pilgrimage -- all the more that the important work of art itself, a thing of the highest distinction, spoke, as soon as one had taken it in, with that authority which makes the difference, ever afterwards, between the remembered and the forgotten quest. (433)

Otherworldliness, supplements, and the "upsetting of the facts", the last two phenomena often addressed in deconstructive criticism, share a fundamental relation. In a discussion of epic and nationality, the upsetting of the facts characterizes the encounter between self and other that, in Bhabha's words, performs the "liminal moment of the

culture of the nation" (Bhabha, 305). Exploring the Derridean concept of the "supplement" in his analysis of the narrative construction of nationhood, Bhabha cites the parliamentary supplementary question as exemplifying an articulation "after" or "in addition" to the "original" -- to "what is already put down on the order paper". "The supplementary strategy", writes Bhabha, "suggests that adding 'to' need not 'add up' but may disturb the calculation. As [R.] Gasché [in The Tain of the Mirror] has succinctly suggested 'supplements are pluses that compensate for a minus in the original'" (305). It might strike readers as ironic that Bhabha employs this vocabulary to characterize the plight of post-colonial immigrants in multicultural London while I borrow his terms to diagnose James's appropriation of the other-worldliness of "mother Europe". After all, James is alarmed and even repulsed by the advent of the pluralistic army -- the "ubiquitous" immigrants he expects shall complicate the American sense of tradition and national identity. However, the episode involving the La Farge exemplifies a strategy for negotiating cultural difference into a complex, heterogeneous societal whole.

For James, the negotiation of cultural otherness proves the fundamental gesture of the national life. The facts get *upset*, a supplement adds to the cultural and political text without adding up. A visual language is appropriated and a new perspective wrought with the composition of a new home -

- a new image of the historical self. "Truth grafts itself on previous truth, modifying it in the process", writes William James; "Previous truth; fresh facts: and our mind finds a new truth" (Pragmatism, 106). Upon reading William's Pragmatism, Henry James wrote his brother that he "was lost in the wonder of the extent to which all my life I have (like M. Jourdain) unconsciously pragmatised" (Letter of 1907). The evolution of the truth climaxes in the pragmatic cultural conversions of Henry James and Lambert Strether. T. S. Eliot writes of the historical redemption of the Jamesian American, stating that "It is the final perfection, the consummation of an American to become, not an Englishman, but a European -- something which no born European, no person of any European nationality can become ("The Hawthorne Aspect", in Don Vann, 30). When its American facts are sufficiently upset by exposure to European otherworldliness, the self becomes a convert to Europeanness, a creature of the cultural threshold.

In the Church of the Ascension, James overcomes what he considers the corruptions of American culture to appropriate European signification and, through a complex hybridization, translate "Europe" into American consciousness. James "penetrates" the scene of the La Farge and returns "home", experiencing a conscious intimacy with objects that confer a sense of his place in the world. Several terms resonating of the epic appear in this representative passage, including

"shade", "shining", "otherworld pilgrimage" and "remembered ... quest"; they merit sustained analysis. The shades of otherworldliness adorn the panoramic consciousness of the Jamesian pilgrim. By apprehending the necessary objects, he seeks to return psychically "home". This American Aeneas rediscovers himself by tracing his culture's development back to its originary locus.

James creates a narrative of self-deliverance that eclipses those of Emerson and Henry James Sr. He emulates his father's devotion to *an* otherworldliness but attends to different objects; *his* otherworldliness conditions a radically different consciousness. Otherworldliness is a function of choice. Sensory provocation encourages personal attention. The attendant's habit of inquiry lets his consciousness grow and prosper. The Jamesian otherworld is the landscape of "interest" that sustains inquiry for extended and, judging from the unresolved questions at the end of The Ambassadors, inexhaustible duration. In his chapter on "Attention" in Principles of Psychology, William James quotes Helmholz on the need to keep attention "riveted" by "setting] ourselves new questions about an object so that a new interest arises" (I, 423). Otherworldliness supplies Henry James and his characters with new interest. In interrogating the focus of its new interest, the Jamesian self crosses its phenomenal threshold to reside in "the place which is language" (to quote Yves Bonnefoy); this dwelling

is, temporally speaking, the singular moment" when (and where), says Mary Ann Caws, "the speaking subject" takes possession of the "substance of reality" (Caws, 191).

Henry James employs the experience of otherworldliness to portray intercultural relations. Emerson and Henry James Sr. had regarded otherworldliness as the repository of the divine. In Notes of a Son and Brother, Henry Jr. distinguishes the objects interesting him from those interesting his father, explaining that he observed a "total otherness of contemplation" (335). For James "otherworldliness" refers to the object of his father's religious contemplations; he recalls the "measure of otherworldliness pervading our premises", deeming it "rather a waste, though oddly enough at the same time a congestion" (337). The wastefulness was lamentably evident in the absence of iconic trappings ("there was not an item of the detail of devotional practice that we had been so much as allowed to divine"), the total bereavement of men, idols, rites associated with the act of Catholic worship that Strether watches Madame de Vionnet perform in "the sacred shade" of a Notre Dame chapel. However, Marie's moment of prayer is provocative as an otherworldly cultural practice rather than for any attestation it makes to the existence of a deity. Henry Jr. contrasts the concrete quality of his interests with the abstractness of his father's theological concerns; he writes that "I gaped imaginatively, as it were, to such a different

set of relations" (339).

The mind of James Jr. attached its "gaping view" to

> things and persons, objects and aspects, frivolities all, I dare say I was willing to grant, compared with whatever manifestations of the serious, these being by need, apparently, the abstract. (337-338)

As Eliot points out, James was "a critic who preyed not upon ideas [like his father, the "better critic"], but upon living beings" (Don Vann, 31). Odysseus offers warm blood to the dead shades to make them speak; analogously, James "preys" upon the shadowy objects of his otherworld by infusing them with the sinewy life of his imagination. In preying upon *his* objects, James enlivens them with his consciousness. He comes to possess these objects thoroughly, to own them. This explains James's frequent use of personification, epitomizing his desire to expand his self-dialogues into the external world.

Jamesian otherworldliness thus occasions intersubjective relations where consciousness is positioned between characters. In Thinking in Henry James, Sharon Cameron explores the ways that "Thought is as if pictured in the world, as a thing would be" (145). Continuing Cameron's investigation from the vantage point of genre, we can understand Jamesian intersubjectivity through the motif of the epic self in verbal relation to the otherworldly shades of the dead. More than heroes in other genres, the epic hero must confront and appropriate otherworldliness as a rite of

constructing his personal and national identity. "Art", writes Susan Langer, "is envisagment of feeling, which involves its formulation and expression in what I call a symbol" (380). In late Jamesian narrative, feeling is envisaged in "shades", visual-lexical elements of a cultural composition. These shades mediate between the late Jamesian hero and the immensity of his cultural otherworld. Whether Strether seated on a bench in the Luxembourg Gardens, Milly Theale perched on an alpine precipice, or Adam Verver transfixed "under some strange midnight sun" (The Golden Bowl, II, v, 186), the Jamesian self is portrayed investigating knowledge immeasurable by positivist methods. During the Jamesian otherworld voyage, the hero contemplates the immensity representing his potential consciousness.

Theologically, immensity connotes "God", the circle which Dante's pilgrim cannot square. In his Autobiography, for example, James herofies his father in the act of musing upon the immense: "It would absolutely not have been possible", he says, "to breathe more the air of that reference to an order of goodness and power greater than any this world itself can show" (335). James likens Henry Sr.'s religious thought to the mouth of a stream from which flowed a "life of the most richly consequent ... that in this life, the most abundantly, and above all naturally, communicated *as* life that it was possible to imagine" (335-336). The senior James sets a standard for experiencing life that Lambert

Strether will try to match. Immensity proves to be the object that generates many of Strether's revelations.

In Gloriani's garden, for example, Strether's "unprepared mind" notes "the range of the immeasurable town" (V, i, 119); about to break into his "live all you can" speech, Strether sits beside Little Bilham trying to process the "immensity" "he had seen" (V, ii, 131). His experience of the immense combination of "things" inspires his Emersonian ejaculation about the need to live vigorously. William James told his brother that he "too" was "leading an Emersonian life", adding that "the environment differs to suit the needs of the different psycho-physical organism which you present" (Letters of William James, 191). In a journal entry of April 18, 1824, Emerson writes of burning "after the 'aliquid immensum infinitumque' which Cicero desired" (Whicher, 7); this naturalist quarry supplies the "emblems of our thoughts" (35). James seeks his infinite other in European streets rather than New England pastures. The European landscape provides James and Lambert Strether the signs and relics they need to satisfy the needs of their psycho-physical organisms.

Freud also cast himself as the explorer of the mysteries of the psycho-physical human organism. A self-proclaimed "*conquistador*", he penetrated the otherworld of the unconscious. The founder of psychoanalysis chose for the epigraph to The Interpretation of Dreams a line from The Aeneid,

"Flectore si nequeo Superos, Acheronta movebo" ("If I cannot bend the higher powers, I will move the infernal regions" [VII. 310]). Like James, Freud becomes the *raconteur* of his studies of self and patients, the weaver of the intricate psychoanalytic narrative. Novelist and psychoanalyst observe analogous methods. The Interpretation of Dreams derives from Freud's self-analysis. The Ambassadors, a dissection of the semi-autobiographical Strether, is James's oblique self-analysis. Their capacities to examine themselves as psycho-physical organisms and to render an account distinguish James and Freud as types of the epic *conquistador*.

The self's contemplation of immensity stimulates its expansion. And "Expansiveness", as Thomas Greene argues, "is the first quality of the epic imagination":

> Epic answers to man's need to clear away an area he can apprehend, if not dominate and commonly this area expands to fill the epic universe, to cover the known world and reach heaven and hell. Epic characteristically refuses to be hemmed in, in time as well as space; it raids the unknown and colonizes it. It is the imagination's manifesto, proclaiming the range of its grasp, or else it is the dream of the will, indulging its fantasies of power. (Greene, 9)

The expansive epic imagination is, to apply a famous Jamesian phrase, "a grasping imagination". The impulse to self-expansion propels the Jamesian hero "on the road of so much inward or apprehensive life" (Autobiography, 292). In Gloriani's garden, Strether experiences the "apprehension of the interesting" and comes to embody the European ghosts in his Bergsonian "present" -- "the consciousness I have of my

body" (Matter and Memory, 140). Strether,

> in contact with that element [European otherworldliness as personified by the sculptor, Gloriani] as he had never yet so intimately been, had the consciousness of opening to it, for the happy instant, all the windows of his mind, of letting this rather grey interior drink in for once the sun of a clime not marked in his old geography. (V, i, 120).

Although underworlds and otherworlds can be dim, gruesome places hardly lending themselves to the joyful epiphany, we must remember that Dante's "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso" also constitute epic otherworlds. These latter realms offer light, beauty, and insight. In The Ambassadors James conceives immensity as a generative object of Strether's contemplation throughout. Chapters two and three of this dissertation explore how mental action accrues through a recurring experience of entrancement by and entrance in the European otherworld. The principle of epic entrance depends upon the notion of immensity as an ultimate object of Jamesian thought. Epic entrance is a neverending process. Since immensity is the endless object of contemplation, knowledge is always conceived in fragmentary form. Every thought is an intuition of an unfathomable whole. As the Jamesian hero ventures and enters further within European otherworldliness, his fragmentary (compared to the immensity of his potential) consciousness accretes and grows more complex. The rule of recurrent entrance, where every penetrated threshold marks the beginning of a new mental stage, characterizes the narratives of the self

set forth in the *Commedia*, the pragmatist writings of Emerson and William James, and The Ambassadors.

The rule of recurrent entrance reflects the three thousand year old impulse of epic to transgress normative boundaries; as Greene says, the genre "refuses to be hemmed in". Epic subverts the existing framework of values, legislating an alternative code of cultural conduct. "The epic", writes Joan Webber, "never accepts the culture in which it finds itself (although for reasons of political tact, it may appear to do so); it questions the characteristic epic goals, the motivations of the hero, and the interhuman struggle which often totally invalidate the apparent epic aim" (Milton Quarterly, 109). Odysseus, the matchless improviser, and his epic descendants, the Dantesque Ulisse and Miltonic Satan, transgress the culturally permissible either by visiting the regions of the dead or by aspiring to knowledge from the forbidden tree. These transgressions make them intimate with death, an object inspiring their most probing questions. "Imagination", writes Derrida, "is at bottom the relation with death" (Of Grammatology, 184). Like Strether, the Jamesian "man of imagination", the epic hero experiences the consciousness particular to his historical moment by interacting with the shades of the dead. Holbein's famous court portrait, "The Ambassadors", contains a *memento mori*; Adeline Tintner argues convincingly that James inscribed a

memento mori in the narrative of The Ambassadors (Leon Edel and Literary Art, 135-150). Strether's meeting with the lovers at the *Cheval Blanc* makes him face his mortality even as the Lambinet landscape inspires him to imagine more ambitiously than ever before.

The Jamesian hero's engagement with the immensest known quantity, death, spurs his imagination, invigorating his powers of mental acquisition. The death-seeing Jamesian American consciousness is depicted as relentlessly acquisitive of data that enables it to experience itself as American. James's interest in rendering his American heroes' consciousness as the very faces of "America" herself is reflected by his obsession with the visages of American presidents. As an American abroad, James repeatedly requested that his parents send him photographs of the current occupant of the White House. In a letter of March 22, 1877, he asks for a photograph of Rutherford Hayes; in a letter of November 28, 1880, he requests one of the newly elected Garfield. Studying these portraits, James felt he was staring into the face of "America" itself, the very face he sought to render through his psychological portraits. Strether's encounter with an otherworldliness equatable in its signifying power to the Derridean ideal of death enables him to divine his portrait of his nation.

To discuss Jamesian narrative as a form of epic literature is, admittedly, a risky venture. Some will ask

"Why try?" The reason to do so is, as I stressed earlier, that the method throws aspects of Jamesian consciousness into a new light. Questions of authorial intention bear minor importance. There is no significant evidence that James harbored longstanding ambitions to produce an American epic. However, scholars like Michael Seidel and Jeffrey Perl have revealed some of the epic characteristics of <u>The Ambassadors</u>. Anecdotally, Tintner points out that James, in a letter to William Dean Howells written in the aftermath of his failure with <u>Guy Domville</u>, quotes from <u>Paradise Lost</u>, saying that "I *have* felt for a long time past that I have fallen on evil days", the narrator's words ("though fallen upon evil dayes,/On evil dayes though fall'n and evil tongues;/In darkness, and with dangers compast round,/And solitude" [VII. 25-30]) at the opening of the book featuring Raphael's creation narrative. James thus had occasion to speak in the voice of an author of epic.

Contrary to what some may think, James also had the erudition and the combative love for the masters of the European literary tradition to produce a work of the imaginative and supranationalist scope of an epic, even if he was not consciously intending to write one. In <u>The Library of Henry James</u>, Leon Edel, who inspected James's Lamb House library before it was dispersed, terms the library "heterogeneous and comparatively modern" though not "essentially *belles lettres*", there being "many volumes of

history [especially treating the Napoleonic imperial period] and philosophy, a great deal of Dr. Johnson, the diaries of Samuel Pepys, and so on" (The Library of Henry James, 3). Edel recalls seeing James's copies of Dante, "in a Florentine edition of 1874 in vellum gilt" and, in the Garden Room, "eight volumes of Milton, if I remember correctly, annotated by James alongside the poet's life by Mitford" (5). James's copies of Dante and Milton are unfortunately lost. Were they ever found, his annotations of Paradise Lost would reveal more clearly his complex relationship with European epic. In any case, I submit that James's annotations can be inferred by his own epic strategies in his late novels. Standard epic conventions and plot lines should however be dismissed as serious considerations since, as Greene argues, "when the [epic] mode crystallized, it tended to choke poetic vitality ... to be perpetuated and renewed, it had to be extended and violated" (9).

What the epic represents to James is very much what "Europe" itself presents: a textual form in every gesture of which the past is suggested. "Memory", as Benjamin says, "is the epic faculty *par excellence*" (97). James enters into dialogue with the epic as he permeates and narrates the stories of "Europe", space of the unbound imagination and, in its accumulated consciousness, tantamount to serried texts of the dead. During his last meeting with Madame de

Vionnet, Strether admires the objects of her salon, anticipating that "he should look back on the perception actually sharpest with him as on the view of something old, old, old, the oldest thing he had ever personally touched" (XII, ii, 316-317); in the literary projects of his major phase and especially in The Ambassadors, James formalizes the act of historical retrospection as the narrative retrieval of a lost literary form. Discussing "learned mythopoeia" as found in "the last period of Henry James and in James Joyce", Frye stresses that "the complexities are designed to reveal and not to disguise the myth ... the learned and the subtle, like the primitive and the popular, tend toward a center of imaginative experience" (Anatomy of Criticism, 117). In James, this "center of imaginative experience", like the Augustinian deity whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere, is immense in its scope of reference.

Finally, I shall examine how the dynamics of the typical otherworld narrative rematerialize in James's "scenic" depiction of the self. In the narrative of The Ambassadors Strether's self-inspection is rendered scenically. This radical technique of what I choose to call "scenicism" coincides with shifts in how history is conceived. As Carlyle writes, in the nineteenth century "knowledge and body, reasoning and belief" became equal to "action and passion" as "essential materials" of "history"

(Selected Writings, 51). This Romantic premise is reconceived by James as the aesthetic, historically charged scrutiny of the processes of the mind. James positions the "I" amid the symbolic whirlwind of its European otherworld. The encounter between "I" and European otherworld is rendered through progressive scenic unfoldings. James concocts a Carlylean method of historiography (scrutinizing knowledge and body, reasoning and belief), a method I shall call "scenic history".

A quick review of James's theoretical faith in "scenicism", as stated in A Small Boy and Others, clarifies my purpose here. In a "Small Boy", James recalls the revelation from hearing his aunt (wife of Augustus James, Henry's paternal uncle) admonish his cousin, little Marie Bay Temple, for resisting instructions to go to bed. The mother's admonishing words sound for James the "epoch-making" "note": "Come my dear", mother says to daughter, "don't make a scene -- I *insist* on your not making a scene" (Autobiography, 107). Hearing life "reduced" to these terms for the first time, twelve year-old Henry intuits a technique for treating the processes of human observation (in chapter four I shall relate this technique to the "system of observation" James refers to in his preface to Roderick Hudson). The principle of seeing in and through scenes becomes his epistemological tenet. Dictating his memoirs and by this mode making a Jamesian scene between

himself and his amanuensis, Theodora Bosanquet -- James remembers the early lesson in narrative structuring.

> The expression, so vivid, so portentous, was one I had never heard -- it had never been addressed to us at home; *and who should say now what a world one mightn't at once read into it*? It seemed freighted to sail so far; it told me so much about life. Life at these intensities clearly became "scenes"; but the great thing, the immense illumination, *was that we could make them or not as we chose*. (107) (my italics)

James explains that he, not his recalcitrant cousin, ultimately engineers the scene. While Marie creates a "visible commotion", her keenly observing cousin Henry, showing "detachment" and "presence of mind", reads through her display "*all* the elements of the troubled time" (Henry and Marie's uncle, Robert Temple, was dying of consumption and their grief-stricken aunt Catherine James Temple [Henry Sr.'s sister] was forced to stay with her brother Augustus James and his family). Henry James understands how Marie's "scene" symbolically synthesizes the family crisis, establishing a site of reference from which the trauma can be inferred. For James the scene-maker is the observing consciousness asserting itself by choosing what to render. The observing "I" is in psycho-historical terms, *the* scene, a juncture of sensation, utterance, and verbal-visual shadings.

At the site of the Jamesian scene, psychological phenomena intersperse with the social sphere to evidence that Jamesian consciousness occurs between characters as the

omnipotent force of the Jamesian "situation" (Eliot's term). In chapters four and five, I shall establish how the Jamesian scene operates in ways essentially analogous to the scenes of canonical European epic otherworld narratives. This will re-situate Jamesian scenicism in a broader literary history and reveal how late Jamesian narrative historicizes the quests and questions of its moment, 1900 and the dawning of the new century.

Throughout his Autobiography, James elaborates his theory of "scenicism". He regards the data of his father writing at his desk "in long fits of remoter consideration, wondering, pondering sessions" as dramatically invaluable: "If one wanted drama *there* was drama ... and of the most concrete and most immediately offered to one's view" (372). The frame extends to show not only Henry Sr. "pondering" but also Henry Jr. observing his father ponder: "If it didn't sound in a manner patronizing I should say that I saw my father saw" (373). James historicizes the process of attention, turning the attentive self studying itself study another into the history of value. His interests and techniques reflect the integration of psychology and sociology in historiography, a discipline significantly changed by the "orchestral burst of thought" said by Jacques Barzun to issue between 1890 and 1914. Understanding these twenty-four years of Euro-American intellectual development as a kind of "reign of William and Henry [James]", Barzun

describes the emerging scenic methodologies reflected in Henry James's narrative techniques.

> History and the ologies started afresh in new shapes. They liked more than ever to call themselves sciences, beginning with history; but the label only meant high seriousness. For Lamprecht in 1904 -- to take but one example -- the "new science of history" denoted its fusion with psychology and sociology. Our latest psycho- and quanto-historians have added nothing to his theoretical base. For the more philosophical Dilthey, history was the re-thinking of past cultural forms and events -- much later Collingwood (and Spengler in a slanted way) adopted this fruitful formula. And the now glorified French school of "Annalistes" (with Fernand Braudel as its present hero) adopted the "anti-bureaucratic" view that all the activities of mankind should figure on the historian's canvas. (215)

In turning the novel of manners into a document of consciousness, James exemplifies the academic conflations of history, psychology, and sociology. The Ambassadors implicitly raises the question "What is history?" In "The Art of Fiction", James expresses the conviction that the historian and the novelist are brothers in the narrative trade. But Langer draws a distinction between the novelist and the historian, terming the novelist's past a "virtual past, a past of his own creation", where "'the truth that he assumes' has its roots in that created history" (290). This distinction notwithstanding, the scenicism depicting the Jamesian hero in relation to his past has methodological resemblances to contemporary historiographies.

In his preface to The Ambassadors, James compares the "scenic" technique to its alternative, the "non-scenic" --

"discriminated preparation ... the fusion and synthesis of picture" (12). A "representational virtue" insists "here and there on being, for the charm of opposition and renewal, other than scenic" (15). James gives two examples of the non-scenic treatment: Strether's initial confrontation with the altered Chad in the box at the *Comédie Française* and Strether's panoramic view of Mamie Pocock on her hotel balcony overlooking Paris of a golden afternoon. While he admits that scenic devices invade these treatments, James states that in them "expressional curiosity and expressional decency are sought and arrived at under quite another law" (14). I shall argue, conversely, that, rather than being "non-scenic", this law functions as an intensified, enveloping variation of scenicism. The non-scenic proves scenic in a phenomenological way. Both treatments emphasize the perspective of the observing "I": in the box at the *Comedie Francais*, the "I" consists of the perspective of the shocked hero experiencing his world spin round as he gauges Chad's unimaginable transformation. The treatment of Mamie on the balcony parallels James's description of watching his father work. Consciousness is conceivable as the figure of concentric circles with Strether's perspective surrounding Mamie's without enclosing it.

Strether's experience of enveloping sight parallels Susan Stringham's experience as she studies Milly Theale perched on her precipice in the Alps -- more even than it

resembles Henry Jr. observing Henry Sr. at work. In the examples from the novels, the observer can only speculate about the observed person's own observations whereas in the Autobiography James is almost "patronizingly" certain that he has seen his father see. Nevertheless, in each of these examples the "scenicism" of the observing "I" is rendered with a precision that suggests an Emersonian entrancement with the visual (other)world. In The Ambassadors, the technique is complicated by the tendency of scenic supersession as one framed scene of self-entrancement and self-entry shades into its successor in a manner that evokes comparison with William James's notion of the "stream of consciousness". In the technique of scenic history, a previous scene is absorbed by its successor, affecting the coding of the present phenomenal field. Evaluating each scene, the reader is referred to past and future scenes through a process of association that directs narrative attention forward and back, giving the semiotic reference of the given scene a vertiginous scope.

The climax of every Jamesian historical scene is a special kind of homecoming where the self integrates itself in time and space. These homecomings are periodic mental events. We are best able to view these homecomings by surveying the treatments that James refers to as "non-scenic" and which I maintain are intensified scenic scrutinies of the self in the act of composing. The foremost

example of this form of "non-scenicism", "picture", or "intensified scenic scrutiny" is the famous Lambinet landscape scene that is used to climax The Ambassadors. This two-section, thirteen-page scene is the essential point of departure for all of my arguments. It illustrates the American otherworldly experience of European aestheticism and the "absolute past", of epic entry and threshold passages, of cognized "shades", and of returns "home" to a conscious state of historical relation. I will approach it from different angles in each of the next five chapters, arguing that Strether's otherworld experience begins as his imaginative passage across the frame of the Lambinet landscape painting he wishes to buy but cannot afford.

This imaginative transgression will be discussed in chapter two. In chapter three, a reading of threshold scenes shall throw light on questions of recurrent entrances, cognitive depths, and the role of guides in Jamesian otherworld narrative. Chapter four will examine the role of "shades" in Jamesian epic consciousness and Chapter five will pursue the argument by reading Jamesian cognitive patterns through the trope of the vainly embraced shade. Finally, chapter six will discuss the epic quest for "home" in terms of what John Hollander calls the "search" by the "contingent heroes of bourgeois modernity" for a "home ... for their own multitudinous selves" (40). In short, the Jamesian concept of "home" will be explored in terms of

secular apocalypse, moments of linguistically derived compositional intensity, and historical legacy.

CHAPTER TWO

EPIC INTIMACIES: GUIDES AND ENTRANCES (1): TRANSGRESSION AS A MORAL NECESSITY IN LATE JAMES

This is the first of two chapters devoted to revealing Strether's (analytic) progress to be based in his feeling of increased entrance within his European otherworld which, in turn, brings about rhythmic accretions in the "sum of his personal consciousness". This sum of consciousness describes his identity, grasped through otherworld inquiry and debate, and reconstructed in time as language. In the works of James's major phase, epic entrance is intrinsic to any act of self-elaboration. Strether's relations to otherworld objects determine his vision; Strether's states of entrance within the scenes of these complex phenomenal objects shape and color his states of thought. Moreover, these states of entrance are precipitated by the impulse to cognitive expansion that I shall identify as a form of moral transgression, characteristic of the hero in epic otherworld narrative.

Strether's complicated experience of otherworldly entry is determined by his experiencing a given mental impression to be superseded by a newer one. The complexity of the interplay between Strether's visual impressions and his states of entrance is heightened since in the novel's action Strether moves ahead in chronological time even as he refers

back through historical time to construct his originary fiction. This originary fiction is fixed in the Lambinet landscape, a landscape that, as already argued, marks the first and last points of Strether's otherworld journey.

Finally, Strether's visual impressions mark furthering states of his entrancement with the referential abyss of his European otherworld. I shall analyze Strether's process of entrance through the metaphor of the threshold passage. The trope of the *limina* recurs throughout epics like La Divina Commedia and The Aeneid as well as in the different historical and epistemological narrative context of The Ambassadors. Strether's tendency to be entranced into entering an unsanctioned locus of thought will be treated at length. His entrances will be read in terms of aestheticized constructions of his "Europe" -- "the clever canvas[es]" through which he repeatedly moves. In addition, I shall demonstrate the degree to which Strether's relations with his epic guides -- notably Maria Gostrey and Marie de Vionnet -- facilitate his European entry.

In a discussion of Strether's entrance within his European otherworld, the first question concerns when and where Strether's otherworld journey begins. The novel's first sentence indicates that Strether's otherworld journey begins with the novel's narrative: "Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel was about his friend, yet on his learning that Waymarsh was apparently not to

arrive till evening he was not wholly disconcerted" (I, i, 17). The sentence describes Strether reaching his first way-station on his otherworldly way -- his Chester hotel. The evidence that Strether's otherworld journey begins precisely here is convincing. Strether has crossed the Atlantic ocean from the United States to Europe, from his homeland to his socio-historical otherworld. He has resorted to questions, the instruments that best serve the otherworld explorer. In raising his first question, he begins what Ian Watt refers to as the "expository" narrative of his self-examination and conversion (Watt, 256).

I shall argue, however, that Strether's otherworld journey begins at an earlier point in his chronological life, prior to his arrival on the European continent. We cannot measure the boundaries of Strether's otherworld journey strictly by the novel's literal geography or by the linear time that passes between Strether's arrival in Chester (first sentence of the novel, early March) and his departure from Paris (last sentence of the novel, late July). Strether's otherworld journey does not begin with his literal arrival in Europe. Rather it begins when he first entertains the idea of "Europe".

Strether's otherworld experience, then, begins in a recess of the narrative time of <u>The Ambassadors</u>, on the day when he is described encountering the "little Lambinet" in a Tremont street gallery. His experience of the painting is

related as a narrative aside. He visited the Boston gallery thirty years earlier. The incident is mentioned late in the narrative (XI, iii) when Strether makes his day-trip to the countryside, observing the "artless" "impulse" to escape the pressures of Paris by taking refuge in the "cool special green" of "French ruralism" which "he had hitherto looked only through the little oblong window of the picture-frame" (XI, iii, 301). The Lambinet introduced Strether to the European way of mind, prompting further investigations. The painting drew Strether out of his Puritan self, the conduct reflecting his socio-psychological habits, and presented him with *other* possibilities.

The effect of the Lambinet sets Strether's otherworld journey in motion. When he reincarnates his memory and re-solves the aesthetic representation "back into its elements", he returns to the site of his cultural roots. Only here is Strether able to revise the cultural presuppositions he abides by. When he recognizes that Chad and Marie are lovers, he wrecks the foundations on which his cultural belief system is based and allows himself to re-construct its premises.

The passage describing Strether's remembrance of the Lambinet elegantly codifies the epic dimensions of his epistemological narrative. I want to give special attention to a pair of telling phrases. The phrases, which complement each other, imply how the Lambinet engages the American

Strether in an aesthetic and historical otherworldliness. The Lambinet put Strether in a state of aesthetic rapture, a trance-state. He wanted to consume its dream-vision by purchasing the canvas. Unfortunately, he lacked enough money even to bid for it. The picture, he recalls, "had been offered ... at a price he had been instructed to believe the lowest ever named for a Lambinet, a price he had never felt so poor as on having to recognise, all the same, as *beyond a dream of possibility*" (XI, iii, 301) (my italics). The phrase "beyond a dream of possibility" suggests how by the end of the novel Strether has extended possibilities of cognition and emotion beyond even his most fervid fantasies. We might say that the Lambinet represents to Strether visual and mental experience deemed *im*possible for an American reared in and formed by New England culture. Despite his pecuniary limits, Strether is inspired by the painting to do something he rarely does, dream. "He had dreamed -- had turned and twisted possibilities for an hour: it had been the only adventure of his life in connexion with the purchase of a work of art" (XI, iii, 301).

Freud's diagnosis that the dream disguises a forbidden wish here applies. An "utterance of value" (New Introductory Lectures, 11) Strether's daydream reveals his desire to transgress the social codes prescribing the range of his possible contemplations. In the manner of the dreamer, Strether considers becoming someone else. The effect of the

Lambinet launches Strether on his otherworld journey by facilitating the process of his imaginative extension; it leads from without his self -- the complex of pictures, text, and tendings, his epistemological habitat -- to a sensible environment that is distinct, disruptive, *un*natural. This painting expresses the aestheticism of an "I" (and eye) formed through immersion in a tradition of art and mores that is otherworldly. In his returning to the fundamental scene of his counter-culture, Strether displays what Michael Seidel terms "the full range of the exilic course, extension and return" and additionally "the full power of exilic imagining, extension *as* return" (11).

Strether's inability to possess and consume the painting precipitates a crisis of selfhood which forces him to pose personally and culturally "unnatural" questions. Why not reconceive the criteria of ownership and, rather than paying in greenbacks and bodily carrying the miniature landscape home in a parcel (The six Lambinet canvases I have inspected in the basement warehouse of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts typically measured one by one and a half feet; they were all contained within over-sized gilt wood frames.), apprehend the aesthetic point of view commanded by its painter?[1]

The painting's expense is "beyond a dream of possibility". One of the ironies of what E.M. Forster calls the "hour-glass" pattern of The Ambassadors is that Strether

reverses the terms of the culturally possible and impossible. Since monetary and material possession of the painting are for Strether *out of the question*, he must learn to possess the painting through a culturally alien method. Possession by means of conversion to a discipline of vision associated with his European otherworld turns out to be his sole possibility. To become the Barbizon seer, Strether has to fathom Lambinet's landscape of mind. The way to convert himself to Lambinet's discipline of vision is to enter its representation. His desire to own the landscape painting converts itself into a need to enter the painting psychically in order to experience the *animus* and strain of mind refracted in its composition.

The dream phase of Strether's experience suggests that epic entrance is fostered by a state of entrancement: "He had dreamed, had twisted possibilities for an hour ... " Strether's "single adventure with the purchase of a work of art" turns into a different form of consumption fantasy. After his arrival in Paris, Strether finds it "interesting ... to feel that he was in the presence of new measures, other standards, a different scale of relations" (III, i, 77). Thirty years earlier, Strether's viewing the Lambinet landscape had initiated him to these "other standards". The results of this initiation remained a psychic residue throughout Strether's Odyssean adulthood. In Paris, Strether finds that it is "the way of nine-tenths of his current

impressions to act as recalls of things imagined"; this suggests the degree to which Strether's quotidian European experience is always conceived as a representation of his *a priori* imaginative experience of "Europe". His later re-collections express further entrances (and states of entrancement) within the otherworld landscape he entered when he set eyes on the Lambinet "and turned and twisted possibilities for an hour". John Carlos Rówe attacks this phenomenon of Stretherian experience from a different angle, writing that "No pure perception of an external object is possible, because every intuition is governed by those a priori concepts that permit us to think the world in the first place" (205).

By focusing Strether's experience in terms of possibility ("beyond a dream of possibility", "turned and twisted possibilities for an hour"), James revives the ages-old question of the decorum of epic-novelistic experience. A comparison of James's terms with those voiced by Fielding in one of his introductory chapters in Tom Jones reveals how James revitalizes the tradition of novelized Anglo-American epic that Fielding begins. In "A wonderful long Chapter concerning the Marvelous" (VIII, i), Fielding writes of reversing Aristotle's requirement that the author of epic "prefer probable impossibilities to improbable possibilities" (Butcher, Poetics, XXIV, 109-110):

> But we who deal in private characters, who search into the most retired recesses, and draw forth examples of

> virtue and vice, from holes and corners of the world, are in a more dangerous situation. As we have no public notoriety, no concurrent testimony, no records to support and corroborate what we deliver, it becomes us not only to keep within limits of possibility, but of probability too; and this more especially in painting what is greatly good and amiable. (Tom Jones, VIII, i, 364).

The narrator(s) of The Ambassadors straddle the divide between Aristotle and Fielding, epic romance and epic realism. In the end, James, as he claims in "The Art of Fiction", functions as a historian to chronicle realistically cases of "the improbably possible". James locates American "improbable possibility" in "Europe". European improbabilities subvert Strether's cultural assumptions and exhort him to assimilate cultural difference. The improbabilities faced by Strether exceed those faced by Tom Jones. While Harold Bloom complains that Strether "does not give us enough grief; his story is not painful enough to us" (Bloom, 8), it seems, rather, that Strether wins our admiration by his capacity to cope with the extremity of improbabilities that would overwhelm a man of less resolve. The extremity of this improbability in action justifies reading Strether's "Europe" as an otherworld of ghosts, devils, daemons, "enchantments" and "enchantresses" ... icons all of the hero's procreative, rapidly reacculturated mind.

The second telling phrase I want to scrutinize emphasizes how Strether's remembrance of the Lambinet marks a transgression. The "little Lambinet" is said to have "abode"

with Strether as "the picture he *would* have bought -- the particular production that had made him for the moment overstep the modesty of nature" (XI, iii, 301). In a scene where James depicts Strether literally enter the Lambinet painting, this remembrance equates modesty with the threshold of the picture plane. The self extends from its biological eye to encompass and appropriate the natural world as experienced within a framed picture. Thought is an act of self-extension. The Emersonian "I" conceives itself through intercourse with its otherworld, "Nature", the "not-me". "Nature" consists of "both nature and art, all other men and my own body" (Whicher, 22). When Emerson compares himself to a transparent eyeball he implies that his mental acquisition of "not-me-Nature" is transgressive. Strether's aesthetic rhapsody reprises the Emersonian dream of communing with a visual field cognitively situated *out there*. The self nourishes itself by enlarging its circle of reference to appropriate the "not-me" -- the new. Emerson declaims of the expansive character of vision. James affirms the tenet in his preface to Roderick Hudson: the "questions" with which the "art of representation" "bristles", cause its "practice" "to spread round us in a widening, not in a narrowing circle" (Roderick Hudson, 35). This epistemological model can be compared to the Dantesque conception of the journey through Paradise as an ascent through widening spheres.

We can understand Strether's transgression in the

pragmatist terms of Emerson and William James by simply inserting the possessive pronoun "his" before the phrase "modesty of nature". Strether oversteps the modesty of *his* nature in choosing to appropriate mentally a complex object. The self claims otherness by voicing its possessive pronoun. "To have a self I can *care* for," writes William James, "nature must at first present me with some object interesting enough to make me instinctively wish to appreciate it for its own sake, and out of it to manufacture one of those material, social, or spiritual selves ..." (Principles, I, 319). James is referring to Emersonian nature presented as potential consciousness and potential time. The passage appears in a section of the chapter, "The Consciousness of Self", headed "What Self is Loved in 'Self-Love'?" Later in the same paragraph, James offers further psychological terms to refine the "I" vs. "otherworld" equation.

> All the shiftings and expansions and contractions of the sphere of what shall be considered me and mine, are but results of the fact that certain *things* appeal to primitive and instinctive impulses of our nature, and that we follow their destinies with an excitement that owes nothing to a reflective source. (I, 319)

In the two uses of "nature" in these two sentences, William James means decidedly different things. In the first sentence, "nature presents"; in the second sentence "our nature" is *appealed to*. Presented nature is apparitional. It is the "great apparition that shines so peacefully around us" that Emerson would have us "interrogate" in "inquiring"

to "what end is nature?" (22). The Lambinet landscape is a Henry Jamesian version of the Emersonian apparition. By contrast, "our nature" is the mode of enlisting specific things in the affective and representational domain of the self. The absence or presence of the possessive pronoun emphasizes a distinction in nature's functions. In the first instance "nature" is simply "nature", unaffiliated; in the second instance, "nature" is "our nature", possessor and possessed. "Me, mine" and "not me, not mine" are the referential poles distinguishing self from otherworld. All of this accords with William James's idea that "thought tends to personal form". In a trenchant passage from his "Stream of Thought" chapter, James describes mental possessiveness as the "elementary psychic fact" since "every thought" is "owned" by a self. (Principles, I, 226)

The implications for Strether's Lambinet episode are subversive. A driven, assertive intellect becomes a necessary trait of the New England self *circa* 1900. Eradicating Puritan "modesty", this hubristic intellect is characterized by a Ulyssean experiential acquisitiveness. Throughout the *Commedia* there persists the Ulyssean refrain to go "piu oltre", to exceed geographical and epistemological limits. Dante's invocation of Ulysses is complex and paradoxical since he, Virgil, and Ovid all portray Ulysses as a master of deception rather than as the archetype of Homeric wisdom. The medieval Ulysses drowns

after exhorting his crew to row to the limits of the known world. He is vanquished by the unnamed force, his ship's prow disappearing in the sea "as pleased an Other" ("e la prora ira in giù, com' altrui piacque" ["Inferno", XXVI, 141]).

Although placed among the fraudulent in the eighth *bolgia* of the ninth infernal circle, Ulysses is the alter-ego of Dante.[2] In the "Paradiso", a mere six cantos before the pilgrim envisions the Trinity, Ulysses is feted for venturing the "varco folle" or "mad crossing". To venture in one's otherworld, be it Virgilian, Dantesque, or Jamesian, is to execute this mad crossing. In The Ambassadors, Strether's rites of cognition can be construed as his mad crossings, aestheticized by the figure of a passage across the frame of a painting. Strether's incremental sense of entry in his European otherworld reflects his venturing another of these crossings within its "clever canvases".

Both Michael Seidel and Charles Feidelson have discussed how transgression is an attribute of Jamesian narrative. Seidel reads Strether as imaginatively enlivened by his exilic perspective. In "coming out the other side" of "his total little experience" (James's words in the "Project for Novel"), Strether epitomizes the "imaginative passage" associated with Romanticist projectionism. Strether undergoes a rite of displacement, inscribing himself in his newly fathomed imaginative domain. "'The other side'",

writes Seidel,

> is neither a complete narrative mystery nor a simple transcontinental romp, but an imaginative passage, a projection of the reality that supposedly inaugurates it. In that complex relation between novelistic mimesis -- human events, activities, motives, manners, expressions, desires, fears -- and the illusionistic space in which mimesis takes place, the notion of crossing to 'the other side' literally perpetuates the metaphor that grants fiction its imaginative domain. (131)

The intriguing adverb in the passage from Seidel is "supposedly": instead of being determinate, the "reality" that begins the imaginative passage stands in a symbiotic relation to what subsists in the projected imaginative domain. As a European "paysage", a French "landscape", the Lambinet precipitates a sequence of imaginative rites of passage characterized by dual stages of exile and homewardness. The Lambinet represents the reality Strether extends and the imaginative domain he extends to. The picture is otherworld fore-shadow and otherworld fulfillment, Jamesian alpha and omega.

James regards human nature as socially-constructed. Strether's imaginative passage represents his shifting association with one social construction of human nature (American) to his association with another (European). To overstep the modesty of nature is to pass within a space of cultural difference. In relating the imaginative passage to the experience of exile, Seidel stresses that Strether gains a "supplement" of imaginative activity from being

geographically displaced. This supplement of enriched space and time resembles the windfall from attention earned by the otherworld explorer in classical and medieval epic. Through his immersion in Paris, "Strether", says Seidel, "no longer serves as the material agent for a family factory, but as a barterer for Europe's historical, epochal, and epic time, the slow, steady accretions of what culture needs to save itself. It is in this sense that the quality of the European experience alters everything for him, makes him imaginatively exilic" (143).

Strether's exile begins when he first sees the Lambinet and oversteps "Nature's modesty". In the Luxembourg Gardens scene, Strether remembers himself as someone who "had failed, as he considered, in everything, in each relation and in half a dozen trades" (II, 61). His wandering from job to job suggests how he becomes "exilic" while marooned in his homeland; he thinks about "Europe" while trying to live in America. In "America", Strether adopts roles that stifle the quest his Lambinet prompted him to begin. As an American consumer, Strether seeks "possibilities" of owning the Lambinet landscape by making the money to buy himself a Barbizon picture. He fails. He remembers his trip to Europe and his vows to pursue a Continental education as a second form of failed quest.

Strether is equipped to exceed his modesty because he is a "man of imagination". Charles Feidelson associates

James's man of the imagination with "the epic hero of the Romantic poets, from Blake's 'Real Man, the Imagination', to the 'major man', the 'giant on the horizon', of Wallace Stevens ... and ... the Wordsworthian Poetic Everyman, whom Wordsworth understood to 'represent' -- at once to depict and himself to *be* -- by means of his long poetic journey into himself in The Prelude" (336). James's man of imagination proves a variation of the Romantic type, a "comparative case ... only in the minor scale" (James's Preface to The Ambassadors, 3). Feidelson observes James to dramatize the "problematic interplay" between the Romanticist's premises and the premises of a "realistic" social novel, considering the experiences of the "ontological image-in-ation" to condition the self's "coming into being". James, says Feidelson, understood the "salvation of the real" to necessitate the "imaginative initiative" (336). In national and epic terms, the *salvaged real* constitutes the American socio-cultural "spirit".

In an essay in his miniature volume Picture and Text on the American illustrator George Boughton's treatments of Dutch landscape, James admires Boughton for his visual sense. Boughton's pictures are "the delightful, irresponsible, visual, sensual, pictorial, capricious impressions of a painter in a strange land, the person surely whom at particular moments one would give most to be" (28).[3] Looking at the Lambinet, Strether sees from the

cognitive perspective of the artist who so conceived the painting. This act of homage turns Strether into a lay disciple of Lambinet. Lambinet is a painter *from* a strange land. Strether becomes the *painterly thinker* whose palette consists of the visual phenomena of his personalized "strange land". As much as a desired destination, the Lambinet landscape becomes a credo.

The painting codifies a secular, twentieth-century revision of the Dantesque and Miltonic myths of redemption. Dante conceives his hero as lost in the midst of his way ("nel mezzo del cammin") and able to right himself only by journeying in the Christian otherworld. Milton also tropes the process of consciousness in terms of a middle passage. It is no coincidence that the first and last words of Paradise Lost combine in the phrase "Of way". Milton makes Adam's drama representative of the Puritan during the English Restoration. The "solitary way" of Adam and Eve is sustainable only through the supplement of the otherworldly. Adam derives his otherworldly supplement from his conversations with the angels Raphael, Michael, and, in a variety of skewed contexts, Satan.

Strether's way to redemption is aestheticized as the method of the painter surveying a strange land. The productions of this merchant aesthete have value in a market of epistemological exchange. In The Ambassadors, the way "home" involves the aestheticization of otherness. The

aestheticized other is appropriated within the sphere of the self. The Jamesian way is conducted as rites of passage through successive representations of otherness. Strether is distinguished for his appreciation, rather than his formation, of an aesthetic. However, his experience of appreciation turns out to have aesthetic characteristics. Like Leopold Bloom, Strether displays an artist's sensibility without having chosen art as a vocation. Strether's wants to "own" paintings by seeing well enough to earn the "vision" inhering in these "representations". This understanding of ownership follows the model of psychic appropriation that William James outlines in The Principles of Psychology: "The will's work", writes James, "is in most cases practically ended when the bare presence to our thought of the unnaturally welcome object is secured" (II, 564). This securing of the "bare presence" describes Strether's appropriation of aestheticized otherness.

The "mad crossing" describes the immodest passage from the perspective of the observer assessing a hung painting to a more authoritative perspective located *somewhere* inside. This crossing to the other side represents archetypal motion in James, a mode of motion that, in its historicized context, evokes the Dantesque "moto spiritale". In the *Commedia*, Virgil explains moral choices in terms of the affective disposition to apprehend objects. This affective disposition is expressed through "motions of the spirit",

"moto spiritale": "Vostra apprensiva da esser verace/tragge intenzione, e dentro a voi la spiega,/sì che l'animo ad essa volger face;/e se, rivolto, inver' di lei si piega,/quel piegare è amor, quell'è natura/che per piacer di novo in voi si lega./Poi, come'l foco movesi in altura/per la sua forma ch'è nata a salire/là dove più in sua matera dura,/così l'animo preso entra in disire,/ch'è moto spiritale, e mai non posa/fin che la cosa amata il fa gioire". ("Your apprehension draws an image from/a real object and expands upon/that object until soul has turned towards it;/and if, so turned, the soul tends steadfastly, then that propensity is love -- it's nature/that joins the soul in you, anew, through beauty./Then, just as flames ascend because the form of fire was fashioned to fly upward, toward/the stuff of its own sphere, where it lasts longest,/so does the soul, when seized, move into longing, a motion of the spirit, never resting till the beloved thing has made it joyous".) (*Purgatorio*, XVIII, 22-33)[4]

The collapsing together of the object and the objectifier is occasioned by the spiritual motion of the objectifier. This motion is generated by perception of the alien, the otherworldly. Throughout his career, James cultivates a poetics *of motion* by and through his developing relations with a cultural otherworld. After he writes The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and Golden Bowl, James reconceives his native land as an otherworld that will

generate the "poetry of motion". In a letter to brother William, dated May 24, 1903, he casts himself as a wayfarer seeking new "possibilities of the prose of *production*" from his American scene.

> There's nothing to be done, by me, any more, in the way of writing, *de chic* little worthless, superficial, *poncif* articles about Spain, Greece or Egypt. They are the sort of thing that doesn't work in at all to what now most interests me: which is human Anglo-Saxondom, with the American extension, or opportunity for it, so far as it may be given me still to work the same. If I *shouldn't*, in other words, bring off going to the U.S., it would simply mean giving up, for the remainder of my days, all chance of such experience as is represented by interesting "travel" -- and which in this special case of my own would be much more than so represented (granting the travel to be American.) I should settle down to a mere mean oscillation from here to London and from London here -- with nothing (to speak of) left, more, to happen to me in life in the way of (the poetry of) motion. That spreads before me as for mind, imagination, special, "professional" labour, a thin, starved, lonely, defeated, *beatise* prospect: in comparison with which your own circumgyrations have been as the adventures of Marco Polo or H.M. Stanley. I *should* like to think of going once or twice more again, for a sufficient number of months, to Italy, where I know my ground sufficiently to be able to plan for such quiet work there as might be needfully involved. But the day is past when I can "write stories" about Italy with a mind otherwise pre-occupied. My native land, which time, absence and change have, in a funny sort of way, made almost as romantic to me as "Europe", in dreams of my earlier time here, used to be -- the actual bristling (as fearfully bristling as you like) U.S.A. have the merit and the precious property that they meet and fit into my ("creative") preoccupations; and that the period there which should represent the poetry of motion, the one big taste of travel not supremely missed, would carry with it also possibilities of the prose of *production* (that is of the production of prose) such as no other mere bought, paid for, sceptically and halfheartedly worried through

> adventure, by land or sea, would be able to give me. (Letters, 270-271)

"America" sizes up as the "particular production" that will inspire James to dream beyond possibilities and to reconceive "reality". Travel in America would be "interesting"; "interest" creates the range and scope of the "poetry of motion". Strether, too, runs on a secular, aesthetic "moto-spiritale". Overstepping the modesty of *his* nature, Strether imaginatively enters what has "been for the most part *his* land of fancy ... practically as distant as Greece, but practically also well nigh as consecrated" (XI, iii 301). By using the phrase "particular production", James establishes a correspondence between the historical reference condensed into an object and the merits of attending to it: lamenting the effacement of New York's historical architecture in The American Scene, James learns what Strether learns in exploring his Lambinet: "There we catch the golden truth which so much of the American world strikes us as positively organized to gainsay, the truth that production takes time, and that the production of interest, in particular, takes *most* time" (482).

The Lambinet is a particular production that generates in Strether a "poetry of motion"; it codifies cultural activities and artistic movements that warrant Strether's "production" of interest. "What [Strether] sees", says Feidelson, "[sic] is an actual life behind him in which he has failed to 'live' precisely in the degree that he has

failed to 'see', and a possible life of seeing before him, or at least a life in which he will see what a life of seeing *consists in*" (331) (my emphasis). Strether's "possible life of seeing" lies precisely *in*side (and consists *in)* the Lambinet. The painting's frame affords Strether entrance into an otherworld where he can reassess all the presuppositions of sight and judgment undergirding his New England life of stasis. Through investigation of his landscape, Strether discerns and joins a community of the interested, both European and American expatriate friends. In joining this community, he repatriates himself.

In sketching Strether's relation to the Lambinet, James constructs a new American knowledge paradigm which effectively revises the philosophical principles of the prevailing Emersonian paradigm. To appreciate the character of this paradigm shift, we must dissect the turn of phrase describing how wonder at the Lambinet caused Strether "for the moment [to] overstep the modesty of nature". The Emersonian "I" (realized, in the transparent eyeball passage, through communion with the "bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight") evinces a Puritan modesty, an intrinsic restraint. This "I" knows little about the social ferocity of Paris *salons* or of the female cosmopolites who mentor green young Americans or of the evil incarnated in European history. "Modesty" results from the Emersonian "I's" interrogation of "Nature". The "modesty of Nature" can

be recast as "Nature's modesty" without altering James's meaning. The possessive implies that the modesty of Emersonian "Nature" becomes a trait of the Emersonian "I". In the Emersonian paradigm, the American self embraces its "Other", "Nature", and re-conceives itself as "modest". My choice of erotic verbs (embrace, conceive) is intended to expose the irony of this erotic action of consciousness leading to the formation of a "modest" American self.

The Jamesian I and its otherworld do not collaborate to produce a self with either strictly Puritan or strictly Emersonian characteristics of modesty. To the contrary, Jamesian otherworld experience evinces the transgression of this culturally-specific form of modesty. Mrs. Newsome personifies the kind of cultural modesty which Strether transgresses. She is the only woman Strether has known "even at Woollett, as to whom his conviction was positive that to lie was beyond her art" (II, ii, 68). Strether is likewise modest in the sense of his limited capacity to dream himself into someone new, either the collector financially able to possess the Lambinet or the aesthete imbued with appreciation for the little yellow volumes (Strether's have become "stale and soiled" somewhere in his attic) and up on the Paris fads. Strether's is the same modesty that deprives Mrs. Newsome of any facility for deception. This facility for deception refers to the facility for self-representational recombination valued by Nietzsche. In the

essay "On Truth and Lies in the Non-Moral Sense", Nietzsche celebrates "art's mastery over life" in Greek culture and the intuitive dreamer who evinces this triumph of life "disguised as illusion and beauty".

> All the manifestations of such a life will be accompanied by this dissimulation, this disavowal of indigence, this glitter of metaphorical intuitions, and, in general, this immediacy of deception: neither the house, nor the gait, nor the clothes, nor the clay jugs give evidence of having been invented because of a pressing need. It seems as if they were all intended to express an exalted happiness, an Olympian cloudlessness, and, as it were, a playing with seriousness (90-91).

Nietzsche's epic individual is an aesthetic re-fashioner who embodies "the drive toward the formation of metaphors ... the fundamental human drive, which one cannot for a single instant dispense with in thought, for one would thereby dispense with man himself" (88-89). This drive "seeks a new realm and another channel for its activity, and it finds this in *myth* and in *art* generally"; it "continually manifests an ardent desire to refashion the world which presents itself to waking man, so that it will be as colorful, irregular, lacking in results and coherence, charming, and eternally new as the world of dreams" (89). These are the moral characteristics James prescribes through his portrait of a New England gentleman. This gentleman must possess the representational resources to refashion himself repeatedly through the application of new metaphors. He makes his otherworldly way by fashioning the phenomena of

his unnatural, culturally new experience into new metaphors. These metaphors each serve as elaborations of his evolving self-portrait in pictures and text.

This relation between representational recombination and self re-fashioning emerges as a crucial subject in several relevant works of social and literary criticism. In "The Jamesian Lie", Leo Bersani writes of how James regarded "fictional invention" to be "neither evasive or tautological" but, instead, what "constitutes the self" (132). According to Bersani, James valued semiotic and aesthetic "inventions" for the freedom they afford the self. Bersani emphasizes the "relationship between dishonesty and possibility", between self-inscription and a salutary newness. However, Bersani portrays a Jamesian "I" as passive rather than appropriative, an "I" that is "merely the neutral territory occupied by language"; conversely, I would argue, with Susan Griffin, for the Jamesian "I" as a master artificer, a driven constructor of metaphors in the Nietzschean sense.[5]

Victor Turner addresses the self's capacity for re-fashioning in a discussion of liminality, understanding self-metamorphosis to perpetuate itself during liminal, leisure-cultural activities that facilitate what he terms "ludic recombination". Turner grounds his analysis in a broader discussion of "comparative symbology" -- the comparison of different symbolic systems. In the liminal states

defined by initiation rites in various cultures, the initiates are in their transitional states "temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure" (27). Their status is akin to that of the Jamesian hero at the moment of "otherworld entry". Entry of this type combines a sudden thrusting in a new psycho-social domain with fluid self-representational recombination climaxing in a new state of self-portraiture and self-understanding. Turner writes that the

> passage from one social status to another is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another. This may take the form of a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas, one associated with the subject's pre-ritual or preliminal status, and the other with his post-ritual or postliminal status. (25)

In James this passage (through a landscape that is a scene of rites of passages) is conditioned by a state of entrancement and fulfilled by the act of entering. During "liminality", says Turner, "people 'play' with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them" (27); entrance and symbolic reorganization accompany one another. Liminality results in the protagonist's construction of new metaphors. The obvious example in The Ambassadors of liminality, and of the resulting metamorphoses in the protagonist's self-representation, is Strether's experience in the Lambinet. This climactic episode is also exemplary. Otherworld entry, liminality, and self-representational recombination occur

every time Strether addresses one of the "clever canvases" between which he moves throughout his stay in Paris.

We find a further triumphing of the recombinational self in the pair of essays on Emerson that Stanley Cavell appends to The Senses of Walden. Cavell quotes from "Experience" where Emerson writes that "the secret of the illusoriness [of life] is in the necessity of a succession of moods or objects. Gladly we would anchor, but the anchorage is quicksand. This onward trick of nature is too strong for us. *Pero si muove*." Cavell comments that

> The fact that we are taken over by this succession, this onwardness, means that you can think of it as at once a succession of moods (inner matters) and a succession of objects (outer matters). This very evanescence of the world proves its existence to me; it *is* what vanishes from me. I guess this is not realism exactly; but it is not solipsism either. (Senses, 127)

The roles of the Jamesian liar, the Nietzschean intuiter, Turner's liminal hero, and Emerson's mood-conceiver overlap in their conceptions of spatialized consciousness and of the mode of appropriating the otherworldly as a way of re-fashioning self-representations. Each of these theorists understands impoverishment in terms of the incapacity to construct the new through acceptance from the universe of "all the colors it wears" (Cavell paraphrasing Emerson, 128). Each agrees with Heidegger's assertion that "questioning is the piety of thinking" (quoted in Cavell, 131). Questioning is an act of Heideggerian "throwness" upon the universe. In questioning,

the epic hero subjects himself to states of entrancement and entry. Entry is a pietistic state, a placing of the self betwixt and between, a reconfigurement of the world as self-knowledge. It is the colonization of the imagined, the familiarization of the foreign, and the upsetting of the facts.

A discussion relating Puritan modesty and the transgressive epistemological impulse addresses the limits of knowledge divinely prescribed in Paradise Lost. Raphael explains these limits to Adam:

> Yet what thou canst attain, which best may serve
> To glorify the Maker, and infer
> Thee also happier, shall not be withheld
> Thy hearing, such Commission from above
> I have receiv'd, to answer thy desire
> Of knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain
> To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope
> Things not reveal'd, which th'invisible King,
> Only Omniscient, hath suppress in Night,
> To none communicable in Earth or Heaven:
> Anough is left besides to search and know.
> (VII, 115-125)

By overstepping the modesty of nature, Strether transgresses this knowledge boundary. He leaps without the "little" "window" of the Lambinet and plunges into the boundlessness of his aestheticized fantasy. Strether believes he has "at a bound" developed a "fearless facility in French". After he reunites with Chad in the box at the *Comedie Francaise* and returns home to marvel at the evidence of Chad's new refinement, he finds himself carried imaginatively onward by the "abounding results". Territorially speaking, Strether remakes himself by

appropriating the forbidden regions of his otherworld. The irony of his extensive conquest of the otherworldly is that the scope of his conquest matches in exhaustiveness those of his failures in "America". His vocational failings, his "un-Americanness", his incapacity for living the American dream all help validate his European windfall.

James spatializes his characters' respective senses of their own pasts. During the scene in the Luxembourg Gardens, Strether reviews his past life, accepting "the fact that, as he perfectly now saw, he had ceased even to measure his meagreness, a meagreness that sprawled, in this retrospect, vague and comprehensive, stretching back like some unmapped Hinterland from a rough coast-settlement" (II, ii, 63). So spatialized, Strether's self is as desolate as an American prairie. By the novel's end, Strether's psycho-historical state is inverted: "You're immense", Maria Gostrey tells him. Maria associates Strether with an immense space different from that of the "rough coast-settlement". She associates him rather with Notre Dame de Paris, saturated with civilization. In Paradise Lost, Milton associates this kind of largeness with the object of scientific (read civilized) discourse. Raphael instructs Adam to forego investigation of the starry heavens; this cosmological text constitutes an immeasurableness that, if overly probed, will damn rather than redeem man.

In Paradise Lost, Satan subverts the divine

epistemology, repeatedly seeking knowledge beyond bounds. He encourages others (the other fallen angels, Sin, Death, Eve) to do the same. Satan epitomizes the epic consciousness. The damned angel demonstrates the way the epic mind tends to supersede its own thoughts with new ones that reconstitute moral frameworks and define new self-limits.

> And in the lowest deep a lower deep
> Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,
> To which the hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.
> (IV, 76-78)

Satan knows himself newly through each psychic incorporation of a newly fathomed depth of Hell. Spatialized consciousness accumulates as a function of the self's accommodating the otherworldly. Each epic hero grows by extending its conscious domain through otherworldly space.

When he for the moment oversteps the modesty of nature, Strether reveals his paradoxical relation to time. He is contained by the moment during which he studies the Lambinet and dreams of owning it. But he also experiences an imaginative ex-stasis that puts him in a different relation to this moment. In this second sense, he *steps out of* the moment. As Strether's otherworld, the Lambinet is a-temporal. To enter the Lambinet is for Strether to step out of time. In returning to the idea of spatialized consciousness, we can posit, more complexly, that Strether dilates the moment. His expansion of consciousness is engineered by this temporal extension. His ex-stasis reconceives the boundaries of his socio-historical self.

The phrase "for the moment to overstep the modesty of nature" suggests how a given culture's habits of vision create its experience of time. To overstep for the moment is to reconceive the moment as described by the Puritan eye and, therefore, to reconceive the prevailing cultural experience of time. To overstep nature's modesty is not to conform to the moment as constructed by the Puritan modes of self-seeking. The action creates a condition wherein Strether is briefly *not natural* and, thus, not American. For the moment to overstep the modesty of nature is to redefine oneself vis à vis the moment, recognized as epic time, what Seidel terms "the slow steady accretions of what culture needs to save itself" (143). It is to penetrate between temporal nodes and seek the unnatural, otherworldly experience there. Unnatural experience consists of the source-phenomena of a consciousness which re-constitutes cultural time. To overstep the modesty of nature is for Strether to free himself from Puritan time and to place himself in a Puritan nowhere.

In Notes of a Son and Brother, Henry James, remarking on his father's writerly pursuits, his disinclination to "attend to business", locates the James family in this Puritan nowhere.

> To attend strictly to business was to be invariably *there*, on a certain spot in a certain place; just as to be nowhere in particular, to *have* to be nowhere, told the queer tale of a lack or of a forfeiture, or possibly even of a state of intrinsic unworthiness. I have already expressed

> how few of these elements of the background we ourselves had ever had either to add or to subtract from, and how this of itself did after a fashion "place" us in the small Newport Colony of the despoiled and disillusioned, the mildly, the reminiscentially desperate. As easy as might be, for the time, I have also noted, was our footing there; but I have not, for myself, forgotten, or even now outlived, the particular shade of satisfaction to be taken in one's thus being in New England without being of it. (Autobiography, 305)

The Newport Colony that offered Henry James affiliations to William Morris Hunt, John LaFarge, and T.S. Perry is a sort of fertile "nowhere" out of which he can reconceive his sense of self through his sense of place. By inhabiting this "nowhere", James reconstructs his cultural and national loyalties. In this "nowhere", he re-fashions the moment by quarrying otherworldly references. Culture proves to be consciousness rendered *in the form of* a chronology, rendered, thus, as a language. There are traces of this method in Paradise Lost, where Milton refers to the "Now" within which "th'Almighty Father from above,/from the pure Empyrean where he sits/High Thron'd above all highth, bend down his eye,/His own works and their works at once to view" (III, 56-59). This "now" becomes dilated and extended through the narrative elaboration of the moment; the "many" (the numerous phenomena observed in the otherworldly ex-stasis) are registered in the "one" (the language that temporalizes eternity with all its otherworldly figments).

In James, as in his epic precursors, the hero can only

correct his self-vision by stepping out of time. He reconstructs "the moment" when he returns from his otherworld by rendering his historical account. He represents the whirlwind of sensible experience in his analytic narrative. His Lambinet experience turns Strether into a lay painter of the mind, a dreamer and dream-interpreter, and a figure and figurer of time.

> He found on the spot the image of his recent history; he was like one of the figures of the old clock at Berne. *They* came out, on one side, at their hour, jigged along their little course in the public eye, and went in on the other side. He too had jigged his little course -- him too a modest retreat awaited. (XII, v, 342)

The fate of the post-Christian epic explorer is to become a combination rhapsodist and stern analyst of time. In late James, Strether, functioning as this time figurer, is revealed as a vessel of new knowledge, a construct of memory. Strether's personal memories, enriching and expansive, form his representative consciousness. Memory is what the epic consciousness is designed to embody, the epic muse being Mnemosyne, goddess of memory. Northrop Frye reminds us that, in its oral forms, the epic narrative served numerous mnemonic functions. The Greek epicist was compelled to remember myriad catalogues in addition to precise cultural information. "In Homer", writes Frye, "in the perhaps more primitive Hesiod, in the poets of the heroic age of the North, we can see the kind of thing the poet had to remember. Lists of kings and foreign tribes, myths and genealo-

gies of gods, historical traditions, the proverbs of popular wisdom, taboos, lucky and unlucky days, charms, the deeds of tribal heroes, were some of the things that came out when the poet unlocked the word-hoard" (Anatomy, 57). "The encyclopedic knowledge in such poems", Frye continues, "is regarded sacramentally, as a human analogy of divine knowledge" (57). Eric Havelock terms The Iliad "a kind of metrical textbook"; the ancient epic form was didactic, its lines reading "like a running report of the society to which the bard addresses his tale, but a report drafted also as a series of recommendations" (87).

The Ambassadors concludes by celebrating the scope and range of Strether's memories of his Parisian adventure. These memories are implicitly related to the knowledge of how to live with which the American convert Chad Newsome has been inculcated. By recalling their early discussion of the unnamed article in London, Maria Gostrey demonstrates how much Strether's otherworld experience has obliterated concern with the article made back "home". In failing to name the article produced by the Newsome business, Strether effectively blots the article from his epic consciousness. It is supplanted as an object of his consideration by the "empire of things" Parisian, French, and European. The effects of this empire domesticate Strether in a state of consciousness essentially all-knowing about the questions (if not the *hows*) of life. Strether's new home is located in

and through his recollections of his recent experience:

> Before he could say yes, however, she had put it to him for other matters. Did he remember, did he remember -- this and that of their first days? He remembered everything, bringing up with humour even things of which she professed no recollection, things she vehemently denied; and falling back above all on the great interest of their early time, the curiosity felt by both of them as to where he would "come out". They had so assumed it was to be in some wonderful place -- they had thought of it as so very *much* out. Well, that was doubtless what it had been -- since he had come out just there. He was out, in truth, as far as it was possible to be, and must now rather bethink himself of getting in again. (XII, v, 342)

Strether's experience of epic entrance completes itself. He enters so much into "his total little experience" that he "comes out the other side". The above passage demonstrates how much the expansion of Strether's consciousness is predicated on his dual experience of entrancement and entry. Through his acts of otherworld entrance, Strether significantly expands his memories. Mnemonically speaking he becomes, as Maria insists, "immense". In the spirit of the epic, James is concerned with Strether's accumulating consciousness that has value. This valued consciousness equips the Jamesian hero to master drawing room life, to be societally deft, to know (like Chad Newsome) how to live.

Epic entrance climaxes in periodic experiences of a retrospective vista. Strether's recollections define a significant backward expanse that he and Maria review as Dante and Beatrice review the airscape of Paradise. When in *Paradiso* Dante and Beatrice prepare to ascend from the

sphere of the fixed stars to the Primum Mobile, Beatrice tells the pilgrim to "Let your eyes/look down and see how far you have revolved" ("Adima/il viso e guarda come tu se volto") (XXVII, 77-78). The pilgrim swiftly surveys the airscape he has penetrated through contemplative discourse with the redeemed souls. The pilgrim's self-development is measured through the spaces and discourses he has entered and penetrated. Strether and Maria Gostrey partake in a comparable act of narrative recollection. Together they review a narrative journey characterized by a plenitude of human relation braved and explored.

Strether turns cultural unnaturalness into cultural newness. In returning from the otherworld journey, he renders temporally the sensory whirlwind. He becomes this *temporal* representation, a cultural signifier. In the phrase "him too a modest retreat awaited", James implies the hermeneutical circle Strether has made from the moment when he first saw the Lambinet canvas to the "now" wherein he foresees his imminent, "modest retreat" home. Strether's movement from overstepping modesty to modestly retreating home describes his hermeneutical circle.

The Jamesian idea that epic entrance is occasioned by states of imaginative entrancement compares to Freud's theory of mental process as a function of decoding the dream narrative. I want now to analyze elaborately a Freudian assertion that appears in a footnote in the introductory

chapter of The Interpretation of Dreams to show the way that Freudian models of thought virtually replicate the transgressive patterns of Jamesian consciousness and classical epic otherworld consciousness. "Every dream," writes Freud, "has at least one point at which it is unfathomable; a central point, as it were, connecting it with the unknown" (Interpretation of Dreams, 22). Freudian dream interpretation is driven by two objectives: the linear interpretative resolution of the condensed symbolic narrative and forward progress on one's mental path. In meeting the first objective, the method of dream interpretation renders the sensory mysteries of the dream comprehensible. In meeting the second, dream interpretation abets the thinker's resolution of the signifying obstacles impeding his progress. The thinker must *be* motion; he must embody the principle of *moto spiritale* in its up-to-date sense.

In Freudian terms, every successful dream interpretation culminates in the sudden consciousness of a new ignorance brought on by the interpreter's recognizing the newly unfathomable point. The end of every interpretive stage doubles as a new beginning. After fathoming the symbolic landscape, the dream interpreter stands primed to encounter its unfathomable central point. He passes through this central point as across the threshold of a newly-observed painting. The Freudian interpretative narrative never lacks for unfathomable points marking the end of dream intervals

and the stations of the "interpretative way".

We can say that every dream interpretation ends in the failure of not resolving a central point in the dream narrative. And yet awareness of this unfathomable point -- the self's intimately experiencing its unfathomability -- is the condition that renews the process of dream interpretation and sustains mental life. The unfathomable point presents the dream interpreter with a threshold inviting his entry within the ensuing phase of mental life. The Freudian journey describes the ritualistic movement from the sensed symbolic whirlwind to the ordered interpretative representation. Rather than signifying an end to the mental journey, this state of interpreted order allows the journey to continue *through* the unfathomable point. However transitory this arrived-at state of interpretive order may be, it nonetheless defines the self. It constitutes the "history", the "personal consciousness", sustaining the Freudian self against the vertigo of its unknown.

The denotations of the word "fathom" reveal the overlap between Freud's conception of mental process and that embodied by literary otherworld narratives. "Fathom" (from the Teutonic "faeOm") means "the two arms outstretched". The Teutonic root of the word means "spreading, broad" while the Greek root of the word means "to spread out". The noun form of "faeOm" means "the embracing arm" while the transitive verb form of the word means "to encircle with the arms". The

related word "fathomable" means "comprehensible, intelligible". In combining the definitions for fathom and fathomable, we deduce that "fathoming" can be figured by "the action of encircling with the arms" -- of epistemological framing -- while fathomless would be figured as "that which cannot be clasped with the arms" -- that which epistemologically remains unframed. These definitions encourage reading Freudian mental process through the epic motif of the embrace of the shade. In chapter 5, I shall read both late Jamesian narrative and classical epic narrative through the motif of the vain epic embrace to reveal the gestural and historicist nature of the mental process encoded in both narratives.

I am not arguing that James consciously appropriates the Freudian model of mental process. Rather, I invoke Freud to illuminate further some of the primary tendencies of Jamesian epic consciousness. This Freudian model for the *action* of mental life resembles the Jamesian as it is codified by the Stretherian journey of imaginative inquiry and compositional intensity. James figures the Freudian process in terms of the tropes and tastes of Paris. Strether moves through Paris "as in a gallery, from clever canvas to clever canvas"; but he also moves inside each of these canvases *after* he confronts them. Strether's quotidian experience in Paris is as sensorially stimulating and vertiginous as the symbolic field of the Freudian dream. We can read Jamesian

narrative through the Freudian model of interpretative progress from point to previously uninterpreted point by translating Freud's terms into those of the art admirer.

Strether is housed by his visual life as though it were a gallery of French paintings. He moves through the Parisian scene like a man interpreting his own dreams. The unfathomable point of the Freudian dream translates as the Jamesian point of vantage beyond the threshold of the particular picture Strether is thinking through at a given time. Strether gets the "unfathomable point" when he crosses the threshold of the picture frame containing sensations he has yet to compose as self-representation. Strether's experience of his visual mental life is dramatized as a succession of threshold crossings into the unknown -- the unconscious (in Freud's terms), the uncomposed (in James's terms). Another good example of this epistemological action is provided in The American Scene where, as the *epic conquistador*, James describes the process of cultural decodification in terms of the action of penetrating scenes presented for his inspection like landscape paintings.

In the American Scene, James regards his shoreline view of Cape Cod as a "pendent, pictured Japanese screen or banner ... a delightful little triumph of 'impressionism', which, during my short visit at least, never departed, under any provocation from its type" (34). As he takes in the landscape's "couchant promontory ... half bosky with ever-

green boskage of the elegant kakemono, half bare with the bareness of refined, the *most* refined, New England decoration", James relishes the sensuality of "having [the landscape turned Japanese screen] so exactly under one's hand". The moment of optic caress recalls the one where Strether admires Maria Gostrey in her cut-down dress with its décolleté as they dine before attending the London theater. Here the landscape is feminized and rendered an object of intercourse. James's satisfaction quickly turns to hermeneutic desire. Unsatisfied by superficial pleasures, the "restless analyst" dreams of historical revelations. James is aroused to plunge inside and disrupt the landscape's "purity of style" in the effort to decode its socio-cultural significance. Despite its "purity of style", its "generous Boston bungalow", its "verandahs haunted with old summer-times", the "sweet promontory" interferes "no whit"

> with the human, the social question always dogging the steps of the ancient contemplative person and making him, before each scene, wish really to get *into* the picture, to cross as it were, the threshold of the frame. (384)

To cross the threshold of the frame is to decode the American dreamscape. James's own question excites him so much that he is willing to hurtle the frame of the peaceful landscape in desire of answering it. James lets his interrogative *bufera* sweep him into the picture. "Before each scene", the Jamesian "I" proves unable to compose in any way but by interrogatively penetrating the "clever canvases"

presented. Cast as the "ancient contemplative person", James allies himself with the ageless *antiquario* of The Golden Bowl as a fellow old world emissary capable of Tiresian divinations. The questions driving James inside his aestheticized landscape address his concerns with *how* we live:

> The *manners*, the manners, where and what are they, and what have they to tell? -- that haunting curiosity, essential to the honour of his office, yet making it much of a burden, fairly buzzes about his [the ancient contemplative person's] head the more pressingly in proportion as the social mystery, the lurking human secret, seems more shy. (385)

Here we can return to our comparison of Jamesian and Freudian schemes of thought, especially to the Freudian notion that thought plays out through successive cognitive embraces of successive "unfathomable points". To be born into the picture by the above question is for the Jamesian "I" to commit itself to resolving the enigma of the present scene. It is to embrace the mystery. Once he gives these manners their voice and form, the Jamesian interpreter will stand confronted with a successive "unfathomable point". The "unfathomable point" will be resolved in a subsequent "clever canvas" constituting a new retrospective interpretative narrative account.

James must elaborate the Cape Cod "pendent screen" into a succeeding work of mental "art" wherein he can at least tentatively resolve the question of the manners and what they have to tell. His penetration of this picture leads to his creation of a subsequent picture. This second picture is

the output of steely-eyed analysis. It reveals the art of retrospection. The movement by both James and Strether from "canvas to clever canvas" describes the action of their thought. Every mental canvas has a sequel that evolves from the unresolved point of the former one. The new picture, the evidence of things *not yet* seen, is experienced *as a function* of the restless analyst's penetration of the picture of the Cape. His interrogative penetration of the Cape Cod landscape generates what Emerson would term a "hieroglyph" of the Cape Cod culture. "Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put," Emerson writes in "Nature": "He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth" (22).

These crossings resolve themselves in Strether's aftersense as interpretations. Interpreting the experiences of his threshold-crossings, Strether represents these experiences, composing his symbolic whirlwind into cohesive pictures. This two-step process of representation can be understood in terms of acts of inquiry and response. Probing the unfathomable point, Strether interrogates the unknown. His act of representation is *his* response to his own inquiry. He tries to answer his own questions by re-presenting the confused symbolic experience prompted by his original act of inquiry. Freudian interpretation and Jamesian vision can both be understood as acts of representation made in response to interrogative experience. The self answers its own

questions by engaging and controlling its symbolic whirlwind.

In the preface to The Ambassadors, James describes the challenges of rendering Strether's "process of vision". This process might predictably be understood as Strether's beholding a procession of symbols and signifiers from his point of view. Instead, the process refers to how Strether proceeds through a symbolic scene and retrospectively conceives the landscape of his proceedings as "picture". James dramatizes the principle of superseding pictures ("another impression had been superimposed") and developing, ultimately filled-out impressions ("the idle play of which would be moreover the aid to the full impression"). The Jamesian model of extending, developing, and filled-out impressions can again be compared to the Freudian model of the dream narrative extended, developed, and filled-out through a process of interpretative scrutiny. The Jamesian and Freudian tropes of mental process both emphasize their agents' penetration through to and *through* the point from which new representations emerge. More even than Freud, James is concerned with where the full impression leads; he weighs how the "unfathomable point" constitutes a threshold enticing the inquiring mind onward.

* * * * * * * *

In The Odyssey, The Aeneid, and La Divina Commedia, the hero enters the otherworld after he recognizes that he lacks

integral knowledge. His sense of himself as lacking intensifies his quest for experience to rectify what he feels he is missing. Having landed with his crew on the isle of Aia, the home of the sorceress Circe, Odysseus will express the existential disorientation that makes necessary the underworld journey Circe will direct him to make. His interrogative urgency fuels his "mad crossing": "O my friends", he says to his comrades "where Dawn lies, and the West,/and where the great Sun, light of man, may go/under the earth by night, and where he rises --/of these things we know nothing, Do we know/any least thing to serve us now? I wonder" (The Odyssey, X, 188-191). This question is itself a subversive assessment of Mycenean culture. In asking this question, Odysseus expresses an intellectual openness that primes him for the visit to the land of the dead. Because Odysseus's question is culturally subversive, his asking the question is culturally *unnatural* in that it undermines cultural codes validating an existing form of knowledge over other unprescribed forms to be experienced only by the hero's journeying "piu oltre" to the land of the dead.

At different historical moments, epic otherworld narrative commences with the epic hero raising questions to reexamine the epistemological presuppositions out of which culture is constructed. In epic, the "unnatural questions" render suspect the given cultural foundations. In the Luxembourg Gardens scene, Strether gets "into relation" with his

present predicament and his entropic self by raising the most culturally subversive of questions: "Had ever a man, he had finally fallen into the way of asking himself, lost so much and even done so much for so little?" (II, ii, 61) Epic entrance occurs when the hero, through questioning, senses cultural inadequacies and seeks a phantasmagorical antidote. His otherworld windfall consists of these *revisionistic phantasmagoria*. This otherworldly engagement begins only after the hero raises his culturally unnatural questions.

The epic hero knows the otherworld by plunging to increasing depths within its regions. His experience of greater depths reflecting further points of entry corresponds to the expansion of consciousness of the explorer self. The further inward the hero proceeds, the greater his expansion of consciousness. The model of expansion as a function of entrance is replicated in William James's theory of the self and of self-seeking: "My present thought", writes James, "stands thus in the plenitude of ownership of the train of my past selves, is owner not only *de facto* but *de jure*, the most real owner there can be, and all without the supposition of my 'inexplicable tie', but in a perfectly verifiable and phenomenal way" (I, 360). The train of the thinker's past selves refers back to preceding points of entry. These past selves formed precisely at each of these earlier points.

Leo Bersani has made a compelling point about what

propels action in the novels of late James: "Most important, the potential thought has as great a propelling force as the actual thought. In fact, the distinction between the potential and the actual is superficial, and the narrative hunger for meanings [Bersani is here analyzing The Wings of the Dove, but his comments apply to The Ambassadors as well], produces plot; speculation is not simply about events but also promotes them" (A Future for Astyanax, 143). Speculation of this kind can be understood in terms of liminal passages into the Parisian "clever canvases" that loom before Strether as the potential thought he is poised to experience in full. The potential thought hovers before the thinker like his dream of possibility, the beckoning representation that must be crossed to, confronted, and embraced, then re-cognized in the context of a reflective (otherworld) account. "You've all of you here so much visual sense," Strether tells Lydia Barrace and Little Bilham in Gloriani's garden," that you've somehow all 'run' to it. There are moments when it strikes me that you haven't any other" (V, ii, 126). The poetry of motion in The Ambassadors is the action of moving towards and within potential visual thoughts that present themselves as clever painterly codifications of the otherworld culture Strether studies and acquires.

The Latin word for threshold is "limina". Liminality is an explicit dimension of the otherworld experience of Vir-

gil, Dante, and James. In Virgil, Aeneas undergoes a phase of conceptual recombination as he crosses every narrative *limina*. In the eighth book of the poem, the hero's mind is portrayed as racing madly: "split, it shifts here, there,/ and rushes on to many different plans,/turning to everything: even as when/the quivering light of water in bronze basins/reflected from the sun or from the moon's/glittering image glides across all things/and now darts skyward, strikes the roof's high ceiling" (VIII, 26-32). This racing mind is frantically searching the threshold through which its thought can find repose in a rewarding impression.

In The Aeneid, epic entrances describe thresholds of penetration: Ante-Hell, the Fields of Mourning, Tartarus, the Elysian Fields, the gates of true and false dreams. Every penetrated otherworld area presents before Aeneas shades that he must interrogate and imaginatively appropriate. Aeneas confronts Anchises, telling him "It was your sad image, so often come, that urged me to these thresholds" (VI, 919-920).[6] A very complex form of the hermeneutical circle is fulfilled as Aeneas celebrates his reunion with his father. Dying, Anchises had advised his son to seek out and find the Sybil's threshold. Now the Sybil conducts Aeneas across the threshold near where his dead father contemplates the future kings of Italy. Earthly, temporally linear thresholds lead to the passage through the otherworld where each crossed *limina* reveals another dimension of the

eternal and subversively non-linear. Threshold passages in the now and in the *there* combine to enact within Aeneas a complex reorganization of associations, feelings, and perspectives. The thresholds in the Latium landscape of the second half of the poem describe Aeneas's gradual solidification of the national destiny. Every one of Aeneas's threshold-crossings contribute to his revision of his own self-portrait.

As I have argued above, otherworld entrance is always characterized by the Ulyssean figure of the "varco folle", the "mad crossing", the gesture by which the human mind flies beyond culturally determined epistemological bounds. Every act of entrance describes a crossing from a prior state of otherworld entrance to a successive state. The whole journey typically begins with a sequence of literal geographic crossings. Odysseus crosses the ocean at night and then he crosses the ocean bourne marking the furthest point of Greek geography. The Aeneid is rife with crossings back and forth across the Mediterranean as Aeneas sails in search of his fate. Numerous significant experiences are figured as liminal passages: the Sybil assures the hero that "no innocent can cross" Hell's thresholds. When Aeneas visits Evander, the rustic king of the Pallantians, the king remarks that Hercules once "stooped to cross these thresholds [of a 'poor man's house']".

Epic entrances depend on successful interactions be-

tween the quest-hero and his guide. As I shall argue at greater length in the next chapter, Maria Gostrey serves Strether as his first otherworld guide and Madame de Vionnet later supplants Maria in the role. James literally compares Maria to the Cumean Sybil in the scene where Strether encounters Chad in Maria's theater box. Maria is assessing Strether's plight in his dealings with Chad and Little Bilham as they await Bilham's arrival. She praises Little Bilham for his genuineness and remarks about the rarity of his type of enlightened American. When she briefly pauses, Strether experiences one of "the quiet instants that sometimes settle more matters than the outbreaks dear to the historic muse" (III, ii, 87). Maria resumes by revealing to Strether that he's been out-maneuvered by Chad and that he is about to show for being more vulnerable to Parisian persuasions than he had believed.

> "They've got you," she merely repeated. Though she disclaimed the prophetic vision she was at this instant the nearest approach he had ever met to the priestess of the oracle. The light was in her eyes. "You must face it now".
> He faced it on the spot. "They had arranged --?" (III, ii, 88)

When Strether asks Maria whether Chad is alone responsible for the beauty of the plan here climaxing in Strether's entrapment, Maria further enlightens him. "'Oh no -- not the whole. *We've* [pilgrim and guide] done some of it. You and I and 'Europe'. 'Europe -- yes,' Strether mused." (III, ii, 88) The significance of Strether's entrancement by and

entrance within "Europe", the complex of cultural signs and cultural habits alien from the American ones, is that it prepares him for the vision he here experiences beside the priestess at the oracle, his Parisian Sybil -- Gostrey.

Maria is being compared to the Sybil at the moment in The Aeneid when she is possessed by the oracular voice. The Cumaen seer experiences her Apollonian visitation "just as the Trojans reached the threshold of" her Euboean crag.

> Now call upon fates
> for oracles. The God is here! The god!
> As she says this before the doors, her face
> And color alter suddenly; her hair
> Is disarranged, her breast heaves, and her wild
> Heart swells with frenzy; she is taller now
> Her voice is more than human,
> For the power of the god is closing in, he breathes upon her.
> (VI, 64-72)

Possessed with divine prescience, the Sybil assumes the role of Aeneas's ambassador, prompting his action with a challenging question: "And are you slow to offer vow and prayers,/Trojan Aeneas? Are you slow?" (VI, 73-74) This is the very essence of Maria's challenge to Strether in the theater box: "are you slow to offer praise of Europe?" she seems to ask: "Are you slow to *appraise* 'Europe', to see and appreciate it so that you can perform your fated part and refashion your historical legacy?"

The otherworld hero draws on the counsel of his guide to develop the crucial characteristic of otherworld experience: the questing disposition. The pilgrim describes the value of this counsel to Virgil: "'Tu m'hai con desiderio *il*

cor disposto/sì al venir con le parole tue,/ch'i' son tornato nel primo proposto./Or va, ch'un sol volere è d'ambedue:-/tua duca, tu segnore e tu maestro.' Cosi li dissi; e poi che mosse fue,/intrai per lo cammino alto e silvestro". ("'You with your words, have so disposed my heart/to longing for this journey -- I return/to what I was at first prepared to do./Now go; a single will fills both of us:/you are my guide, my governor, my master'./These were my words to him; when he advanced,/I entered on the steep and savage path".) [*Inferno*, II, 136-142.] The passage demonstrates how the pilgrim enters his otherworld by establishing relations with key facilitators of his otherworld scene. In order to ensure his forward movement, Aeneas, at the Sybil's behest, must observe some word, gesture, or custom of the world of the dead. The otherworld narrative describes mental accumulation as a function of penetration. Mental penetration results in the hero's permutation of innocence into experience, what Daniel Mark Fogel refers to in his study of the Romanticist patterns of Jamesian consciousness as "organized innocence" (4).

Entrance through *limina* engineers the process that Victor Turner calls "ludic recombination". "Ludic recombination", says Turner, refers to a self's recombination of cultural factors: "But to my mind it is the analysis of culture into factors and their free or 'ludic' recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird, that is of

the essence of liminality, liminality par excellence" (28). For Henry James in The American Scene, ludic recombination occurs in the sacred space of the Church of the Ascension when he sees an altar fresco by John La Farge and feels the "sensation, for the moment, so upset all the facts" (433). For Lambert Strether, ludic recombination occurs when he sees the Lambinet and "for the moment" is carried beyond his modest American self by a dream narrative that reveals new experiential possibilities. Like his creator, Strether experiences liminal conditions repeatedly after his otherwo-rld initiation rituals.

It is useful to read the psychic progress of Odysseus as a function of his spatial penetration of the Greek underworld. As Raymond Clark has pointed out, Odysseus moves from the votive pit on the shore of the ocean bourne down into the underworld. Clark stresses that for Odysseus entrance is progressive. His degree of entrance is a function of his increased involvement with the revisionistic phantasmagoria of the land of the dead. Clark writes that "There is no reason in fact to suppose that Odysseus is below the earth until immediately after his meeting with Achilles, when he seems, if not to be below ground already, at least to be peering through the front door into the interior of the underworld. 'The soul of swift Achilles', says Odysseus, 'went off with long strides across the asphodel meadow, rejoicing in that I said his son was illustrious [Odyssey,

XI. 538-540]' ... Immediately afterwards, from Minos onwards to line 627, we find Odysseus deep within the interior of the Underworld" (76). Clark's analysis shows the relation between Odysseus's entrancement by the mesmerizing shades and his progress to greater depths of the underworld landscape.

I want to analyze rigorously two passages in The Ambassadors that, read together, testify to the visual powers that Strether gains as a function of his otherworld entrancement. Early in the novel, Strether anxiously contemplates the prospect of a Parisian experience. He feels guilty towards Mrs. Newsome for enjoying Paris his first days there. He is depicted trying to fashion his conscience-stricken state of mind. James provides a simile that sets Strether in the tradition of epic sea-crossers venturing within their otherworlds:

> Strether could not at this point indeed have completed his thought by the image of what she might have to thank herself *for*: the image, at best, of his own likeness -- poor Lambert Strether washed up on the sunny strand by the waves of a single day, poor Lambert Strether thankful for breathing-time and stiffening himself while he gasped. There he was, and with nothing in his aspect or his posture to scandalise: it was only true that if he had seen Mrs. Newsome coming he would instinctively have jumped up to walk away a little. (II, ii, 60)

Comparison between this passage and the following one from the *Commedia* reveals similarities in the images resorted to by James and Dante to describe the conscience-racked mental states of their moral transgressors. Lost in

the woods "nel mezzo del cammin", the pilgrim compares himself to a drifter who has barely survived the chancy navigation of a treacherous sea:

> E come quei che con lena affannata,
> uscito fuor del pelago a la riva,
> si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata,
> cosi l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva,
> si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo
> che non lascio gia mai persona viva.
>
> (And just as he who, with exhausted breath,
> having escaped from sea to shore, turns back
> to watch the dangerous waters he has quit,
> so did my spirit, still a fugitive,
> turn back to look intently at the pass
> that never has let any man survive).
> (*Inferno*, I, 22-27)

Strether and the pilgrim share the perspective of men in crisis, of human beings lost in mid-journey. The metaphor of the exhausted, nearly drowned sea-crosser describes both the condition of felt sinfulness and the sense of escape into an otherworld of excessive sensual stimulation. Each man crosses from himself as previously self-represented to the new self-portrait.

However, James renders Strether as yet unready to construct the self-portrait that the narrator provides us. Strether cannot "at this point" supply the image that the narrator supplies. He has not entered to a point far enough within his otherworld to be able to re-construct his emotions into this "portrait". It is the novel's narrator who here supplies the image at present beyond Strether's cognitive capacities. Because he commands a place deep within the hero's otherworld, the narrator can draw on pictorial re-

sources "at this point" unavailable to Strether.

The very language "at this point" suggests the Jamesian narrative as a sequence of its hero's epic entrances at successive points of the otherworld landscape. Strether experiences Paris as though he, like the figures he observes in the Tuileries gardens, moves from point to point over a temporal map. The scene within the Lambinet landscape constitutes his kept "appointment" with a cognitive experience he must have. Conversely, his decision to back Madame de Vionnet contributes vitally to Mrs. Newsome's "disappointment" -- to the divergence in the way they two read the identical circumstances. We can summarize the odd disqualification ("Strether could not at this point have completed his thought by the image") as implying that Strether has not yet entered deeply enough into his otherworld, his not having passed through sufficient otherworld checkpoints, to be able to devise the self-portrait of the American moral transgressor being condemned by the American moral establishment.

In James, the unpictured refers to the visual space the self is poised to enter. In order to penetrate this space, Strether and the other enlightened James characters must first adequately penetrate it. In describing the image of the simile as a portrait of self Strether can as yet not entertain, James implies that his hero will acquire the powers to picture himself this way at *a later point*. The

proof of the powers Strether acquires through gradual otherworld entry will be in his later acquiring the capacity to picture himself as criticized by his former Woollett allies.

The image that "completes" Strether's thought occurs to him late in the novel when he visits the Pococks' hotel suite. He finds no one in the salon when he enters. However, he does find copies of the Revue des Deux Mondes and Fromentin's Maitres d'Autrefois left by Chad for Sarah and Mamie and, next to these testimonies to French aesthetics, a "heavy letter addressed in a hand he knew". Mrs. Newsome has by now ceased writing to him. Studying her familiar handwriting, Strether feels as if she is rebuking him for his wantonness and disloyalty.

> He looked at Sarah's name and address, in short, as if he had been looking hard into her mother's face, and then turned from it as if the face had declined to relax. But since it was in a manner as if Mrs. Newsome were thereby all the more, instead of the less, in the room, and were conscious, sharply and sorely conscious, of himself, so he felt both held and hushed, summoned to stay at least to take his punishment. (IX, iii, 246)

The incident serves as a sequel to the earlier scene in the Luxembourg Gardens. There, Strether awaited his rebuke but could not yet imagine himself in the place of the person being rebuked. He has by now entered so deeply within his European otherworld that self-portraiture has become a way of thought. The French literary review and the book of art criticism represent the cultural powers that Strether appropriates in depicting himself as chastened. At a latter point

of otherworldly entry, Strether displays the facility for self-conception he earlier lacked.

Taken together, the above passages exemplify a process of cognitive and aesthetic delay. James's late style delays reader response, building the reading experience to moments of compositional intensity. Delay proves one of Strether's chief tools. The narrator implies that he (or she or they) holds the picture of washed-up Strether in store, allowing Strether the time he needs to be able to deal with being in such a state. Readers gain an ironic perspective by receiving a narrative picture that Strether has not yet conceived. Our perspective ranges beyond Strether's point of view, the fruit of our intimate relations with the narrator(s). Together, these passages evince how consciousness in James is situated between selves, between, in this case, the narrator and readers, and beyond Strether's point of view.

In the *Commedia*, the final stage of epic entrance commences a new state of mental action: narration. This entrance describes the hero's passage from the role of journeyer and explorer to the role of narrator and relator. The hero becomes the homeward-bound raconteur of revelations. While this passage from being the entranced to becoming the entrancer is literalized in the final scene of the *Commedia*, the same passage is inscribed and reinscribed within every significant threshold scene of the poem. In The Ambassadors, Strether turns into an otherworld relator -- an

otherworld entrancer -- when he returns to his hotel rooms to mull over recent events. There in "the watches of the night", he keeps watch: when he mentally reconceives his experiences, he functions as a time-dweller and time-piece, a storyteller of the present tense, and a historian of otherworld entrancement: "He found himself supposing innumerable and wonderful things" (XI, iv, 313). Here Strether turns into a dream interpreter as well as dreamer, a time figurer as well as a time figure. He becomes analytic and revelatory. The final measure of Strether's otherworld entrancement and entry shows in his new ability to function as a narrative entrancer.

1.Let me quickly summarize the Museum of Fine Arts's Lambinet collection. My information comes from a letter written by Julia Langdon, a museum intern, dated December 12, 1984, and kept on file in the museum curator's office. The six canvases are 1) Seaside Village, 1866, oil on canvas, 11 1/2 x 18 inches. 2)In The Fields, (undated), oil on canvas, 13 x 18 1/4 inches. 3)On the Seine, (undated), oil on canvas, 9 5/8 x 12 3/4 inches. 4)The Farmyard, 1862, oil on panel, 15 x 24 inches. 5) Landscape: The Washerwoman, (undated), oil on canvas, 6 5/8 x 8 5/8 inches. 6) Under the Willows, (undated), oil on canvas, 29 1/2 x 36 5/8 inches.

2. Teodolinda Barolini makes this point in her discussion of Ulysses and Geryone: "In sum, then, the Ulyssean component of the poem is ultimately related to the *impresa* of the *Commedia* itself, to the poet's transgressing of the boundary between life and death, between God and man" (58). Barolini adds that "The Ulysses episode is not unique in reflecting Dante's awareness of the dangers of his position" [as a transgressor of divinely inscribed boundaries]. However, in Dante's complicatedly allusive mythopoeic system, Ulysses best represents the poet's instincts to transgress imposed epistemological limits to redeem mankind for the earlier transgression of Adam: "But most important from this perspective is Ulysses, most important because the poet makes him so, investing him not only with the unforgettable

language of *Inferno* 26 but making his name a hermeneutic lodestone of the *Commedia*, associating it with the voyage metaphor that keeps the Ulyssean thematic alive even in the hero's absence. Ulysses is designed as a recurring presence because the issue of the *trapassar del segno*, of Adam's sin conceived not literally as the eating of the tree but metaphorically as a transgression, is one that Dante cannot discount" (58).

3. The volume's title implies how James was interested in the complex relation between pictures and texts. Throughout The Ambassadors, he explores the ways in which a picture is a text and a text a picture, showing how pictures and texts complement each other in a given mental design.

4.The Italian quotations come from the Sapegno edition of La Divina Commedia. The English versions come from Allen Mandelbaum's English verse translation.

5. "The moment of perception is a moment of engagement with the problems of life. Strether's role as a representative Jamesian perceiver marks him not as a passionless intellect who stands apart and waits for impressions, but as an active, interested self who survives by perceiving" (Griffin, 43).

6. All quotations for The Aeneid come from Allen Mandelbaum's English verse translation. The line numberings accord with Mandelbaum's English version.

CHAPTER THREE

EPIC INTIMACIES: ENTRANCES AND GUIDES (2)

EXPANSIVENESS AND THE EXPLORATION OF NARRATIVE DEPTHS

In reviewing the rhythm of entrance in otherworld narrative, I have tried to show how otherworld entrance recurs as a rite of self-renewal. As the hero experiences new objects and situations, he believes himself to re-commence the journey from a new starting point. Every re-experience of entry within the otherworld represents the commencement of a new stage of his thought. Re-entry can be understood as a trope that expresses a new stage of mental extension. Every stage of entrance climaxes in the consolidation of sensory otherworld experience in language. This consolidation is superseded by a new mental stage where the self leavens itself from language, its medium of representation, and falls forward into the unnamed and inarticulate. Entrance in the otherworld begins the process of self-extension beyond prescriptive boundaries. Consummated entrance represents the articulation of the newly experienced otherworld data in words. This articulation signifies the newly formed selfhood (William James would say "personal consciousness") of the entrant.

Emerson is invaluable as a theorist of the recurrent (re)entry of man within the otherness of potential thought and time: "Every action admits of being outdone. Our life is

an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens" (168). We have heard Milton's Satan recognize with certainty the same infinite space availing consciousness ("And in the lowest deep a lower deep/Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide/To which the hell I suffer seems a Heav'n". [Paradise Lost, IV, 76-78.]) Satan seems to lament this law of the inevitable spatial extension of Mind while Emerson celebrates the tendency. Their differences of tone reflect their different perspectives: Satan notes with dread the certain damnation inhering in so much human possibility. Emerson more sanguinely lauds this sign of exertion as the very attribute which makes for life. Satan is the ultimate figure of animalistic frustration. Emerson sees this exertion as occasioning transcendence:

> This fact, as far as it symbolizes the moral fact of the Unattainable, the flying Perfect, around which the hands of man can never meet, at once the inspirer and condemner of every success, may conveniently serve us to connect many illustrations of human power in every department (168).

Inspiring words from the thinker who dubbed man "the ever-losing winner". It is noteworthy that Emerson coincidentally evokes the embrace of the shade motif ("the flying Perfect, around which the hands of man can never meet") to refer to the imperfect dimension in every mental

gesture. Nevertheless, his positive assessment of the process of engaging the "Unattainable" suggests a moral outlook that James will further complicate. We should recall the words James penned in his American notebooks in 1905 after visiting the grave of his sister Alice with its "exquisite little Florentine urn" inscribed with verses from the "Paradiso". There James asks himself, "Why does my pen not drop from my hand on approaching the infinite pity and tragedy of all the past? It does, poor helpless pen, with what it meets of the ineffable, what it meets of the cold-Medusa-face of life, of all the life *lived*, on every side. *Basta, basta!*" (Notebooks, 240) Here we find some of the Satanic dread before the ineffable through which the self will pass and from which it will appropriate all that it is. The past itself constitutes this ineffability into which James pushes on provoking its ghosts. This self seems poised to plunge indefinitely into a hellish void.

And yet this nightmarish investigation of a past liable to stunt its explorer provides James a paradoxical experience of homecoming. James records the verses inscribed on the urn in his journal as "Dopo lungo exilio e martiro/Viene a questa pace", misquoting the actual tribute to Boethius, "ed essa da martiro e da essilio venne a questa pace" (*Paradiso* X. 128-129). The misquotation reveals the way James conceives himself drawn homeward by an irresistible personal and cultural past. It is his self-

extension into problematic circumstances wherefrom he can recognize some added, new mental state that occasions his homecoming. Exile and martyrdom come with the Satanic submission to the will to expand. Homewardness, paradisal repose, come with self-consolidation into verbal assertion. Such repose does not permit the self an invulnerable refuge. The greater consolation is in the process itself with its traces of mental advance.

I shall detail in the pages to follow how the process of otherworld entrance leads Strether to a similarly stern assessment of human improbabilities and the rhythms of the expansive self. The first crucial question concerns how to spatialize the narrative of self-development. Here the Dantesque and Emersonian models of the self as expansive circle are most useful. The self re-draws its circle as it increasingly penetrates the otherworld lying beyond its boundaries. The figure of the circle creates limitless possibilities of directional movement. The Jamesian narrative of self-extension is not reduced to a narrative of descent. In this way, it differs from an underworld narrative like Book XI of The Odyssey.

As I have argued repeatedly, the territorial advance of the self is best understood in terms of the movements towards and within looming, framed representations -- the "clever canvases" of "Europe". The two-step process of entrance and recoiling that I see as descriptive of the

Jamesian self-narrative can thus be understood as a process of being drawn *in* to representations of cultural otherness and a subsequent stage of withdrawing through which the self re-draws itself. The self, as Emerson says, is a picture, and its otherworld, too, is a picture -- a very deep picture, indeed a picture of infinite depths.

What better place for this process of the drawing in, withdrawing, and re-drawing of the self to occur than the European drawing room, the site of heroic action in the Jamesian epic? Writers like Seidel and Jeffrey Perl have showed how James "transposed" the heroic conflicts characterizing classical epic into a context of leisure where the drama of American re-creation can take place: "The near-comic tone *cum* deadly serious intent of The Ambassadors," writes Perl, is the direct result of another innovation: the battle has penetrated the modern drawing room. This technique, which James called 'adventure transposed', translates all the heroism of warfare directly into the most chic parlors of Paris" (162). Perl posits that "mock-epic" was James's only option in "introducing heroism to bourgeois domestic life", and maintains, incontestably, that James "takes responsibility for the grave implications of the metaphor" (163). In The Ambassadors, the battling that takes place early between Strether and Chad and late between Strether and the Pococks describes the contesting of the represented facts concerning Chad's relations with

Madame de Vionnet. Strether learns that these facts can only truly be appreciated by what James early in his career referred to as "the grasping imagination". This imagination must penetrate the surfaces of appearances and grasp within their depths. Below I will review the process of narrative entrance as it contributes to Strether's penetration to knowledge of the facts of the lovers' relation and will conclude my review by showing how Jamesian epistemology is characterized by a version of the Satanic experience of bottomless depths.

* * * * *

In The Ambassadors, Strether re-experiences a sense of entrance into a new self-narrative throughout the action. With every new stage of entrance, he reconceives his relation to his European otherworld. This process suggests a correspondence in Strether's experience between recurrent entry and an incremental increase in penetrated depths.

The novel is very clearly established as an otherworld narrative, complete with multiple crossings, numerous threshold passages, and the presentation of the guide. I have already discussed the way the otherworld narrative begins when Strether sees the Lambinet and apprehends the human possibility the painting suggests. Strether's otherworld narrative continues when he reaches Chester, his first otherworld abode, for his initial hotel stay in "Europe".

In the third paragraph of the novel, Strether makes the acquaintance of Maria Gostrey. The scene evokes obvious comparisons with scenes at the beginning of precursor otherworld narratives where the hero meets his necessary guide. Their recognition scene is staged as though it were an appointment determined by fate. The scene is appropriately staged in a context of leisure, a hotel lobby in a historic medieval town frequented by tourists. Strether has just checked in and he turns from the hotel clerk's glass cage to face the woman who looms before him the way Virgil's shade "offers" itself to Dante.

> ... he turned away to find himself, in the hall, facing a lady who met his eyes as with an intention suddenly determined, and whose features -- not freshly young, not markedly fine, but on happy terms with each other -- came back to him as from a recent vision. For a moment they stood confronted; then the moment placed her: (I,i, 18)

The *moment places* Gostrey. The language evokes the crucial passage where Strether is induced by the Lambinet *for the moment* to overstep the modesty of nature. Here, too, the moment appears to dilate. The temporality of the action is measured in Strether's gathering Gostrey in like an object from out there and re-cognizing her in his own terms. The interaction commences somewhere between linear temporal nodes within a dilated moment. The logic of Jamesian otherworld narrative is supported by the detail of Strether's having seen Gostrey before and his now recognizing her. Strether's imagination feeds on every

detail of its otherworld scene. His impressions act as recalls of things imagined: he now recognizes Gostrey as the reincarnation of some specific imaginative musing. Strether "would as little have been able to say what had been the sign of her face for him on the first occasion as to name the ground of his present recognition" (I, i, 18). We can say that his "mad crossing" was inspired by his original impression of "the sign of her face". Somehow this was processed. Now, he is recognizing her as the remembrance of an imagined ideal guide.

It is noteworthy that in the "Project for Novel", James plans for Strether and Gostrey to meet on the rampart of the Chester wall. Strether and Waymarsh (who is at the time of the "Project" named Waymark) are touring the wall and responding in opposed ways: taking in the view of Chester Strether has "the interesting and interested sense of [what]... he has lost, or only caught the last whisk of the tip of the tail of" while Waymarsh "unamenable, unadjustable, to a new and disarranging adventure ... fails to react, fails of elasticity, of 'amusement', throws himself back on suspicion, depreciation, resentment really; the sense of exteriority, the cultivation of dissent, the surrender to unbridgeable difference" (Notebooks, 545). They meet Gostrey on the rampart when she approaches Waymarsh, whom she says she knows from an earlier social occasion in America. The encounter is conceived as an ironic recognition

scene. Recognized by Gostrey, Waymarsh at first fails to recognize her and subsequently "drops out of it" as Strether and Maria converse. Strether's abilities are foregrounded against Waymarsh's reluctance to "see" -- to recognize his European guide, to enter in conversation with her about historic Chester. Recognition becomes the prevailing experience of the Jamesian imaginative man. The action invites comparison with "Inferno," XV where the pilgrim encounters his former teacher, Brunetto Latini with a host of other Sodomites on a flaming hot sand rampart embanking the Phlegethon. As they approach each other, "Sir Brunetto's" face suddenly comes into focus for the pilgrim (we recall that Strether recognizes the "sign of" Gostrey's "face" in the hotel lobby). The vision of the other's face (his "cotto aspetto") symbolizes the knowledge that will pass between him whom Eliot evokes (in "Little Gidding") as "some dead master" and the apprentice, the divided otherworld witness.

In this discussion of entrances and guides, I find myself invariably reverting to comparisons between <u>The Ambassadors</u> and the *Commedia*. The strategy is of course not intended to argue for James's conscious imitation but, rather, to show how some comparable narrative structures served the signification of mental process and epistemological quest for their respective historical moments. We find that many of the paralleled scenes address

the fact of sudden revelation, the act of witness; what is dramatized is the experience of a thought desired yet dreaded in picture-form.

Let us return to the actual recognition scene that occurs in the novel. As the abandoned recognition scene on the Chester wall rampart suggests, Strether has already experienced a need for a guide by the time he encounters Gostrey. He has experienced "such a consciousness of personal freedom as he hadn't known for years". And he is baffled about what to make of this freedom. He knows enough to know he does not want Waymarsh to sound the first "note" of his European experience. Thus he can wait further before seeing Waymarsh without "disappointment". Any word with "point" ("appointment", "disappointment", "pointed", "pointedly") is a loaded term in The Ambassadors since James employs the word to imply progress in terms of visual thought.

Strether's otherworld narrative, which is to say the narrative of Strether's reformation of a national consciousness, is best conceived as a map of personalized pictures with each picture denoting a point of progress along Strether's otherworld way. In the pivotal Lambinet scene in which Strether experiences his historical apocalypse, he gets out of his train as "securely as if to keep an appointment" (XI, iii, 302). In that instance, the appointment he keeps is between the image he harbors in his

mind and the visual image of the otherworld landscape that presents itself to his perception. Appointments describe the reconciliation between imaginative expectation and visual fact. In overstepping the modesty of his nature, Strether ap-points himself into the Lambinet landscape in that he entertains a mental image induced by his sensory experience of the picture. The action of the entire otherworld narrative of The Ambassadors can thus be understood as Strether's repeatedly ap-pointing himself within new visual impressions. In his chapter on the "Will", William James stresses that "the *terminus* of the psychological process in volition, *the point* to which the will is directly applied, is always an idea. There are at all times some ideas from which we shy away like frightened horses the moment we get a glimpse of their forbidding profile upon the threshold of our thought" (Principles, II, 567) (My emphasis of "point"). The "idea" which beckons at the threshold of our thought is a picture into which the self ap-points itself. Otherworld entrance is equatable with the willful act of keeping cognitive appointments with what William James understands to be visual ideas.

Gostrey and Strether thus keep what for him seems an "unsought" yet unavoidable appointment, an appointment almost supernaturally pre-determined: "It was almost as if she had been in possession and received him as a guest" (I, i, 19-20). Gostrey "supersedes" the hotel clerk in her

function as the person-in-the-know on the premises. She guides Strether into the hotel garden and then quickly makes another appointment to escort him around the Chester wall and view the town. Their early dealings are orchestrated as a ritualistic exchange of identities in the mode of otherworld narrative but tailored to the cosmopolitan leisure context of the Jamesian scene. First, there is the recognition scene itself. I have already described the way Strether registers the "sign" of Gostrey's "face". When they meet again in the hotel garden, James locates the narrative perspective "in the vision of the other party to Strether's appointment" (I, i, 20): what comes through in the two lengthy sentences by which the narrator presents Strether are certain signs of wear and tear. His hair is "irregularly streaked with grey" and "a line, unusually deep and drawn, the prolonged pen-stroke of time" accompanies "the curve of the moustache from nostril to chin" (I, i, 20).[1] Strether is presented as human all too human, a biological time piece. He is depicted as the mortal man entering the vision of the otherworld guide who knows how to draw more life still out of him. When Strether and Gostrey first meet she asks him if he knows Waymarsh. He responds effusively, afterwards noting "how much there had been in him of response". James ends Strether's answer to Maria with the words, "Strether wound up". In one sense, this means "Strether concluded". In a second sense, it suggests that all Strether's interaction

with his European interlocutors contributes to improving and refining him as an American time-piece. Interaction with Maria will repeatedly wind Strether up like a human watch that is on the verge of running down and requires re-tooling.

Maria "knew even intimate things about him that he hadn't yet told her and perhaps never would". (I, i, 22) She has the capacity to discern truths about Strether without his articulating them to her. This is Dantesque: Virgil reveals to the pilgrim that he discerns "the longing you have hid from me" ("il disio ancor che tu mi taci" [*Inferno* X. 18]). The effect is that Maria can draw Strether out of himself. Through their interactions, she occasions his self-extension.

They exchange pasteboard name cards as though they were trading identities and periphrasized pasts in the *Purgatorio*. Every gesture and delay in these actions marks a new point of Strether's mental penetration in the scene. As he puts Gostrey's card in his pocket, Strether experiences a sense of personal possession, securing "Maria Gostrey, whoever she was -- of which he hadn't really the least idea -- in a place of safe keeping" (I, i, 22). But Gostrey connotes more than a name or a person. She defines a newly opened vista: as Strether pockets her identity, "he met with the smile of a straying thought what the expanse before the hotel offered to his view" (I, i, 22). His guide introduces

him to a world of unfamiliar habits before which he pauses unable to identify himself securely. This is why Strether delays in giving Gostrey his name card (he awkwardly carries it between forefinger and thumb while retaining overcoat and umbrella in his arms). The otherworldliness of "Europe" (the name of the continent is placed in quotations for the first time in this context) undermines his sense of self. He experiences sudden ambivalence about giving himself up to this unfamiliar moment. His delay represents his confusion at confronting the unnaturalness of his surroundings. His confusion draws parallels with his namesake, Louis Lambert, the Balzac mystic who falls into a cataleptic fit on the eve of his marriage. This scene commences the rites of marriage between the bridegroom, Lambert Strether, the American lamb, and the bride, "Europe", "the Catholic Church", "the monster of the bulging eyes and far-reaching quivering groping tentacles","the wicked old rows of Chester, rank with feudalism", "exactly in short Europe" (I, iii, 38).

When Gostrey leads him around the ramparts of the medieval Chester wall, Strether has his first sustained view of the European otherworld. Together, the pair see the otherworld as they circle it. Their progress is Dantesque in the way it suggests vision is a product of encircling observation. On arriving in "Europe", Strether "had believed he had a limit, but the limit had been transcended within thirty-six hours" (I, i, 23). The act of drawing the new

circle in the Emersonian sense is suggested literally by their tracing the circle of the medieval wall. "With a gay decisive "So now--!" Maria Gostrey had "led him forth into the world" (I, i, 23). "So now" again suggests the dilation of the moment through an expansive engagement with an otherworld causing Strether to overstep the modesty of his nature ("he had a limit, but the limit had been transcended"). Witness the way the guide's aid impels the motion of the pilgrim in "Paradiso":

> La dolce donna dietro a lor mi pinse
> con un sol cenno su per quella scala,
> sì sua virtù la mia natura vinse;
> né mai qua giù dove si mota e cala
> naturalmente, fu sì ratto moto
> ch'agguagliar si potese a la mia ala.
>
> The gentle lady -- simply with a sign --
> impelled me after them and up that ladder,
> so did her power overcome my nature;
> and never here below, where our ascent
> and descent follow nature's law, was there
> motion as swift as mine when I took wing.
> (*Paradiso*, XXII, 99-105)

Gostrey helps Strether stray from the pre-determining moral script he lives by. She assists him in abandoning himself newly to the world (... "with a gay decisive 'So now --!' [she] led him forth into the world"); he experiences the post-lapsarian self-abandonment exemplified by Milton's Adam and Eve who find "the world all before them" and therein make their "solitary way". James makes the note of revelation explicit when he describes the tower of the Chester cathedral as "charming to [Strether's] long-sealed eyes".

As they proceed with their circuit of the Chester wall, Maria reveals to Strether the full nature of her duty and the full import of her contribution to the Americans abroad whom she "picks up". She thus suggests the nationalist scope of the novel.

> My own fate has been too many for me, and I've succumbed to it. I'm a general guide -- to "Europe", don't you know? I wait for people -- I put them through. I pick them up -- I set them down. I'm a sort of superior "courier-maid". I'm a companion at large.

Maria speaks of Europe as though it were in quotations to make clear that she is discussing Europe as a habitat of the mind. She is describing the nexus of cultural traits and convictions into which she must initiate Americans. Perhaps here in a discussion of what it is that Maria guides Strether *through* we should draw on a passage from Richard Blackmur in one of his discussions of James. James, says Blackmur,

> felt none of the difficulty about conviction or principle or aim in his work which troubles a lesser writer; both his experience and his values came straight and clear and unquestionable, so much so that he seems to inhabit another world, that other world which has as substance what for us is merely hoped for. James, as an artist, was above all a man of faith. (70)

This otherworld that James comes personally to "own", to know as substance, is what Maria invites her Americans, willing and unwilling both, to enter. This otherworld is an idealized form of the past with all the socio-cultural intricacies that make the idealization apprehendable. It is

a strain of conduct and a will to consciousness formulated in a cultural field. Its vestigial evidence is constituted by Europe proper. But the otherworld traversed is a historical possibility rather than a reality, a possibility that can be apprehended personally by the sufficiently imaginative American questioner.

Maria situates "Europe" in an epistemological framework when she defines herself as a guide free of ignorances.

> It's a dreadful thing to have to say, in so wicked a world, but I verily believe that, such as you see me, there's nothing I don't know. I know all the shops and the prices -- but I know worse things still. I bear on my back the huge load of our national consciousness, or, in other words -- for it comes to that -- of our nation itself. Of what is our nation composed but of the men and women individually on my shoulders? (I, ii, 26)

Shops and prices are valid quantities even in "Europe" but they remain mere dressings to the kind of historical revelations which Strether will savor for their "taste". Maria trades in modes of material consumption but she knows the motives for them. She has seen "Europe" expose the instincts, habits, and limits of Americans and she has dwelled within these Americans' ignorance. She cultivates the interesting and she has seen *her* Americans stiffen before it. Thoreau in Walden had asked the question that Maria knows by rote:

> Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has not time to be any thing but a machine. How can he remember well his ignorance -- which his growth

> requires -- who has so often to use his knowledge? (3)

It is the American denial of these necessary acts of exposure and remembrance that Maria has witnessed repeatedly. The "worse things still" that Maria knows are expressly the American incapacity to re-member ignorance through a reconstitutive journey through an American otherworld that will reverse Americans' perspectives of themselves.

In London, Strether recognizes the truth of Maria's profession though not without trepidation: "She knew her theater, she knew her play, as she had triumphantly known, three days running, everything else, and the moment filled to the brim, for her companion, that apprehension of the interesting which, whether or no the interesting happened to filter through his guide, strained now to its limits his brief opportunity" (II, i, 41). The "interesting", a very William Jamesian word for the "otherworld", makes Strether apprehensive; he fearfully anticipates what this otherworld holds in store. It is specifically this strain of apprehension and resistance that Maria recognizes so well. It reveals a dread of self-exposure and of the recognition of what is really useless in the American self. Strether's further entrance within his European otherworld is occasioned by his recognition of past futilities and his being reconciled to a kind of drifting, listless, purely interrogative existence that will paradoxically provide a

new cachet of utilizable consciousness: "He was so distinctly fagged out that it must serve precisely as his convenience, and if he could but consistently be good for little enough he might do everything he wanted (II, ii, 63).

"Everything he wanted" implies a paradisal condition of self-fulfillment that Strether will not realize. But the inversion of values ("being fagged out" will "serve ... as his convenience", being "consistently good for little enough" will allow him to "do everything he wanted") represents another stage of his entrance within his European otherworld.

Maria completes her dissertation on her function as guide in the Chester hotel garden the next day. Every American otherworld journey climaxes with the American's return to the home country. The European guide brings "about for [her disoriented compatriots] such a complexity of relations -- unless indeed we call it a simplicity!--that the situation *has* to wind itself up. They want to go back." Her emphasis, however, makes the Americans' return sound futile and ironic, hardly a revelatory homecoming. It seems that it rarely is one. Maria concludes: "That's my little system; and, if you want to know, it's my real secret, my innermost mission and use. I only seem, you see, to beguile and approve; but I've thought it all out and I'm working all the while underground. I can't perhaps quite give you my formula, but I think that practically I succeed. I send you

back spent. So you stay back. Passed through my hands —" (I, iii, 35) This underground guide only reveals her true values to someone who recognizes her as the facilitator of a Europe-bestowed consciousness that will convert Americans to a new perspective. She terms Strether a "special case", meaning simply that "you've recognized me -- which is rather beautiful and rare. You see what I am" (I, i, 25). But to recognize her is to enter an abyss of one's own imaginative making ("I feel quite enough, as I hinted yesterday, your abysses", Strether tells her) that leads to one's apprehension of the interesting, the sensations that vitalize a reformed historical consciousness.

Upon recognizing Maria, Strether becomes poised to re-conceive his moral narrative. What follows for him are numerous experiences of his making a new beginning on this project. This experience reveals the pattern of recurrent entrance that I have been associating with otherworld narrative. For example, as Strether prepares to meet Maria in the hotel garden, he detects himself at this point poised to abandon the moral script of his Puritan American past and to begin to improvise a new moral scheme.

> Nothing could have been odder than Strether's sense of himself as at that moment launched in something of which the sense would be quite disconnected from the sense of his past and which was literally beginning there and then. (I, i, 59)

This passage once again characterizes Strether's experience in terms of his dilation of time. He senses

himself as *at that moment* launched in something disconnected and disconnecting, something new. The very threshold passage described by his imaginative fathoming of the Lambinet landscape is here replicated. Strether once again oversteps the modesty of *his* nature. Every significant experience of otherworld entrance revives the characteristics of transgression and dilated time. The moment becomes a kind of receptacle within which otherworld experience occurs. The otherworldly which, in some basic philosophical sense, lies beyond time, is, through Strether's mad crossing, personally appropriated; his capacious sense of the otherworldly is thereby infused into what has become his highly personal sense of time.

In the scene in the London theater shortly thereafter, Strether experiences a further, thoroughly exhilarating sense of entrance. He feels "as if the play itself penetrated him with the naked elbow of his neighbor, a great stripped handsome red-haired lady who conversed with a gentleman on her other side in stray dissylables which had for his ear, in the oddest way in the world, so much sound that he wondered they hadn't more sense" (II, i, 44). Strether is here provoked by the stimulating difference of his environment. He is provoked by sensation to cross the threshold to articulation of this phantom foreignness. The effect of the stray dissylables positions Strether as someone able to appreciate European vagueness and feel

entranced by it but still as someone unable to articulate for himself what it means. Again William James is relevant: "The effort by which someone succeeds in keeping the right *name* unwaveringly present to his mind proves to be his saving moral act" (II, 565). Strether's sense of the "stray dissylables" symbolize his larger struggle to find names for unfamiliar sensations. This act of articulation should be read through the figure of the "mad crossing". The action of the self's finding appropriate, salutary names involves its passage across the threshold dividing it from the new thing, its mental embrace of the thing, and its subsequent recoiling into an act of self-affirming articulation. In "The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James," an essay devoted to exploring how James was "prodded ... by the very muses of deep form that he was only hauntedly aware of" (128), Blackmur poses that Strether's epic concern with articulation concerned a previously unexplored "territory of human relations".

> It may be said that James wooed into being -- by seeing what was there and then going on to create what might be there in consciousness and conscience -- a whole territory of human relations hitherto untouched or unarticulated. I do not say not experienced, only unarticulated. (139)

The acts of articulating this unexplored territory constitute what James will later refer to as the "performance of Europe". In the London theater, Strether, excited by his having a woman he likes and is attracted to beside him in a bustling public atmosphere, reflects on the

rarity of his present privilege. The experience is quite other from those of his past: "He had married, in the far-away years, so young as to have missed the time natural in Boston for taking girls to the Museum" (II, i, 43). His present experience is a kind of unnatural recompense for previous missed chances. Strether perceives that it was a world of types [one could easily say "otherworld of types" with respect to Strether], and this was a connexion above all in which the figures and faces in the stalls were interchangeable with those on the stage" (II, i, 43). The interchangeability of those in the audience and those in the stage suggests Strether's own status as a threshold-crosser moving between the roles of perceiver and articulator. Every one of his further experiences of entrance within "Europe" coincides with his added capacity to articulate its phantom foreignness, the pictorial ideas provocatively placed at the "threshold of his thought".

I will further trace the pattern of epic entrance to establish the way the pattern holds throughout the novel. In the novel's first scene of solitude, Strether crosses from the Parisian right bank to the left, leaving Waymarsh to read the newspapers at the American bank that strikes him as "the abutment of some transatlantic bridge". Waymarsh's inclination to hide away in American cultural sites signifies his inability to make any cognitive crossings at all. Conversely, Strether seeks to "put himself in relation"

with "Paris" and winds up in the Luxembourg Gardens where he reads Mrs. Newsome's letters and reviews his own unsatisfying past. He gets into relation by his integrating his memories of his dead wife and son, his old ambitions for high culture, his relationship with Mrs. Newsome, his most recent experiences in Europe with Gostrey, and his sense of Chad Newsome's romantic privilege with his present impressions. His relation to "Europe" proves to be that of a man characterized by a "double consciousness" -- consciousness of his personal past and consciousness of the potential future afforded him by his quarrying the alternative presented to him in the veneer forms of Europe.

The scene concludes with Strether convinced of his success in "getting into relation"; he strolls to Chad's residence on the Boulevard Malesherbes. Once there, he studies the facade. The building facade effects him with its elegance in such a way that it seems to both invite and challenge his right to pass through it and upstairs to Chad's apartments. The building hits him with its interrogative appeal:

> He had struck off the fancy that it might, as a preliminary, be of service to him to be seen, by a happy accident, from the third-story windows, which took all the March sun, but of what service was it to find himself making out after a moment that the quality 'sprung,' the quality produced by measure and balance, the fine relation of part to part and space to space, was probably -- aided by the presence of ornament as positive as it was discreet, and by the complexion of the stone, a cold fair grey, warmed and polished a little by life -- neither more nor less than a case of

> distinction, such a case as he could only feel unexpectedly as a sort of delivered challenge? (II, ii, 69)

In this astonishing sentence, exemplifying the wandering, dilatory, abstract, and evanescent qualities of James's late style, the building or, more specifically, Strether's vision of the building challenges him to give an account of himself. Strether's vision of the building seems to be asking him, like the shades whom Odysseus encounters in the underworld, "how did you get to experience me as you see me here? How did you get here at all in this otherworld? Who grants it?" (In The Odyssey, various shades ask Odysseus how he managed to enter the underworld. For example, Achilles: "... old knife, what next? What greater feat remains/for you to put your mind on, after this?/How did you find your way down to the dark/where the dimwitted dead are camped forever/the afterimages of used-up men?" [XI, 470-473]) Whereas James usually maintains narrative attention on the so-called "center" of Strether's consciousness, narrative attention in the above sentence seems to drift so as to conceive the point of view of the building facing Strether. The question mark with which the sentence culminates seems to express the thought (if thought is the right word) of the building, experienced visually by Strether as a kind of conversing otherworld shade.

This tendency to ventriloquize inanimate phenomena visually registered is characteristic of late James. Sharon

Cameron explains at least part of what James is up to: "... it is one thing to say that thoughts are things in the sense that only in consciousness are things 'constituted' as material. It is another to equate thoughts with things by an inverse spatial movement which moves thoughts out of the mind and into the world, where they have the palpable existence that things would have" (27). Strether's vision of the building, his picturing thought of the edifice, is what James grants a virtual autonomy -- testifying to Strether about Europe's deep history the way Agamemnon or Achilles impart cultural and historical significance to Odysseus through their interactions with him. With a subtlety almost precious, James describes Strether's experience in Paris in the very terms emphasized in his "Project for Novel": "A whole process begins to take form in him which is of the core of the subject, and the steps and shades in the representation of which I cannot pretend here to adumbrate" (Notebooks, 560).

Strether's consciousness appears to cross the street to meet the *effect* of the building. This is an extreme but altogether consistent example of the kinds of crossings James reveals throughout the novel. Entrancement predicates entrance. "Before Strether had cut the knot by crossing", Little Bilham appears on Chad's balcony to smoke a cigarette. Bilham and Strether conduct a wordless visual interview that precipitates Strether's entering the building

and entering the next stage of his otherworld narrative. The scene replicates a standard otherworld stand-off between the hero-explorer and a shade of the dead.

> The young man looked at him still, he looked at the young man; and the issue, by a rapid process, was that this knowledge of a perched privacy appeared to him the last of luxuries. To him too the perched privacy was open, and he saw it now but in one light -- that of the only domicile, the only fireside, in the great ironic city, on which he had the shadow of a claim. (II, 70)

During his ruminations in the Luxembourg Gardens, Strether had associated Chad with death -- the moral death suffered by the young man corrupted by the presumably wicked woman (he quotes the Latin motto mentioned in Gautier's travels of Spain, "Omnes vulnerant, ultima necat"). But the sight of Little Bilham expresses precisely the opposite of what Strether expected: "youth". Strether then recognizes that there was "youth in everything but his own business" (II, i, 70). This recognition precipitates a crucial early stage of his otherworld entrance. Strether weighs the prospect of meeting the young man in Chad's rooms with the alternative of reuniting with Waymarsh "alone", "not only undiluted but positively strengthened" in his moral intransigence. The result of crossing the street and "passing through the porte-cochere" was "like consciously leaving Waymarsh out". Otherworld entrance reflects a choice of attention. Leaving Waymarsh "out" means not having to attend to him; Strether's preference for a different interlocutor furthers his advance.

His entrance within Chad's residence represents a crucial rite of passage that he will remember as a point of departure. When he lunches with Bilham and Miss Barrace in Chad's rooms the next day, Strether will observe the view of Paris through the balcony window and re-assess the fruits of entrance: "Strether literally felt at the present hour that there was a precipitation in his fate. 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 everything?" (III, i, 76) Strether's imaginative embrace of the building facade is here fulfilled by his sensualized cognition of alternative possibilities. He takes the measure of the extent of his otherworld passage late in the novel when he lingers late one night on the same balcony from which Bilham had looked down at him:

> He spent a long time on the balcony; he hung over it as he had seen little Bilham hang the day of his first approach, as he had seen Mamie hang over her own the day little Bilham himself might have seen her from below; he passed back into the rooms, the three that occupied the front and that communicated by wide doors; and while he circulated and rested, tried to recover the impression that they had made on him three months before, to catch again the voice in which they had seemed then to speak to him. That voice, he had to note, failed audibly to sound; which he took as the proof of all the change in himself. He had heard, of old, only what he *could* then hear; what he could do now was to think of three months ago as a point far in the past. (XI, i, 281)

This is a classic instance revealing James's famous formula for Strether: he has crossed to *an* other side. His experiences of entrance have brought him to a point far

beyond that mentally attainable for him when he first stood before Chad's building.

A few more examples of the persistence of Strether's experience of entry will suffice to prove the rule. After lunching with Little Bilham and Miss Barrace in Chad's apartment Strether notes "The very beginning with him of a condition as to which, later on, it will be seen, he found cause to pull himself up; and he was to remember the moment duly as the first step in a process" (III, ii, 78). When he and Maria Gostrey arrange to meet Little Bilham by appointment in the Louvre and, while they study Titian's portrait of a young man, Bilham advances from "the waxed and gilded vista", Strether has "a sense of having at last taken hold" (III, ii, 83). But this sense is superseded by his bewildering first encounter with Chad in the box of the *Théâtre de Comedie Française*. There, Strether plunges further into the unprepared for when he accepts that his "imagination" "had faced every contingency but that Chad should not be Chad, and this was what it now had to face with a mere strained smile and uncomfortable flush" (III, ii, 90). Strether's appearance at Gloriani's garden party precipitates another stage of arresting entrance: "Far back from streets and unsuspected by crowds, reached by a long passage and a quiet court, it was as striking to the unprepared mind, he immediately saw, as a treasure dug up; giving him too, more than anything yet, the note of the

range of the immeasurable town and sweeping away, as by a last brave brush, his usual landmarks and terms" (V, i, 119).

At Gloriani's, Strether of course makes the acquaintance of Madame de Vionnet. This relation hastens yet further experiences of entrance. When he visits her at her residence, for example, he knocks his face against a metaphorical wall that divides what he has known up to know from what he will begin to know by virtue of his new relation to Madame de Vionnet:

> He guessed at intense little preferences and sharp little exclusions, a deep suspicion of the vulgar and a personal view of the right. The general result of this was something for which he had no name on the spot quite ready, but something he would have come nearest to naming in speaking of it as the air of supreme respectability, the consciousness, small, still, reserved, but none the less distinct and diffused, of private honour. The air of supreme respectability -- that was a strange blank wall for his adventure to have brought him to break his nose against. It had in fact, as he was now aware, filled all the approaches, hovered in the court as he passed, hung on the staircase as he mounted, sounded in the grave rumble of the old bell, as little electric as possible, of which Chad, at the door, had pulled the ancient but neatly-kept tassel; it formed in short the clearest medium of its particular kind that he had ever breathed. (VI, i, 146)

That Strether has no "name" for this aura of "supreme respectability" makes obvious that he is about to execute yet another mad crossing effecting new consciousness through the act of new articulation. It also happens that in this scene Madame de Vionnet supersedes Maria Gostrey in the role

of epic guide. In Strether's otherworld narrative, the role of guide (or ambassador, the Jamesian version of the epic guide) is passed on depending on who is needed for Strether to address his unnatural questions. "Confronted with Madame de Vionnet", Strether "felt the simplicity of his original impression of Miss Gostrey. She certainly had been a fact of rapid growth; but the world was wide, each day was more and more a new lesson" (VI, i, 150). Occasioning Strether's new sense of entrance, the object of his attention, Madame de Vionnet, provokes him to raise new questions. Entrancing him, the Countess encourages an experience of entrance for Strether that has the character of the absolute. When Strether reassures Madame de Vionnet about his tolerance for anxiety the Countess smiles at him in a way that makes him feel that he enters precisely into her biological point of view: "Deep and beautiful on this her smile came back, and with the effect of making him hear what he had said just as she had heard it" (VI, i, 150). This marks a rather dizzying kind of empathic and sensory crossing. Strether enters into the other mind's experience of his words. This entrance is effected through conversation, a crucial mechanism contributing to the advance of Strether's otherworld journey throughout.

The spatial complexities of the Jamesian narrative of consciousness are elaborated at the close of the novel. Strether's increased entrance into his European otherworld

concludes with his emergence in his social context as a psyche synchronized with "America". His faithful study of his entrancement with Europe has turned the historical "dream" beyond possibility into a reality. "Wasn't what you came out for to find out *all*?" Maria Gostrey asks him. (IV, ii, 118) The cumulative effect of his otherworld entrance sees him come out, "like the figure on the clock at Berne," as far as he is able. In the paradoxical scheme of narrative directions, to be farthest out is to have entered most deeply into the European scene and thus to be able best to articulate the obscured message of America.

*   *   *   *   *   *   *

Having surveyed the appearance and function of epic entrance in The Ambassadors, I now want to explore a question of considerable contention in James criticism regarding the experience of depths. Leo Bersani, for example, contends that consciousness (in this instance, of Europe) is experienced strictly as surfaces, what we can understand, in terms of the cognitive formula of The Ambassadors, as the lateral traversing from "canvas to clever canvas." "James's fiction, " writes Bersani, "is notoriously dense in what I suppose we have to call psychological detail, but it is remarkably resistant to an interest in psychological depth" (130). He adds that "the grounds for what we might think of as a 'vertical' motive (plunging down 'into' personality) eventually disappear from

James's fiction". It would seem, rather, that in the late novels "personality" is itself a function of "plunging down". Readers accompany the depicted self in its endlessly repeated thrusts downward. Bersani concludes: "In short, compositional play need not be merely tangential to being; and in the immense faith in time and language which this gamble implies, James works toward a richly superficial art in which hidden depths would never ironically undermine the life inspired by his own and his characters' mere ingenuities of design (132)". Bersani argues that depth is more a figure of James's rhetoric than a fact of his narrative treatment. Granted, Bersani discusses depth in the sense of unconscious content -- the Freudian depths that interfere with the surface play of linguistic composition. But he fails to account for James's tendency to propose undisclosed depths as the very sources of new self-compositions. In the sequence of references to Strether's "touching bottom", James locates the point of view at the limina dividing the buried from the revealed, the divisive from the scripted, as in the example of Strether's seeing his past revealed to him as a picture that gracefully deepens to allow him to view his primary past (II, ii, 61).

In the Luxembourg Gardens scene, Strether regards his past as a "backward picture" that "hung" before his eyes, its "long crooked course, grey in the shadow of his solitude" (II, ii, 61).

> It had been a dreadful sociable solitude, a solitude of life or choice, of community; but though there had been people enough all round it there had been but three or four persons in it. Waymarsh was one of these, and the fact struck him just now as marking the record. (II, ii, 61)

This backward picture recedes in space revealing other figures.

> Mrs. Newsome was another, and Miss Gostrey had of a sudden shown signs of becoming a third.

The logic of the picture refutes Bersani's assertion that the Jamesian aesthetic is one of surfaces without depths. Waymarsh's appearance in the picture expresses a physical fact, a material reality. But he and the other figures in the foreground, Mrs. Newsome and Maria Gostrey, give way to others behind them. The figures to the rear pale like ghosts.

> Beyond, behind was the pale figure of his real youth, which held against its breast the two presences paler than itself -- the young wife he had early lost and the young son he had stupidly sacrificed. (II, ii, 61)

I want to contend, counter to Bersani, that, throughout the narrative, Strether has an expanding consciousness of revealed depths. Strether's repeated experience of entrance within a new self-narrative coincides with his repeated experience of "touching" to a new "bottom" that can be understood as the new boundary of the self. I would argue that every time Strether touches bottom, he tends to sound what William James calls "the self of all selves", the "spiritual self", that point of view wherefrom we "think of

ourselves as thinkers". The experience of touching bottom positions the thinker at a cyclical stage of self-recapitulation marked by the knowledge of mental advance. The narrative of The Ambassadors depicts Strether plunging to greater depths just as it depicts him gradually penetrating new thresholds of relation. Cognitive depths prove infinite in the way the otherworld represents the infinitude of potential thought. Yet to feel oneself "touch bottom", as Strether does so often in the novel, is to feel you have conceived some thought that thoroughly satisfies your demands for the moment. To do this is to come "home". But we must note that in The Ambassadors, Strether, like Milton's Satan, never stays in one place of mental repose for very long. Let us review a few passages to see how this pattern develops.

As he speaks with Maria Gostrey, Strether notes that "It was always the case for him in these counsels that each of his remarks, as it came seemed to drop into a deeper well. He had at all events to wait a moment to hear the slight splash of this one" (IV, iii, 114). At an evening party in Chad's "lovely home", Strether senses himself " moving in a strange air and on ground not of the firmest" (VI, ii, 159). When he meets Madame de Vionnet in Notre Dame, Strether describes his purchase of the "seventy blazing volumes" of Victor Hugo as being "out of proportion" to "any other plunge" (VII, i, 174): "Yet he felt even as he

spoke how at that instant he was plunging." On hearing out Madame de Vionnet on a crucial matter, Strether feels a momentary awe: "The manner of this speech gave Strether such a sense of depths below it and behind it as he hadn't yet had -- ministered in a way that almost frightened him to his dim divinations of reasons" (VIII, ii, 226).

Depths provoke Strether's quest for a hermeneutic account. The reasons, Strether learns, must be revised for "everything." He is depicted in the act of repeatedly revising his moral framework. With his every "plunge," Strether's framework is further revised. This action pits Strether in the role of historical revisionary.

Every bottom gives way to a successive one: "That was it--when once they were off he had dropped; this moreover was what he had dropped to, and now he was touching bottom" (XII, iii, 303); this is followed by, "He hadn't yet struck himself, since leaving Woollett, so much as a loafer, though there had been times when he believed himself touching bottom. This was a deeper depth than any, and with no foresight, scarcely with a care, as to what he should bring up" (XII, i, 316).

And yet even while he is specifically described as penetrating his Parisian medium, Strether is also penetrated. He experiences his increased sympathy for Madame de Vionnet as though she were driving it into him with her "golden nails" (James makes much in the "Project" of Madame

de Vionnet's "prodigious penetration"). Strether is the site of entrance, a kind of passage through which sensation goes in and language passes out.

The experience of historical depths must finally be accepted in terms of the penetration of picture planes. The place of temporary mental repose always lies at the still point deep within the apprehendable impression. The Lambinet scene represents this process better than any other single example in the works of James. However, there are many others to choose from. There is Milly Theale's "pale sister", the Bronzino portrait at the heart of her Matcham labyrinth. There is also the drawing room portrait of the young man with whom Ralph Pendrel exchanges historical places in The Sense of the Past. James summarizes Ralph's fate in his "first statement" for the novel.

> What is involved in my prodigy, and makes the real drama, story or situation of it, is that one or the other of the young men in consequence of what so supernaturally passes between them, steps back or steps forward, into the life of the other exactly as that life is at that moment constituted, at that moment going on and being enacted, representing each the other for the persons, the society about him, concerned with but the double consciousness the representation of which makes the thrill and the curiosity of the affair, the consciousness of *being the other and yet himself also, of being himself and yet the other also*. (Notebooks, 504-505) (my italics)

This is the double consciousness of the Jamesian witness, a witness divided between himself and the other, the present and the past, the here and the beyond, the surface and its depths. The only way for this consciousness

to extend to encompass its owned other is by penetrating the depths of a painting. James describes Ralph as a kind of Ulyssean sea-crosser. Ralph emerges into his sense of the past "as from below, after the fashion of a swimmer who has dived or sunk or been dragged down for the minute and who comes up to the surface, recovering breath with difficulty at first and then gets by a few strokes more onto the fact of terra firma, where he feels his feet and can stand erect and look about and know where he is" (506). Ralph's crossing of the picture plane enacts a crossing to an otherworld that must be known through an experience of depths. The past proves *deep*. And so the journey into the past must be a journey through depths.

Strether, too, is characterized by his "double consciousness". He, too, is a divided witness. Paintings describe the layers of his experience. He is the American gallery-visitor whose otherworld consists exclusively of European paintings. Strether tunnels through these in quest of deep experience. His "appointments" refer to his ceaselessly being appointed on into new paintings that constitute his interpretable world, his potential present tense. The bottom in a Jamesian narrative space conceived in terms of penetrable pictures turns into a temporal endpoint, the point of temporary homecoming, of temporary apocalyptic repose.

1. Seymour Chatman analyzes why James resorts to a cleft sentence structure in presenting Strether "in the vision of the other party". The sentence in which Strether is presented begins, "When in a quarter of an hour, he came down, what his hostess saw, what she might have taken in with a vision kindly adjusted, was the lean slightly loose figure of a man of the middle height ... " Chatman remarks that "*What* itself is so general as to set up for any possibility, even the most intangible ... Thus even human beings can be made to seem more abstract by being placed in a syntax which could as easily anticipate abstract nouns" (66). This supports my notion of an otherworld scheme. Characters confront each other as vague and otherly only to become more concrete as they verbally interact. Characters become concrete gradually as they are psychically and verbally appropriated. James's syntax suggests the progression from the vague to concrete, from the shadowy to the material, that comes about through the repeated mental crossings and penetrations. The reader might justifiably ask why Gostrey, Strether's all-seeing otherworld guide, would have to suffer the sense of Strether as apparitional and indiscernible. While Gostrey knows the things that Strether needs to know to effect his European "conversion", she has other personal concerns that range beyond her function as guide. For example, the otherworld guide is not supposed to fall in love with her charge as Gostrey will. Gostrey is not simply a

ficelle, she is a character with desires. But James devises the novel so that Gostrey's desires are met only to the degree that they serve Strether in his conversion journey. This is why she is the "most unmitigated and abandoned of *ficelles*" (Preface to The Ambassadors, 12). To the degree that she experiences desires beyond the compass of her role as *ficelle,* Gostrey endures the vagueness of the otherworld journeyer the way any other such journeyer would. The above cleft sentence seems to imply how subject she is to the very processes of gradual consciousness, the gradual clarifications of desire, into which she initiates Strether.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SELF IN RELATION TO OTHERWORLD SHADES

Epic otherworld consciousness forms through the self's relations to the otherworld shades of the dead. In this chapter, I shall demonstrate how Strether's experiences "Europe" as though it is composed of otherworld shades. Strether's mental experience synthesizes with his sense of his external environment to render his thought and sensations shade-like. Abstract and concrete mental objects together occupy his point of view. These phenomena display themselves in the psychic site James terms the "footlights of consciousness". They perform the past. The phenomena provoke Strether's attention and invite him to appropriate them to present consciousness. As shades, these phenomena remain "other" until Strether appropriates them. Like the authors of classical and medieval epic otherworld narrative, James conceives his hero's saving act to be his appropriation of the consciousness offered by otherworld shades. Through his relation with these shades, the hero forms the intricate consciousness of self, nation, and historical tradition that locates him in time. Through his appropriation of European objects, Strether forms his epic consciousness.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, examples from The Odyssey, The Aeneid, La Divina Commedia, and Paradise Lost are adduced to establish the

elements of the epic hero's relation to shades that apply to Strether's experience in The Ambassadors. In the second section, the reading of shades in James is contextualized by examining instances where Emerson and William James include the terms "shade" and "shadows" in their discussion of psychological experience. Pivotal to my discussion will be a passage from Principles of Psychology where William James describes mental experience to be a function of "shades of relation". In the third section, I shall return to The Ambassadors to examine James's frequent references to shades. James constructs the narrative in ways that invite reading Strether's epistemological progress in terms of his passage through numerous encounters with shades. Pivotal interactions with shades mark Strether's experiences of mental homecoming. These experiences foreshadow his apocalyptic vision at the *Cheval Blanc*, a vision to be analyzed at length in the later chapter on homecomings.

A. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HERO'S RELATIONS WITH SHADES IN CLASSICAL EPIC

The following characteristics of the epic hero's experience of the otherworld shades inform the analysis of Jamesian epic consciousness.

Firstly, the epic hero develops his consciousness of "home" through his interviews with otherworld shades. The question of homecomings has been discussed in other chapters, so I will not pursue the point here. I shall simply state the

fundamental relation between the experience of shades and homecomings. Epic consciousness is concerned with "going home". Through his interviews with shades, the epic hero gains the consciousness that represents his homecoming. To take one example, The Odyssesy shows Odysseus clarifying his sense of Greek selfhood as a result of his contacts with shades. When he sees and speaks to his lovesick mother, the swarm of Greek heroines, maimed Agamemnon, and bitter Aias, Odysseus integrates the attributes of the Mycenean Greek self in his personal consciousness. He comes "home", historically speaking, gaining the cultural consciousness encoded within these shades.

There are four characteristics of the hero's relation to shades. The first regards the disposition of the epic hero: he is prone to imaginative flights while burdened by a past marked by personal losses and cultural strife. The hero is haunted by both the past and the possible. Memory and imagination dominate his experience. It is fitting that the epic hero visits with the shades of the dead since he is acutely a creature of memory and imagination, intensely engaged with the shadow-life of the mind. The heroes of classical epic are different historical forms of the haunted man.

The second characteristic of the hero's relations with shades is the feeling of threat. For different reasons in different narrative contexts, the hero initially dreads his

dealings with shades. His dread could be understood psychoanalytically as his resistance to confronting the unnerving truths laid bare by these interviews. Dante's *Commedia* is an often caustic condemning scrutiny of human kind. It portrays man invariably as twisted towards evil ("al mal si torce" Virgil explains to Dante on the Purgatorial terrace of sloth), unable to make his way virtuously by appropriating the right mental objects (objects that would comprise a consciousness worthy of grace). Exposing the flaws of a culture, the otherworld narrative implicates the hero as culture's accomplice. These dynamics of the hero's dread are related to Strether's initial attitude when he arrives in Paris, "the great bright Babylon".

The third characteristic of the hero's experience of shades speaks to the hero's mental process. When first confronted with the shades, he is taken aback by their immense numbers. Gradually he sifts the crowd and chooses some shade with whom he wishes to speak. Though casually related, these tendencies epitomize the process of otherworld vision. The hero's experience of shades follows a two-stage epistemological pattern. He views the shades panoramically before locating a specific shade with which he interacts. He moves from a vague vision of dizzying plenitude to a verbal interview. The process evinces two things: first, that the epic consciousness is generally expansive.[1] In trying to fathom the immense scope of the past signified by shades, this

heroic consciousness extends its limits. Secondly, the hero's expansion is only consolidated in language. The hero's viewing of immensity is an epistemological gesture. He only consolidates his self-expansion through his concrete verbal dealings with a specific shade or shades.

The process of otherworld vision is of course infinitely more nuanced than this bald summary. But what's needed here is only a general formula. Scenes from classical otherworld narrative that exemplify the two-stage visionary process will be reviewed to illustrate how this formula applies to James's rendering of Strether's thought process.

The last characteristic of the episodes with shades, implicit in my discussions of "homecomings", is the historicist function of shades. The shades are of course vestiges of the dead. They are intrinsically "other" from the epic hero who remains alive. Their otherness is what makes them the signifiers of a knowledge the hero must have. Phantoms of the past, they indicate an intricate historical depth. Fundamentally storytellers, they each constitute a text. They are also *provocateurs*, challenging the hero to sustain his vision of them. They question him as he questions them. They draw the hero out from himself, inspiring what Dante calls the "mad crossing" and what James, discussing Strether, refers to as his passage through to "the other side". As Ronald Macdonald argues, these shades compose a semiosis of history. They comprise the integument of the deep

past and serve as inextinguishable reference points that insinuate the hero within the depth of this past.

> The souls that the [Dantesque] pilgrim meets, and not only those in Hell but those in Purgatory and Paradise as well, are never presented to us simply as a series of examples of sin or saintliness, mere points in an abstract moral schema, but rather as the results of a process, the artifacts of the various ways in which they have lived their lives in time. In the results that we meet we can always see the traces of the process by which this result came to be, and it is the sense of historical depth, the sense that things do not simply exist but came to be this way, that gives Dante's poetry its excitement, its concreteness, its unfailing ability to give us the feeling of real presence. (75)

Macdonald reads these otherworld tableaus of the dead as condensed dreamscapes that, when interpreted, lead below their surface in numerous directions. As the hero talks to these shades, he intuits the past to which they refer. He imaginatively penetrates the past's vestiges and develops a grammar of depths. Using language, his principal tool, the hero addresses a true history of dizzying referentiality.

Two of the pilgrim's conversations in the *Commedia* will serve to demonstrate how his interviews with shades historicize the hero. The shades effectively function as forms of psychological and historical currency in which the hero learns to trade. In these semiotic transactions, he gives up a part of himself -- an idea, belief, loyalty -- to gain a new insight or conviction from his conversation.

The historicist character of the hero's dealings with shades will dominate the discussion in the next chapter of the

epic motif of the embrace of the shade. This chapter will lay the groundwork for that discussion. The selection of passages from classical epic otherworld narrative is admittedly extemporaneous. I have worked with those incidents that remained most in my mind. My intention in this section is simply to reinvolve the reader in the epic realm of shades. I want the reader to begin my analysis of William James's psychological "shades of relations" (in section II) and of the many references to shades in The Ambassadors (in section III) fresh from a brief tour of epic otherworlds. As I review my four characteristics of otherworld relations, I will from time to time draw comparisons to Henry James's reconception of otherworld relations in The Ambassadors. However, my full analysis of the function of epic "shades" in The Ambassadors will appear in Section III of this chapter.

I have spoken of the epic hero as someone in the thrall of his prodigious imagination, as oddly haunted. Let us briefly summarize how this condition applies to Odysseus, Aeneas, Dante's pilgrim, and Milton's Adam.

The Greek *Nekyia* is the visionary experience of a man who, by habit, is haunted by his world. Odysseus is first haunted by the productions of his own fertile imagination. His wandering seems half the consequence of his insatiable curiosity and his taste for improbable adventures. Second, he is haunted by the "nightmare" of "history", the bad dream from which Stephen Dedalus cannot awake. Odyssean exile is of

course Joyce's archetype for Bloomian cogitation. Like Leopold Bloom, Odysseus's exile is a function of the extreme degree to which he is affected by historical experience. "Master of land ways and sea ways" (XI, 406), Odysseus has survived a ten-year war abroad in which he was a crucial participant. The crafty Ithacan personally masterminded the sack of Troy, having conceived the trick of the Trojan Horse. If he isn't conscience stricken about the obliteration of the Trojan civilization, he still questions the virtue of the carnage he has helped to engineer.

Odysseus is also mnemonically haunted by his thoughts of his Ithacan homeland and the wife, son, parents, property, and the home affairs that war forced him to abandon. His thoughts of his "*nostos*" inhabit his mind like ghosts demanding their re-establishment in material reality.

Aeneas, too, is haunted. He remembers the fall of Troy, the sacking of his palace, the murder of his wife Creusa. He has seen his compatriots massacred and their survivors exiled around the Mediterranean. He is haunted by his abandonment of Dido and by desire to reunite with his father Anchises: "It was your sad image," Aeneas tells his father's shade, "so often come, that urged me to these thresholds [of Dis]" (VI, 919-920). His mind consumed by ghosts, Aeneas is fated to visit the underworld dominated by the phantoms. In the otherworld, the dialogue he has maintained with his memories is recontextualized in a transgressive space. There he is able

to interrogate these ghosts with revisionary boldness. He is granted the power to elaborate his memories. Their increased resonance expands his consciousness. The phantoms of the past speak in the voice of the future. The otherworld interviews correct his sense of the past, purging his mind of the old Trojan ghosts and equipping him with the prophetic vision of an Italian future.

The poet and the pilgrim of the *Commedia* are haunted men. The poet is a Florentine exile, driven out of his native city by political enemies. The pilgrim, his autobiographical *persona*, expresses the poet's wrath and his desire to purge the evils of the past with an apocalyptic providential order. The pilgrim assumes all the poet's ghosts. He is haunted by Beatrice, whose death at twenty-five inspired his theological studies and beliefs. He is also haunted by his precursor, Virgil. In the *Commedia*, the guides earn their office by being powerful ghosts. By haunting the pilgrim's imagination, they force him to make them his guides in a redemptive journey.

The poet-pilgrim is haunted by history and by his dream of applying a corrective. His corrective comes in a poem that re-members the revisionary experience of his imagination. Dante begins the "Paradiso" by invoking Apollo: "O divina virtù, se mi ti presti/tanto che l'ombra del beato regno/segnata nel mio capo io manifesti" ("O godly force, if you so lend yourself/to me, that I might show the shadow of/the blessed realm inscribed within my mind ..." ["Paradiso"

I, 22-24]). The poet records with shadows an otherworld that is itself all shadows.

Milton's Adam, too, is beset by the converging phantom-worlds of memory and the imagination. In his Genesis-narrative (Paradise Lost, VIII, 249-560), he describes his Eden as the fulfillment of a dream: "Whereat I wak'd," he tells Raphael "and found/Before mine Eyes all real, as the dream/Had lively shadow'd: Here had new begun/My wandering ..." (VIII, 309-311). Adam's dreams symbolize his appetite for knowledge. The shadows of his imagination compel him to transgress the bounds of knowledge set by his creator. Adam's shadows associate him with Satan. The Satanic taste for dreams and transgression possesses Adam. It is Satan who, perched at Eve's ear, causes her to dream of eating from the Tree of Knowledge (V, 29-94).

Later, after he eats from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam is haunted by the dream of Death, the shadow that complements the other shadows of his imagination. "Thou my Shade Inseparable must with mee along" (Paradise Lost, X, 249): Sin thus brings death into the landscape of mankind. The dream of death shadows Adam and Eve as they make their "solitary way". In Paradise Lost, history itself becomes a shadow-scape. Atop the Mount of Contemplation, the warrior angel Michael reveals to Adam the prophetic vision of history that culminates in the martyrdom of Christ and the Last Judgment.

Lambert Strether is also haunted by his imagination and by his past. James refers to him in the novel's preface as "a

man of imagination", someone whose thought exceeds in range and reference the events of his life. Strether is haunted by an immense consciousness of his unfulfilled past: "The fact that he had failed, as he considered, in everything, in each relation and in half a dozen trades, as he liked luxuriously to put it, might have made, might still make, for an empty present; but it stood solidly for a crowded past" (II, ii, 61). Strether's wife and son are dead. He still chides himself for having neglected his son "who had died at school of rapid diptheria", observing "the secret habit of sorrow which had slowly given way to time". He is a man haunted by personal losses and missed chances. But, as he reacclimates himself to Europe, he also becomes haunted by the sensual and imaginative appeal of the continent. The shades of "Europe" will provoke him to re-conceive his sense of his past.

Having seen the epic hero to be, in his ghosted state, psychologically and experientially suited for the journey through the otherworld of shades, let us now note how he enters the otherworld feeling a terrible threat. His sense of a threat owes itself to varying sensations that are emphasized to different degrees in the otherworld narratives. In almost every narrative, the hero early on suffers from the deprivation of sunlight. The Homeric and Virgilian otherworlds and the Dantesque hell are first experienced as realms of darkness. In these *unreal* spaces, the conditions of earthly life are reversed. Before he meets the shades of the dead, the

epic hero copes with a darkness symbolic of his historical disorientation. Aeneas and the Cumaen Sybil move "along in darkness ... as those who journey in a forest/beneath the scanty light of a changing moon,/when Jupiter has wrapped the sky in shadows/and black night steals the color from all things" (VI. 356-362).

In the ring of the lustful ("Inferno", V, 28) Dante's pilgrim enters "a place where every light is muted" ("Io venni in loco d'ogne luce muto") and struggles to habituate his eyes in order to discern the faint figures floating in wind-swept air. The quest-querier experiences this reversal in earthly conditions as a rite of preparation for the unnatural visual experiences to come. The lightlessness also occasions the hero's historicized otherworld dream. It functions as one of his principle rites of passage into difference.

In The Ambassadors, Strether's darkness is metaphorical. It also symbolizes his periodic sense of ignorance and disorientation. At first, he regards his Parisian otherworld as a threatening place, a place of moral corruption. But he soon changes his attitude. The change in how he views Paris is foreshadowed by his having acclimated himself to his darkness. Early on, Strether confesses to Waymarsh his surprise at finding Chad's "home" so "lovely", Little Bilham so amenable, and himself clueless about Chad's whereabouts and his plans. After he answers "I don't know" to several questions put to him by Waymarsh, his American friend scornfully asks, "Then

what the devil *do* you know?" Strether responds "almost gaily": "I guess I don't know anything!", thereby confessing to his disorientation. While such ignorance causes Strether bemused concern, it also exhilarates him:

> It was somehow enlarging; and the air of that amplitude was now 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." (III, i, 72)

This cognitive darkness fills Strether with an anticipation that compensates him for his anxiety and loss of direction. The darkness excites his imagination. Strether's experience resembles those of earlier epic heroes in the way the darkness makes him anticipate the more the shades he will see.

Not only the darkness threatens the hero. His first views of the shades disturb him as well. The hero must overcome the dread he feels at first sight. Following Circe's instructions, Odysseus pours libations in a votive pit, sacrifices a black lamb and a black ewe, and promises to make further sacrifices upon his return to Ithaca. When the spirits of the dead appear from underground, he finds himself terrified: "From every side they came and sought the pit/with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear" (XI, 38-39). Odysseus bears his sword, the warrior's most valued mechanism of defense, to control which shades approach his votive pit. Although equipped with Circe's advice, Athena's influence, and Penelope's memory, he remains

a soldier who uses instruments of war to orchestrate the presentation of the shades.

It can of course be argued that his drawn sword represents human longing for the erotic coupling and communal prestige he knew in domestic life. This longing spurs Odysseus to deal with the shades. Homer uses the blood-sacrifice ritual to symbolize the visceral exchange of feeling for experience that results in human consciousness. Odysseus can make the dead shades speak only by offering them blood. The sacrificed animals' blood symbolizes the "blood offering" he makes in pursuing his desires. Only blood will reactivate the past. Only with blood can Odysseus invigorate Tiresias, the Theban seer, and the other shades that populate his landscape: "Any dead man/whom you allow to enter where the blood is/will speak to you, and speak the truth; but those/deprived will grow remote again and fade" (XI, 146-149).

The equation of blood for consciousness implies the harshness and violence characteristic of the epic otherworld experience. These characteristics sustain the hero's sense of threat throughout the narrative. The violence implicit in the Greek hero's blood sacrifice and his bearing his sword are recodified in The Ambassadors through the use of martial tropes and specific references to the "violence" Strether experiences when he recognizes Chad and Madame de Vionnet as the lovers keeping their tryst at the *Cheval Blanc*. Strether, too, proceeds through his otherworld narrative threatened by

certain prospects -- that he might (as he puts it to Maria) "break down" or that his beliefs in the "virtuous attachment" might prove false. His progress involves his negotiating these feelings.

The feeling of threat applies to Aeneas as well. He is terrified by his first view of shades. A short way inside Dis, he passes "a giant shaded elm ... home of empty Dreams" underneath which "so many monstrous shapes" lurk, including Centaurs and double-bodied Scyllas ... the hundred-handed Briareus ... Gorgons and Harpies ... and Geryon, the shade that wears three bodies" (VI, 373-382). He grips his sword and flails at these shadows only to be reassured by the Sybil that "they were only thin lives that glide without a body in/the hollow semblance of a form" (VI, 386-388). In de-emphasizing the need for physical protection, Virgil modifies the Homeric otherworld. In his version of Hades, the shades don't literally feed on animal blood. Virgil's otherworld describes a realm of virtual reality where his "pietistic" hero Aeneas can affront his historical destiny unthreatened by vestiges who mark the carnage of the past. The opposite proves true when the sight of Aeneas "and/his weapons glittering across the shadows" disperses in terror "the hosts of Agamemnon".

The following passage from the The Ambassadors depicts Strether crowded and challenged by his impressions. Note how James implies the air of threat. Standing on Chad's balcony of a Paris evening, Strether is as besieged as Odysseus felt

brandishing his sword to check the advancing shades: "All voices had grown thicker and meant more things; they crowded on him as he moved about -- it was the way they sounded together that wouldn't let him be still. He felt, strangely, as sad as if he had come for some wrong, and yet as excited as if he had come for some freedom" (XI, 281). Strether experiences these voices of the past with the ambivalence of the otherworld explorer divided in his loyalties between old beliefs and new claims. The project of representing the imaginative life goes hand in hand with integrating present discoveries with past beliefs. The epic hero's feeling of threat is caused partly by his fear that, in sacrificing past beliefs, he will be annihilated.

Now to the third point: the dynamics of otherworld vision. One of the first things about the shades that strikes the hero is their apparent infinitude. In their sum they express the immensity of the unexamined past and a sensory potential that gives the hero vertigo. The surging phantoms are an immeasurable quantity. They describe the vista of the unfocused heroic imagination. In viewing the innumerable shades, the hero reveals the expansive power of his imagination. He does not possess the mind or linguistic resources to name every shade of this immense host. But he does craft a limited consciousness from the immense possibilities presented to him. He crafts this consciousness out of his interviews with specific shades of his otherworld.

The plenitude of the shades represents the plenitude of potential experience. This is a feature of every otherworld narrative. In The Odyssey, Odysseus refers to the population of Erebos as "the unnumbered dead". In The Aeneid, Virgil measures the quantity of the shades through marvelous similes. Aeneas sees the "multitude" of the shades of the unburied swarm toward Charon's boat in the desire to reach their eternal abode across the river Acheron. The clustered shades are compared to "the leaves that with the early frost/of autumn drop and fall within the forest,/or as the birds that flock along the beaches,/in flight from frenzied seas when the chill season/drives them across the waves to lands of sun" (309-312, 407-411).

The passage is not solely about the hero's experience of an immense number of shades. It also addresses the central question of otherworld crossings. I will here digress to make a point that complements my general theory of otherworld vision. The shades observed by Aeneas are desperately and vainly struggling to cross the Acheron. As the Cumaen Sybil reveals, however, "The waves/will only carry souls that have a tomb" (VI, 428-429). The otherworld trope of crossing to a place of repose is intrinsic to both the epic and to the Jamesian poetics of mind I am theorizing. The shades of the dead offer innumerable points of historical departure. Epic crossings describe the epistemological movement from gaping at immensity to focusing historical significance. Aeneas, for

example, must cross many underworld thresholds to see the procession of future Roman heroes.

The same trope of crossing as expressive of mental penetration appears throughout The Ambassadors. James writes that Strether has to "recognize the truth that wherever one paused in Paris the imagination reacted before one could stop it" (II, ii, 69). In reacting, the imagination crosses to apprehend some object of the Parisian scene. This crossing results in Strether's experiencing a moment of cognitive extension. In his skewing of Virgil, James stresses how Strether attends to shade-like objects in his Parisan otherworld and pursues their reference until he arrives at a state of hermeneutic repose.

These imaginative crossings bring the self into relation with its historical past. Its historical experience stems from its discernment of visual objects. This is never more the case than in Maria Gostrey's apartments where the ruminative Strether seems to take counsel with her possessions in deciding how to deal with the Newsomes. (For example: "He had bent, with neared glasses over a group of articles on a small stand; and at this [Gostrey's question about Chad] he came up" [III, ii, 82].) It is also the case for Milly Theale in the Matcham labyrinth where, as Cameron points out, she identifies herself and her fate with the object she takes in -- the Bronzino portrait: "Milly projects the image of the lady [in the portrait] forward from the moment of the painting and

projects the image of herself backward; in the intersection of these moments resemblance is located: she sees the woman as she sees herself, another woman who is dying" (Cameron, 128). At critical moments, the intersection of the imaginative self and its mused over object registers in an epiphany of the historical order. Milly has to view the Bronzino in order to accept the European bequest and to generate her future American bequest. She defines herself as the American heiress of history by attending to the painting.

In his discussion of epic-novelistic form, Lukacs describes this moment of historical placement, predicated on the "surmounting of duality": His analysis merits quotation: "The duality of interiority and the outside world can be abolished for the subject if he (the subject) glimpses the organic unity of his whole life through the process by which his living present has grown from the stream of his past life damned up within his memory. The surmounting of duality -- that is to say the successful mastering and integration of the object -- makes this experience into an element of authentically epic form" (127). This surmounting of duality occurs in the Lambinet scene when Strether oversteps the modesty of his nature and, crossing the threshold of the picture, blends into its landscape. In extending himself through the object, Strether integrates himself with the cultural past consisting in it. John Carlos Rowe emphasizes James's validation of "representative values", the

"'constructive connections' made by the observer in his imaginative reconstruction of history, of the whole chain of figurative acts that have given rise to the particular scene as an 'object' for sense, as well as an occasion or motive for representation" (214). It is through this imaginative reconstruction that the Jamesian observer achieves hermeneutic repose, the sudden feeling of relation to a national (and supra-national) past.

Now to return to the hero's problem of constructing vision out of his initial sense of immensity. In canto III of "Inferno", the pilgrim reaches the same ante-chamber beside the Acheron as Aeneas had. There he appreciates the epistemological scale of his coming journey when he sees the countless dead: "dietro le venìa sì lunga tratta/di gente, ch'i' non avrei creduto/che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta" ("Behind the banner trailed so long a file/of people -- I should never have believed/that death could have unmade so many souls". [III, 55-57]). It is these lines that T. S. Eliot echoes in <u>The Waste Land</u>: "Unreal City,/Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,/A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,/I had not thought death had undone so many" (I, 60-64). Eliot's echo suggests his debt to the pattern of consciousness promoted by Dante and the epic otherworld narrative tradition. Both Dante and Eliot here present the nightmare of history panoramically. The view of so much death imbalances the unprepared witness. In <u>The Waste Land</u>, the vision is a grim

commentary on the generation of European men lost in World War I. In the *Commedia*, Dante also emphasizes the humanity wasted by one kind of sin or another. But the passage also shows the pilgrim's consciousness in the act of rapidly expanding. The view of the innumerable dead suggests the scale of the pilgrim's exposure.

In canto V of "Inferno", Dante gives a different example of the rigorous expansion of consciousness the pilgrim must undergo. In this example, the pilgrim moves from a panoramic to a textual experience of the shades. In the circle of the "lussoriosi", the pilgrim sees the souls get blown by the *bufera* like hapless cranes. He is awed by the number of Love's martyrs. He asks Virgil to identify a mournful-looking shade who, it turns out, is Semiramis. In response, Virgil not only names Semiramis but recounts her history (V, 52-59). He continues by pointing out Dido, Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Paris and Tristan.

The narrative then insinuates readers into an abyss: "e più di mille/ombre mostrommi e nominommi a dito,/ch'amor di nostra vita dipartille" (V, 67-69). The detail suggests how much the Dantesque pilgrim must expand his consciousness. He must not only observe the captives of love in their innumerableness. He must also let Virgil point out and name more than a thousand of the spirits. The otherworld hero's struggle to order the immense potential consciousness is represented by his act of naming and historically identifying

these shades.

As mentioned at the outset of this section, in the epic otherworld the self grows through its uses of language. In the above example, the pilgrim progresses from vague awareness of an unnumbered, unnamed multitude to articulate consciousness of the specific thousand or so shades whose names and histories he learns. Naming and discussing the thousand shades marks for the hero both a contraction and an expansion of consciousness. Naming marks a contraction of his initial sighting of the countless shades. By resorting to names and conversations with a specific and finite number of shades, the pilgrim contracts his consciousness from that unsustainable intellectual experience of infinitude. Conversely, by learning about the shades, he has expanded his consciousness beyond the *point* where it was before he entered the circle of *the lussoriosi*.

To summarize once more, the hero's consciousness accrues through his relations to shades. In documenting the hero's modes of seeing -- his panoramic observation and focal interrogation of these shades -- otherworld narrative reveals the visual and lexical dynamics of epic consciousness. The narrative maps the self as it expands vertiginously and then recoils into a form of identity. These dynamics of epic consciousness are also at work in Jamesian narrative, especially in The Ambassadors.

In his preface to Roderick Hudson, James articulates his

representational strategy in words that evoke the predicament of the otherworld hero confronted by innumerable shades. James stresses the need for the writer describing "experience" to devise a "system of observation" by which to organize impressions and render his novelistic account. He is mindful that a method is needed to overcome cognitive vertigo. "The art of representation", he writes, "bristles with questions the very terms of which are difficult to apply and appreciate; but whatever makes it arduous makes it, *for our refreshment infinite*, causes the practice of it, with experience, to spread round us in a widening, not in a narrowing circle. Therefore it is that experience has to organise, for convenience and cheer, some system of observation -- *for fear, in the admirable immensity, of losing its way*" (35).

James's system of observation is defined by contrary impulses that succeed and balance each other to effect a verbal account of the visual: the first is the imaginative impulse to expand and the latter is the restrictive impulse to re-present. This double impulse defines the archetypal action of "finding one's way". The Jamesian explorer-self must find its way while venturing amid the "admirable immensity" by following a "system of observation" akin to the one followed by the otherworld hero. He must concentrate his attention on specific shades and represent his relations with those shades in the way that serves his aesthetic purpose. "Really, universally", James says in the same preface, "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" (37). In focusing on specific representative relations that signify historical experience, James observes an aesthetic system of observation that is methodologically comparable to the system followed by the otherworld hero.

In connoting the wondrous and the immeasurable, James's term "admirable immensity" suggests a firmament of the mind, the Jamesian aestheticized God. James displays his religious proclivities in his faith that he can concretize narrative form and interest through his willful quarry of the Immeasurable. His venturing in the "admirable immensity" provides his venturer-self the occasion of its own conversion to new vision.

In a famous formulation, James theorizes that the writer's "Experience is never limited and ... 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 airborne particle in its tissue" ("Art of Fiction" in Tales, 351-352). "Experience" is braved in the face of significant risks. The hazards of interrogating the "admirable immensity" are implied in the fate of Roderick Hudson, whose death in a thunder storm seems his natural comeuppance for having too impetuously thrown himself into deciphering the riddles of the imagination. In

The Ambassadors, Strether is similarly depicted in a virtual life and death struggle to cope with the immense scope of his new experiences. He suffers a kind of violence in striving to see and, through his mode of retrospective mental visualization, "measure" experiences which, like the virtuous attachment between Chad and the Countess, are coded by an overwhelming range of references.

In Gloriani's garden, "he had seen moreover an immensity" and the vision prompts his famous declaration about the need to live. At times, he becomes exasperated by the burden of his adventure. "How *much* I have to judge!" he sighs, only to have Madame de Vionnet unconsolingly confirm the fact: "Everything", she responds. This "remark [sic] was indeed -- with the refined disguised suppressed passion of her face -- what he most carried away" (IX, ii, 240).

The ways in which the hero sifts through the immense population of shades to select a specific shade with whom to have an intense encounter demands particular scrutiny; I shall term this act of selection "epic sighting" -- the act by which the hero narrows his attention by zeroing in on a figure(s) or figures that acutely incite his curiosity. This will prepare the way for exploring the fourth and final point concerning the historicist function of otherworld shades. In canto V of "Inferno" the shades sighted and interrogated are Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta, the adulterers brought together by their reading of an Arthurian romance and soon after murdered

by Gianciotto Malatesta, Paolo's older brother and Francesca's husband. The pilgrim desires to question these souls about their love. He recognizes an obscured part of himself in their story. If he has never acted in blind passion, he has contemplated the lures of *troubadour* romance. The interview with Francesca is an indirect reflection on the ethic of courtly love that pervades his lyrical poetry and his cultural moment.

The Dantesque pilgrim's method of eliciting the facts from Francesca exemplifies the way the otherworld hero gathers his insights. Once he sights the specific shade, he seeks its significance. He pauses to consult his guide, Virgil, puts careful follow-up questions, tearfully sympathizes and pities the shades, determines their significance for his vision of his world. Francesca describes her demise through the lyricism of the *dolce stil nuovo* ("Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende ... Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona ... Amor condusse noi ad una morte." [V. 100-106.]), the poetic style favored by Dante in La Vita Nuova. But she represents new knowledge for the pilgrim in that he himself has not experienced and enacted so impulsive and destructive a love. She animates him in a new way as he comes to possess her as a historical text.

The textuality of epic otherworld consciousness is further evidenced by the pilgrim's first encounter with Virgil. They meet at the foot of Mount Purgatory. Virgil's

image is "offered" to the pilgrim's eyes: "dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto/chi per lungo silenzio parea fioco" (I, 62-63). The pilgrim quickly expresses his consternation in his question: "qual che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!" Almost every meeting between the pilgrim and a shade begins with the pilgrim trying to identify the shade. The looming shade is asked to explain its status and significance.

Virgil does not directly answer Dante's question. He responds with a negative: "non omo, omo gia fui". This suggests the way his existence as a shade refers to his total past experience. As a shade, he is a visual text of the temporal man he was. Virgil identifies himself by referring to his emperor, his religion, his birthplace, his vocation, and the subject and hero of his literary masterpiece. This need for Dante to depict his shades placing themselves in their past is one of the reasons he often resorts to the rhetorical technique of periphrasis. The shade identifies itself through extended reference to the geography of its birthplace, its political activities, and social ties instead of directly stating its name. To the pilgrim's question "who are you?" the shade responds with far more than its name. After he identifies himself, Virgil reverts to his role as a facilitator, confronting the pilgrim through questions: "Ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia?/perché non sali il dilettoso monte/ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?" (I, 76-78)

The collaboration between self and shade begins with this

exchange of questions. Dante uses Virgil as a textual resource and as an "other" who inspires a consciousness he cannot generate alone. In the *Commedia*, collaborations of this kind are so intense that Virgil and many other shades can read the mind of the pilgrim as he picks his way through the otherworld.

The historicist function of Strether's otherworld European shades will be discussed in section III of this chapter and in section III of the following chapter, where Strether's relationship with Madame de Vionnet will be dealt with exclusively. Here, however, it is helpful to consider one example of the way the shades of Strether's otherworld operate textually to insinuate him into the past. When Strether visits Madame de Vionnet in her apartments, he finds that "old Paris" "echoe[s]" there. From the "immemorial polish" of her building's "wide waxed [exterior] staircase" to the "relics" adorning the Countess's inner rooms, the past speaks. It is these objects that *intone* the past, carrying Strether "further back" to the age of Napoleon -- the epic time of Empire. Napoleon is a crucial historical reference for James because of the expansive character of his sensibility. Like Dante's Ulysses, Napoleon personifies the insatiable epic desire for acquisitions and power.

The point of this passage is that so much is referred for Strether by the objects that occupy his mental vision. These objects are the shades of his otherworld landscape. The point

is not lost on James, who writes that Madame de Vionnet's chambers are full of "dim historic shades". In developing cognitive relations with these objects, Strether reads them for historical references the way the classical epic hero, through conversations, "reads" his otherworld shades.

B. "SHADES OF RELATION": USING PRAGMATIST PSYCHOLOGY AS A KNOWLEDGE PARADIGM TO CONTEXTUALIZE READING THE JAMESIAN SELF IN RELATION TO OTHERWORLD SHADES

The analysis of Strether as a character in complex relation to European shades pivots on James's tendency throughout The Ambassadors and other late works to pun on the word "shades". The pun effects a double analogy. The first analogy is between the epic otherworld shades and the shades of a painting, the gradations in light and color and that characterize its composition. The second analogy is between epic otherworld shades and the psychological "shades" William James refers to in discussing the intricacy and range of psychological experience.

In "The Stream of Thought" chapter of Principles of Psychology, William James implies his own analogy between the on-flow of the personal consciousness and the accumulation of different shades within a pictorial composition. In a section headed "Thought is in constant change", he stipulates the following: "... there is no proof that the same bodily sensation is ever got by us twice". He then chooses the

example of the painter to make his point. "The grass out of the window now looks to me of the same green in the sun as in the shade, and yet a painter would have to paint one part of it dark brown, another part bright yellow, to give its real sensational effect. We take not heed, as a rule, of the different way in which the same things look and sound and smell at different distances and under different circumstances" (I, 231). William James is discussing how thought is experienced affectively in varying perceptual shades whose force is determined by their contiguity to other shades. The emphasis is on the accumulative and complementary nature of mental life. This principle of complementariness also guides a Barbizon master like Corot, concerned as he was with "pictorial values". Similarly, the principle of accumulation defines the epic otherworld hero's experiences of his superseding impressions of the story-telling shades of the dead.

William James understands "shades of relation" to connote relations between the self and external objects. A former painter who apprenticed under William Morris Hunt, the leading popularizer of Barbizon in the United States, William James uses the term "shades of relation" in referring to the manifold interaction of the self and its otherworld objects. The concept of "shades of relation" applies to the metaphor of vision that grounds The Ambassadors: it is the metaphor of the American visitor to an American art gallery poised before a

framed European landscape painting at which she or he gazes with interest. In The Ambassadors, the Jamesian self *is* the character poised before the European canvas who dreams of what life is like within its represented world -- that self's otherworld. In the novel, the epic "shades" are those "shades of relation" established between the picture-viewer and the painterly shades composing the "otherworldly" landscape. These psychic shades inform the combinations of self and otherworld, internal and external experience, mind and history. The "psychological" shades are what becomes represented as self at *the moment* the Jamesian self enacts its epistemological threshold-crossing.

As already stated, the whole of the action in The Ambassadors, from Strether's arrival at his Chester hotel to his departure from Maria Gostrey's apartment, is framed as an otherworld landscape painting. Strether's consciousness accrues by virtue of its interactive play within this landscape. This evolving, decomposing and recomposing landscape consists of innumerable shades, the representational gestures of a European culture symbolizing a complex of cultural memory that Strether can experience only when he physically and imaginatively abandons "America" -- his native phenomenal habitat.

The text of The Ambassadors evinces the relation between psychological shades and the language wherein they are embodied. The novel converts the Jamesian otherworld landscape

to text. The picture of the landscape doubles as a text, as in the climactic Lambinet scene: "For this had been all day at bottom the spell of the picture -- that it was essentially more than anything else a scene and a stage, that the very air of the play was in the rustle of the willows and the tone of the sky" (XI, iii, 306). In both the classical epic and the Jamesian depictions of thought, picture and text complement each other as the vestige and the body, the body and the vestige involved in an indivisible grasp. The surface picture leads to its historical reference, the sub-surface lexicon of the past. The Jamesian otherworld landscape, created through the complex cooperation of memory and imagination, is recorded in words. In the "The Stream of Thought" chapter of Principles of Psychology, William James discusses the way words embody shades of relation within our thoughts:

> There is not a conjunction or a preposition, and hardly an adverbial phrase, syntactic form, or inflection of voice, in human speech, that does not express *some shading or other of relation* which we at some moment feel to exist between larger objects of our thought. If we speak objectively, it is the real relations that appear revealed; if we speak subjectively, it is the stream of consciousness that matches each of them by an inward coloring of its own. In either case the relations are numberless, and no existing language is capable of doing justice to all their shades. (I, 245)

In emphasizing the infinite number of possible psychological shades, William James brings to mind the Homeric references to the "unnumbered dead" of the Greek underworld. In emphasizing the "coloring" of the relations by the subjective viewpoint, he evokes the techniques of the Barbizon

landscapists obsessed with rendering the pictorial "values" ranging before the "eye". The Barbizon obsession is exemplified by the following revery of Theodore Rousseau: "I also heard the voices of the trees ...; this whole world of flora lived as deaf-mutes whose signs I divined and whose passions I uncovered; I wanted to talk with them and to be able to tell myself, by this other language -- painting -- that I had put my finger on the secret of their majesty" (Quoted in Herbert, 14). The Barbizon seer ventriloquizes his landscape and translates it into a painterly language.

William James argues that the vestigial world relating the self to objects positioned beyond it can only be adequately recognized through verbalization. This ghostly world acquires its virtual sinew and form in specific choices of words. As a visual array, psychology's epic shades constitute the potentiality of the self. Words return the projecting self within the limits of its being. And yet language will not be vital if the self does not begin by executing its romantic projections. This returns us to the point made in the previous section about the two-stage process of otherworld vision. The self transpires through its pulsation between ecstatic contemplation of historical infinitude and its "identific" return to words. It moves from embracing the phenomenal to embedding itself in the lexical.

These parallels between epic shades, shades of Barbizon landscape paintings, and psychological shades develop directly

out of Emerson's theories of the mind. "Man", writes Emerson, "is an analogist and studies relations in all objects. He is placed in the center of beings, and a ray of relation passes from every other thing to him. And neither can man be understood without these objects, nor these objects without man" (32). As the vanishing point of his cultural landscape, "man" is a point both of focus and of emanation. Attending to a particular object, he identifies it as it identifies him. His historical narrative is produced through the mutual identification between himself and his selected objects. "Every experience in nature corresponds to some state of mind, and that state of mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture" (32). Relations between the epic hero and the dead shades are equally characterized by an immense web of correspondences. His relations with shades determine how the epic hero's historical identity composes. Francesca da Rimini, Palinurus, and Achilles each evoke an immanent part of the hero to whom they relate their plights. The hero's historical consciousness is a function of his choosing to relate to these figures.

Emerson regards nature as the encylcopedic source of human identity as realized in language. Language identifies man's innumerable relations to Nature's shadowy forms, orienting him in his explorations of the otherworldly visual. "The world is emblematic", says the Concord sage. Invaluable for its "analogical import", the natural world becomes an

extension of the mind which embraces it. The interrogative human being turns the pictorial promise of his otherworld into pictorial selfhood. "Every man's condition", writes Emerson, "is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put" (22). In this sense, to become a transparent eyeball is to be a thoroughly interrogative creature -- to give oneself up to one's questions and to employ nature to compose a responsive pictorial assertion. The picture, a consequence of interrogative acts, is rendered in language. And the very picturesqueness of the language attests to the vivacity of the linguist: "Thus inevitably does the universe wear our color, and every object fall successively into the subject itself" (271).

The optimism of the early Emerson is balanced by the skepticism of the author of "Experience". In "Nature", Emerson emphasizes the omnipotence of the self: "Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable" (22). Every answered question would contribute -- like a revelation in a dialogue between epic hero and shade of the dead -- to the Emersonian self-portrait. Emerson here avows the possibility of a conclusive picture encoding a state of absolute realization; as a finished hieroglyph, the self would be elaborated to perfection. In "Experience", however, Emerson contradicts any belief in a total "self-realization": "I know better than to claim any completeness for my picture. I am a fragment and this is a fragment of me" (272).

Combined, the Emersonian images of the transparent eyeball and the fragmentary picture allow the following formula. The self assumes the character of the transparent eyeball in engaging with objects. As a transparent eyeball, it consumes its visual surroundings, immersing and losing itself in otherness. Afterwards, the self registers its visual acquisition in language. In the act of articulation, the self is transformed from the transparent to the visualized state; it becomes a representation, passing from the act of absorption to that of production. The stages of absorption and production are also characteristic of the epic hero's experience of otherworld shades. The hero becomes transparent as he attends to the shades and gets inscribed by the historical consciousness they encode. He then renders his narrative account of the particular interview. The transparent eyeball image testifies to a belief that "Nature", otherness, can be completely grasped and articulated ("I am nothing. I see all."). On the other hand, the notion of the self as fragmentary picture emphasizes the transience of all self-representation. The self enunciates its portrait even as it is poised to re-submerge itself in the naturalist vagueness and re-commence the action of articulation. If no questions remain unanwerable, neither is there ever a time to stopping asking questions. Thoughts of death provoke an infinite number.

Applying Emerson's metaphor of the self as "picture", we can read Strether as a visual treatment, an evolving fragment.

Strether's otherworld is the enveloping panorama offering him figurative mental possibilities. Emerson's self is a self-portrait, a "Me" continually revising itself by appropriating objects from the visual field of its otherworld -- "Nature", the "not Me". Every thought by which the Emersonian self extends itself through interaction with its natural otherworld promotes a variation on the self-portrait which forms the visual basis for its lexical expression. "We learn that God is", writes Emerson in "Circles", "that he is in me; and that all things are shadows of him" (172). Emersonian self-expansion is driven by the idea of an interior spirit that is knowable strictly through the epistemological capture of some sensory correlative in the external visual field. The shades of self-relation lie "out there" in the visual world. Emerson's construction of his ever fragmentary self-portrait depends upon his recognizing those shadows of his otherworld. The principle of analogy holds: "The instincts of the ant are very unimportant considered as the ant's; but the moment a ray of relation is seen to extend from it to man, and the little drudge is seen to be a monitor, a little body with a mighty heart, then all its habits, even that said to be recently observed, that it never sleeps, become sublime" (33). The ant is a shade, an Emersonian *somewhat*, the vehicle for a narrative of self-revelation. The Emersonian hero's fragmentary self-portrait expands and refines through continued relations with its shades.

The narrative of The Ambassadors makes explicit that Strether assimilates the European aesthetics of thought as though he were literally passing within specific artistic representations that encode this aesthetics. He experiences Paris as though he were moving "from canvas to clever canvas". He progresses epistemologically by plunging inside each looming representation and boring through it to the point where he begins to fathom its successor. James understands every "mad crossing" as the self's passage across a frame of represented phenomena. The self thus realizes a sudden intimacy with its phenomenal otherness. Frame-passages describe Strether's progress throughout the novel.

What had been as other as the aesthetic constituents of a Barbizon painter's "eye" appear to a Boston gallery visitor, becomes Srether's personal possession, his present consciousness. What to the American of the Woollett industrialist ethic had felt alien and unthinkable, the thought represented in the complex symbolic French landscape, becomes Strether's thought, becomes *him*. The tonal shades of the painting register the psychic nuances and imaginative range of the "I" of the French painter. Strether wrests, appropriates, and translates these shades into the complex visual field that constitutes his changing self. The techniques of reception epitomized by the Barbizon landscape painter, the American psychologist, the classical epic heroes and Lambert Strether retain an essential similarity.

The analogy between Jamesian narrative and the epic narratives of shades is further elucidated by reviewing James's typical concern with "point of view". Strether's point of view consists of the numerous shades impressed upon his awareness. A review of the comments on point of view made by James and Percy Lubbock will be helpful before showing how interpreting the phenomena presented through Strether's point of view as epic shades allows us the historicization of reading the novel.

Henry James establishes the otherworld landscape as the European shades of consciousness that flicker in the American's point of view. Throughout his critical prefaces, James prizes the strategy of the "center of consciousness", his technical means of making his hero's history cohere. In the preface to Roderick Hudson we are told that "the centre of interest" is "throughout ... in Rowland Mallet's consciousness, and the drama is the very drama of that consciousness -- which I had of course to make sufficiently acute in order to enable it, like a set and lighted scene, to hold the play" (45-46). The novel "remains in equilibrium by having found its center", it is "made historically vivid", it "achieve[s] intensity". Similarly in the preface to The Portrait of a Lady, James describes the inner dialogue whereby he had the idea to "place the centre of the subject in the young woman's consciousness" and to "Stick to *that* ... [putting] the heaviest weight into *that* scale, which will be

so largely the scale of her relation to herself" (50). Isabel is to be made "only interested enough, at the same time, in the things that are not herself" so that the crucial Jamesian drama of the self's engagement with what it is yet not -- those people, habits, attitudes, politics, feelings that make for its future tense -- can be shown in its complicated evolution. This self is depicted in a complex action of defense against and negotiated appropriation of the "appearances reflected in" its points of view. As the center, this self is the Emersonian picture with its enveloping panorama of appearances functioning as its palette.

In The Ambassadors, the "major propriety" observed involves "employing but one centre and keeping it all within my hero's compass". "Other persons" will "people the scene ... each with his or her axe to grind, his or her situation to treat, his or her coherency not to fail of", but only "Strether's sense of these things ... should avail me for showing them; I should know them but through his more or less groping knowledge of them, since his very gropings would figure among his most interesting motions, and a full observance of the rich rigour I speak of would give me more of the effect I should be most 'after' than all other possible observances together" (43). It is crucial to note that both the people of the scene and the particular axes they grind, situations they treat, and coherencies they do not fail of are accorded equal status as "things" -- the objects that haunt

the point of view. Here James observes the compositional method first exhibited by the Barbizon landscapists and furthered by the Impressionists by de-emphasizing the primacy of the human figure before the individual consciousness and re-conceiving this figure as one element amid other more abstract elements in an intricate and uniform visual composition. In this instance, the human figure conforms to a more complex scene of "appearances", with these appearances functioning as the dramatic actors on the Jamesian stage.[2]

Critics typically follow James in understanding him to craft consciousness according to a dramatic mode. James writes of himself as dealing "essentially with an Action", his concern being "the very drama of [the] consciousness" of his hero. Through this means, James realizes "the grace to which the enlightened story-teller will at any time, for his interest sacrifice if need be all other graces whatever ... the *grace of intensity*" (Preface to The Ambassadors, 43) (my italics). The Jamesian collective of sensation and thought passing before the point of view is thus compared to a team of actors. Percy Lubbock describes it this way: "Just as the writer of a play embodies his subject in visible action and audible speech, so the novelist, dealing with a situation like Strether's, represents it by means of the movement that flickers over the surface of his mind. The impulses and reactions of his mood are the players upon the new scene" (Qtd. in Rosenbaum's edition of The Ambassadors, 414). In

comparing these mental phenomena to actors, Lubbock doesn't consider their referentiality. The comparison implies neither James's adherence to principles of pictorial composition nor his probing interrogation of the historical circumstances consigning his characters to their particular moral choices. Rather than actors, Strether's moods, impulses, feelings and thoughts function like epic shades.

In The Ambassadors, Strether's swarming host of otherworld messengers includes the Frenchmen he sees in the garden of the Tuileries, the site of the destroyed Tuileries palace, the shock-headed, slouching young men by the book stalls in the Place de Odeon, the facade of Chad's building on the Boulevard Malesherbes, Baptiste -- "subtlest of servants" -- the towns of Chartres, Fontainebleau, and Rouen where he stays overnight, and his own thoughts -- for example "his greatest uneasiness" that "seemed to peep at him out of the imminent impression that almost any acceptance of Paris might give one's authority away" (II, ii, 64). In this cosmos, the abstract and inhuman function together with actual characters as the complete panoply of the hero's otherworld shades.

During his final visit with Madame de Vionnet, Strether has an especially powerful impression of his otherworld host. Seated in Madame de Vionnet's *salon*, he feels the "vague voice" of Paris, "excited and exciting", enter the room from the windows: "Strether had all along been subject to sudden gusts of fancy in connexion with such matters as these -- odd

starts of the historic sense, suppositions and divinations with no warrant but their intensity. Thus and so, on the eve of the great recorded dates, the days and nights of revolution, the sounds had come in, the omens, the beginnings broken out. They were the smell of revolution, the smell of the public temper -- or perhaps simply the smell of blood" (XI, i, 317). Whether referring to the French Revolution or to later nineteenth century uprisings, James does not idly romanticize the events. He shows Strether recapture the historical resonances of the period through his relation to their figurers: Madame de Vionnet, her *salon*, its objects, her gestures, manners, speech. All of these comprise the shades which he reads through to become alive to "the smell of blood".

C. THE APPEARANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF OTHERWORLD SHADES IN THE AMBASSADORS

Scholars have often shown James to render thought in visual terms. Susan Griffin's work in The Visual Eye is a recent example. Griffin brings to the topic of James's visual thought a New Historicist emphasis: "Like William James, for whom identity is a 'relative' entity in constant flux, Henry is interested, not in some 'real', prior self, but in the experience of identity over
time. In his descriptions of the visual interplay between self and environment, we can trace the making of the these

historical identities. And the perceptual stream wherein James constructs -- and reconstructs -- his own historical self displays his ambivalent participation in the political and economic conditions that surround him" (4-5).

My approach in these pages is designed to affirm this view from a particular formalist and historicist perspective. I want to begin with a point too easily taken for granted. Not only does James conceive thought as visual; he also understands otherness in visual terms. In fact in The Ambassadors, he understands Strether's otherness in terms of a culturally-opposed capacity and technique for thinking visually. Conceiving historical and cultural otherness in terms of visual aesthetics, James understands Strether's otherness as the native French capacity to envision the Lambinet landscape. For Strether, the landscape painting is someone else's, *an other's* picture. It is actually possessed by two others -- Lambinet, the artist who had the imaginative and technical wherewithal to paint the aesthetic composition, and the hypothetical Tremont Street gallery visitor who has the money Strether lacks to buy the painting. The point is that Strether will never earn the money literally to buy the painting. His cultural conversion involves his learning to own the painting by being able to see the way its painter saw.

Strether's conversion to another's way of seeing is understood in terms of his creating the ocular palette with which to paint his own world. In the Lambinet episode, he

takes a "train from a station -- as well as *to* a station", disembarking when his window view matches his memory of the landscape painting. Earlier lamenting his missed chances to Little Bilham, Strether explains, "It's as if the train had fairly waited at the station for me without my having had the gumption to know it was there. Now I hear its faint receding whistle miles and miles down the line" (V, ii, 132). "Gumption" implies Strether's epistemological machinery. One meaning of "gumption" is "common sense, mother wit, shrewdness"; a second, used by Walter Scott and other early nineteenth century English writers, is "the [painter's] art of preparing colors". Lacking the "common sense" to know his train was *there*, Strether lacks the imagination prepared to recognize the train as the means of seeing something *other*. The self must devise a palette to compose its thoughts.

Strether's entire adventure *within* the otherworld of "Europe" owes itself to his experience of seeing the "certain small Lambinet ... long years before, at a Boston dealer's [which] he had quite absurdly never forgotten" (XI, iii, 301). This "little Lambinet" is like the keyhole through which the Jamesian spiritual self squeezes, the little window that, once pierced, affords his entrance within a dizzying world of tilting sky, unsure ground, and blinding luminosity offering the phenomenological phantoms of a new world. As a memory, the Lambinet contains Strether. It affects his uncanny sense of recognizing so many details of a Parisian world that is

basically new to him. After he enters the Lambinet imaginatively, he never leaves. Instead, he elaborates and extends its impression through every point of his European visit. He lives amid the Lambinet painting's shades.

> The little Lambinet abode with him as the picture he *would* have bought -- the particular production that had made him for the moment overstep the modesty of nature. He was quite aware that if he were to see it again he should perhaps have a drop or a shock, and he never found himself wishing that the wheel of time would turn it up again, just as he had seen it in the maroon-coloured, sky-lighted inner shrine of Tremont Street. It would be a different thing, however, to see the remembered mixture resolved back into its elements -- to assist at the restoration to nature of the whole far-away hour: the dusty day in Boston, the background of the Fitchburg Depot, of the maroon-coloured sanctum, the special-green vision, the ridiculous price, the poplars, the willows, the rushes, the river, the sunny silvery sky, the shady woody horizon. (XI, iii, 301)

The little Lambinet "abides" with Strether. It is the intricate map of a psycho-historical habitat that, from his vantage point as a potential Boston collector, Strether cherished. Accepting Strether's otherworld journey to consist of his exploration of "Europe" -- the imaginative space, cultural complex, and symbolization of the deep past -- we can say that this journey begins when he sees, savors, and desires to acquire the "little Lambinet" landscape. "He had dreamed -- had turned and twisted possibilities for an hour: it had been the only adventure of his life in connexion with the purchase of a work of art" (XI, iii, 301). This "adventure" describes Strether's initial threshold-passage from the American towards the European point of view, a life-changing choice that makes

him (what Chad perceives as) "possible" when he returns to France thirty years later. Strether's quest for his new self begins when he first sees the Lambinet.

It is crucial that Strether is actually renewing his acquaintance with Europe, having visited thirty years earlier on a kind of honeymoon taken after the close of the Civil War. We know he had "trod the wall" of Chester earlier and had begun his "relation" with the higher culture.

The Lambinet is termed "the particular production that had made him for the moment overstep the modesty of nature" (XI, iii, 301). *That* moment becomes inverted into his "total little experience"; the momentary experience gratifying the impulse to transgress turns into the epic experience of imaginative abundance and apparent infinitude. "Apparent infinitude", the otherworld landscape of "the unnumbered dead" is specifically where the Lambinet points one.

Measuring the effect of the Lambinet, Strether communes with a super-subtle mental and historical experience expressed in shades of paint. If one reads art criticism on the Barbizon artists or on later movements, one finds frequent mention of the effects of tonality, of *shading*. Discussing the evolution of French art from Impressionism to Cubism in an essay entitled "On the role of Nature in Modernist Painting", Clement Greenberg writes: "Cubism undertook a completely two-dimensional transcription of three-dimensional phenomena, in defiance of everything the Impressionists had learned about

light and verisimilitude through light; but by being sculpturally exhaustive, by showing *in shaded relief* the back and sides as well as front of an object, Cubism ended with an even more radical denial of all experience not literally accessible to the eye. The world was stripped of its surface, of its skin, and the skin was spread flat on the flatness of the picture plane. Pictorial art reduced itself entirely to what was visually verifiable, and Western painting had finally to give up its five hundred years' effort to rival sculpture in the evocation of the tactile" (173-174). What is of importance in this comment on an artistic movement that emerges about when James is publishing The American Scene is the emphasis on how shading and shadedness contribute to an effect of total surface expressing a greater artistic ambition in the referentiality of the representation. The Cubist emphasis is on perspectivally encircling the subject and then rendering this all-seen subject on a two-dimensional picture plane. Shades and shading allow for achieving a greater intricacy and fictive fullness of the representation.

Strether interprets these "shades" of paint for their historical significance. In the Lambinet scene, he relishes the chance to "see the remembered mixture resolved back into its elements" as though to convert these shades of paint back into the originary impression of the mind that enjoyed the "special-green vision" in the Fountainebleau forest. Strether's originary quest describes his desire to read

through the painterly shades. They constitute the semiosis of a history. Ronald Macdonald adopts a similar analytic stance when he reads the shades in Dante as "results" of historical "process", suggestors of "historical depth".

"Restored to nature", Strether's Lambinet reveals to him a Romanticist vista that implies a redeeming vision in its *shady* woody horizon. As employed in the above passage, the word "shady" is freighted with epic reference. In his preface to The Princess Cassamassima, James refers to the revolutionary politics of Diedrich Hoffendahl and his anarchist followers as constituting Hyacinth's "'shady' underworld". He puts "shady" in quotations to emphasize his pun. In The Ambassadors, "shadiness" refers to the historicizing visual phenomena of the trifold otherworld of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise contained in Strether's "Europe". James need not put the "shady" of the phrase "shady woody horizon" in quotes to confirm that, in passing within the Lambinet, Strether enters a previously impossible cultural space that now speaks to him with the historical and redemptive force of the epic worlds of the dead.

The crucial detail of Strether's original experience of the Lambinet concerns his being unable to buy the painting: "It had been offered, he remembered, at a price he had been instructed to believe the lowest ever named for a Lambinet, a price he had never felt so poor as on having to recognise, all the same as beyond a dream of possibility" (XI, iii, 301). If

we understand the Lambinet to impart through its "shades" what for Strether comprises historicizing meaning, the consciousness that centers him, we see that Strether cannot procure this windfall in the materialist American way. His possession of a historical consciousness by consumerist means is exactly what is ruled out.

Strether's material deprivation and his ultimate capacity to "*get* the picture" imaginatively by earning the psychic currency enabling him to possess its symbolic field allows a new historicist interpretation of the episode in terms of the circulation of social power. The Lambinet's historical shades, the unobtained monetary currency required to purchase the painting, and the symbolic collateral by which Strether finally acquires the power to possess the picture together interweave. The scene expresses complex questions regarding the nature of New England commodity culture and Strether's ability to buck its authority (personified by Mrs. Newsome) to have the mental experience such a commodity culture would deny him. Strether's mode of imaginative consumption is juxtaposed to the prevailing mode of Woollett mercantilism.

* * * * * *

It is now time to consider how "shades" function in James's otherworld scheme. These shades can be understood as the mental phenomena, perceptual coherences, and vital syntheses of Strether's European landscape of the mind. They can can be specific persons like Madame de Vionnet; however

they are often more abstract. As already noted, in The Ambassadors the word "shade" refers to both a gradation of color and light in a painting and the vestiges that tell the otherworld hero something about himself and his native country.

As the following examples show, James uses the word "shade" mindful of both kinds. Maria Gostrey laughs at "the *shade of alarm* in [Strether's] amusement" as they discuss their impromptu rendez-vous in the Chester hotel garden (I, i, 22). Strether detects in Chad a "shade of shyness" ("mere good taste") when he confronts him in the Avenue de l'Opera cafe (IV, i, 96). Frustrated by Strether's inability to guess the details of Chad's situation, Maria Gostrey shows him a "shade of pity" (IV, ii, 106). Strether reveals to Little Bilham a "shade of sadness" while listening to Miss Barrace mock Waymarsh (V, ii, 126). In each instance, this "shade", as though cognitively framed, acts like a phenomenological signal sent by one conversant to the other.

In the crucial Notre Dame scene, Strether watches Madame de Vionnet pray in the "sacred shade" of a chapel. The example is distinct in that, rather than cohering in the figure of Madame de Vionnet, the shade encompasses her. It is not the "shade of sacredness", it is the "sacred shade". The shade is not so much a vestigial harmony expressing a character's significance as it is a mood encompassing the character. We can, however, read the usage metonymically. Although the shade

of the chapel is distinct from the shade of a personage in the otherworld, it signifies historical meaning for Strether the way the otherworld shade signifies historical meaning to the otherworld explorer. The inversion of terms, from the expected "shade of sacredness" to "sacred shade", at the halfway point of this conversion novel (VII, i, 172) represents how Strether himself is inverting conditions and reconceiving frameworks. What was the corporeal self has turned into the past's shadow and what looms as the imagined fore-shadow becomes the corporeal self. Strether steps through the shadow that confronts him and, by stepping through, he reverses his relation to the objects of his European circuit. Strether's recognition of the sacred shade represents a vital point of his mental penetration and his perching before the abyss of a new mental possibility. This shade is a depth within which Madame de Vionnet, the signifier of the abyss, lurks. She is its messenger.

The action of The Ambassadors charts Strether's movement through superseding shades of knowledge. His movement parallels the otherworld journeyer's epistemological forward movement from interview to interview with specific shades of his otherworld. As in the *Commedia*, these shades supersede each other in immediate importance for Strether even as they join within his consciousness as the combined mental effects that represent his history.

Strether's mental progress is summarized during his

final interview with Madame de Vionnet in her apartments. Here Strether welcomes his return to Madame de Vionnet's salon, "where the ghost of the empire walked", noting that "every occasion of seeing [the salon] was a pleasure of a different shade" (XII, i, 315). He quickly wonders what he is doing with "shades of pleasure now", then relishes them. We can understand how his cognizing shades of pleasure marks the climax of his narrative progress by reviewing in their order of appearance James's earlier references to shades. Strether's journey begins with his "shade of alarm" -- pure horror at his sudden intimacy with his European "guide". He assumes that his new acquaintance with Maria, impermissible by Woollett standards, is disapproved of by the hotel desk receptionist. Later, Chad's "shade of shyness" suggests the early tentativeness in their dealings. They have yet to side together. Miss Gostrey's "shade of pity" is for Strether's continued inability (his epistemological conversion has yet to occur) to get the Parisian picture. "Shade of sadness" suggests Strether's progress to a point of view where he can observe and lament the limitations of his American cohort, Waymarsh. And "shades of pleasure" suggests the full extent of Strether's psychological passage. He now experiences a virtual paradise in mind as he prepares to leave Madame de Vionnet's salon, the chief precinct of "Europe", for the last time. His sense of "Paradise" derives from his having gained a more intricate, variable sense of the plentiful shades of

consciousness that constitute his experience of Madame de Vionnet in her imperial salon. These shades come compacted with a dizzying array of erotic and historical references.

James uses the term "shade" to designate pivotal moments of Strether's self-recognition. Since, as John Carlos Rowe argues, Strether's "own composition of self is made up as much by the characters with whom he is involved and defined as of 'himself': the unbounded, liberated 'observer'", Strether's self-recognition depends upon his increased speculative involvement with one or more of his Parisian friends. If, "in order to 'compose' himself, Strether must construct his relations with others", his points of sudden self-recognition will result from his elaborating his relation to specified others (Rowe, 198-199). James uses the term "shades" to invoke the epic character of the composing consciousness, specifically emphasizing those points when Strether recomposes his sense of his Parisan situation that mark his passage to and arrival at a new point of self-recognition.

In the above examples, Strether's conversant -- Maria Gostrey in three instances, Chad, little Bilham, and Madame de Vionnet in the other instances -- seem as conscious of the shade (of "alarm", "shyness", "pity", "sadness", "pleasure") as is Strether. These shades seem the fusion of emotions exchanged by Strether and his conversant. They exist between people as extra-sensory phenomena determining the composition of mental life on both sides. James suggests that Maria

Gostrey and Strether together inspect Strether's "shade of alarm". Experienced by Maria Gostrey, Strether's "shade of alarm" means one thing: she laughs. Experienced by Strether, this shade tempers "his amusement" at the prospect of asking the Chester inn receptionist for Maria's name. They have assumed an intimacy and Strether is alarmed by the idea of showing the receptionist, who has seen it happen, that the relation has progressed so far before he has even learned his new friend's name. The "shade of amusement" is an element of his and Gostrey's interaction. It is the currency of *two minds*, a thought hovering before and between characters that demands their mutual exchange. By showing characters' interaction to be based on their mutual sense of shades of consciousness stationed between them, James provides a model of consciousness that is intersubjective, relational, and collaborative.

James employs the term shade to suggest the ways in which outer and inner experience converge in consciousness. He subverts the presuppositions of traditional psychology that consciousness is discrete, internal, and circumscribed, and proposes instead a model of intersubjective consciousness. Sharon Cameron has argued, similarly, for a view of Jamesian consciousness as intersubjective.

> In the novels consciousness is not in persons; it is rather between them, whether this manifests itself between Rowland and Roderick, Isabel and Pansy, or Isabel and Merle, or between Maisie and Sir Claude. Thus, although the Prefaces attempt to revise or redetermine our conception of

> consciousness, the more radical revision is advanced by the novels themselves, in James's structural reconceptions of consciousness. For in the novels consciousness is disengaged from the self. It is reconceived as extrinsic, made to take shape -- indeed, to become social -- as an *inter*subjective phenomenon. What is radical about this reconception is that it dispenses with the idea of a psychology while preserving the idea of a consciousness. In fact, it valorizes consciousness just to the extent that consciousness can be separated from the confines of the self. (77)

Cameron correctly understands Jamesian consciousness to be a function of social relations. She comes to this view through a complex phenomenological reading. I find myself trying to answer the same fundamental question Cameron is: What is consciousness in the novels of late James and what does it do? In relating Husserl's phenomenological theory to James's conceptions of consciousness, Cameron examines a passage from the Fifth Meditation of Cartesian Meditations which describes how the self performs its phenomenological reduction. Husserl describes how the constituting self, a "functioning animate organism" senses the phenomena of the outer world as "phantom-things" and proceeds to synthesize these apperceptions into a unifying consciousness. Here's Cameron's summary: "In what Husserl calls "passive genesis" -- which refers to the rudimentary levels of constituting that precede categorical judgment -- there are first sensations; then the extension of those sensations into the external spatial world, where, not yet codified, they have the status of phantoms; then the solidification of those phantoms into concrete identity, into the 'real [material] thing' of

consciousness (77-81) ... sensations are perceived 'out there' as phantoms because they are not yet owned or incorporated by consciousness. Only in consciousness (only conferred materiality, hence otherness, *by* consciousness) do thing-phantoms become real things" (Cameron, 25). As a result of this interplay of sensation and imaginative projection, "the subject" by "constituting the object, also constitutes itself".

By regarding Jamesian consciousness as a consciousness of epic shades instead of Husserlian phantom-things, readers are equipped with a ready means to historicize the kind of process that Cameron presents above as an analogue to Jamesian consciousness. We can approach James's conception of consciousness as related to Husserlian phenomenology but more historically grounded. Cameron's argument that James's narratives of consciousness manifest an intricate set of power-relations can also be advanced by examining Jamesian consciousness in these terms.

Even when using "shade" in the more strictly pictorial sense, James tends to make the term resonate with epic associations. There is, for example, the Review that Strether says provides "my one presentable little scrap of an identity". The cover of the Review is colored "the most lovely shade" of green. At the outset of the novel, the Review represents the one sign of Strether's realized ambition to think like a European, the slight degree to which he has

quarried the symbolic landscape of "Europe". It is the one sign of his investment in self-reform. The detail of the shaded green cover of the Little Review anticipates Strether's apocalyptic adventure within the Lambinet Barbizon landscape, the "special-green vision" with its multiple shades of green. Amid the Lambinet, Strether "mak[es] for the shady woody horizon". When he arrives at the White Horse Inn, he notes that one of its outer walls is "painted the most improbable shade" of "coppery green". At the *Cheval Blanc*, conditions assert their difference from Woollett as nowhere else.

Strether entertains a panorama of difference in a garden enclosed by a wall painted this extraordinary shade. He moves from the little scrap of identity symbolized by the lovely green-shaded cover of the Little Review to the sense of self-sufficiency represented by his perspective in the Cheval Blanc, passing from shade to shade. His psychic movement is occasioned by the change in objects through which he identifies himself; the movement from the little Review cover conferring its single scrap of identity to the improbable depth-perspective of the Lambinet aesthetic, from the cover of a closed book to the enclosing wall of an open-air garden. These objects promote his psychic movement from identity in scraps to identity full-fledged, from paradise suggested to paradise conceived. No James character can hope for more paradise -- more historical consciousness in a specific moment -- than Strether gets at the *Cheval Blanc*. While he remains a

fragment, in the Emersonian pictorial sense, Strether has the illusion of completeness. Only when Strether recognizes the innumerable "shades of pleasure" life might afford him can he have his historical revelation. The lovers in their row boat represent to him the emergent historical phase. He elaborates his Lambinet revelation upon returning to his hotel room, passing the night "supposing innumerable and wonderful things" (XII, i, 313).

1. Thomas Greene makes this point in his discussion of the "norms of epic": "The first quality of the epic imagination is expansiveness, the impulse to extend its own luminosity in ever widening circles ... the epic universe is there to be invaded by the human will and imagination ... Epic characteristically refuses to be hemmed in, in time as well as space; it raids the unknown and colonizes it. It is the imagination's manifesto, proclaiming the range of its grasp, or else it is the dream of the will, indulging its fantasies of power" (10).

2. A perfect example of this way of seeing the figure in its larger historical setting occurs when Strether meets Madame de Vionnet in Notre Dame. Strether here relishes the credit he implicitly gets from the Countess for being deeply moved by the scene of ritual and prayer inside Notre Dame. He feels that she gives him credit for reading through the surfaces of the scene and grasping the extraordinary power of their reference: "Oh, I like so much your also being found --!", she says to him, leaving the "object vague". Strether's sense of what he considers "the taste of her vagueness" is subsequently composed out of his minutely situating the Countess in a historical scene that allows him to focus and define her: "He was conscious of how much it was affected, this sense, by something subdued and discreet in the way she had arranged herself for her special object and her morning walk -- he had believed her to have come on foot; the way her slightly thicker veil was drawn -- a mere touch, but everything; the composed gravity of her dress, in which, here and there, a dull wine-colour seemed to gleam faintly through black; the charming discretion of her small compact head; the quiet note, as she sat, of her folded, grey-gloved hands. It was, to Strether's mind, as if she sat on her own ground, the light honours of which, at an open gate, she thus easily did him, while all the vastness and mystery of the domain stretched off behind.

when people were so completely in possession they could be extraordinarily civil; and our friend had indeed at this hour a kind of revelation of her heritage" (VII, 173-174). Strether situates the Countess within the historical scene that defines her historical reference the way Dante situates historical characters like Francesca da Rimini or Count Ugolino in their extreme but always historically defining scenes.

CHAPTER FIVE

READING CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE AMBASSADORS THROUGH THE EPIC MOTIF OF THE EMBRACE OF THE SHADE

In epic otherworld narrative, the improbable emotive and semiotic intimacy between a living being and a shade of the dead becomes a principle means by which the hero acquires epic consciousness. This exchange is most intense when the hero and the dead shade embrace. In classical epic, the embraced shade is beloved by the hero: Odysseus's mother -- Antiklea, Aeneas's father -- Anchises, Dante's friend -- the songster Casella. The embrace is the imaginative gesture by which the hero reviews and recreates experience. In The Ambassadors, Strether's intimacy with Madame de Vionnet feeds his "historical sense". The woman "romantic for him far beyond what she could have guessed" (VII, i, 174), Madame de Vionnet is the shade who speaks to Strether's imagination. Their interviews allow him to project his desired self into the world. Strether realizes his dormant potential and achieves a refinement of intercourse particular to the old world. The fundamental question explored in The Ambassadors is how to create and to use intimacy, the powerful yet threatening source of the Jamesian epic dispensation.

Reading Strether's experience in The Ambassadors through this motif reveals the truly epic scope of James's

narrative of consciousness. This reading will demonstrate how in the Jamesian conversion scene, the imagination revises memory in furnishing the self its historical vision. Ronald Macdonald terms the "land of the dead" "an arena where the poet can contemplate the past *as* past, where, to use Freud's terminology, he can *remember* the past without being obliged to repeat it" (8). The embrace of the shade is a rite of otherworld inquiry that allows the hero to contemplate the past as past. The hero barters his sense of his personal past for the recollection of his deep past, which he comes to know through a process of imaginative association. His act of epic remembrance is informed by the sense of difference symbolized by his inability to embrace successfully the shade of the beloved relative or friend.

Reading the action of the mind in late James through this epic motif strengthens T. S. Eliot's argument that James's true literary subject is "the sense of the sense" of the past. Eliot makes this point while discussing the "deeper psychology" characterizing the work of both James and Hawthorne: "Both men had that sense of the past which is peculiarly American, but in Hawthorne this sense exercised itself in a grip on the past itself; in James it is a sense of the sense" (in Don Vann, 31). Eliot leaves the meaning of his figurative language ambiguous. It suggests that he means that James's interests exercised themselves as a *grip on the sense of the past, rather than on the past itself*. Eliot's

appraisal relates to John Carlos Rowe's method of reading James's late writing through the rhetorical figure of *hypotyposis*. In Paul De Man's words, hypotyposis functions to "make present to the senses something which is not within their reach ... because it consists ... of elements too abstract for sensory representation" (Rowe, 209). Clearly what is too abstract for direct dealing is this "sense of the sense" of the past, a once removed "sense" that can only be fathomed through figures. The motif of the embrace perfectly renders the grasping imagination in the ambiguous act of trying to capture the sense of the past.

The embrace motif figures the action of the hero's thought and the process of his vision. Through this archetypal rhythm, the epic genre ritualizes the bodily pursuit of wisdom. Rather than a quantity, this wisdom is experienced as the most encompassing cultural perspective the hero can attain.

In The Ambassadors, many characters work to transmit a sense of the past to Strether. Little Bilham, Maria Gostrey, Lydia Barrace, Chad, Gloriani, the Duchess in Gloriani's garden, the hostess at the *Cheval Blanc* all function for Strether as ambassadors of a deep cultural past. However, Madame de Vionnet transmits more of the European past to Strether than anyone. The relationship between the Countess and Strether revives the epic embrace motif. Their relationship makes Strether appreciate the very things he

arrived in Paris to oppose. Madame de Vionnet functions for Strether as the vehicle of a cultural otherness he can experience only through her. Strether's desire for her intensifies his interest in the historical import she transmits. He gradually adopts her "new" European terminology to re-articulate his American past. His new language derives from their otherworldly interviews.

In embracing his "shade", Strether frames the European past and reverses himself into the picture: out of his new experience of this past, he reconstructs his self-portrait, his Emersonian meta-picture. This double act of shedding personality and accepting a new past has the effect of historicizing the American moment in the image of the single self. As the American ambassador, Strether becomes a cultural Hermes, returning home to deliver a new interpretation of American culture. His interpretation is textualized in his revised personal consciousness.[1]

The following analysis of the relevance of the epic embrace to Jamesian mental action is divided into three sections. Section A reviews the central classical epic examples of the embrace motif. Section B will ground this reading of The Ambassadors in Emerson's conception of the "I" in relation to "Nature". After establishing in this way a proto-Pragmatist context for reading Henry James's variation on the motif of epic embrace, section C will explore its significance to The Ambassadors (section C). The

complete analysis will illustrate how in their intimate relations, Strether and Madame de Vionnet collaborate to produce a new "tone" that becomes the Jamesian bequest to the new American century.

A. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EMBRACE MOTIF IN CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL EPIC

The three major examples of epic embrace appear in The Odyssey, The Aeneid, and La Divina Commedia. Though the details of the action vary with each epic, crucial significances obtain throughout. In each embrace episode, the hero's experience of personal loss turns into a consciousness of difference resulting in a change in his historical perspective. He sacrifices his personal past for his epic dispensation, cognizance of a deeper communal heritage. The discussion of epic homecomings to follow in chapter 5 will then demonstrate how Lambert Strether experiences a similar conversion in the *Cheval Blanc* garden where he has his revelation. In fact, Strether experiences repeated psychic undoings and re-doings at key moments throughout The Ambassadors. His consciousness builds through the repeated rite of personal loss and imaginative appropriation.

In The Odyssey, Odysseus vainly tries to embrace his mother, Antiklea. In the Homeric vision, Odysseus's mother's body represents the mistaken object of his quest for

origins. In accepting his loss, Odysseus converts the body into a mental object confronted along his way, a threshold he crosses to acquire his historical vision. Odysseus reverses his historical perspective by supplementing his loss of the sense of one origin -- his mother's body -- by another -- the deep Greek past. His acceptance of the loss of his mother prepares Odysseus to appreciate the historical phantasmagoria of the Greek underworld. His mother's shade slips through his grasp like a rapid dream; but he then experiences the communal dream vision through which he situates himself as a Greek citizen -- a soldier and landholder who comes to terms with his war experience and readies himself to return to Ithaca to reclaim his property.

Alasdair MacIntyre points out that the Homeric poems are meant to portray the hero carrying out his "social function" (6). To be "agathos" (the Greek verbal ancestor to the English "good"), the Greek man must realize the ideal conduct of a warrior and landholder. In helping Odysseus to reconcile himself to his war experiences and to prepare him psychologically to reclaim his property from Penelope's suitors, his underworld experiences give him the historical consciousness to realize the Greek ideal. The embrace describes a mad-crossing to a reversed world. Odysseus crosses from the unmistakeable fact (in his mind) that his mother is alive to the revelation that she is dead. This knowledge helps him *see in* the underworld, which means he

will return to the external world seeing things differently. Odysseus only learns that Antiklea has died when they meet in the underworld, where she approaches his votive pit to drink his blood-offering.

As in the examples to follow, the embrace motif represents Odysseus's relation to a particularly cherished thought. He cradles this thought of his mother alive in his mind and then loses it. This thought is itself beloved: losing *the thought* then marks his crisis. Odysseus indicates this in a filial wail: "O my mother,/will you not stay, be still, here in my arms,/may we not, in this place of Death, as well,/hold one another, touch with love, and taste/salt tears' relief, the twinge of welling tears?" (XI, 209-212). Odysseus must let this thought go and revise his psychological conception of "home" -- the complex mental object synthesizing his sense of self and grounding his historical perspective. It is fitting that Odysseus couches his lament to his mother's shade in the interrogative since, throughout the epic tradition, questions remain the chief discursive tools with which the hero explores his otherworld and refashions his self. Questions also abet Strether in his fathoming of his otherworld experience; we recall, for example, that the first sentence of The Ambassadors begins, "Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel .. "

Odysseus's acceptance of the loss of a cherished thought which, in his case, is a complex object denoting his

relation to his mother, is of course itself a mental act. In describing the "strain of attention" as the "fundamental act of will", William James speaks directly to the crisis of thought the epic hero faces and tries to overcome in the act of embracing his otherworld shade:

> The strong-willed man, however, is the man who hears the still small voice unflinchingly, and who, when the death-bringing consideration comes, *looks at its face, consents to its presence, clings to it, affirms it, and holds it fast* [my emphasis], in spite of the host of exciting mental images which rise in revolt against it and would expel it from the mind. Sustained in this way by a resolute effort of attention, the difficult object erelong begins to call up its own congeners and associates and ends by changing the disposition of the man's consciousness altogether. And with his consciousness, his action changes, for the new object, once stably *in possession of the field of his thoughts* [James's emphasis] infallibly produces its own motor effects. The difficulty lies in gaining possession of that field. Though the spontaneous drift of thought is all the other way, the attention must be kept strained on that one object until at last it *grows* [James's emphasis], so as to maintain itself before the mind with ease. This strain of the attention is the fundamental act of will. And the will's work is in most cases practically ended when the bare presence to our thought of the *naturally unwelcome object* [my emphasis] has been secured (563-564).

The epic hero's consent to the loss of his thought is faced and held fast. His acceptance of this loss puts him "stably in possession of the field of his [new] thoughts", implying his new past. This past "grows" until it "maintain[s] itself before the mind with ease". The reversal enacted through the hero's loss of the beloved and his gain of a new "field" of historical thought is clear in terms of William James's ideas of the will and the "strain of

attention". The psychological stresses of his losing this thought are intensified by Antiklea's telling her son that she died of longing for his return: "Not that the keen-eyed huntress with her shafts/had marked me down and shot to kill me; not/that illness overtook me -- no true illness/wasting the body to undo the spirit;/only my loneliness for you, Odysseus,/took my own life away" (The Odyssey, XI, 198-204).

If the shades of the Greek underworld are read as the symbols of concrete and abstract objects floating in Odysseus's mind, Antiklea then becomes a *thought telling its thinker* that it died because *it thought* that *he was no longer thinking of it*. By "coming home", Odysseus would showcase his care for this thought of his mind. Properly re-cognized, this thought would not have withered to death. The thought dies because it goes unloved, unharbored. Loving the thought and attending to it have identical effects on the object. This action characterizes the universe of Henry James where, according to Sharon Cameron, thoughts are regarded as things in the world. Cameron implies that the Jamesian otherworld is imaginative experience projected out into the real world of action: "It is one thing to say that thoughts are things in the sense that only in consciousness are thing 'constituted' as material. It is another to equate thoughts with things by an inverse spatial movement which moves thoughts out of the mind and into the world, where they have the palpable existence that things would have"

(Cameron, 27). Antiklea can be regarded as a thought of Odysseus refigured as the shade of his mother. His thought receives its image and language through this act of transference. Odysseus crosses to his mother, "perplexed"; he throws his arms around her shade only to experience her "sift" through his grasp "wavering like a dream" (XI, 207). As his lost "dream", she represents the data of a personal past he must relinquish mentally as a rite of his envisioning the Greek underworld's historicity.

Odysseus's meeting with his mother is woven within a narrative that includes Tiresias's prophecy, a vision of bewitching Greek queens and mistresses that unsettles the hero, and soldiers' parleys with Achilles and Agamemnon. The encounters fuse into a canvas of Greek culture which Odysseus mentally appropriates and later disseminates in two forms: he narrates the scene at Alkinoos's overnight banquet and personifies the cultural ideal back in Ithaca. The failed embrace frees him to enter imaginatively into this vision.

In The Aeneid, Aeneas embraces his father, Anchises. After the embrace, Anchises relates to him the future history of the Italian patriarchs. As a man of "pious love", Aeneas has motives for visiting the underworld that differ from those of his Greek precursor. The Trojan quest for a new political state, satisfied by Aeneas's interview with Anchises, motivates Aeneas whereas Odysseus was driven by

his desire to return to Penelope and live the Greek ideal. But in both the Greek and Roman examples, the epic hero is confronted by the shade of a parent whose body each longs to hold. Greeting his father, Aeneas tells him, "It was your sad image,/ so often come, that urged me to these thresholds" (XI, 919-920). It is again a beloved thought, symbolized by the father's shade -- the thought being *of the father alive* -- that prompts the epic hero to cross the threshold of Dis and to reach Elysium. Aeneas is driven by *the dream* of his father's body, the body he bore upon his shoulders in escaping Troy. This "dream" symbolizes all of Aeneas's lost past -- Troy, his first wife, Creusa (lost as he hastily flees Troy and then thrice-embraced in shadow-form amid the dim city's ruins), his lost Trojan relations.[2]

> His face,
> was wet with weeping as he spoke. Three times
> he tried to throw his arms around Anchises'
> neck; and three times the Shade escaped from that
> vain clasp -- like light winds, or most like swift
> dreams.
> (VI, 924-927)

The vain embrace locates the intersection of the Trojan past of defeat and the Trojan future of imperial conquest in this specific moment of Aeneas's personal loss and imaginative reaping. His body and his father's shade symbolize the past and the future: Aeneas's body represents the past. The voice of the father's shade -- the text Aeneas must claim -- represents the future. In the act of embracing his father's shade, Aeneas overcomes the burdens of his past

and imaginatively frames the future.[3] Aeneas feels his father escape from his "vain clasp ... like swift dreams". "Meanwhile", he sees as through the man he embraces. He surveys the meadows filled with "the countless tribes and peoples" who will drink of the river Lethe and then return to earth with second bodies to form the "seed and race" of Anchises. He sees *through* the embrace.

In this pivotal crossing, he identifies with the vision of future Roman rulers. He trades his old past -- a past symbolized by his father's body and consisting of *his own bodily experience* -- for a new past knowable only through the "pious" fervor of his imagination.

Symbolizing a supreme act of creation, the embrace describes Aeneas's imaginative compass. By its means, he grasps the text of the future. Anchises's body represents the unrecollectable. Aeneas refocuses his attention from his father's body to the anatomy of language in which his father fore-scripts Roman history. The sire becomes a narrative shadow. Anchises's prophetic text compensates Aeneas for the loss of the father's body (and, since Aeneas is a representative man, resolves his problem of historical identity). Embracing his father's shade, Aeneas barters his personal experience for the historical vision.

In La Divina Commedia, the pilgrim vainly embraces the shade of Casella as a rite of his imaginative embrace of the deep past of God. The embrace occurs in the "Purgatorio",

where the body represents the earthly affections that inhibit the soul's climb to the Earthly Paradise. Nostalgia for Earth suggests the inclinations of the body for an earthly past from which the redeemable soul must be weaned. In its sensations, thoughts, and feelings, the body represents a history the self must shed if it is to gain the redemptive spheres of Paradise. For this reason, Dante sets the embrace at the outset of "Purgatorio", the canticle of penance: Casella, newly arrived on the isle with a boatful of souls, embraces the pilgrim. In a unique turn to the embrace ritual, Dante has Casella, a musician who in life probably set Dante's verses to music, sing one of the pilgrim's lyrics. The embrace scene thus literally expresses the idea of an exchange of texts.

The scene represents how the pilgrim must wean himself from a *language* deemed too earthly, a tongue epitomized by the *dolce stil nuovo* of La Nuova Vita, and how he must learn the ethereal idioms of the Dantean Paradise. The embrace represents a stage in the pilgrim's conversion to the language of salvation. The pilgrim gives up his text, the voice of his past, in his intercourse with the embraced shade. The scene represents a stage in the pilgrim's movement towards his loss of his earthly speech (the text of his past), since Casella, evanesced by death, becomes the otherworldly interpreter of his text. The shifting of the pilgrim's perspective from the nostalgic to the providential

point of view is represented in the dead shade's appropriation of his text. The irony is that, even though the text is entrusted to the otherworld "intonations" of Casella the lyric remains too earthy: the text so captivates Dante and the other shades that it hinders their progress to Ante-Purgatory:

> Lo mio maestro e io e quella gente
> ch'eran con lui parevan si contenti;
> come a nessun toccasse altro la mente.
> "Purgatorio", II, ll. 115-117.

The souls, so captured by a love lyric, allow nothing else to "touch" their mind. The verse quoted in the text reads "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona" (II., 112). Again the embrace of the shade dramatizes the hero coming to terms with a cherished thought; the thought addresses the nature of love. This thought is expressed in Casella's rendering of the lyric. The love lyricized in the *dolce stil* is different in kind from the love expressed in the diction of the souls of the "Paradiso". The vain embrace figures how the pilgrim must relinquish the idioms of the love lyric and the thoughts that attach to them for the evanesced lyricism of Paradise with the thoughts of divine love that attach to them. The scene juxtaposes earthly and divine conceptions of love and depicts the pilgrim parting (in that he is vainly embracing it) with the thoughts and feelings he associates with the *dolce stil* -- the language *of* his past. It is fitting that Cato, the symbol of the stern civic will that earns true freedom, interrupts Casella, reproaches the pack

for delaying, and hastens their resuming the way of expurgation.

Dante shows how the vain embrace represents the pilgrim's sacrifice of *a past*, representing this past as a style of language. He will later represent the pilgrim's alternative, redemptive past of God as a style of language. The pilgrim will gradually acquire this linguistic style of redemption through his colloquies with otherworld shades.

It must be admitted that there are resonances of *dolce stil* lyricism in the "Paradiso", suggesting that no matter how weaned from present attention, the old past -- its old language(s) -- the "earthly" (in James, one would say the "native") tongue -- will revive and echo. The *Commedia* witnesses the persistence of the personal past in the otherworld. This past remains a residual excitement and use, a tool to be converted into historical consciousness. It must be re-accepted even as it is turned from. The failed embrace nevertheless symbolizes how the epic hero weans himself of the language of one past to be able to envision the deeper revelatory history that Dante, a disciple of St. John of Patmos, believed in. Like its epic precursors, the Dantesque embrace represents a historical transaction. However, it more literally figures this transaction in terms of language as an exchange of texts -- an exchange of a text that is *this worldly* for one that is otherworldly.

B. READING THE EMBRACE OF THE SHADE MOTIF IN A PRAGMATIST CONTEXT

Five hundred and sixteen years after Dante's death, Emerson devised the metaphorical style of his essays through his relation to an otherworld supplying the visual life of his language. Disenchanted with the abstractness of the Unitarian sermonizers, Emerson created a pictorial idiom that rendered concretely the vestigial world of faith.

By understanding mental life through the two-step process of relinquishment and possession, Emerson evokes the processes of the epic embrace. To become "nothing" and thereby commune with the divinity inhering in "Nature" by becoming a "transparent eyeball" is to sanction the loss of one's personal past, like Aeneas, and articulate one's future in the language of the originary divine, like Dante. The Emersonian self transcends its bodily self and imaginatively embraces and dissolves into God. Rather than renounce its physical being, the Emersonian self devotes itself to the nearly overwhelming amount of sensation through which God establishes Himself. "We learn that God is", writes Emerson in "Circles"; "that he is in me; and that all things are shadows of him" (172). In the epic embrace scene, the epic hero also devotes himself to the overwhelming *imaginative* sensation of the historical "dream" by which he realizes the national reality.

Right before he introduces the image of the transparent

eyeball, Emerson compares the man rhapsodizing in the woods to a snake casting off its slough: the man loses his bodily identity (his slough) and experiences his visionary possession, God. Becoming "nothing", he "sees all" as the "currents of the Universal Being circulate through" him (24). His ecstasy converts him into a prophet. He is *him* through which the revolutions of the Universe are measured. Emerson continues:

> In the typical landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds *somewhat* as beautiful as his own nature. (24, my emphasis)

This discerned "somewhat" is a shade reflecting at the observer and containing his potential self. It is a figure of mind awaiting, as it offers, its articulation in words. Emersonian "Nature" is the repository of a past supplying the questioner his potential present. It is the vital force that, if imaginatively embraced, -- *if, that is, framed as our deep past* -- allows man to conceive his *present Reality*.

Prefiguring James, Emerson values the history of self-creation as the narrative exemplifying the American quest for spirit. When Emerson tropes this historical narrative, he, whether intending to or not, invariably reconjures the epic embrace motif. In the Emersonian scheme of "relinquishment and possession" (these are also Richard Poirier's terms in A World Elsewhere, 19), the "I" or "eye" acts as the embracing hero while Nature interacts like the embraced shade.

> In private places, among sordid objects, an act of truth or heroism seems at once to draw itself the sky as its temple, the sun as its candle. Nature stretches out her arms to embrace man, only let his thoughts be of equal greatness. Willingly does she follow his steps with the rose and the violet, and bend her lines of grandeur and grace to the decoration of her darling child. Only let his thoughts be of equal scope, and the frame will suit the picture. (29)

This passage appears in "Nature" in a section headed "Beauty". The heroic acts to which Emerson alludes are the martyrdoms of Sir Harry Vane and Lord Russell, both executed by Charles II. These men were enveloped in the shade of "natural beauty" on their way to their heroic public deaths. Emerson implies that to inquire ably into Nature is to draw from her enhancing palette the durable signification of these historical events. Nature becomes Emerson's medium of the past. It represents the "green ball", the circular otherworld within which all shades of history can be seen and sounded if interrogated with fervent appreciation: "Every object rightly seen, unlocks a new faculty of the soul. That which was unconscious truth, becomes, when interpreted and defined in an object, a part of the domain of knowledge -- a new weapon in the magazine of power" (36).

These are epic words in the way they chart the self's act of appropriating objects and transforming them pragmatically to social use. "Unconscious truth" here refers to the obscured spaces of the past wherein vestiges invite the activating energies of the imagination. The return to the otherworld typically describes a resumption of battle as

Odysseus, Aeneas, Dante, and Adam all show. The arms build-up occurs mentally and the otherworld inquirer returns to *his* world more sovereign over himself and prepared to wage his battles with time. To embrace "Nature" is to frame the historical reference of the "apparition". It is to render an historical account.

As apparition, "Nature" is not the single, tell-all shade of epic otherworlds. She is neither Tiresias or Anchises. In rhetorical terms, "Nature" is the vehicle through which so significant a shade and its subordinate shades are re-cognized. She represents the epic landscape into which the imaginative man insinuates himself in taking possession of the past. The specific shades correspond to the *somewhats* in the Emerson landscape. Nature offers inquiring man the palette with which *to paint* his dead. "The condition of true naming, on the poet's part, is his resigning himself to the *divine aura* which breathes through forms, and accompanying that" (233). The poet decodes the shadow forms and grasps their immanent significance. Emerson understands "the immediate dependence of language upon nature" as the "conversion of an outward phenomenon into a type of somewhat in human life". The somewhat is a shade resolved in linguistic expression -- a natural fact corresponding to thought. The Emersonian American quest-hero embraces "Nature" and obtains the answer to his question.

In The Ambassadors, the embrace motif informs the

relation between psychological shades and the language in which they are embodied. In grasping at its shades, the imaginatively engaged self produces new verbal forms. James adopts the metaphor of the "growing rose of observation" to describe Strether's mental life.

> Strether relapsed into the sense -- which had for him in these days most of comfort -- that he was free to believe in anything that from hour to hour kept him going. He had positively motions and flutters of this conscious hour-to-hour kind, temporary surrenders to irony, to fancy, frequent instinctive snatches at the growing rose of observation, constantly stronger for him, as he felt, in scent and colour, and in which he could bury his nose even to wantonness. (X, i, 262)

The metaphor contains naturalist and literary overtones. It sensualizes the act of using language; by snatching and sniffing at the "rose", Strether articulates his observations. The rose of observation also evokes the rose of the redeemed souls that the pilgrim views in the *Primum Mobile*. The shades occupying the rose of observation are so many tell-tale signs that contribute to a historical consciousness. Reading these "shades" of observation, clutching at them as he delights in his "rose", Strether renders his verbal account of his otherworld. "How well you know us!" Madame de Vionnet exclaims to him. "No", he corrects her, "it seems to me it's we I know" (IX, i, 234). This is exemplary of the dynamics of epic otherworld narrative. The self communes with the shades of otherness (the "us" of Madame de Vionnet) so that it can create its own narrative (the national "we" of Strether, the Newsomes,

and Woollett). The embrace motif becomes more explicit as the narrative moves towards its final revelations. Inside his Lambinet landscape, Strether enjoys a preternatural intimacy with Madame de Vionnet, the occupant of stately Parisian apartments offering "vistas" of "dim historic shades".

In his late style, James shows consciousness to be a function of the self's linguistic register of its manifold "shades of relation". James's late style also succeeds in implying the innumerable shades beyond its range of reference. Terms like "all" ("Tell her all. 'All?' he oddly echoed.") and "everything" ("'How *much* I have to judge!''Everything,' said Madame de Vionnet:") seem to dwarf the not insubstantial scope of Strether's registered consciousness, implying how much he (and we) will never know. In devising his extraordinarily refined and attenuating late manner, James dares to register the greatest possible number of the shades populating Strether's extra-psychic scene. Unlike Emerson, he accepts that some questions are not answerable; in terms of epic otherworld narrative, this acceptance translates into the recognition that the shades are innumerable. A text like The Ambassadors displays the struggle to reduce the immense, undeciphered otherworld to a new form of linguistic expression that is "enlarging".

In Strether's otherworld landscape, Madame de Vionnet

is the most complex and suggestive shade. If, as William James says, "memory" is "a feeling of belief in a peculiar complex object", then Madame de Vionnet is the Emersonian someone, instead of somewhat, who inspires in Strether his most complex faith. If, as William James continues, "the object of memory is only an object imagined in the past (usually very completely imagined there) to which the emotion of belief adheres)" ("Principles", I, 652), then Madame de Vionnet inspires Strether to conceive a capacious and vivid past far beyond what knowing any other person could inspire him to conceive. Knowing the Countess presents Strether with the complex "shade of relation" that enables him to appropriate the consciousness of *how* to get "home" through continuous interrogations of his otherworld. She introduces him to an "imagined past" that is valuable for the same reasons as it is epic: in its referentiality, this "imagined past" equips him with his greatest sense of human possibility.

The making of human relations becomes the most pragmatic means of enlarging and refining the self. Madame de Vionnet is one of those Emersonian acquaintances who, "like skies and waters, are coextensive with our idea; who, answering each to a certain affection of the soul, satisfy our desire on that side" (41). It is the purpose of the Countess to convert Strether to a way of seeing he could not achieve without her help. When the conversion is complete,

her presence in his life must end. Writing as though he had the relation between Strether and the Countess in mind, Emerson analyzes the pragmatic ingredient we find in Jamesian relations: "When much intercourse with a friend has supplied us with a standard of excellence, and has increased our respect for the resources of God who thus sends a real person to outgo our ideal; when he has moreover, become an object of thought, and, whilst his character retains all its unconscious effect, is converted in the mind into solid and sweet wisdom, -- it is a sign to us that his office is closing, and he is commonly withdrawn from our sight in a short time" (41). Strether converts his experience of Madame de Vionnet into a consciousness of self situated in respect to time and tradition. The object of Strether's thought, Marie becomes the point of irradiation in Strether's expansive consciousness. The Countess induces Strether to feel at "home" on European ground; their intimacies alter Strether's perspective, making him reconceive his sense of his Americanism.

C. READING THE ACTION OF THOUGHT IN THE AMBASSADORS THROUGH THE EPIC MOTIF OF THE EMBRACE OF THE SHADE

Madame de Vionnet functions as the central, prophetic shade of epic otherworlds in two ways. First, she transmits to Strether a sense of the scope of past history that he need experience to redefine himself as an American in 1900.

Secondly, she collaborates with Strether to create a language suffused with the sense of the past that expresses the nuances of his contemporary American moment. Madame de Vionnet establishes Strether in his most comprehensive relation to his European otherworld. In doing this, she sets in motion a mental process that allows Strether to reconceive himself as an American. She achieves this success by introducing Strether to experiences forbidden in his new world environment. By teaching him to overcome the impoverishment of his culture, the Countess equips him to overcome its inhibitions and blind-spots. Strether's relation to Madame de Vionnet provides him the consciousness sealed from him when he is on American soil and at the same time necessary for him to experience in order for him to come "home" in the hermeneutic sense, to be able to interpret the legacy left by his historical moment.

In "Europe" Strether has the uncanny experience of feeling as though he were returning to places and people he hardly knows. The experience is uncanny because you cannot truly return to a place you have never been nor re-experience states of mind that are new. Granted that Strether did make one youthful visit to Europe after the Civil War, accompanied by his new bride. Nonetheless, his experiencing the sense of familiarity with everything he sees is attributable to his studies of European art. In The Ambassadors, epic recognition occurs when Strether

recognizes some person or thing that has lived within his imagination. More than any other character in The Ambassadors, Madame de Vionnet in her beguiling person fulfills these prolepses of Strether's imagination. Strether produces a ghostly figure resembling the Countess in his imagination; when he encounters her in fact, he experiences her as though she were a memory of some "thing" he had already imagined. When he visits her alone in her *salon* for the first time, Strether recognizes Madame de Vionnet to be the indispensable shade he has unconsciously come to "Europe" seeking to meet:

> At the back of his head, behind everything, was the sense that she was -- there before him, close to him, in vivid imperative form -- one of the rare women he had so often heard of, read of, thought of, but never met, whose very presence, look, voice, the mere contemporaneous *fact* of whom, from the moment it was at all presented, made a relation of mere recognition.

The stretch from the back of Strether's head (seat of his imagination) to the woman "close" "before him" describes the course Strether's mind takes as he imaginatively embraces Madame de Vionnet. The presentation before Strether's consciousness of "the mere contemporaneous fact" of the refined, bewitching woman, symbolizes his epic privilege. The emphasis on Strether's experience of sights and sounds, "look, voice" -- describes how much his imaginative embrace of "the mere contemporaneous *fact*", the Countess's "presence", is a bodily experience. The sentence describes the looping action of Strether's mind as though he

were vainly circling his arms around his heroine to mark their reunion. This experience of meeting "one of the rare women he had so often heard of, read of, thought of" represents his crossing to a mental state that puts him in relation with his defining cultural past. Strether experiences this fbcal shade bf the landscape bf his cultural membry as *returned to* because she fulfills his imagined foreshadowings. He thus returns to Madame de Vionnet as to a beloved relation afloat in his otherworld. The irrational crossing at the same time marks his arrival at a mental state imbued with the sense of cultural difference. Strether's crossing makes it possible for him to receive his epic dispensation.

In embracing Madame de Vionnet, Strether embraces the manifold European mind, "Europe". Their embrace describes an intimate exchange between the ambassadors of the old and new world. Strether offers the Countess the prostrate recognition of the imaginative man while Madame de Vionnet presents him the intuition of the deep past he needs to reform his "moral" self.[4] She dispenses the style of tradition, a wisdom (she refers to it as the "*vielle sagesse*") acquired by pedigree and historical "accident". As Strether becomes intimate with her, he imaginatively embraces this "vielle sagesse" -- the lexicon into which her European habits are distilled. In the following passage, Strether's attention orbits her room and cradles the

Countess within the scope of her Parisian reference.

> He couldn't help it; it wasn't his fault; he had done nothing; but by a turn of the hand she had somehow made their encounter a relation. And the relation profited by a mass of things that were not strictly in it or of it; by the very air in which they sat, by the high cold delicate room, by the world outside and the little plash in the court, by the First Empire and the relics in the stiff cabinets, by matters as far off as those and by others as near as the unbroken clasp of her hands in her lap and the look her expression had of being most natural when her eyes were most fixed. (VI, 148)

The tendency of Strether's vision to move back and forth between the *fact* of the Countess and the specific objects ("things" in Jamesian parlance) that constitute the scene suggests how, through his relationship with her, Strether is able to appreciate these objects. By now she has usurped the role of epic guide from Maria Gostrey and transmits to Strether the historical import of her objects simply by staring earnestly at him. Rather than suggesting withdrawal, "the unbroken clasp of her hands" suggests her forthrightness. Her overture to Strether is akin to the embrace made by the otherworld shade. By accepting it, Strether begins to take possession of all the "Europe" she refers to.

The analogy between Madame de Vionnet and the embraced shades of the epic otherworld becomes more explicit by Book IX of the novel. Strether and Madame de Vionnet again convene in her apartments to discuss the arrival of the Pococks. Strether feels "the effect of his being there with

her at the end of ten minutes more intimately on the basis of saving her than he yet had occasion to be" (IX, i, 230). Madame de Vionnet expresses deference and admiration towards Strether with greater intensity than ever before: "No one feels so much as *you*," she tells him, "No -- not any one". As he prepares to leave, they pass through three rooms, from her salon to the apartments' ante-chamber. Strether pauses to look back:

> the whole thing made a vista, which he found high melancholy and sweet -- full once more, of dim historic shades, of the faint far-away cannon roar of the great Empire. It was doubtless half the projection of his mind, but his mind was a thing that, among old waxed parquets, pale shades of pink and green, pseudo-classic candelabra, he had always needfully to reckon with. (IX, i, 236)

Strether stands in the middle of the antechamber, "slightly lingering, vaguely directing his glasses, while, *leaning against the door-post of the room*, [Madame de Vionnet] gently pressed her cheek to the side of the recess" (IX, i, 237). Strether is looking back through the doorways he has just passed through to view the "whole thing", the "vista" of "dim historic shades" and Madame de Vionnet is standing in his view, framed by the doorway, re-cognized by him as the queen shade of the company. By gently pressing her cheek to the door-post, she suggests her "amiability" ("She was so amiable that nobody had had a word to say" [V, iii, 138]), the seductive way she intimates the past to Strether: "You would have been a friend," she tells him, following this by announcing that her daughter is being

married and that Chad has helped arrange the match. She then expresses trust in Chad's intentions ("He wouldn't hurt her for the world ... he would never hurt *me*"). As she says this, Strether feels her offer "her whole story" to him as though it were a pair of outstretched arms.

> Her face, with what he had by this time *grasped*, told him more than her words; whether something had come into it, or whether he only read clearer, her whole story -- what at least he then took for such -- *reached out to him from it*. (IX, i, 239, my emphasis)

"The whole story" reaches out to the "grasping" Strether from Madame de Vionnet's face as she takes her place amid the vista of "dim historic shades". "The whole story" is the epic consciousnes she dispenses to him, the genealogy of feeling encoded in the "dim shades". At this instant, his mind embraces the otherness of the European world. It seeks to see the historical reference and historical depth signified by the presented figure -- the French Countess. The applied embrace motif helps explain the nature of Strether's own mental breakthrough:

> He waited a moment -- it all came. "I see -- I see." He felt he really did see. (IX, i, 239)

The Arcadian reference ("high melancholy and sweet") suggests the degree to which *"really" seeing* always involves *seeing* the death that gives the picture its meaning. In the otherworld journey, one must "really" *see* the dead and recognize them as such in order to be able to appropriate

their consciousness.

"The Ambassadors" is of course also the title of the famous Holbein painting of two Renaissance courtiers with the *momento mori* visible from an oblique angle. Adeline Tintner has discussed the possibility that James named his novel after the Holbein painting as a tribute to the intellectual and courtly values associated with the depicted ambassadors (In "Edel", 134-150). The painting implies the association, as old as the myth of Eden, between death and knowledge. The painting suggests that death is an oblique presence throughout the journey of consciousness. Death and consciousness prove inseparable: the consciousness of what life can be arises from the imagination of death. The ratio between the imagination of death and the derivation of consciousness of course holds true in the epic otherworld narrative. During his epic otherworld interviews with shades, the hero becomes so wrapped up in interpreting some fine point of existence and in reaping a revelation of gossip, politics, or philosophy that enhances his ability to see life more fully that he almost forgets that he is in contact with someone who is dead. As a dead shade tells its story, it foregrounds its historical significance in ways that obscure from its auditor its status as dead. The otherworld explorer focuses his attention on the significance of the shade rather than on its status. When the epic hero tries to embrace a specific shade, he again

confronts the reality of death. It could be said that when verbally interacting with the shade, the hero sees the scope of the shade's historical reference.

Holbein describes the scope of this reference in depicting the instruments representing the seven liberal arts, the Trivium (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and the Quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy) and the ambassadors, Jean de Dinteville, Lord of Polisy, and Georges de Selve, Bishop of Lavour, the archetypal courtier (homme d'épée, de robe courte) and scholar (homme de plume, de robe longue) of the French Renaissance. The usable consciousness and sheer historical reference conveyed by the shades of the dead shift attention from the reality of their death as the Holbein painting, in its celebration of learning, diplomatic craft, and *carpe diem*, blurs the ineffaceable presence of death in the equations of consciousness. The act of embracing the shade can be thought to restore to the epic hero the long-term untenability of his situation. In the throes of his embrace, he sees clearly outlined the anamorphic death's-skull, a skull escaping straightforward attention only to be revealed when he gains the properly oblique perspective (Greenblatt, 17-22). Vainly embraced, death commands the hero's visual attention. His visualization of death serves as a rite of passage for his appreciating the range of historical reference expressed by his otherworld.

The concept of the oblique angle also informs how Madame de Vionnet translates consciousness to Strether in this scene. In the preface to The Ambassadors, James refers to having executed his portrait of Mamie Pocock on her hotel balcony "at an angle of vision as yet untried" (15). Set as it is in Madame de Vionnet's chamber of "dim historic shades", the scene between Strether and the Countess also gets at Madame de Vionnet's "whole story" "by an angle of vision as yet untried". The Countess is ultimately giving her love to Strether but she does so indirectly by expressing her love for Chad. Her love, which amounts to her way of expressing herself -- its example and method -- almost surreptitiously handed over, contributes essentially to Strether's epic dispensation.

The phrase "pale shades" (the "vista" includes "waxed parquets, pale shades of pink and green, pseudo-classic candelabra") by association introduces another element into this scene of epic return. Immediately after his arrival in Paris, Strether visits the Luxembourg Gardens to read Mrs. Newsome's letters and re-acclimate himself to the city he once visited thirty years earlier. He commences to review his whole life as a series of Odyssean wanderings, concluding his train of thought by conceiving of his past *as a picture* -- a "backward picture" that "hung there, the long crooked course, grey in the shadow of his solitude" (II, ii, 61). The picture is peopled by Waymarsh, Mrs. Newsome, Maria

Gostrey, and "Beyond, behind them was the pale figure of his real youth, which held against its breast the two presences paler than itself" -- Strether's dead wife and son. As haunting personal memories, these pale shades inhabit Strether's *otherworld*. This otherworld is conditioned by his personal experiences. His otherworld can be said to emerge as the effect of the interplay between his memories and his imagination. These "shades", Strether's "pale figures", continue to conjure numerous feelings. They populate the "inward picture" that combines within Strether's consciousness with the outward scene -- the vista of Madame de Vionnet's apartments. The residue of Strether's earlier intimate experiences of his wife and son partly determines the way Strether experiences Madame de Vionnet and Chad, his surrogate wife and son in the otherworld that is conceived by his imaginative elaboration of his memories. The vista of Madame de Vionnet's "dim shades" becomes the back drop for a love scene between Strether and the Countess. Strether experiences "love" Europeanized, distilled through the body and person of Madame de Vionnet as he also experiences feelings for his irretrievable wife -- the figure of an unembraceable past.

The detail of Madame de Vionnet's "fixed" eyes evokes the intimacy rites of Dante's "Paradiso", where the pilgrim refers to Beatrice's eyes as "la mia gloria e del mio paradiso" ("Paradiso", XV, 35-36). As Beatrice is ultimately

surpassed as the vehicle of the pilgrim's visionary deliverance by his culminating vision of the Catholic Trinity in "Paradiso" XXXIII, Madame de Vionnet, for all her vehicular force, is similarly surpassed as the foundational semiotic complex of historical meaning by the more comprehensive and penetrable Lambinet landscape painting. Strether finds "conditions" at the *Cheval Blanc* to be the "thing ... even to a greater degree than Madame de Vionnet's old high salon" (XI, iii, 306). This *thing* helps him to a yet more comprehensive vision of history. The vision of Lambinet, the Jamesian apocalypse scene, encompasses and absorbs even the "fixed" gaze by which the Countess transmits to Strether "her whole story", "founded on a *vielle sagesse*". In "Paradiso" the vision of the Rose and the final epiphany of the Trinity surpass in effect the grace given by Beatrice's glance: "non pur ne' miei occhi è paradiso", she tells the pilgrim ("Paradiso, XVIII, 21), anticipating the great sublimation of desire climaxing in his vision of God. The figure of the imaginative embrace of the shade -- Madame de Vionnet in The Ambassadors, Beatrice in La Divina Commedia -- gives way to an embrace that is more total in the extremity of its renunciation and in the scope of its historical reference.

The spatial dimensions of Strether's mental experience implied by this passage suggest the specific epic characteristics of Jamesian consciousness. The circuit of

Strether's mind is defined by two points: first "at the back of his head, behind everything"; second "there before him, close to him, in vivid imperative form". The circuit travels through these points. This circuit suggests an experience of historical depths. Strether experiences these depths as the external world ("there before him") reveals what his imagination ("at the back of his head, behind everything") desired him to see. His sense of depths describes the spatial division between what he has imagined and what the "outside world" reveals. Strether again and again acknowledges that his experience of depths exceeds what he had expected. He feels this way most of all when dealing with Madame de Vionnet: "He had allowed for depths, but these were greater: and it was as if, oppressively -- indeed absurdly -- he was responsible for what they had now thrown up to the surface" (IX, i, 238). The epic embrace describes the crossing from "behind everything" (the point where Strether's imagination implicitly takes flight) to the vestigial figure "before him, close to him".

As "vivid imperative form," Madame de Vionnet represents the concretion of Strether's imagined ideal. "Every actual occasion," writes Alfred North Whitehead, "is a limitation imposed on possibility, and that by virtue of this limitation the particular value of the shaped togetherness of things emerges" (174). Madame de Vionnet prevails upon Strether's imagination to recognize her.

Strether's recognition involves his making the Countess correspond with his imagined thought. The woman, as Strether fancied her, is now fulfilled in his sensations. Strether's consciousness of Madame de Vionnet expresses his double sense of her erotic power: she is an intoxicating physical and intellectual presence and she corresponds to Strether's imagined ideal. The Countess's correspondence to Strether's imagination of so complex and commanding a presence produces his experience of homecoming. This homecoming is understandable as the paradoxical mental rite of his return to difference. As Strether's imaginative ideal, Madame de Vionnet is a mental shade of consciousness in which he chooses to believe. She is his most prized beloved thought realized in his external world. Strether associates her with Madame de Stael and Madame Roland, actual historical figures of the period of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire who seem as though resurrected by her person. Her name Marie evokes Marie Antoinette and the Virgin Mary. She vivifies the ghosts of European history in her person. These very ghosts inspire Strether to his imaginative flights. In this sense, she represents the intersection of the narrative of the European past with the narrative of Strether's imaginative activity. These narratives of cultural memory and individual imagination intersect through her. Madame de Vionnet objectifies Strether's historical ideal.

The embrace of the shade motif also informs Strether's

relation to Madame de Vionnet as he watches her kneel praying in a chapel inside the Cathedral of Notre Dame. He has come to Notre Dame as though it were Sunday. In The Ambassadors, James tends to omit reference to the day of the week as though to suggest that the contemplative intensity of a secular Sunday-worship holds throughout the action. His omissions of the specific day or date are intended to make Emerson's point that "wisdom, poetry, virtue" were "never got [sic] on any calendar day" (255). The omission suggests that Strether sustains his otherworldly scrutiny on every day of the week throughout his stay in Europe.

Once inside the Church, Strether sights the kneeling woman who appeals to his imaginative ideal. His "vague tenderness" has not "indeed *so felt its responsibility* as when ... he suddenly *measured* the suggestive effect of a lady whose supreme stillness, in the shade of one of the chapels, he had two or three times noticed as he made, and made once more, his slow circuit" (VII, i, 172). James chooses terms that fix the focus on the abstract activities of the conscious self as it interacts with its otherworld. Strether's vague tenderness "*feels* its responsibility" and he "*measures* the suggestive effect of the lady". These terms foreground the way the shade-like phenomena of Strether's environment invite his curiosity. The objects to which Strether attends choose him as their observer.

Richard Rorty describes the relation of a thinker to

necessary truth in terms of "a proposition which is believed because the 'grip' of the object upon us is ineluctable" (157). Rorty makes this observation during a Kantian discussion of mathematical formulations, like the Pythagorean triangle, which he says, contrary to empirical experience, display a "rigorous provability". Nonetheless, this dynamic of mental life applies to Strether's experience. In Notre Dame, Strether is in the grip of an observed object that impresses upon him an interpretation of European history he perceives to be undeniably true.

> She only sat and gazed before her, as he himself often sat; but she had placed herself, as he never did, within the focus of the shrine, and she had lost herself, he could easily see, as he would only have liked to do. She was not a wandering alien, keeping back more than she gave, but one of the familiar, the intimate, the fortunate, for whom these dealings had a method and a meaning. (VII, i, 172)

Otherworld epic experience gets one in its grip even as it incites the epic hero to his vain embrace. The ineluctable "clever canvases" of Strether's Parisian otherworld, the shades of Jamesian prophecy, are the "necessary facts" that sustain Strether's attention.

The complex mental process described by the imaginative embrace recurs for Strether throughout The Ambassadors. The epic embrace figures the gestures of Jamesian thought, the double ritual of self-shedding combined with the act of newly appropriating some imaginatively appreciated facet of the historical past. This double ritual allows for the

experience of cognitive addition that informs Strether's mental progress throughout. In his preface, James emphasizes that his main concern is with demonstrating Strether's "process of vision". This process of vision can be understood to progress through repeating acts of imaginative embrace that propel Strether to succeeding states of otherworldly entrance. Strether's re-cognitions describe the way his sensations confirm his imaginative visions. He literally repeats his imaginative embrace of Madame de Vionnet at successive points of the action, with each embrace constituting a further stage of his mental narrative.

The Ambassadors reconceives Emerson's figure of Man Thinking, accepting Nature's out-stretched arms ("Nature stretches out her arms to embrace man", etc.). However, James's vision is distinguished from Emerson's by how it combines history, specifically the production of cultural forms, to Nature, understanding the American imagination to embrace this composite.[5] In the passage from "Nature" where Emerson describes the English martyrs cloaked by the natural world, "the sky as [their] temple, the sun as [their] candle", nature remains transcendent over history, the strict source of consciousness. In his epic reconfiguration of the Emersonian otherworld, James would blend the actions of the martyrs (giving off "the smell of blood") with the natural landscape so that the signifying shades of his

otherworld represent civilization as the "natural" world. Through their distinct vocabularies, Emerson and James both show consciousness to be produced through the interaction between the self and its otherworld. This self is understood to *visit* its otherworld every time it follows the transgressive impulse to reconceive its relation to inevitably progressing Time. The visit is a perpetual occurrence of mental experience. This self is inevitably and repeatedly stepping inside its otherworld the way Strether experiences himself step inside "the little Lambinet" landscape painting. James revises and recontextualizes the Emersonian action of embracing outstretched "Nature" in Concord by having Strether embrace an erotically beguiling woman who represents European tradition and Parisian culture.

C1. THE EMBRACE AS THE ACT OF EXPRESSING THE AMERICAN SELF IN 1900

Strether's relationship with Madame de Vionnet continues to evolve in the later stages of the novel. Re-examining the Lambinet scene will elucidate the relation between epic embrace and the depiction of Jamesian consciousness. These next pages will show how Strether, spending the day leisurely strolling through the countryside, entertains thoughts of the Countess that continue to imply the action of epic embrace.

The Lambinet scene marks Strether's most powerful

moment of imaginative return and historical recreation. The moment describes the trade-off between personal loss and historical gain I have associated with epic embrace. Strether's experience in this scene climaxes the long sequence of his acts of imaginative embrace.

As already discussed, Strether's first sight of the Lambinet marked his entrance into his European otherworld. He comes to know Madame de Vionnet personally and imaginatively after he crosses the Lambinet's frame; she lies within Strether's Lambinet landscape. The frame of reference of the landscape exceeds even that of the Countess. This is why "conditions" at the Cheval Blanc, the "little court" that is very much inside Strether's Lambinet are thought to be "*the thing* ... even to a greater degree than Madame de Vionnet's old high salon where the ghost of the Empire walked" (XI, iii, 306). And why the female figure rowed by Chad in their advancing boat is "wanted in the [bigger] picture" all day. Madame de Vionnet becomes a symbolic part of the Lambinet's larger message. Holding her parasol aloft to hide her face from Strether, she makes "so fine a pink point in [its] shining scene" (XI, 308, iv).

As Strether exists within the landscape painting, he focuses intensely on Madame de Vionnet. The rural scene makes her more present to him than any previous backdrop. She exists inside his sense of the painting and is its most noteworthy shade. Strether's thoughts are sexually charged.

He sensualizes the landscape as he savors his memories of two recent meetings with the Countess. She presides in Strether's mind like the epic shade drinking from the Greek votive pit. In the lengthy paragraph that follows, James tracks Strether's thoughts of the Countess as he lounges on a hillside -- "his hillside" -- falls asleep, wakes, reflects, *dreams* while awake. The paragraph merits full quotation because it demonstrates how Strether's thoughts of the Countess affect his sensations of the landscape. Strether embraces the shade of Madame de Vionnet occupying his mind.

> It struck him now as sufficiently plain that if he had still been careful he had been so for a reason. He had really feared, in his behaviour, a lapse from good faith; if there was a danger of one's liking such a woman too much one's best safety was in waiting at least till one had the right to do so. In the light of the last few days the danger was fairly vivid; so that it was proportionately fortunate that the right was likewise established. It seemed to our friend that he had on each occasion profited to the utmost by the latter: how could he have done so more, he at all events asked himself, than in having immediately let her know that, if it was all the same to her, he preferred not to talk about anything tiresome? He had never in his life so sacrificed an armful of high interests as in that remark; he had never so prepared the way for the comparatively frivolous as in addressing it to Madame de Vionnet's intelligence. It hadn't been till later that he quite recalled how in conjuring away everything but the pleasant he had conjured away almost all they had hitherto talked about; it was not till later even that he remembered how, with their new tone, they hadn't so much as mentioned the name of Chad himself. *One of the things that most lingered with him on his hillside was this delightful facility, with such a woman, of arriving at a new tone; he thought, as he lay on his back, of all the ones she might make possible if one were to*

> *try her, and at any rate of the probability that one could trust her to fit them to occasions.* He had wanted her to feel that, as he was disinterested now, so she herself should be, and she had showed she felt it, and he had showed he was grateful, and it had been for all the world as if he were calling for the first time. They had had other, but irrelevant meetings; it was quite as if, had they sooner known how much they *really* had in common, there were quantities of comparatively dull matters they might have skipped. Well, they were skipping them now, even to graceful gratitude, even to handsome "Don't mention it!" -- and it was amazing what could still come up without reference to what had been going on between them. It might have been, on analysis, nothing more than Shakespeare and the musical glasses; but it had served all the purpose of his appearing to have said to her: "Don't like me, if it's a question of liking me, for anything obvious and clumsy that I've, as they call it 'done' for you: like me -- well like me, hang it, for anything else you choose. So, by the same propriety, don't be for me simply the person I've come to know through my awkward connexion with Chad -- was ever anything, by the way, *more* awkward? Be for me please, with all your admirable tact and trust, just whatever I may show you it's a present pleasure to me to think you". It had been a large indication to meet; but if she hadn't met it what *had* she done, and how had their time together slipped along so smoothly, mild but not slow, and melting, liquefying, into his happy illusion of idleness? He could recognise on the other hand that he had probably not been without reason, in his prior, his restricted state, for keeping an eye on his liability to lapse from good faith. (XI, iii, 304-305) (my emphasis of the sentences on "tones")

Crossing the boundary dividing the "mine" from "not-mine", Strether regards the landscape as "his". His enjoyment of its grassy curve under his body figures his auricular grasp of the swerving idioms of Madame de Vionnet's talk. He experiences the landscape (hillside, poplars) to be *his* because, savoring its scents, vistas and contours, he

thinks about making love to the Countess. Like Emerson, Strether appropriates the apparitional constituents of the scene. Unlike Emerson, he consciously entertains erotic fantasies. James links the sensual effects of the French landscape and the French woman as he did in an earlier scene in Chad's "lovely home" when Gloriani, observed by Strether, studies a French landscape with animalistic voracity before taking Strether's place beside Madamoiselle de Vionnet, who is described as a "faint pastel in an oval frame" (VI, ii, 154) and as a "lurking apparition". In both instances, the European female is -- from the perspective of the American male -- conceived as a visual and textual field of especially valued knowledge.

The above passage suggests that for Strether conversation with Madame de Vionnet is an erotic act. He is kept enthralled by her language. Born of French and English blood, Madame de Vionnet has devised an English that is itself hybrid, "the real monopoly of *a special shade of speech*". Speaking English, Madame de Vionnet commands Strether's attention like a prophetic otherworld shade.

> When she spoke the charming slightly strange English he best knew her by he seemed to feel her as a creature, among all the millions, with a language quite to herself, *the real monopoly of a special shade of speech*, beautifully easy for her, yet of a colour and a cadence that were both inimitable and matters of accident. (XI, iv, 310, my emphasis)

The phrase "Best knew her" suggests how Madame de Vionnet's "strange English" embodies Strether's imagined

ideal of a nuanced, individuated self. In her choices of words, the Countess concretizes complex modes of thought. Her "strange English" makes Madame de Vionnet "best known" to Strether because the Countess thereby represents the fulfillment in reality of Strether's imaginings. Her "shade of speech" expresses Strether's idealization of the stylish Continental heroine. The "special shade" reveals the history of "Europe". The phrase "Seemed to feel her" implies the symbiotic relation between language and affect in the Jamesian model of consciousness.

His hearing Madame de Vionnet's "strange English" makes Strether single her out "among all the millions" the way the Dantesque pilgrim singles out Francesca da Rimini from the countless shades. The Countess emerges from the "voluble cluster" of her French compatriots, an "inimitable" "creature". A figure of Strether's imagination ("she was -- there, before him, close to him ... one of the rare women he had so often heard of, read of, thought of, but never met"), Madame de Vionnet becomes an empowering agent in Strether's material world. Her shade of speech expresses a "shade of [the] relation" between Strether and the larger otherworld object, "Europe".

The two conversants shed the idioms of their home countries, America and France, and converge in the "other-space" conceived both in Madame de Vionnet's English and by Strether's appreciation of her English. As the confidant of

the Countess, Strether experiences an *ex-stasis* by being temporarily freed from the relational and linguistic norms that determine his American identity. He bounds clear of the Woollett syntax and usage denoting his Puritan "America" to embrace the "charming", "slightly strange" English speech that re-presents Madame de Vionnet. The American man and the French woman, the Jamesian "I" and its otherworld facilitator, convene in the idiomatic space *between* their national tongues. This idiomatic space composes what Richard Poirier refers to as "a world elsewhere". Its idioms are encoded with the style of a vast, infinitely nuanced cultural past.

Poirier describes The Ambassadors as a novel "essentially about ... the process of 'conversion'" ... the 'conversion' of Strether by Paris into a man whose capacities for appreciation create a world -- alternative to Paris and to Woollett and more compelling in the duties it demands from him than either place could be" (130-131). Strether creates this alternative world most of all through his appreciation of Madame de Vionnet. The alternative world is best expressed by the "special shade" of the Countess's "slightly strange" English speech. In speaking her "charming" English, the Countess offers the American ambassador a "bridge to style". The phrase "bridge to style" comes from James's famous account of his childhood reverie in the *Gallerie d'Apollon*. Delacroix's ceiling fresco of

Apollo fighting the python combines with the gilt splendor of the great room to intoxicate James with the sense of old world majesty. James's account in Notes of a Son and Brother has unmistakeable erotic resonances. So, too, does his account of Strether conversing with the Countess. In the special shade of English in which she expresses the continental past, Madame de Vionnet represents Strether's means of *crossing* to the otherworld of Style. Physically excited by Marie, Strether experiences shades of relation between them. However, he only *crosses to* and *embraces* Marie when he appreciates her "special shade" of English.

In the long paragraph quoted at the beginning of this section, Strether considers the "new tone(s)" ("conjuring away everything but the pleasant") that he and the Countess create through their intimate talk. The "tone" of their languid banter lives on in Strether as he lies in the Lambinet landscape: "He thought, as he lay on his back, of all the tones she might make possible if one were to try her, and at any rate of the probability that one could trust her to fit them to occasions" (XI, iii, 304). Language incarnates the "shades of relation" between Strether and Madame de Vionnet and between Strether and the many objects he associates with her. The "present pleasures" he feels when he visits the Countess in her salon (XII, iii, 305) become incarnated in their "new tone".

Tone" may imply conversations ("tone of") or pictures

("tones in"), the color of a sound or the color of a painting. In James, literary composition synthesizes the two: the "story" must have an "idea", the "scene" dialogue. Madame de Vionnet's greatest value for Strether is her "facility" for helping him improvise his speech and his actions. She mesmerically extracts his thoughts from him and helps him to "fit" them to the given time. Their shared facility suggests the rhythmic coordination of love-makers and the net result: reproduction. A "new tone" connotes a Jamesian "Vita Nuova", a new "America". The Countess and Strether collaborate to style distinctly and to encode historically the hybrid Euro-American English language that becomes Strether's new "home".

Madame de Vionnet's idiomatic English presents to Strether a complex trace of her European heritage. In reflecting upon their conversations, Strether translates her account (of herself and "Europe"). This act of translation resembles the way the epic hero grasps the dead shade's story in its peculiarity and, returning to the world, adapts it to his historical account. Strether's method of converting Madame de Vionnet's language is comparable to the conversion of monetary currencies performed by travellers when crossing national borders. His mental experience of the "otherworldly" takes the form of a retrospective account. Through his retrospective account, Strether (the otherworld narrator) develops his "new tone". His "new tone" suffuses

his visual and auditory experience. This "tone" -- the distinguishing hue in his self-portrait and the dominant note of his reflections -- pervades Strether's reconstructed Self.

The novel's narrative describes Strether's formation of his "new tone". The tone first appears in his sympathetic references to Madame de Vionnet in his letters home, causing Mrs. Newsome to send over Sarah Pocock to rescue him. He admits that "It's just that tone" (VIII, i, 204) -- the tone of the convert -- that has alarmed Mrs. Newsome. "With such a woman" as Madame de Vionnet, one "arrives at a new tone". The metaphorical phrase emphasizes how new choices of language represent points on Strether's mental journey. These choices create habitats of the mind. Arrival is what Strether experiences every time he has a "mental homecoming". Strether expresses his new tone as he overcomes his moral rigidity and conceives a more nuanced visual and verbal life. The new tone suffuses both his speech and James's late manner.

Here is an example of Strether expressing himself in his "new tone". He finds it while speaking with Miss Barrace at the party Chad gives for his sister. The pair admire the party's effect of stifling any criticism Sarah Pocock could make of her brother.

> "If we are merry (says Strether) it's because Chad has understood so well".
> "He has understood amazingly", said Miss Barrace.
> "It's wonderful!" -- Strether anticipated for her.

> "It's wonderful!" she to meet it, intensified; so that, face to face over it, they largely and recklessly laughed. (X, i, 263)

Strether finds the tone characteristic of Miss Barrace, an enlightened expatriate American. Only Americans who have lived in "Europe" can "arrive at" this tone. Strether has arrived at it from dealing so intimately with Madame de Vionnet and developing a new linguistic facility.

Facility is the attribute of the American who improvises his way through Europe. In becoming a moral improviser, Strether, like the Dantesque pilgrim, copes with nuances of manners that impede the less resourceful otherworld traveller.[6] The word "facility" denotes the fluency of speech and of occasion. The self masters resistance and attends to necessary objects. William James understands facility to obtain when the self allows harnessed impulses free expression. In his chapter on the "Will", William James describes the resistance the self must overcome on reaching the threshold of a new thought: "The only resistance which our will can possibly experience is the resistance which such an idea offers to being attended to at all" (II, 567). William James's formulation can be read through the motif of the epic embrace. After vainly embracing the shade, the hero abandons his resistance to the idea that he cannot retrieve valued aspects of his past. This acceptance frees him to attend to a new idea. The resistance to new thought includes a nostalgic clinging to old thought. The embrace of the

shade frees the hero to attend to new thought.

"Philosophizing," Strether appreciates how the "very conditions of perception, the terms of thought" have changed (VII, iii, 196). His conditions of perception and terms of thought become those of Lambinet. *Lamb*ert Strether's conversion allows him to see as Emile-Charles *Lamb*inet saw. In embracing Madame de Vionnet, Strether embraces *her* conditions of perception and *her* terms of thought. The Lambinet landscape *in-tones* these. The Lambinet landscape contains the Countess, its most significant shade. The pun "in-ton-ation" describes how the Lambinet painting enables Strether to ventriloquize the phenomena of the European tradition. Composed of pictorial tones, the painting also in-tones in Strether, inspiring his intonation -- his historical account.

Entranced by Madame de Vionnet's "special shade of speech", Strether remains in a paradoxical relation to her. Like the shades in the embrace scenes analyzed above, the Countess invokes history for Strether while eluding his physical grasp. The frustrations characterizing the earlier epic embraces are in The Ambassadors reconceived to emphasize Strether's sexual futility. The Lambinet scene climaxes with Strether accepting that Chad and Marie are lovers and that he and Marie can never be lovers. Nevertheless, Strether's sexual desire engineers the process of self-expansion resulting in his hermeneutic

circumscription of the historical factors that earlier tended to overwhelm him. He gets his mind around European history, so to speak, and reconstructs his historical perspective. Strether "knows" Madame de Vionnet by cognitively compassing the qualities of the European tradition that she transmits; however, he is denied carnal knowledge. Like his epic forerunners, Strether experiences the significance of this otherworld shade but fails to consummate the physical reunion. The Lambinet scene concludes with Strether experiencing both the sexual frustration and the supplement of historical experience operative in the epic embrace.

The sound and sense of Madame de Vionnet's "strange English" have the effect of displacing Strether. When the Countess speaks to him in English, Strether experiences her as if she were speaking *in* French. His experience is shaped by his fancy that he is developing a "fearless facility in French". This conviction proves untrue when Strether encounters the lovers at the *Cheval Blanc* and is faced with having to comprehend and return Madame de Vionnet's rapid French. The Countess speaks "with an unprecedented command of idiomatic turns" and gets "as he might have said, somewhat away from him, taking all at once little brilliant jumps that he could but lamely match" (XI, iv, 310). The Lambinet episode is devised to expose the limits real experience imposes on Strether's imaginative ecstasies.

Strether feels these limits when he recognizes he will not attain "facility in French", which means, finally, that he will not "match" Madame de Vionnet. Neither will he (since for James carnal intimacy is realized in linguistic play) be Madame de Vionnet's "match". Facility in French proves impossible for Strether the way an endless floating existence amid the unnatural and otherworldly proves impossible for the epic hero. The epic hero accept the limits of his linguistic resources and his bodily past, accepts, finally, his necessary return within the best "home" he can textually construct in time.

In articulating her special shade of speech, Madame de Vionnet functions like Casella, the songster employed by Dante to dramatize the process of linguistic alloying and transmutation so central to otherworld experience in the *Commedia*. The Countess is an intoxicating voice, a spellbinding message, the self's expurgative shade revealed bver and bver in the cbuntless new "tbnes" she and Strether imprbvise cbnversing tbgether. As I mentioned above, Casella renders one of the lyrics Dante publishes in Il Convivio, giving the pilgrim's earthly verses his otherworldly interpretation. The action obliquely symbolizes the pilgrim's constant experience of otherworldly knowledge as knowledge that he crosses to. Hearing Casella's interpretation of his lyric, he hears himself as Casella, his otherworld relation, hears him. Strether has a similar

experience of hearing himself in the perspective of the other after he pronounces himself psychologically sturdy to Madame de Vionnet ("'Well I can bear almost anything!' our friend briskly interrupted" [VI, i, 150).). In response, Madame de Vionnet's "deep", "beautiful" smile makes him "hear what he had said just as she had heard it". Here again relating to Madame de Vionnet makes Strether ex-static. Displaced from his biological point of view, he occupies a reverse perspective of culture and, in this case, gender. By forcing Strether to scrutinize himself from the perspective of the cultural other, Madame de Vionnet helps him re-present himself to himself.

Carren Kaston says this scene demonstrates an intimacy that is the hallmark of the European civilization: "The miracle of hearing someone hearing you, or of sensing someone sensing you creates an echo chamber in which the experience is doubled, and ultimately multiplied without end. The presentation of a reciprocal or collaborative relation between a man and a woman, a relation devoid on each side, even if only verbally, of both tyrannical self-absorption and empathic self-effacement, is one of the most memorable accomplishments of The Ambassadors, and one of the most revolutionary in all of James. Such communication is the principal adventure of Paris for Strether and represents civilization at its peak. It joins American naturalness to European civilization in making the case that the natural

self may be not only immeasurably enriched, but actually made more capable of naturalness, through the civilized world of art and artifice" (Kaston, 105). Strether's new consciousness emerges through his inter-views with this queen shade of his otherworld.

C2. THE VISION OF HISTORY THAT STRETHER EXPERIENCES THROUGH HIS EMBRACE OF MADAME DE VIONNET

As the queen shade of his otherworld, Madame de Vionnet appeals to Strether through his senses. When Maria Gostrey reviews Marie's past, Strether savors the "taste of history". Other details like the good smell fostered by Madame de Vionnet in Chad's quarters in the Boulevard Malesherbes and the luminous view of the "shining barge-burdened Seine" enjoyed by Strether when he lunches with the Countess stress how Strether's shade occasions bodily pleasure. Alone with Gostrey in Gloriani's garden after the other guests go inside for tea, Strether consumes Maria's account of Madame de Vionnet as though feeding from the tree of knowledge. The young James had used the figure of feeding from the forbidden tree to explain the spell of his year-long stay in Europe in 1870. Leon Edel mentions that James frequently spoke of "having been fed 'too prompt a mouthful' of the fruit of the tree" to explain the lasting spell of his year-long stay in Europe in 1870 (Edel, 118). "Europe" constitutes a form of knowledge forbidden for Americans.

At other times, the effect of a word or gesture from

Madame de Vionnet penetrates Strether to his core. In a reversal of sexual stereotypes, Marie comes to dominate Strether. Every time she drives into Strether "by a single word a little golden nail", he becomes more enthralled. In a letter to Grace Norton written in 1870, James describes the "European gains" from his recent Continental tour as a "bullet" over which his "American experience" was "closing *bunchily*"; "But I have only to probe a little to hear the golden ring of that precious projectile", James adds (Edel, 118). Strether is acted upon by his European otherworld in ways that evoke James's description. James understands the European otherworld to penetrate the American "I" through its senses and to storm the American imagination.

The metaphor of the golden nails even suggests the forms adopted by pagan gods in their seduction of Greek heroines (Danae and the golden shower, Leda and the swan). James reverses gender roles to render the heroine the omnipotent penetrator and revises the naturalist metaphors to an industrial metaphor (the nails) to emphasize his conception that Nature is a force of culture. Marie possesses Strether physically and mentally to the point that she effects a change in his language. Strether admits her dominance when they separate for the last time: "'Ah, but you've *had* me!' he declared at the door, with an emphasis that made an end'" (XII, ii, 324). Possessed by Madame de Vionnet, Strether recalls her seduction in their "new tone".

In an intriguing simile, Maria supposes Marie de Vionnet's mind to have "doors as numerous as the many-tongued cluster of confessionals at St. Peter's" (V, iii, 139). The trope offers another way to figure Madame de Vionnet's function as Strether's chief otherworld shade. The simile compares the mind of the Countess with the mystic shadows of the confessionals in the largest and most important Catholic church. Her consciousness is the cumulative text of the countless confessions made in many languages in the Vatican's dim booths. She distills in Strether the meaning of the secrets volunteered in various tongues by European citizens.

Gostrey remembers Marie from their school days in Geneva as a precocious student of languages who effortlessly assumed the identities of citizens from every European nationality:

> As polyglot as a little Jewess (which she wasn't, oh no!) and chattering French, English, German, Italian, anything one would, in a way that made a clean sweep, if not of prizes and parchments, at least of every "part", whether memorised or improvised, in the curtained costumed school repertory, and in especial of all mysteries of race and vagueness of reference, all swagger about "home", among the variegated mates. (V, iii, 138)

The school's Swiss setting is symbolically crucial. The site of Marie de Vionnet's early years of acculturation, Switzerland also becomes Strether's symbolic final destination. He concludes the novel by comparing himself to a figure on the Berne clock. The Jamesian narrative of

acculturation begins with Marie's education in Geneva and climaxes with Strether's apotheosis as the Berne clock figure. This narrative of acculturation describes a circle beginning and ending in Switzerland, a country symbolizing the alternative world ("alternative to Paris and to Woollet-t", Poirier says) that Strether stylistically constructs. The circle we suppose Strether to draw in imaginatively compassing Madame de Vionnet through his epic embrace is implied by the circle of acculturation deriving from and returning to Switzerland. In comparing Strether to a Swiss clock figure, James also implies Strether's accuracy as a time piece, his representativeness of the American historical moment.

Her mind as shadowy as the "numerous" "many-tongued" confessionals at St. Peter's, Marie de Vionnet synthesizes different national histories in her performance of "Europe". No longer Rousseau's "small child of Nature at the Geneva School", she matures into a post-Emersonian receptacle of darkness. As the shade in which sins are confessed, God is confronted, and grace is conferred, her mind marks the site of Jamesian historical experience, the place where the Jamesian quest hero encounters the unnatural. By becoming intimate with Madame de Vionnet, Strether gains the fundamental knowledge of European socio-culture. This *fundament* consists of the personal secrets of Europeans, especially their illicit desires, for nearly two millenia

articulated in confession booths in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lamb.

Strether embraces the shade of Madame de Vionnet as this shade is symbolized by the simile comparing her mind to the dimness of the St. Peter's confessionals. He amasses its text as his personal consciousness. The figure of Strether passing through the shadows also derives from the simile comparing him to the Berne clock figure: "*They* came out, on one side, at their hour, jigged along their little course in the public eye, and went in on the other side" (XII, V, 342) When not "out", these clock figures are turning *in* the shadowy depths of the clock interior. When the two "shade similes" are read in combination they symbolize how Strether's conversations with Madame de Vionnet provide him epic consciousness. When he talks to the Countess, he enters a mind as charged with consciousness as the Catholic confessionals. Once their conversation concludes, he emerges from the shadowy confessional and renders his account. His account situates him in "time". Emerging from the shadow, he functions like the Berne clock figure that sounds the time after maneuvering through the clock's shadowy interior space.

Like Milton, James understands consciousness acquired through imaginative penetration of the abysmal to be historicizing. Milton begins Paradise Lost by invoking the Holy Spirit for the epic consciousness that will "justify

the ways of God to men": "Thou from the first/Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread/Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss/and mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark/Illumine, what is low raise and support;/That to the highth of this great Argument/I may assert Eternal Providence,/And justify the ways of God to men" (I, 17-22). In The Ambassadors, women are equated with abysses. "We're abysses", Maria Gostrey tells Strether (V,. iii, 141). Women are abysses for Strether in the way they comprise the infinite "other side" of the relational space through which he conducts his endless journey of the mind. These abysmal women invite Strether's explorations. They provoke and respond to his questions. Strether's sense of his epistemological abyss develops through his relations with provocative others, especially women.

Milton conceives the Puritan self as an abyss to be inseminated with knowledge by the Holy Ghost. James understands the international self to create and explore its abyss in the act of making relations with satisfying objects. The Jamesian self produces its sense of an abyss through projection. The abyss is inseminated with the consciousness resulting from the self's social interactions. The consciousness Strether gains through his interaction with Madame de Vionnet's abysmal mind expresses the American moment.

The Countess renders Strether a secular communicant

whose wafer is words. Based on his beliefs in her "virtuous attachment" to Chad, Strether regards Madame de Vionnet as his "Virgin Marie". She is impregnated with the word of God -- which, in the Jamesian *cosmos*, translates into the text and icons of European culture -- Hugo's novels, the Revue des Deux Mondes, the First Empire, Titian's "Man with a Glove", Madame de Stael, Chateaubriand, Madame Roland, Barbizon. She teaches Strether a secular language of Christ-like homecomings, together with him improvising a new American scripture.

Madame de Vionnet is identified with the Catholic Church, the institution that Waymarsh deems "the enemy, the monster of bulging eyes and far-reaching quivering groping tentacles" (I, iii, 38); as the "monster", a "creature" of "strange" speech, she seduces in tongues, using her sexuality to show wayward Americans the European way. "In Europe," Michael Seidel comments, "women tend not to negotiate from positions of familial power but to persuade as the transmitters, the molders of behavior that is 'wonderful', as Miss Barrace keeps putting it, that is culturally and perhaps even sexually awesome" (147).[7] Madame de Vionnet's sexuality helps her to express herself and to extract intention from her interlocutors. After she converts Chad to her creed of moral dexterity, she converts Strether.

In lamenting his wasted chances to Little Bilham, Strether describes himself deterministically as

consciousness poured into a set mold. Contact with Madame de Vionnet produces an overflow of his consciousness, creating his need for a new mould. The moment *when* Strether laments his consciousness as set and staid paradoxically becomes one *where* he consciously overflows. One of the bases for conscious overflow is self-recognition of the limits of one's consciousness. The self's transgression of limits coincides with its recognizing these limits. It is fitting that, immediately after he meets Madame de Vionnet, Strether makes his "confession" to Little Bilham (F. O. Matthiessen has noted this). Strether's interaction with Marie, the woman with a mind of as many shadows as there are Vatican confession stalls, prompts the personal confession that makes his redemption possible.

We can conclude, therefore, that Strether follows a pattern of loss, groping and regain, losing the shade of Madame de Vionnet in order to regain her in another state and form; she becomes the center-point of his newly intense Lambinet re-composition, a historical figure. This is what he recognizes her to be in the climactic scene: "He too had within the minute taken in something, taken in that he knew the lady whose parasol, shifting as if to hide her face, made so fine a pink point in the shining scene" (XI, iv, 308). Strether's entire Parisian experience is incorporated in his reconstruction of the landscape painting. We can say that his epic gain (historical dispensation) comes at the

sacrifice of his romance (uncompromised union with Madame de Vionnet). Charles Feidelson has stressed James's delicate negotiation between realism and romanticism: James romanticizes the real into facts vivid enough to warrant and reward attention; however, he also acknowledges the need to impose limits on a romantic impulse which, if observed unrestrictedly, could bring self-dissolution.

In depicting Strether straining to match Madame de Vionnet Gallic idiom for idiom over dinner at the *Cheval Blanc*, James reveals his hero's failure to sustain an untenable Romantic projection. Reading this episode through the epic embrace motif, we conclude that Strether must retreat into objects that constitute his past -- in this case the words, phrases, queries, exclamations of his reconceived native tongue. The act of embrace is climaxed by a recoiling into one's textual self. Strether's own language describes his place of retreat, his altered reality. The English language constitutes the real object James wants to romanticize -- to stretch, unbound, and re-render in more stylish forms. In The Ambassadors, the applied motif of the embrace of the shade symbolizes, finally, a process of linguistic extension, synthesis and refinement.

1. Several of the definitions listed under "embrace" (from the Old French "embracer") in the O.E.D. help to elucidate the meaning of this act in epic. It means to "clasp in arms as a sign of fondness or friendship"; it can signify sexual embrace. It also means "to compass, gain (an object of desire", "to accept, submit to", and "to adopt (a doctrine, opinion, religion)". The

most Dantesque meaning is "to entwine, encircle, surround", the most Emersonian "to take in with the eye or the mind". Out of these various definitions, we may synthesize one that suffuses the epic examples including Henry James: "embrace" would mean to frame imaginatively, to possess within one's imaginative compass. The act would be driven by eros. It would describe a return to difference, the closing of a mental circle climaxing in a changed perspective.

The relation between arm and frame specifies a triple analogy between the reaching body, the brace of a picture, and the visualizing mind.

2. Aeneas earlier embraces the shade of his murdered wife, Creusa, as Troy falls (II, 1065-1070). That separation ritual again reflects the hero's loss of his bodily past -- his wife, her body, their sexual experience together. Only after resigning himself to this loss can Aeneas begin his exilic quest at all.

3. Macdonald argues that "It is certainly one of the functions of the great journey to the land of the dead in the sixth Aeneid to take the hero under divine auspices through a kind of ritual recapitulation of his experience and ultimately to free him of it" (29). I would argue that the false embrace symbolizes this double act of recapitulation and liberation. Aeneas overcomes the "dead weight" of his past in experiencing *the failure* of his embrace. Even when Aeneas extricates himself from one past, however, he remains in a false position, "not really perfected", the fallible hero of fate who exits the Virgilian underworld through the gate of false dreams. His "body's dead weight" is a limit Aeneas negotiates. He extends its limits without fully overcoming it. The embrace of the shade motif represents Aeneas in the mystifying act of trying to overcome this limit, a limit symbolic of Troy's defeat, the hero's tragic relationship with Dido, and the old form of his filial devotion to his father, Anchises.

4. I take morality in the general sense to refer to one's *habits of representation*. In his chapter on "Will" in Principles of Psychology, William James defines moral action in terms of habits of representation. "To *sustain a representation," he writes, "to think*, is, in short, the only moral act, for the impulsive and the obstructed, for sane and lunatics alike" (II, 566). A person's morality depends strictly on what objects that person opts to attend to. The strict criteria of morality are thus what objects the individual holds before her or his mind and what mental composition describe her or his relations to these objects. The person's representational choices become the measure of their moral conduct.

5. John Carlos Rowe argues convincingly that James's version of "Nature", *his* otherworld, "seems present ... only as a 'Gardencourt', the oxymoronic name in which nature and culture

are agglutinated" (199). Rowe here perfectly distinguishes the Jamesian otherworld from the Emersonian, establishing the different terms in which each writer conceived the process of thought.

6. An example of the pilgrim improvising occurs in the icy depths of hell in the bottom ring of the betrayers. Showing "disdegno", he outfoxes the lying souls and continues his course. He learns his "disdegno" from the terrible angel who appears in "Inferno" IX to liberate the gates of Dis from devils so that pilgrim and Virgil can continue their journey. The pilgrim ultimately surpasses Virgil in his ability to improvise solutions to troublesome encounters.

7. Seidel begins his analysis of the perspective of exile in The Ambassadors and The American Scene by quoting James's famous diagnosis of Strether in the "Project for Novel": "he has come so far through his total little experience that he has come out on the other side" (Notebooks, 575). Seidel conceives the action of Strether's mind in terms of an "imaginative passage, a projection of the reality that supposedly inaugurates it" (131). These notions of crossing to the other side and of imaginative passage can be related to the epic action of the embrace of the shade where the epic hero's encounter with this vestige of his real experience -- the ghost of someone he has known in his real life -- is also the fulfillment of his imaginative quest to reach a state of consciousness understandable as "exilic" -- outside what can be understood to constitute his existing self.

CHAPTER SIX

APPOINTMENTS AND HOMECOMINGS

Until this point in my discussion, I have referred to my concept of "home" as a Jamesian desideratum without thoroughly presenting an account of the phenomenon of homecoming, its occurrences and its meanings. What constitutes a homecoming in The Ambassadors? Where and when does Strether come "home" in the novel? How does James's treatment of the phenomenon suggest some transmutation of the phenomenon as it functions in the European epics I have identified as generic precursors to The Ambassadors? How is the homecoming temporalized? And, finally, how does Strether's "coming home" describe his getting into complex relation with his native country? The word "home" recurs in The Ambassadors with a frequency that leaves no doubt of the author's interest in the relation between identity and place, self-development and national affiliation. The word appears with an insistence that gradually makes clear that, if conceived as an epic quest, the action of the novel describes a quest for "home". It serves our purpose to review some of the key appearances of the word "home" in order to establish how the theme of homecomings dominates the narrative structure.

In the "Project for novel", James begins by using the word "home" to refer to Woollett. Strether "seems to make out that the image of the actual Chad doesn't fit with the image

preconceived by themselves (Strether, Mrs. Newsome, and the Pococks) at home" (Notebooks, 554). As events proceed, Strether "tries at least to tell his friend at home (Mrs. Newsome), to whom he profusely writes, as much as he can" (556). These two examples suggest the following: first, Strether's mission concerns his finding a way to get Chad "home". Second, this "home" is associated at the beginning of the action with Woollett's perspective, interests, and forms of acculturation. A little later in the "Project", James makes another, more complicating reference to "home". He explains how Strether is persuaded by Chad to recognize that Madame de Vionnet and her daughter have made for Chad "a kind of charming second home" (562). In the text of the novel, Chad's quarters on the Boulevard Malesherbes are repeatedly referred to as his "lovely home". When Maria, meeting Strether in Paris for the first time, asks him what "facts" he has "got at" about Chad, Strether can only reply "Well, he has a lovely home" (III, ii, 81). Strether's recognition evinces the ironic pattern of reversal that holds throughout the action. Strether comes to Paris to return Chad to the "home" it is felt he desperately needs only to discover that Chad's "second home" surpasses his native one in the character and quality of its life.

When the Pococks come to Paris, they come foremost now with the purpose (in the words of the "Project") of bringing Strether "home". Sarah Pocock threatens Strether, warning him

that if he "doesn't look out, he forfeits everything comfortable and pleasant that his prospect of marriage with Mrs. Newsome has caused to cluster so richly about his future ... at any rate the promise of ease and security, a refined, and even a luxurious, home for the rest of his days" (566-567). Strether spends some time with Jim Pocock, who, James explains, is designed to represent to Strether "as vulgarly as possible the whole particular mass of interests at home" (569). James's usage makes it obvious that the subject of the novel has ironically become Strether's reconception of his own "home" as brought about by his exposure to the cultural differences of Paris. In fact, he is brought to the point of forfeiting his "home" as he had conceived it up to the time of his otherworld journey to Europe. But he does not conclude the novel "homeless". Rather, the novel describes his construction of an alternative "home", a specifically acculturated state of selfhood he develops through his European experience.

When we inspect the text of the novel we see "home" used in more varied and complicated ways. Everyone Strether visits in Paris -- Maria, Madame de Vionnet, Gloriani, Lydia Barrace, even Little Bilham -- has a home that, in its objects and ordering, denotes taste, craft, and, beyond everything else, thought. Maria's "compact and crowded chambers" signify to him that the "lust of the eyes and the pride of life had indeed thus their temple" (III, ii, 80). "The circle in which" Strether and his hostess stand is "warm with life, and every

question between them would live there as nowhere else". These residences serve as the shrines of their occupant's identities. Characters tend to be identified in terms of the objects to which they choose to attend and by the settings containing these objects.

Character is location: yet when we scrutinize James's usage, we detect the irony and paradox contained in his treatment of "home". Indeed, home sometimes refers to temporary dwellings, characters' Parisian hotels, lodgings that appear the antithesis of hearth and home. The following sample demonstrates the variability of James's references. Strether is "to dine at home" with Waymarsh (VII, ii, 182), "home" referring to their "admittedly secondary hotel in the bye street from the Rue de la Paix" (II, ii, 70). After receiving his cable from the Newsomes, Strether confers with Maria who asks him if he has received "a letter to bring you home?" (VII, iii, 190) Later, Sarah defends Woollett before Madame de Vionnet ("Our home's not an impossible place" [VIII, iii, 221]); and when Strether stops at the Pocock's hotel rooms on the Right Bank, he finds "Mamie alone at home" (IX, iii, 247); Jim Pocock reveals to Strether that Mrs. Newsome has been "sitting up all night" for him, exclaiming "So don't you go home!" (VII, ii, 217) and at a later party at Chad's "lovely home" Strether explains Maria Gostrey's absence to Miss Barrace, saying "she's only sitting up for me at home" (X, i, 262). At the same party, he tries to convince Little

Bilham of Mamie's affection for him by testifying "that I found her three days ago stopping at home alone all the golden afternoon on the mere chance that you'd come to her" (X, i, 258). By "home", he here means Mamie's hotel room.

Perhaps the key to what James tries to denote with the word "home" appears in the scene where Strether finds Mamie alone on her hotel balcony. Mamie "alone at home" is "absorbed interested interesting" (IX, iii, 247). She is only to be understood to be "at home" because she is "interested interesting". Her affective state places her. In the "Consciousness of Self" chapter in The Principles of Psychology, William James adopts the phrase "home of interest" to refer to the "active element in all consciousness", the "source of effort and attention", a "sort of innermost centre within the circle, of sanctuary within the citadel, constituted by the subjective life as a whole" (I, 297). He then dispenses with his sacral language and defines this central self as "physiological acts" of "adjustment". Without claiming a facile parallelism between the respective notions of Henry and William James, we can still say that in The Ambassadors the word "home" is employed to spatialize consciousness as though to emphasize that there is no such thing as consciousness without objects, settings, and, in broader sense, culture. To be "home" you must be "interested interesting"; to be that you must be acculturated in some complex way. Finally, "home" must be taken to refer to a

mental state derived from one's relations to an objectified world.

The idea of conceiving Strether's mental development in terms of transitory yet accreting states of "home" is established by another of James's subtle uses of the word. James tends to contextualize "home" in discussions of Strether's mental experience. For example, when, in the Project, James describes Strether's recognition of his missed chances in Gloriani's, he writes of his hero that, "the 'too late' comes immensely home to Strether" (558). In this instance, "home" quite obviously refers to the figurative place where Strether's thoughts collect, his so-called center of consciousness. James is here referring to one of the most pivotal thoughts Strether has experienced, his sudden epiphany of his failings in life. Strether's experience of his thought of himself as wasted, lost, "homeless" is ironically conceived as a homecoming, a situating experience of self in time and place. Another example of the pattern of thought finding its home occurs when Strether encounters Chad at the *Comédie Française* and tries to "settle" his "mind" "to the new vision", to "habituate it, so to speak, to the remarkable truth" (III, ii, 90). He finds himself unable immediately to do so. Yet the phrasing still reveals the pattern. Later in the novel, Strether will "habituate" his mind to new truth, creating in effect a habitat for the truth. James plays frequently enough on the relation between home and states of

mind that fundamentally define states of self that it becomes apparent he at least partly understands this relation to embody the Romantic premise enunciated by Milton's Satan that "The mind is its own place"; however, unlike Satan, who promises to resist external experience, Strether constructs his home out of his new external experiences. Strether constructs his sense of "home" out of sensible and, indeed, cultural experiences of difference.

I am here arguing that in The Ambassadors, Strether's "homecomings" occur repeatedly in terms of specific, contextual states of consciousness, accreting experiences of what I prefer to term compositional intensity. Throughout my analysis, I have maintained that Strether's entire otherworld experience, the scope of the novelistic action, is framed by his visual experience of the "little Lambinet" he is said to have seen perhaps thirty years before the commencement of the action. Strether's experiences of "home" occur in relation to his original experience of transgression upon seeing the landscape painting and being moved "to overstep the modesty of nature". That *moment* in which he experienced himself transgress the limits of his Puritan self witnessed in him a process of decomposition and recomposition that his literal trip to Europe has greatly intensified. I want now to explore the way the action of The Ambassadors climaxes in Strether's "apocalyptic" experience of homecoming, the crowning experience of all his otherworld querying that in an absolute

manner redefines his self in terms of my nationalist model of re-acculturation. In analyzing the experience of apocalyptic homecoming in The Ambassadors, I will again make comparisons between the action in James's novel and the narratives of visionary apocalypse found in precursor epics like The Aeneid, La Divina Commedia, and Paradise Lost.

Strether's crowning experience of consciousness of course occurs when he re-solves "the remembered mixture" of the Lambinet landscape "back into its elements". By resolving back to its primordial elements the cultural artifact that represents the values he has come to embrace and advocate, Strether has the experience of returning to the site of the origins of European culture and there experiencing his defining epiphany of difference. The climax of this scene at the Cheval Blanc sees Strether accept the loss of his Woollett "home" -- the entire complex of Woollett's values, habits, and creeds -- and construct his own alternative "home" as the complex synthesis of "Europe" and "America".

Before I proceed to my third reading of the Lambinet scene from a third distinct epic perspective -- the crucial perspective of homecomings -- I want to establish further the relation between the Lambinet scene and the question of "home".

There is much evidence of the great bearing of this scene upon this question contained in the two separate conversations that Strether has with Madame de Vionnet and Maria Gostrey

immediately after his countryside recognitions in the garden of the Cheval Blanc. In these conversations, Strether for the final time contemplates the question of where his "home" is and of what this "home" consists, ending the novel on a nationalist and fundamentally epic note. Madame de Vionnet puts the question of home to Strether point-blank during their last meeting: "Where is your 'home' moreover now -- what has become of it?" (The Ambassadors, XII, ii, 321) Her question may be understood literally and symbolically. Literally, Strether has forfeited his future with Mrs. Newsome, his financial patron and possible bride, by opposing her interest in Chad's return. Strether forfeits the financial protection and emotional support of "Woollett". Symbolically, Strether's state of homelessness may be understood philosophically and psychologically. His sense of homelessness is a consequence of his taking the European point of view of his circumstances. The question of his "home" addresses an inseparable question concerning his cultural point of view. Having come out the other side of his "total little experience" (as James puts it in the "Project"), Strether has disassociated himself from the Woollett modes of constructing reality. Thus, the question of Strether's home at this late stage of the action addresses the question of the cultural and historical construction of his self. Since he has disavowed such a construction along Woollett's lines, he becomes a cultural nomad.

Indeed, Strether's obsessive concern with where he is

with respect to how he understands his situation reflects James's own more elliptical concern with locating America in modern history. Strether's crises of place recur with the regularity of a Puritan's doubt. For example, after he is surprised by Madame de Vionnet's announcement that Jeanne is to be married, he loses hold of his reliable references: "He had struck himself at the hotel, before Sarah and Waymarsh, as being in her boat; but where on earth was he now?" (IX, i, 239) Strether raises such a question repeatedly. The insistence of his interrogative refrain suggests his author's concerns with the destiny of his native country. Emerson begins his essay "Experience" asking the same question as Strether does, though without quite the sense of vertigo or exasperation: "Where do we find ourselves"? He answers, "In a series of which we do not know the extremes and believe that it has none" (Whicher, 254). In the way Emerson celebrates the infinite capaciousness of human thought and the idea that self and country can quarry this capaciousness to ground themselves in a historical reality, Emerson's words are the epic preliminary to The Ambassadors. "Nothing is left us now but death," he remarks in the same essay, grasping for solid knowledge; "We look to that with a grim satisfaction, saying There at least is reality that will not dodge us" (256-257). By conceiving Strether's experience in terms of an otherworld narrative, a journey to the land of the dead, I of course presume that Strether's experience in "Europe" is charged with

a consciousness of the dead, what James refers to enigmatically as a "sense of the past".

That, throughout their final scene together, Madame de Vionnet remains up in the air about the question of Strether's "home" suggests the extent to which she worries that the vertiginousness of an experience forcing him to make so many moral re-evaluations has caused his unremediable loss of his psychological bearings. Strether and Maria Gostrey discuss the danger of his mental dissolution throughout the novel, for example as late as the second chapter of Book XI, immediately prior to the Lambinet episode: "'Ah but the worst -- since you've left such a margin -- may be still to come. You may yet break down.' 'Yes, I may yet break down. But will you take me --?' He had hesitated, and she waited. 'Take you?' 'For as long as I can bear it'" (XI, ii, 300). Even when James applies the comic touch, he means to emphasize Strether's continual jeopardy. Strether's exchange with Maria here forebodes the ultimate agon awaiting him when he takes off for the countryside.

After the comic catastrophe at the *Cheval Blanc*, Madame de Vionnet sends for Strether "to see what the difference thus made for him might amount to" (XII, ii, 319). After realizing that his attitude testifies to a complete embrace of her Europeanized point of view, she here puts to him the question of his "home", adding "I've made a change in your life, I know I have; I've upset everything in your mind as well; in your

sense of -- what shall I call it? -- all the decencies and possibilities. It gives me a kind of detestation ---" (XII, ii, 321). Strether does not answer her question. Madame de Vionnet gives herself up to a sudden effusive lament ("The wretched self is always there, always making one somehow a fresh anxiety") and concludes resignedly by marvelling to Strether that "You know so, at least ... where you are!" (XII, ii, 321) She in effect answers her own question: her interrogative "Where is your 'home' moreover now" evolves into the declarative "You know so ... where you are", while Strether fails to answer her question. Where, we must ask, *is* Strether? And how does this "where" conform to his sense of "home"?

The question of Strether's psychological and socio-historical homelessness is sounded to the very end of the book. When Strether says goodbye to Maria Gostrey at *her* home, Maria reverts to the question of his "home" as though it were the recurring question of the entire novel, one for which no answer will be lasting.

> It brought her back to her unanswered question. "To what do you go home?"
> "I don't know. There will always be something."
> "To a great difference," she said as she kept his hand.
> "A great difference -- no doubt. Yet I shall see what I can make of it." (XII, v, 344)

It is again the woman who asks Strether the question who proceeds to answer her own question. In proposing the idea of a great difference, Maria, Strether's original guide to "Europe", confirms the success of her project to convert

Strether to the otherworldly culture and to create for him a new historical perspective. *Going home* seems a function of engaging difference, affirming the philosophical principle that you construct a self out of its experience of culturally constructed otherness.[1] In his typical way, James answers Strether's question indirectly through an ambiguous dialogue that, on its face, seems to beg the question entirely. James leaves it to readers to interpret both the difference Strether goes home to and the home he conceives out of his fathoming this difference. For Strether to make what he can out of this great difference is for him to try to compose (and invariably re-compose) his "home" -- a contextually-acculturated state of selfhood. He emerges from his communion with a Europe consisting for him of innumerable shade-like "impressions" with a consciousness of self that rhythmically composes as his "home" before giving itself up to temporally complementary experiences of alienation and loss.

By the end of the novel, Strether sees himself more completely than he ever has ("You're complete," Maria Gostrey tells him [XII, iii, 330] as the novel is itself poised for completion), and the sudden thoroughness of his self-envisioning constitutes a specific stage of his homecoming. This sense of completeness is an illusion; Strether's consciousness of self will continue to undergo constant alteration. But his feeling of being "at home" refers to his sense, at the actual instant in which he entertains a

particular consciousness of his self, of *feeling* expressed for that moment in time.

In Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton, the epic quest is, in some ultimate sense, a quest for home, with "home" denoting a complex of objectives relative to the specific culture the author represents. "Home" describes a vision representative of culture into which the otherworld explorer can insert himself through two inseparable mental acts. First, he must imaginatively appropriate the vision. Second, he must re-interpret the appropriated vision through a narrative account. We can trace this pattern of homecoming in The Odyssey. Classical scholars usually agree that Odysseus's purpose in travelling to the underworld is to learn how to make his way home to Ithaca. They differ, however, over whether Odysseus actually receives this information when he does get there. For example, Raymond Clark argues that "There can be no doubt, then, about the ostensible reason for Odysseus' journey [to the underworld]. It was to consult Tiresias' ghost about his Homecoming" (40). Clark quickly qualifies this assertion by acknowledging the point made by scholars of the poem that "very little -- all too little say [these scholars] -- seems to have been said about it in the event" (40). Clark wonders how the purpose of the journey can be Odysseus's homecoming if in fact the Greek soldier hardly discussed the matter of his homeward way with Tiresias or any other shade in the underworld.

I would argue that, in visiting the underworld, Odysseus's true purpose is to obtain an "idea of home" that corresponds to an array of attributes that furnish a sense of self that is culturally descriptive and historically specific. It can be argued that Odysseus cannot fully articulate this purpose to himself even as he visits the underworld. While he risks visiting the underworld because of his literal need to return to Ithaca, he also goes there in order to re-discover who he is. Although sometimes vague, Tiresias does instruct Odysseus in his destiny and the hazards of his homeward course. But it is Odysseus's interviews with the other shades that provide the true texture of his developing consciousness of "home". These interviews combine to compose before Odysseus a view of culture, an intricate canvas of Greek life that the hero enters *as* he imaginatively appropriates it. Odysseus's sense of "home" can this way also be understood to describe a historical consciousness, his consciousness of himself as a historically situated being.

Alasdair MacIntyre has shown how the Greeks of the Homeric period valued as morally "good" personal assets that helped confirm an individual's ability as a soldier, diplomat, and nobleman. The Greek term for "good" was "agathos"; MacIntyre quotes W.H. Adkins on what traits the Greek citizen had to demonstrate to be deemed "agathos". This representative Greek, says Adkins, "must be brave, skillful and successful in war and in peace; and must possess the wealth and (in peace)

the leisure which are at once the necessary conditions for the development of these skills and the natural reward of their successful employment" (MacIntyre, 6). A major virtue of Odysseus's visit to the underworld and his collective interaction with the "unnumbered dead" is that he emerges with a more total consciousness of his self as constituted by an array of habits that in sum exemplify "agathos." His "homecoming" represents a kind of self-revelation. My choice of the word "habits" (those habits Odysseus comes to see himself constituted by, habits which furnish for his self a "habitat") is admittedly pointed. I read epic homecomings as a function of the hero's continuous forging and altering of habits. Personal and cultural habits not only reflect one's cultural and historical habitat; they determine this habitat. "The great thing, then, in all education", writes William James, "is to *make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy*. It is to fund and capitalize our acquisitions, and live at ease upon the interest of the fund. *For this we must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can*, and guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us, as we should guard against the plague" (I, 122). To develop these habits is to turn one's body into a "home". On a macro-scale, a given "historical moment" is thus the intricate collective of the innumerable attitudes and habits that comprise a culture. My notion of epic "history" describes the acts of self-scrutiny

directed at this very collective of attitudes and habits and the subsequent acts of self-revision that ensue as a consequence of one's absorption in a culturally-constructed otherworld.[2]

Odysseus re-experiences his visionary homecoming again in a personalized, narratively-transformed way when he completes the over-night narrative, especially the underworld section, to Alkinoos and the Phaician revellers. Finishing his story, Odysseus has the complete and completely altered perspective of a man who has entered thoroughly into otherness and returned to know himself newly; telling the story, he is already literally homeward bound for Ithaca as well as bound up in a consciousness of his self that is home-like. His facility for reconceiving and reconstituting his self through the story of his otherworld journey enables him to realize sudden compositional intensity.

The experience of compositional intensity, the visionary appropriation of otherworld impressions in a fashion that locates the otherworld hero culturally and historically, characterizes all the otherworld narrative precursors of The Ambassadors. We can summarize how this idea unfolds in Book VI of The Aeneid. Clark shows how Virgil appropriates from Homer the model of the otherworld journey as a scene of inspiration and instruction that provides Aeneas the vision of cultural community and historical destiny (147-183). After Anchises reveals before his son the line of future Italian kings, each

figure superimposed over the preceding one in Aeneas' consciousness the way Lambert Strether experiences his impressions superimpose themselves over one another throughout The Ambassadors, Aeneas *"comes home"* in the sense that he has the experience of cultural identification. His vision is imperial: "And when father Anchises/has shown his son each scene and fired his soul/with love of coming glory, then he tells/Aeneas of the wars he must still wage,/of the Laurentians, of Latinus' city,/and how he is to flee or face each trial" (VI, 1185-1190). What drives Aeneas is his expectation of "coming glory". His otherworld vision figures the national redemption of his defeated Trojan people. Aeneas's homecoming can be said to occur when he identifies himself with the figures he is presented with in his otherworld. The otherworld narrative thus evinces a process of object-selection and appropriation as a mode of cultural re-identification.

Before proceeding to an analysis of visionary apocalypse as it occurs in La Divina Commedia, Paradise Lost, and The Ambassadors, I want to emphasize the signficance of the process of visionary appropriation to epic otherworld experience. The terms devised by Blake and consistently reiterated throughout his prophetic epics apply to the experience of each otherworld *conquistador*: this hero *becomes* what he *beholds*. The terms apply to the action of the otherworld narrative of the imperialist Virgil as much as they

do to the apocalyptic night-visions of the rebel who composed The Four Zoas. In each instance, the question of individual fulfillment is measured by the self's capacity to negotiate what it beholds; in the case of James, it could even be argued that the measure of the viable self is in its capacity to *dominate* that which it beholds. Blake's scriptural language evokes the old Testament where nationhood is understood in terms of a process of visionary possession and subsequent settlement. If we review the language of the Pentateuch, we find this process literalized in the quest of the Israelites to settle their homeland. Thus Moses in Deuteronomy will present the wilderness beyond the river Jordan to the Israelites as though it were a vision to be possessed in order to be settled: "Behold I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them" (Deuteronomy: 1:8). Moses's presentation of the homeland is paradigmatic in the way it relates the process of visual appropriation and homecoming. In every otherworld narrative, the epic hero must experience his cultural sanctum as picture before he can enter it as habitat. Let me thus once more summarize the epic paradigm that I will show holds for La Divina Commedia, Paradise Lost, and The Ambassadors: the heroic self has its home*comings*, it be*comes* what it beholds, through acts of visionary possession resulting in experiences of historical identification.

I shall now identify the scenes of apocalyptic homecoming occurring in La Divina Commedia and Paradise Lost that I want to compare to the scene where Strether's adventures climax at the *Cheval Blanc*. I will move back and forth from my analyses of these vital scenes in Dante and Milton to the Lambinet scene to establish the thematic emphases that correspond between each. I shall begin with Canto XXXIII of the *Paradiso*.

The Dantesque pilgrim enacts his climactic rite of knowledge as his final penetration through the radiance of God. His final guide, Bernard of Clairvaux, explains to him the epistemological dynamics of the pilgrim's return: We shall "turn our vision to the Primal love, that gazing at Him, you may penetrate --/as far as that can be -- His radiance". ("e drizzeremo li occhi al primo amore,/sì che, guardando verso lui, penètri/quant'è possibil per lo suo fulgore" [XXXII. 142-144]). Central to Bernard's conceptualization of this visionary moment is the complex relation between the further probing of depths ("quanto'è possibil per lo suo folgore") and the continuing extension of the mind. This can be loosely compared to Strether's sense of himself penetrating the Lambinet landscape. Strether is said to "bore so deep into his impression and his idleness that he might fairly have got through them again and reached the maroon-coloured wall" (XI, iii, 302). The upshot of Strether's revelation at the *Cheval Blanc*, the upshot, therefore, of all his penetrating within

the representational space of the Lambinet, is that he reconceives his understanding of the "virtuous attachment" between Chad and Madame de Vionnet.

In the pointed, repeated way that James uses the term "virtuous attachment" throughout The Ambassadors, he means to suggest, I believe, that the term is useful to conceive relations beyond the key relation between Chad and Madame de Vionnet. In a broad sense, James suggests the term "virtuous attachment" can be used to describe the relation between the thoughtful individual and a particular thought that is vivifying (the Latin word "virtu" means "power"). In the Jamesian sense, the "virtuous attachment" would refer to Strether's relation to a particular thought concerning his culture that invested him with power and freedom. In the Dantean context, the "virtuous attachment" can be said to describe the relation between the pilgrim and the particular culturally-related thought that most awes and propels him, that thought specifically being a thought of God. In Strether's case, the generative thought to which he attaches himself addresses the intimacy between Chad and the Countess and all the refinements of the culture that abet its performance. In each apocalyptic narrative, the experience of imaginative penetration leads to the revelation of a thought that can be understood to found the conceptions of life and culture in which, in their respective narratives, Strether and the Dantesque pilgrim, choose to believe.[3]

The revelation awaiting the pilgrim exists within the depths of the divine radiance: "Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,/legato con amore in un volume/cio che per l'universo si squaderna". ("In its profundity I saw --ingathered/and bound by love into one single volume--/what, in the universe, seems separate, scattered". [XXXIII. 85-87]) Thus begins the prolonged moment of compositional intensity. The experience of the pilgrim compares to the experience of Strether when he alights from his train on "catching a suggestion of the particular note required". This "suggestion" is said to make "its sign ... weather, air, light, colour and his mood all favouring" and Strether finds himself getting out as securely to keep an appointment" (XI, iii, 302). In keeping his "appointment" of course, Strether "sees the remembered mixture [of the Lambinet landscape] resolved back into its elements". Implicit in Strether's act of reversing the Barbizon representation back to the historical time when it was purely aestheticized presence (yet to be re-presented) is that he is tracing the manifold pre-suppositions on which his Woollett cultural perspective is founded and arriving at the source of that perspective by crossing to "the other side". This other side is the side of the French painter, the side from which the Lambinet representation was first constructed. Strether has only been able to retreat so far into the past because of his willingness to reassess the presuppositions of his cultural perspective throughout the novel's action. The

river scene in the *Cheval Blanc* marks the climax of his trek. It is a return to the origins of the very difference from which his self takes new shape.

In a general sense, we can say the same thing about the narrative of the Dantesque pilgrim. He has steadily retreated within the past expressed throughout the otherworld in the forms of its dead until he arrives at the origins of the very difference (God) from which his self takes shape.

Another element of visionary epic consciousness that characterizes the account of the pilgrim's consciousness in the last canto of the *Paradiso* concerns the idea of reaching an ultimate limit of knowledge. The Dantesque narrative emphasizes that the otherworld journeyer has reached this limit. This limit is understood in terms of the trope of fulfilled desire. "E io ch'al fine di tutt'i disii/appropinquava, sì com'io dovea,/l'ardor del desiderio in me finii." ("And I, who now was nearing Him who is/the end of all desires, as I ought,/lifted my longing to its ardent limit".) (XXXIII. 46-47) As the pilgrim experiences this limit, he must struggle with the problem of remembering it in his own narrative. The poet, now fully in a different time and space, in the time and space of this world of the written word, implores the "highest light" to allow him enough remembrance, to render his "tongue so powerful" ("e fa la lingua mia tanto possente") that he may leave "for posterity one gleam of divine glory" ("ch'una favilla sol del la tua

gloria") [XXXIII. 71]. Dante here associates memory and writing so that the two are one: "to return to my memory" ("per tornare alquanto a mia memoria") is to echo a little in these lines ("e per sonare un poco in questi versi"). Dante stresses the complexity of this Pauline rapture in his use of "mente", which can mean both "mind" and "memory". In a fundamental sense, the pilgrim's mind is all "memory". He is that which he remembers linguistically and his culture is precisely what he interprets it to be in his remembrances. Non-linguistic experience remains as uncanny, as *unheimlich,* as the figures of a dream. The pilgrim compares himself to "one who sees in a dream" ("Qual è colüi che sognando vede") but must afterwards sort its emotional traces into a narrative. In The Ambassadors, Strether's apocalyptic encounter with the lovers at the *Cheval Blanc* is also compared to a "dream" ("It was a sharp fantastic crisis that had popped up as if in a dream"). He too must sort its emotional traces into an account of the culture it represents. The purpose of Dante-poet's memory is to pay tribute to the *vittoria*, the matchless power, of God on which the Dantesque culture is founded. Strether's subsequent ruminations and mental interpretations -- his narrative account -- must pay tribute to the matchless intricacy of the European cultural past.

I want to emphasize the way that, in his rendering of the pilgrim's ultimate defining experience of vision, Dante prioritizes the process of visionary apprehension over the

content of the apprehended vision. The drama of the struggle to remember what was seen at the highest heights reflects the earthly drama of habituating the mystery of the otherworld to language and habits. God is "home" and yet God is hardly rememberable. With awe and weariness, Dante-poet repeatedly admits to the inadequacy of mimesis: "Da qunci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio/che'l parlar mostra, ch'a tal vista cede,/e cede la memoria a tanto oltraggio." ("From that point on, what I could see was greater/than speech can show: at such a sight it fails--/and memory fails when faced with such excess.") (XXXIII. 55-57) In its uncanniness, the otherwordly vision overwhelms the resources of memory and speech. The poet describes his predicament as resembling that of the geometer who tries to square the circle ("Qual è'l geomètra che tutto s'affige/per misurar lo cerchio"). His final act of faith, of self-definition, and decisiveness still contains the thrill of the interrogative. Charles Singleton glosses this passage by emphasizing that "Incommensurability is at the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation" (Singleton, 585).

The canto iterates the strains placed upon the epic consciousness: the pilgrim's sense of the immense divinity overwhelms his principle resource -- language; "il mio veder fu maggio/che'l parlar mostra, ch'a tal vista cede" ("what I could see was greater/than speech can show") (XXXIII. 55-56). In spite of these difficulties, the poet proves his faith by executing his record of remembrance. Dante critics have often

wondered whether the final vision is an anti-climax. What depiction of God can reward the reader who has managed the ninety-nine canto trek always anticipating the final scene? Dante checks our expectations by concentrating to a greater extent on the process and vigor of faith than on the object of faith. The canto relates the furious negotiations with vision; in the fervent struggle of remembrance the verses display the force of faith that is its own reward. The divine vision is compared to a dream that fades while the dreamer's passion remains impressed and the "sweetness" of passion distilled.

Dante stresses the enormity of the vision with respect to time:

> Un punto solo me'è maggior letargo
> che venticinque secoli a la 'mpresa
> che fé Nettuno ammirar l'ombra d'Argo.
>
> That one moment
> brings more forgetfulness to me than twenty-
> five centuries have brought to the endeavor
> that startled Neptune with the Argo's shadow!
> (XXXIII. 94-96)

The moment of visionary appropriation is dilated to immense proportions. The phenomenon of the moment dilated, opened wide and filled with unnatural experience, resembles the turning point for Strether when for a moment he oversteps Nature's modesty on seeing the Lambinet. In one sense, Strether continues to persist within the dilation of this moment until the point when he takes the train to the countryside. His return to the origins of the Lambinet representation describes his closing of his circle. The

Lambinet has lived for him in memory and initiated him to his otherworld. It was a representation. Here, however, he moves within the originary scene -- the shining scene suggested by the prefix of *lamb*ent. The rapture described is a rapture of the Good in a modern, internationalized and decidedly aestheticized sense: "It was all there in short -- it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet. Moreover, he was freely walking about in it" (XI, iii, 302).

As I have argued throughout, the climax of the Lambinet scene suggests a new conception of epic experience in terms of establishing Strether as the hero of time. At the beginning of the episode, "time" is referred to figuratively as a wheel ("he never found himself wishing that the wheel of time would turn it up again") while by the aftermath of the episode Strether conceives of himself as a cog on such a wheel as one of the figures on the Berne clock that "jig their little course in the public eye". Strether's destiny is to operate for James, for readers, and for modern America, as a figure of time. In the notebook entry of October 31, 1895 when he first penned his idea for The Ambassadors, James chooses these relevant words: "'The idea of the tale' is the revolution that takes place in the poor man, the impression made on him by the particular experience, the incident in which this revolution and this impression embody themselves is the *point a trouver*" (Notebooks, 142). I want to emphasize the relation between

"impression" and "revolution". We are invited to regard Strether as a figure revolving (and in revolution) in response to a manifold of impressions all of which come together in one defining impression when he resolves the Lambinet landscape back into its elements. The relation between impression and revolution is, in a different historical context, embodied in the final image of the *Commedia*.

> ma già volgeva il mio disio e'l velle,
> sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
> l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.
>
> but my
> desire and will were moved already -- like
> a wheel revolving uniformly -- by
> the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.
> (XXXIII. 143-154)

The pilgrim becomes a wheel of time and history, a figure rotated by and rotating with love. The pilgrim's revolutions result from the impression he experiences ("la passione impresa"). Dante establishes the symbiotic relation between the supernatural object of worship, God, and the worshipping subject, Christian man. Through his visionary appropriation of God, Dante's Christian man becomes more of this world, more temporally articulated. He becomes the representer of History. Recall that Beatrice's harsh parting words to the pilgrim refer to the imminent apotheosis of Henry VII and the nearing damnation of Pope Clement V, reviled for being Henry's antagonist and the latest in the long line of corrupt Popes. In the *Commedia*, to envision God is to begin to perform a corrective of history. The connection between the poem's final

image of the revolving pilgrim and the final image of Strether, compared to one of the rotating figures on the clock at Berne, is valid.

These experiences of otherworld immersion and personal and historical revolution are notably evoked in the following passage from William James's chapter on "The Will" in The Principles of Psychology: "The huge world that girdles us about puts all sorts of questions to us, and tests us in all sorts of ways. Some of the tests we meet by actions that are easy, and some of the questions we answer in articulately formulated words. But the deepest question that is ever asked admits of no reply but the dumb turning of the will and tightening of our heartstrings as we say, 'Yes, I *will* even have it so!'" (II, 578) The dumb turning of the will: this figure brings together the pilgrim and Strether, establishing how each involves himself in a historical relationship with the otherworld objects of his cultural environment. Through their respective involvements, each man processes his account of himself.

In Books XI and XII of Paradise Lost, we find a second example of the visionary apocalypse with which Strether's experience at the *Cheval Blanc* can be compared. Fallen, therefore poised to envision good and evil (in short, history), Adam is led by the angel Michael atop "a Hill/Of Paradise the highest, from whose top/The hemisphere of Earth in clearest Ken/Stretcht out to the amplest reach of prospect

lay" (XI, 378-380). Adam attains the vantage point affording him the most extensive vista of the future. This exemplifies the expansive, yet comprehensive historical vision characteristic of epic. Adam and Michael thus "ascend /in the Visions of God" (XI, 376-377), Michael removing the "film" that the apple, "false fruit" had "bred", and purging with "Euphrasy and Rue" Adam's "visual nerve". Adam, feeling the "Ingredients pierced/Ev'n to the inmost seat of mental sight", is "enforc't to close his eyes" and sink down "all his Spirits ... intranst" (XI, 416-420). His entrancement allows his entry into the narrative of death and redemption that justifies the ways of God.

Michael wakes Adam and, "his attention thus recall'd", Adam submits to the prophecy of post-lapsarian humanity wandering through a continuum of grim events and awkwardly groping for its salvation. Adam sees "perplexed", questioning what he sees as Michael serves as his hermeneut. They conduct a hermeneutic colloquy aimed at Adam's enlightenment, a colloquy about death that the querier and his clarifying angel continue at length: "Why is life giv'n/To be thus wrested from us?", Adam asks, presented with the "lazar-house" of diseases and overseen by "triumphant death"; "rather why [is life]/Obtruded on us thus?" (XI. 501-503) This is the first of a flurry of questions, expressive of Adam's interrogative angst. Adam, vulnerable to emotive overreaction, self-castigation, and premature reprieves, repeatedly mis-reads the

vision while the angel sternly tutors and corrects him. In the above example, Michael explains to Adam possibilities of a more peaceful death if Adam is "by temperance taught". Adam responds by resigning himself to death and disavowing life only to have Michael respond with another corrective: "Nor love thy Life, nor hate; but what thou liv'st/Live well" (XI, 552-553). Their collaboration results in the gradual, accumulative enlarging of Adam's historical perspective -- the means by which he frames historical consciousness.

Knowledge is sequential and revisionary: when Adam observes the sons of Seth "all in heat ... light the Nuptial Torch", he rejoices to Michael: "True opener of mine eyes, prime Angel blest, much better seems this Vision" (XI, 598-599) only to have his tutor caution him that appearances deceive: "Judge not what is best/By pleasure ... Those Tents thou saw'st so pleasant, were the Tents/of wickedness, wherein shall dwell his Race/Who slew his Brother" (XI, 603-609). Adam repeatedly claims that the prophetic narrative has fully opened his eyes only to discover that there is no ideal condition where the eye is thoroughly opened and truth revealed through it. Again in Book XII, Adam exclaims at the revelation of Abraham and his seed: "Now first I find/Mine eyes true op'ning, and my heart much eas'd,/Erewhile perplext with thoughts what would become/of mee and all Mankind; but now I see/His day, in whom all Nations shall be blest,/Favor unmerited by me, who sought/Forbidd'n knowledge by forbidd'n

means" (XII, 273-279). Michael is quick to enjoin a different reading: "Doubt not but that sin/Will reign among them, as of thee begot" (XII, 285-286). This form of collaborative elaboration leads Adam to advance in cognitive space. Michael, his otherworld guide presides at this narrative of historical entrancement, revising with Adam every mis-reading in order to synchronize him with the historical prophecy.

After depicting the deluge with Noah's ark, Michael, having determined that Adam's "mortal sight" will "fail" ("objects divine/Must needs impair and weary human sense"), shifts from showing the future to describing it to Adam in conversation. But Adam remains prone to errant interpretations, misreading the tale as Michael continues to correct him. When Michael forecasts the arrival of Christ ("he shall ascend/the throne hereditary, and bound his Reign/With earth's wide bounds, his glory with the Heav'ns" [XII. 369-371]), Adam, convinced of the *felix culpa*, responds again with joy, protesting that he now fully understands the divine prediction that his offspring will bruise Satan's head while Satan injures man's heel.

> O Prophet of glad tidings, finisher
> Of utmost hope! now clear I understand
> What oft my steadiest thoughts have searcht in vain,
> Why our great expectation should be call'd
> The seed of Woman: Virgin Mother, Hail,
> High in the love of Heav'n, yet from my Loins
> Thou shalt proceed, and from thy Womb the Son
> Of God most High; So God with man unites.
> Needs must the Serpent now his capital bruise
> Expect with mortal pain: say where and when
> Thir fight, what stroke shall bruise the Victor's
> heel.

(XII, 375-382)

Adam's interpretation requires yet another correction by his angelic mentor. "Dream not of thir fight,/As of a Duel, or the local wounds/Of head or heel", Michael tells him, explaining the imagery as an allegory of man's Fall and redemption by Christ. There is a tendency for each visual section of narrative to follow upon its predecessor and transform the significance of everything in its train to Adam's latest thought, his most recent interpretation. This tendency is also evidenced by the Homeric underworld narrative where vision proceeds sequentially as a series of pictures. The most recent picture in the series modifies the significance of those that precede it. The latest picture integrates its predecessors in its suddenly intense composition. In this way, the otherworldly vision composes and re-composes in the consciousness of both Odysseus and Adam.[4]

For Adam, too, judgment is a function of mental elaboration and reintegration. The rhythm of observation and assessment characterizes his experience throughout. Indeed, observation becomes assessment. This phenomenon illustrates William James's analysis of thinking in his chapter on "The Consciousness of Self" in Principles of Psychology. James poses that the most recent thought (adopting the first person, he calls it "My present thought") experienced by a self absorbs the content of its predecessors in the mental stream and expresses the accumulation in a revised form. James calls

this latest thought the "judging thought", asserting that the thought, through its palpable presence, has a moral power: "Thought appropriates the past in a real way, and so long as the Thought has no grounds for repudiating it stronger than those which lead to its appropriation ... My present Thought stands thus in the plenitude of ownership of my past selves, is owner not only *de facto* but *de jure*, the most real owner there can be" (I, 360). The "real owner", the "present Thought" results in an act of individual judgment that re-situates the human agent in time. Adam's colloquy with Michael exemplifies how the judging thought is a function of collaboration between the human subject and its guide; Adam's judging thought is the afterthought engendered by Michael's hermeneutic clarification.

Throughout the visionary narrative, Adam is entering further into comprehension of death, life, Christ, God, Satan, good, evil. His states of entrance correspond to the mental breakthroughs he enjoys as Michael intervenes to relieve him of his ignorance. A related form of intercession appears in The Ambassadors when Strether meets Madame de Vionnet in Notre Dame. Recognizing her for the woman he had watched pray in a "dim chapel", Strether is disconcerted. Madame de Vionnet intervenes, skillfully negotiating his emotions like a Miltonic angel: "She checked, quickly, a certain confusion in him, came to meet it, turned it back, by an art of her own; the confusion having threatened him as he knew her for the

person he had lately been observing" (VII, i, 173). The object of Strether's circumspection, Madame de Vionnet also coordinates her effects. She helps Strether to elaborate his thoughts, to refine and reform them through interactions with the specters of his otherworld.

Paradise Lost concludes by presenting the image of Christ as the reward of faith. The picture of the Last Judgment with Christ ascending amid the heavenly host codifies what Adam is to take from Michael's prophetic narrative. The visual codification of redemption in the image of the Lamb begins with Michael's tale of the Passion: Christ is described "nail'd to the Cross by his own Nation". The final vision of the Last Judgment completes Milton's rebuke of Pope and clergy ("What will they then/But force the Spirit of Grace itself, and bind/His consort Liberty; what but unbuild/His living Temples, built by Faith to stand,/Thir own Faith not another's" [XII. 524-528]). Adam experiences the apocalypse as a vision and then appropriates it to his consciousness. He experiences ex-stasis. The otherworldly historical revelation becomes personally *his*.

In Milton, Dante and James, we find three different images of the "lamb" -- the Medieval Catholic Christ, the Reformation Christ, and the secular, cognitive landscape painted by Emil Charles Lambinet. Each lamb codifies what Frank Kermode, quoting Lascelles Abercrombie, foregrounds as "a great symbolic attitude" (Kermode, 86, 123). In these

narratives, the homecoming occurs when the hero cognitively appropriates the codification of the Lamb; the Lamb is read and internalized as a moral code that dictates subsequent experience. Milton's purpose by the climax of his poem is to present Christ before the reader, to justify the ways of God through the example of the Savior's heroic sacrifice. In the *Commedia*, the pilgrim's final fixation on the circle in which Christ ("l'imago al cerchio") is inscribed fosters his spiritual revolution. In James, as we shall see, the penetration and improvisation through the reconstructed representation of the Lambinet occasions Strether's secular revelation and reformation. James constructs the narrative of self-development as an evolving sequence of compositionally intense instants when the visual impression completes itself and the seer experiences an aesthetic fullness and vitality.

Michael's narrative entrances Adam, providing the justification of his and his descendants' lives. Milton describes the revelation of Christ in carefully restrained language.

> so shall the World go on,
> To good malignant, to bad men benign,
> Under her own weight groaning, till the day
> Appear of respiration to the just,
> And vengeance to the wicked, at return
> Of him so lately promis'd to thy aid,
> The Woman's seed, obscurely then foretold,
> Now amplier known thy Saviour and thy Lord,
> Last in the Clouds from Heav'n to be reveal'd
> In glory of the Father, to dissolve
> Satan with his perverted World, then raise
> From the conflagrant mass purg'd and refin'd,
> New Heav'ns, new Earth, Ages of endless date
> Founded in righteousness and peace and love,

> To bring forth fruits Joy and eternal Bliss.
> (XII, 537-552)

This is the final reversal of the historical course, a last conversion of the "facts". Christ's intercession reverses fates. The "good" who had suffered the malignance of the world will be saved, the bad who had known benignity justly damned. Christ's intercession also reverses the cognitive state of Adam, the reader of history. Although Adam learns this news in conversation rather than by a vision, the news nevertheless constitutes his visionary experience of Apocalypse. The words conjure up a vision of last things that suddenly justifies present acts. The enactment of revelation through conversation with the otherworldly agent centers Adam in his historical consciousness. This is a model for Strether's experience of historical consciousness in The Ambassadors: revelation is signified in the language by an outside, otherworldly agent -- an "other voice". Revelation happens scenically. Scenic history describes the unfolding cognitive process by which otherworldly signs are decoded to construct a spatio-temporal home of self-repose.

Michael directs Adam to regard this scene of historical signification as a map of mind and self. "Thou hast attain'd the sum/Of wisdom; hope no higher", he counsels, asking Adam to "add/Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,/Add Virtue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,/By name to come call'd Charity, the soul of all the rest" (XII. 576-587, 582-585). The windfall of such resolve is a sense of self-consciousness

that is sufficient, even pragmatic. Equipped with virtues and visions, Adam will "not be loath/To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess/A paradise within thee, happier far" (XII. 585-587). The interior paradise is the historical consciousness of the adaptive self.

Bakhtin's theory of the epic hero as a creature "already completed and unchanging" does and does not apply to Adam (Bakhtin, 10). In one sense, Milton portrays Adam at the outset of his mortal life as possessed of the very knowledge he requires for redemption. He is already fully molded. In a different sense, Adam has simply been impressed with a narrative image of paradise; his self-construction continues and he revises his sense of self, achieving paradisal mental states that reflect points of duration. "Paradise" is a persistent reconceiving of the material in the mould: Adam, who says he will "have my fill/Of knowledge, what this Vessel can contain" will repeatedly have his fill with the different epistemological materials combining in his "vessel". The metaphor of the mould must be related to that of the palette. The mould supplies materials that the self, as though daubing at its palette, uses to compose its latest self-image.

We will now see how the Lambinet painting codifies the historical consciousness that situates Strether in time and country. As already implied, the coincident presence of "lamb" in *Lamb*ert and *Lamb*inet, in view of Balzac's Louis Lambert's mysticism and Lambinet's quest to redeem the mind by

transmuting sensory "facts" into aesthetic representations, make "lamb" appear an allusion to Christ, as critics have argued. Richard Poirier's witty remarks on the tendency of Americanist critics to read Christ figures everywhere are well-taken: "Discovering Christ figures in American literature is still accounted an achievement even though it takes some dexterity to avoid them. The only thing worth noticing about the recurrence is that most American writers are much more skeptical about them than are archetypal critics" (75). The valid retort may be made to the skeptical Poirier: how does he propose we read these theorized Christ figures instead, particularly in an novel like The Ambassadors where James makes such a pointed allusion? Nevertheless, the allusion need not be taken over seriously; it does, however, inform the scope of Lambert Strether's referential identity.

When Strether takes the "other side" of Chad and Madame de Vionnet against his former American allies, Mrs. Newsome, Sarah, and Waymarsh, he assumes the pose of a Christ figure. He works redemptively to resolve the damage done by American friends (and an American nation) too rigid either to accept Chad's change or ascribe its cause to Madame de Vionnet. He saves America from an aesthetic attitude James regards as sinful because so inept and sacrifices himself to the "sacred rage" (a different luminosity ["rage" deriving from "raggio", "light ray"] in the intercontinental light show) of Waymarsh and Sarah Pocock. Strether is aware of the role he's assumed:

he tells Maria, "I've been like a lamb to Sarah" (XI, ii, 297). Strether and the Lambinet painting each intercede in Christ-like fashion. As Christ mediates for God and man, the Lambinet mediates between Strether and "Europe", an epistemological pathway, while Strether interposes between the divisive European and American factions.

As a kind of *ficelle*, the Lambinet provides Strether an artefact enabling him to extract and objectify his inner voices. Strether's experience of the Lambinet turns *him* into an epistemological portrait. After he tells Maria he has been like Sarah's lamb, he continues: "I've only put my back to the wall. It's to *that* one naturally staggers when one has been violently pushed there" (XI, ii, 297). With his back to the wall, Strether is a representation -- a variation of the Lambinet as self-portrait, hung up and presented to Sarah as they debate Chad's future. He is an otherworld shade comprising Sarah's otherworld, one she cannot tolerate; she denies what she sees.

I shall proceed by analyzing aspects of the Lambinet scene omitted in my previous analyses to show how the Lambinet painting and the name "Lambinet" codify cultural and historical knowledge which functions redemptively for Strether. Before doing so, however, I want to show how the Lambinet functions as an artifact of historical process; doing so, I hope to show that, as a Barbizon painting, the Lambinet is closely associated by James with the formative time of his

life when he was cultivating his relation to his European otherworld. After contextualizing the significance of the Lambinet in James's (and Strether's) imaginative life, I shall demonstrate how the Lambinet scene portrays Strether in the climactic act of reading and appropriating figures of his otherworldly visual field to experience his historical revelation (and apocalyptic homecoming).

ACCIDENTS OF ASSOCIATION

In The Ambassadors, Strether cherishes his memory of the "little Lambinet" through some "accident of association". I shall account for this "accident" by tracing the relevant particulars of Henry James's aesthetic development, notably his experiences in the Newport *atelier* of the Barbizon painter William Morris Hunt. I shall show how for the sixty-nine year-old author of Notes of a Son and Brother the Barbizon style is associated with experiences decisive to the flowering of his aesthetic attitudes. James associates Lambinet partly with Hunt, a French-trained artist who, at the time Henry followed his brother William into Hunt's studio, was beginning to popularize his synthesis of the classical and Barbizon styles in the American markets. But, more, Barbizon is a keyword summoning for James an environment and time of crucial aesthetic and intellectual initiations.

"Frankly, intensely", writes James, "these [hours spent in Hunt's studio] were hours of Art, art definitely named,

looking me full in the face and accepting my stare in return" (Autobiography, 285). This allegory of a spiritual face-off with a transforming Other dramatizes the experience in Hunt's studio as one of inward journey and cultural appropriation. James is there presented with the otherwordly significance of "Europe". He predictably compares the stimulation of Hunt's studio to the less exciting influence of Reverend William C. Leverett, the curate of the local Trinity Church, "the proud episcopal heart of Newport" (285). The point is that these two sources of otherworldliness do not compare in their effect on James. The otherworldliness of European art captivates him while the religious otherworldliness so insatiably probed by his father fails to provoke Henry's interest. Leverett's attention "failed to give me the impression that anything worth naming had opened out to me, whereas in the studio I was at threshold of a world" (285).

To appreciate how Strether's experience of his Lambinet accommodates him, we must remember why James personally associates Barbizon with his aestheticized constructions of "home". James associates Barbizon with the valued time of his formative years when he immersed himself decisively in the art and books of "Europe". In A Small Boy and Others, James recalls accepting with reservation his father's decision to return to Boston so that William could "embrace the artistic career" by studying under Hunt: "I alone of the family perhaps made bold not to say quite directly or literally that we went

home to learn to paint. People stared or laughed when we said it, and I disliked their thinking us so simple -- though dreaming too a little perhaps that they might have been struck with our patriotism" (Autobiography, 275). The reference to patriotism, intended as irony, has a roundabout truth. William and Henry construct their careers mindful of the relation between their vocational choices and their nationalist sympathies. Their respective senses of nationality are reflected in the modes of vision inhering in the vocational methods each adopts.

William's decision to give up the artistic career coincides with his choosing to adopt a more characteristically "American" way of life. The world of the Francophied Hunt's studio does not serve as his epistemological theater. Ironically, Henry, the hopeless apprentice painter, uses his experience in Hunt's studio to consolidate his aesthetic affiliation to "Europe". Through his friendship with John La Farge, Henry's interim in Hunt's studio serves as a conversion experience disciplining him in European ways of seeing. When James correlates "learning to paint" with patriotism he implies the essential service of representational techniques in the national life: by training his aesthetic "I", he equips himself to reconceive America from the European point of view.

The memoirist of Notes of a Son and Brother values the "whole passage" of the time he spent in Hunt's studio, recalling the master's "truly fertilising action" on our

common life: "I was at the threshold of a world" (285). This world is distinctly other than the world of Puritan production. A student of Couture, Frere, and Millet, Hunt functions for the youthful Henry as the archetype and ambassador of this European otherworld, a "mere sacrificing vision of ... the constituted picturesque or treated 'subject' in efficient figure, personal form, vivid human style" (286). Hunt is "the living and communicating artist", the Barbizon seer, with "a shade of resemblance to" Don Quixote. The "picturesque" "constituted" by Hunt refers to a compositional ideal shot through with aesthetic cognizance.

The Barbizon historian integrates the concrete and abstract. The James who remembers Hunt as having "eyes that both recognized and wondered, strained eyes that played over questions as if they were objects and objects as if they were questions" (286) is the writer of the passage describing Strether dining with Madame de Vionnet by the Seine and noting how his companion's "grey eyes moved in and out of their talk, back to the quarter of the warm spring air, in which early summer had already begun to throb, and then back again to his face and their human questions" (VII, i, 176). Hunt is the inspiration for the Jamesian "picture", characterized, according to Viola Hopkins Winner, by an "adherence to the ideal of integration that [James] found supremely realized in Tinteretto and Delacroix: thoughts, gestures, speech, and decor ... should be fused just as color and line, detail and

mass, and figures and background are made inseparable" (Winner, 67). The textual picture harmonizes objects with the actions of observation. It renders an epistemological otherworld where questions vitalize the mind like objects and objects stir its philosophical sense like questions. In Hunt's studio, James starts developing his painterly poetics by heeding the example of Barbizon.

More than Hunt, it is John La Farge, Hunt's student, who becomes an invaluable mentor to seventeen year-old Henry, introducing him to Balzac, Browning, and Mérimée, and serving as apostle of "Europe", the "embodiment of the gospel of aesthetics" who "opened up prospects and possibilities that made the future flush and swarm" (287). La Farge is termed the "figure of figures", "a bright apparition"; with his stays in Brittany, his evocatively named French acquaintances, his knowledge of French letters, La Farge is an otherworld shade whose every gesture is freighted with European reference. He is both cultural signifier and guide, a variant of the Dantesque Virgil, poised at the threshold of the Jamesian otherworld. James is impressed by La Farge's Europeanization to the point of "hovering envy"; as "a representative, a rounded figure", La Farge distills the essence of the mother continent. It is fitting that the acquaintance with a painter in an artist's studio would prove so valuable to James, equipping him with the representational resources he would go on to develop as a writer of the converging European and

American scenes. During his time in the studio, Henry begins to immerse himself in Balzac and the Revue des Deux Mondes, a painterly writer and thinker in the act of cultivating his palette.

James implies the dichotomy between Newport (this world) and "Europe" (the otherworld) when he says that the volumes of the *Revue* constitute "an alternative sphere of habitation". The Jamesian American is forever finding the meaning of "home" in the precinct of the otherworldly. We can go farther and say that the *Revue* and Hunt's *atelier* together constitute this alternative dwelling. James makes it clear that La Farge serves him as its guide: "Out of the safe rich home of the *Revue*, which opened away into the vastness of visions, [La Farge] practically stepped, and into it, with all his ease, he mysteriously returned again: he came nearer to being what might have been meant concretely throughout it all -- though meant most of course in its full-charged stream of fiction -- than any other visiting figure" (288). La Farge is a liminal figure straddling the divide between two worlds and bridging their difference. As the apostolic shade of "Europe", La Farge signifies the whole of the *Revue's* otherworldly reference.

James describes how the volumes of the *Revue* accumulate in "serried rows" in a "certain particular capacious closet" in the James family's Newport residence (288). The location of the volumes in the family closet becomes a metaphor for the way James's European initiations excavate his closeted self.

This self grows as a function of his quarrying the European depths beneath the American surface. Henry and William together "pushed into that world of the closet" and found La Farge to be a worthy guide -- "somehow always in it with us" (288). Eight years James's senior, the twenty five year-old La Farge guided Henry through this otherworld of textual reference. The detail of his showing Henry his illustrations of Browning's Men and Women further exemplifies how La Farge was involved in helping Henry to fashion his pictorial responses to the European otherworld.

La Farge becomes an archetype of what James terms "the inward or apprehensive life" (292). He conveys an example that James will emulate. Two of the primary O.E.D. definitions for "apprehensive" are the "physical action of laying hold or seizing" and the "action of grasping with the intellect". James associates the Barbizon style with this fertile period in which he was apprehending the otherworldly with special dedication. Throughout this period, he is engaged with grasping its innumerable signifying shades. La Farge is indelibly part of James's crucial initiation to Balzac. James indicates this when he mentions how, upon a re-reading of Balzac's Eugenie Grandet, his "initiator's youthful face, so irregular but so refined, look[s] out at me between the lines as through blurred prison bars" (292). La Farge becomes a captive of the otherworldly cultural scene he enters and vouches for, its convert and disseminator.

With the image of La Farge looking out from between the prison bars of the text, James implies the way memories mould the self, making it a kind of captive of its past. It is hard to say whether, in the above passage, it is La Farge or James who is imprisoned by the lines of the Balzac text. The image suggests that both Henry and La Farge inhabit a prison cell representing their personal captivation by Balzac. Each is the captive of his associations and his chances the way Strether is a captive to the accidents of association making the Lambinet so "sweet". In the act of apprehending, of seizing upon intellectual otherness, the self is also seized and held by that to which it chooses to attend.

James describes this time of his indoctrination as one of personal and cultural "ecstasy" ("I recall at all events less of the agitation than of the ecstasy" [296]). His ecstasy describes his tendency to project himself into the field of cultural otherness presented to his attention. When we consider famous depictions of ecstasy in literature, we of course recur to John Donne. But in Dante, too, we find an example of ecstasy that is pertinent to the Jamesian narrative of consciousness. In "Paradiso" XXIII, the pilgrim witnesses the triumph of Christ in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars. His mind expands like "lightning breaking from a cloud,/expanding so that it cannot be pent,/against its nature, down to earth descends" ("Come foco di nube sì diserra/per dilatarsi si che non vi cape,/e fuor di sua natura in giù s'atterra [XXIII, 40-

42]). James, too, experiences an ecstasy when presented with the otherworldly material of redemption -- European modes of constructing history. The Lamb, Christ the Redeemer, becomes reconceived as the apprehendable method of redeeming oneself. The cognitive process becomes objectified, scrutinized, and apprehended as the means to effecting personal redemption.

James's memories of La Farge and his European initiations are fittingly tied up with reminiscences of the Newport landscape. In Notes of a Son and Brother, James describes seeing some of La Farge's early landscape studies in a commemorative exhibit held in Boston shortly after the painter's death. The landscapes "called back into life a hundred memories". They remain textual fields that James converts into his personal narrative of assimilating the European sensibility. James completes this section of his memoir by discussing the long walks he took through the Newport landscape. La Farge's landscapes carry him back to the impressions of his youth. The "vast region" was practically "roadless". The unpaved landscape is idealized as a consecrated scene of otherworldly initiations: "the sea" is "so often as of the isles of Greece, the mildly but perpetually embayed promontories of mossy rock and wasted thankless pasture, bathed in a refinement of radiance and a sweetness of solitude which amounted in themselves to the highest 'finish'" (300). The Newport landscape is a metaphor for the vast range of European material being assimilated by

James through his contact with Hunt and tutelage by La Farge. The landscape is like a "kind of boundless empty carpeted saloon": the natural environment is reconceived as a cultural interior where the data of the cultural European otherworld can be apprehended. The landscape eventually becomes violated by the paving of a "vulgar road" which James derides for the way it supersedes "the old rich alternative".

If we view the unpaved Newport landscape as a codification of the European "values" James assimilated from his associations with Hunt and La Farge, we can read the "vulgar" paving and ordering of this landscape as reflecting an American misreading of the European cultural heritage, a mis-appropriation for "vulgar" ends. Earlier, James derides "the merciless manner in which a living and hurrying public educates itself, making and devouring in a day reputations and values which represent something of the belief in it that it has had in *them*, but at the memory of which we wince, almost to horror, as at the legend of victims who have been buried alive" (287). He implicitly contrasts this vulgar form of cultural appropriation to his own more nuanced appropriation of the aesthetic and cultural values embodied by Hunt and La Farge. As rendered by La Farge, the landscape symbolizes the European heritage -- nature distilled through the European "I". The vulgar, predictable, and conformist appropriation of this heritage is symbolized by the "vulgar" paved road. The more nuanced appropriation of this heritage is symbolized by

Henry's zig-zagging, manifold course -- a mode of perambulation similar to Strether's throughout his day inside his Lambinet.

THE SPIRITS OF BARBIZON

Throughout this study, I argue that The Ambassadors validates the process of consciousness as an epic form of history. I have organized my argument around the Lambinet scene in the conviction that the Barbizon painting represents a form of history akin to epic otherworld narrative and to The Ambassadors. The Barbizon masters effected their histories by translating mental experience into their imagistic vernacular. By understanding the Barbizon manner and, thus, the Lambinet painting, as a history painting, we can explore how the climactic scene documenting Strether's return to the site of composition is an example of his uncanny return to the origins of his documented culture.

Between 1830 and 1850, French painting shifted from traditional historical subjects to the Barbizon style. According to Daniel Rosenfield, the curator of an exhibit examining the Barbizon movement in France and the United States, this shift reflected an ideological transformation:

> From the vantage point of the early nineteenth century, this inclination fore-shadowed the dissolution of a well-established order. Landscape painting, especially in France, had been a minor genre in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, subservient to history painting which emphasized the depiction of great deeds from the past and which held that historical, religious and mythological subjects provided examples of virtuous human behavior that, when rendered in an idealized

style, represented a higher order of human affairs. (Rosenfield, 10)

Classical history painting enjoyed continuing vitality during the French revolution, then became a form of propaganda during the Napoleonic Empire before languishing during the Bourbon Restoration (Rosenfield, 11). The emergence of the Barbizon landscapists coincided with the rise of Romanticism and the resurgence of populism exemplified by the revolution of 1830. While Barbizon paintings were critically condemned when exhibited in the Paris salons, the movement prevailed eventually when the aesthetic rearguard recognized that the naturalist methods addressed the future of the discipline. In 1861, the critic Albert de la Fizeliere admitted that "genre painting, adopting the principles formulated by the landscape schools, in its turn enters on the fertile path at the end of which modern art must infallibly find the new form of historic and religious art" (Sloane, 106).

It is useful to recall that, early in his career, Lambinet studied with Horace Vernet as the pair travelled in North Africa seeking the exotic (slave markets, for example) as a subject. Later, he turned from the exoticism of the colonial scene to the local color of his home-town Bougival by the Seine. The change of subject suggests his trading of one "otherworld" for another: his original otherworld was North Africa. Like an Emersonian nativist, Lambinet gradually replaced the North African otherworld with the local otherworld affording him his greatest aesthetic intensities.

The subject of Barbizon history was what James featured in The Ambassadors: the process of vision. In their *en plein air* canvases, the Barbizon masters narrated the experience of vision. "Increasingly, as the decades of the 1830's, 40's, and 50's unfolded", writes Kermit Champa, "the feeling of seeing and the open-ended communicative potential of that feeling fascinated them. To paint from that feeling, without abandoning totally feelings pre-sealed in poetic language, became the mature pictorial enterprise of [Corot and Rousseau]. The feeling of seeing would be left free to operate wherever and whenever word-based feeling reached its communicative outer limits" (Champa, 30). The Barbizon painters were limit-testers in their own historical context. They, too, studied what John Carlos Rowe terms the "cognitive determinants of the scene" -- the "idea" in its "picture". They conceived their relation to "Nature" in scenic terms. They execute a painterly variation of the narrative technique I associate with James in The Ambassadors: scenic history. Barbizon represents a method of encoding the world and habituating vision to canvas that James comes to appreciate.

Moreover, these Barbizon painters sought an early somewhat less complicated form of the freedom many critics consider to be James's true subject and objective. "What needs to be emphasized", writes Champa, "is the fact that to paint landscape was the clearest declaration of a desire for freedom (in one or another form) that an artist prior to 1860 in

France could possibly make" (25). Leo Bersani remarks that "The recurrent Jamesian subject is only superficially the international theme, or the confrontation of innocence and experience, or the conflict of acquisitive and self-renouncing impulses. His subject is freedom -- but we must understand that word in the sense of inventions so coercive that they resist any attempt to enrich -- or reduce -- them with meaning" (132). The freedom Bersani refers to lies on the far side of the romanticist freedom prized by the masters of Barbizon. It is a freedom based on an endless capacity for controlling mutually shared impressions to one's advantage with the effect of bewildering your interlocutor. It is the perverse freedom which Strether comes to appreciate when, after dining with the lovers at the *Cheval Blanc*, he marvels at their ability to lie their way through the encounter in order to minimize his dismay.

Inscribed in pencil on the inside cover of Henry James's copy of Emerson's essays (1885) is this sentence from "Self-Reliance": "In this pleasing, contrite wood-life which God allows me, let me record day by day my honest thought without prospect or retrospect, and, I cannot doubt, it will be found symmetrical, though I mean it not, and see it not." That James would select this passage reflects his adherence to the aesthetic gesture that distinguishes his late narratives as patternings of thought. It is the kind of compositional prayer to be expected of a Barbizon rustic. The Barbizon technique

featured a Jamesian faith in impressions, with open-air sketching revised in the studio. The technique resembles the two-step compositional tendencies to reception and restraint I have associated with James: the plunging in "the admirable immensity" and the formal reduction of the vertiginous interrogative "experience" to its linguistic register and narrative pattern.[5]

In A Small Boy and Others, James describes the walks through Paris that he and William James habitually took in the autumn of 1856. These strolls typically led to visits to the Louvre and Luxembourg Museum. These walks are virtually identical to the walk Strether takes in The Ambassadors (II, ii) when he reviews his circumstances and gets "into relation" with the "Europe" of his past dreams and sudden challenges. The walks Henry, William, and Strether make to view the modern landscape masters -- from the Louvre to the Luxembourg Gardens museum, right bank to left -- figure the impulse of modernity. For Henry, "every step" of the brothers' *measurement* of "the great space that separated us from the gallery of the Luxembourg", "fed us with some interesting, some admirable image" (191). The walk engenders a narrative of sensual apprehension and psychic improvisation. Personifying the objects of the landscape, James recalls his stroll through the Left Bank as though it were punctuated by personal greetings from these objects: "every low-browed vitrine waylaid us and we moved in a world of which the dark message, expressed in we

couldn't have said what sinister way too, might have been 'Art, art, art, don't you see? Learn, little gaping pilgrims, what *that* is!" (191).

The objects of the Left Bank become avowers of Parisian taste. "Yes, small staring jeune homme," the facades of "the high grey-headed, clear-faced, straight-standing old houses" tell the teen-age James, "we are dignity and memory and measure, we are conscience and proportion and taste, not to mention strong sense too: for all of which good things take us -- you won't find one of them when you find (as you're going to begin to at such a rate) vulgarity" (191). Dignity and measure prove a function of memory -- the captivating past. James coaxes the value of Paris out of his perceptual field by gripping it in an apprehensive embrace. The valued past is, to quote Wallace Stevens, "an abstraction blooded" by perceptual experience of the vitrines and houses.

The Lambinet studied by the young James hung in the Luxembourg Museum, the museum that Strether and Little Bilham visit in The Ambassadors. In A Small Boy and Others, James recalls seeing Couture's *Romains de la Decadence* at the Luxembourg. He says that he could never, in "the long after time, face [Couture's] masterpiece and all its old meanings and marvels without a rush of memories and a stir of ghosts" (192-193). The passage implies how for James specific aesthetic objects are associated with a stratum of emotional experience expressed through the metaphor of supernatural

spirits. Objects inspire a range of emotional reaction that is figured as a "stir of ghosts" -- a host of otherworld shades. The range of the Couture painting's reference can be figured as the numberless quantity of shades encountered in a circle of the Dantesque otherworld. I have made this point in my discussions of the Lambinet: every shade of applied paint refers to a cultural and psychological nuance comprising the viewer's range of reference. The Couture is in the classical style of history painting. The Barbizon Lambinet will surpass Couture as the revamped method of pictorial historicism. The later Barbizon canvases instill James with an equal "rush of memories and stir of ghosts", effecting the kinds of accidents of association that make the memory of the Lambinet painting "sweet" for Strether.

In the Luxembourg galleries, Couture and Edouard Frere, Hunt's teachers, comprise a group of luminaries that includes "three or four of the so finely interesting landscapists of that and the previous age, Troyon, Rousseau, Daubigny, even Lambinet and others ... " (193) James again considers European culture as something Americans collect. "Europe" is objectified and desired. "America" seeks and consumes. But "America" does not simply buy "Europe" with its money. "America" objectifies "Europe" as the narrative of its quest for identity. "Europe" is what, through an intense process of mental projection and recuperation, Americans re-collect as the discipline of vision that modifies and refines their

national way of seeing. James expresses tender regard and nostalgia for the formative time: "It was a comfortable time -- when appreciation could go so straight, could rise, and rise higher, without critical contortions; when we could, I mean, be both so intelligent and so 'quiet'" (193). James nests his self in aesthetic objects that provide revolutionary epistemological possibilities. To cross Paris to visit the Luxembourg Museum where the Barbizon artists are shown is to cross to "Style", to make the wanton crossing James associates with his famous delirium in the *Gallerie d'Apollon*.

Equipped with these associations, let us now once more review the Lambinet scene as a form of secular apocalypse.

THE INTENSE AMERICAN

One of the most important subjects of the Lambinet episode is Strether's relation to time. Strether tours the countryside as though he were a clock hand keeping its circuit. Moving within the "enclosing lines" of the Lambinet's "oblong gilt frame", Strether moves within his clock. "He had kept along the height", "had lost his way and found it again", "and had meanwhile not once overstepped the oblong gilt frame": "The frame had drawn itself out for him, as much as you please, but that was just his luck" (XI, iii, 305). The frame can be taken for the outline of the clock face. Inside the frame, time *is*; outside the frame, timeless potentiality lies inviting the self to interrogate it. At the end of his day, Strether closes the circle: "He had finally come down

again to the valley, to keep within touch of stations and trains, turning his face to the quarter from which he had started ... " (XI, iii, 305) He completes his mental journey, exemplifying the rotational pattern of the Berne clock figure to which he later compares himself. An hour hand completing its circuit, he returns to the *Cheval Blanc* to mark the new day.

Closing Time's circle, Strether schedules his dinner at the rustic inn, unknowingly preparing to learn the truth of relations between Marie and Chad. Conditions at the *Cheval Blanc* surpass those in the "old high salon" of Madame de Vionnet as the objective distillation of "Europe". In his garden chair at the Cheval Blanc (the inn's name evokes the figure of the "White Horse" in "The Book of Revelations", implying the connection between the vision in store for Strether and Biblical revelation), Strether enjoys his profoundest sense of otherworld entrance. He achieves a Heideggerian with-in-time-ness.

> The conditions had nowhere so asserted their difference from those of Woollett as they appeared to him to assert it in the little court of the Cheval Blanc while he arranged with his hostess for a comfortable climax. They were few and simple, scant and humble, but they were *the thing*, as he would have called it, even to a greater degree than Madame de Vionnet's old high salon where the ghost of the Empire walked. "The" thing was the thing that implied the greatest number of other things of the sort he had had to tackle; and it was queer of course, but so it was -- the implication here was complete. (XI, iii, 304)

This landscape becomes dense with textual reference, a

scene of semiotic potential. Semiotic potential of this order is what James pursues in his "quest for experience": the resources by which the vastest consciousness may be realized. Thus in the "Art of Fiction", James emphasizes his interest in textual density and expansive inclusiveness: "Art is essentially selection, but it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be *inclusive*" (357). The novel, for James, must, like Strether's perspective from the garden of the *Cheval Blanc*, have the "character" of an "immense and exquisite correspondence with life" (359). The perspective renders Strether "one of the people on whom nothing is lost" (352). In the sense that every syllable of suggestion conforms to its text, Strether's Lambinet expresses "Experience ... never limited ... never complete ... an immense sensibility" allowing the "imaginative" mind to "take[sic] to itself the faintest hints of life," and "convert[sic] the very pulses of the air into revelations" (351-352). To be one on whom nothing is lost isn't simply advice given to the apprentice writer. It is a pragmatist commandment.

The "thing" explodes semiotically, referring to every element of Strether's experience to this point. In the inn garden, Strether commands a table with a view of the unnamed river that, symbolizing enlightenment, evokes the rivers of Eden, the Euphrates and the Tigris, and the river of light particles (in "Paradiso" XXX) that, after the pilgrim bends to drink from it through his eyelashes, spins into the celestial

rose where the redeemed souls of Paradise convene. The Dantean trope figures how the mind converts a specific object into its historical references. It demonstrates how sensory experience precipitates human participation in a constructed vision of community. The object is detonated into shards of semiotic reference and then re-melded together. The figure of the Christian river of light is evoked by the figure of the river of *Lamb*inet and *Lamb*ert Strether. This figure compares with William James's stream of consciousness -- a stream of luminous, illuminating objects. William James draws on more than Heraclitus in formulating the idea of a stream of mind; he reinvigorates a tradition of revelation imparted to him by his theologic father. His stream recontextualizes the Christian figure of the luminous river.

The details of the scene contribute to the idea that Strether's experience at t*he Cheval Blanc* is a secular rite of self- transformation. There is Strether's view of a "small and primitive" riverside pavilion, "clearly in esteemed requisition for Sundays and other feasts" (307). His leisurely mood and reverential manner combine to lend the air of Sunday to the scene. One could argue that every day in The Ambassadors feels like Sunday since the days are spent leisurely in observance of the aesthetically sacred. As a shining scene, the Lambinet describes a day of sun -- of enlightenment. The theory of the liminal that Victor Turner derives from his studies of indigenous holy day rituals

applies to the experience in store for Strether when he by chance meets the lovers, hesitates confusedly when they try to escape his notice, temporarily decides the crisis for everyone by signalling a salute and then, much later, reconstructs his moral landscape by reviewing his initiation ritual during a midnight vigil in his hotel room.

Seated at his table in his garden, Strether has the "*agrement* of everything". Strether's everything" is shade-like and otherworldly in the Virgilian sense but also akin to the landscape of history presented to Adam and Eve as they pass through the eastern gates of Eden at the close of Paradise Lost. He sees "exactly the right thing", two figures "advancing" round the bend towards the *Cheval Blanc* in a row boat, the man at the paddles, the woman with a pink parasol. Viola Hopkins Winner, among others, has pointed out the figures belong in an Impressionist canvas rather than a Barbizon painting: "To what extent James consciously sought the effect ... probably cannot be determined, but it seems ... that when Strether enters the village where he plans to have his dinner, it is no longer a Lambinet which is being described but an impressionist canvas instead" (77). Archetypes of urbanity and ease, the "figures" have been "wanted". Strether's Lambinet has "lacked" them throughout the day (indeed Barbizon has lacked them its entire epoch): "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" (XI, iv, 307). The figures are wanted to signify the meaning of "Europe" and to express the knowledge (of "Europe") symbolized by the Lambinet. They come with the consciousness that the artist Lambinet conveyed with oils, board, brush, palette.

The scene shows Strether claiming these figures for their historical significance. In Notes of a Son and Brother, James refers to the stimulation and meaning provided by the "figure" of John LaFarge -- as already noted, an invaluable mentor and inspiration to Henry. As the appropriate figure, La Farge provides James with more than representational color; he offers a center-point around which to effect a historical cohesiveness.

> A representative, a rounded figure, however, is as none of its relations definable or announceable beforehand; we only know it, for good or ill, but with something of the throb of elation always, when we see it, and then it in general sufficiently accounts for itself. We often for that matter insist on its *being* a figure, we positively make it one, in proportion as we seem to need it -- or as in other words we too acutely miss the active virtue of representation. It takes some extraordinary set of circumstances or time of life, I think, either to beguile or to hustle us into indifference to some larger felt extension roundabout us of "the world" -- a sphere the confines of which move on even as we ourselves move and which is always there, just beyond us, to twit us with the more it should have to show if we were a little more of it. (Autobiography, 289-290)

The Lambinet is a history painting that researches the manners of a certain time. It testifies to a philosophy of life; it is a composition of knowledge. It inquires of French

"manners" and synthesizes them in the French visual field. The wanted figures are figures *in* the know who embody "the way to do it", inherited French manners, and the precise comprehensiveness of the French eye. The Lambinet functions as a metaphor to set these invisible data in a pictorial history. The figures are themselves the revelation. Strether accepts them as a visual offering:

> The air quite thickened, at their approach, with further intimations; the intimation that they were expert, familiar, frequent -- that this wouldn't at all events be the first time. They knew how to do it he vaguely felt -- (XI, iv, 307)

The two figures in the Lambinet express the fulfillment of Strether's dream early in life to pose beside his wife in the European scene. The interrogative energy Strether expends throughout the day is poised to be consummated in the image of wedlock set within "Europe". Strether projects the memory of himself and his wife into a picture wherein their (and their nation's) unrealized hopes are imaginatively fulfilled. The pair represent figures of death revived in the compositional field of his imagination. *Strether's* dead represent the coalescence of his personal past (lost wife and son) with a greater cultural and historical past, both "American" ways he overcomes (represented by the unnamed article produced by the Woollett firm) and the European "manners" he penetrates and encompasses (embodied in Madame de Vionnet, their conveyor, and Chad, the specimen to whom she "gives" all). The European scene contextualizes "death", allowing Strether to experience

and use it to realize the "other-picture" -- his "European" self.

It is ambiguous whether the male figure deemed "wanted" in the picture represents the youthful Strether or his son matured. The female figure alternatively assumes the role of erotic partner or mother, depending on how her male companion is interpreted. The ambiguities imply the tension between Strether's acting towards Marie de Vionnet as a father figure for Chad and his wanting to make love to her. The tension describes Strether's wanting to be the figure *in* the picture -- the possessor of the consciousness of how to live like an otherworldly European and his accepting that it is Chad's picture. Chad describes a portrait of the young man Strether might have been had he spent his twenties in "Europe". Marie de Vionnet is the woman he would physically possess if he had a second youth. The scene implies a slippage of roles that defies point-by-point interpretation; references create a kaleidoscope. The envisioner of the intimacy keeps the ironic perspective of the excluded -- a perspective that makes his vision more intense. Bersani lists Strether's recognition scene among other scenes in James that feature a "betrayal [that] takes the form of an intimacy which excludes its witness" (133).

Rowe argues that "the uncanny coincidence of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's appearance in this apparently random scene is already governed by the secret textuality of Strether's bid

for impressionistic freshness and spontaneity" (198). Strether's imaginative impress lay framed and awaiting the fulfillment of these needed figures. The figures have knowledge forbidden in the hero's (Strether's) present-day (Puritan) culture. These figures impart a forbidden cultural knowledge characteristically given to the epic traveller by the dead shades.

Rowe points out that Strether moves from the naive impressionism of the escapist to an impressionism where "picture" and "idea" fuse and Strether achieves his historical identity: "It is a meta-literary moment not only for James's novel but, more important, for Strether's own composition of self, which is made up as much by the characters with whom he is involved and defined as of 'himself': the unbounded, liberated 'observer'. In order to 'compose' himself, Strether must construct his relations with others; the 'holiday' is, as we recognize from the beginning, a searching reflection on the nature of those relations and the role that Strether has played (or failed to play) in the preceding drama" (199). Rowe's specifications serve as a valuable critical precedent for my theory. Strether's relations determine *how* he composes. The ontological model is the epic hero knowing himself through his relations to the shades of the otherworld. Strether's spatial relation to the Lambinet describes his double status as observer and observed, subject and object. He can be conceived straddling the threshold of the picture frame,

placing one foot tentatively inside the picture while the other, like the stationary leg of a compass, remains grounded outside.

At the moment Strether has his impression of the figures' suitability, however, their boat begins to drift wide, undermining the impression. The constructed moment deconstructs resulting in the impressing of a new perplexity. This extreme perplexity -- the perplexity sought by the apprentice Lambinet as he travelled in North Africa -- is only fathomed by Strether after he returns to his hotel.

Strether experiences violent shock and stress once he recognizes the lovers and realizes that, having recognized him, they "are intensely debating" "the risk of betrayal" -- of rowing off without acknowledging him: "It was a sharp fantastic crisis that had popped up as if in a dream, and it had had only to last the few seconds to make him feel it as quite horrible" (XI, iv, 308). Such violence is referred to by Scripture as a pre-condition of Christian grace. In Luke 16:16, the faith-keeper is said to enter forcefully into apocalyptic knowledge of God: "The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently". In the Lambinet scene, James reconceives the Christian kingdom of God as a transformed and transforming picture of consciousness. Strether violently enters his own picture of "the good news". The New Testament kingdom of God is reconceived as the

"virtue" attaching the figures "wanted" by Strether's picture. The violence Strether experiences is due to his battling his resistance to the figures; a part of him would prefer Woollett blindness and ignorance. He violently overcomes this resistance, forcing himself to see and interact with the figures. He keeps an appointment by revising the ethical aesthetic he first imputes to the Lambinet -- disembodied romanticism -- in its stead reading the picture as an equivalent of sexual intimacy and verbal skill. The Barbizon painting becomes an Impressionist painting, coded with the consciousness of Renoir lovers rowing in a blushing light. Strether ap-points himself within the revised picture. In recomprehending the picture, Strether interprets it in terms of a different epistemological paradigm based on human relatedness and sexual intimacy rather than on Emersonian (and Barbizon) transcendentalism.

The scene within Lambinet becomes a trial of ambivalence: for the figures to escape before Strether recognizes them would be for them to exclude him from their picture. In the Husserlian terms Cameron introduces, this is equal to the self that constructs its own consciousness -- its unifying phenomenological world-view -- experiencing the phantom-things comprising its view as though they fly its consciousness of their own accord; such action implies the self experiencing these phantom-things as effectively absenting Strether, their constituting observer. Cameron's

radical argument is that Strether cannot discretely detach his self from the other theoretically discrete characters in the novel. The narrative of The Ambassadors implies resistance. The figures play to Strether's unconscious desire to ignore the true character of the "virtuous attachment". A part of him does not want to recognize that sexual trysts, adultery, and deception make up "the picture". The so-called moral content of this picture is dubious in Woollett terms; it is the triumph of the novel that these Woollett terms are ultimately re-conceived, their frameworks re-negotiated.

Presented with the figures of his otherworld in a situation where *they* try to "'cut' him, out there in the eye of nature, *on the assumption that he wouldn't know it*", Strether must execute a Dantesque "varco folle", a mad crossing. He must generate the rite of interaction whereby he gains a consciousness that reverses the attempt on the part of the lovers to empty the scene, to render it devoid of figures. In the twentieth century, the "mad crossing" is inevitably interpreted in terms of desire. The Ulyssean "varco volle" finds its historically precise metaphor in Joyce's Ulysses where the novel ends with Molly recalling losing her virginity to Bloom on Mount Howth. Sex becomes the literal "mad crossing"; however, desire, in its many imaginative transmutations, instigates other metaphors.

Strether has to "settle" "their common question" (his and the lovers's) by some sign of surprise and joy. He settles the

question by creating a picture wherein the question is addressed. "Essentially more than anything else a scene and a stage" (306), the Lambinet picture is the site of a performance. Adeline Tintner argues that Strether's landscape is destroyed by his discovery of the lovers: "The turning point for Strether is when the Lambinet picture by which he handles his landscape falls apart ... Suddenly the landscape cannot hold, so Strether converts it into a play" (The Museum World, 112-113). Instead, of converting picture into play, Strether improvises the composition of a new picture. He improvises his liminal passage, "agitating his hat and his stick and loudly calling out -- a demonstration that brought him relief as soon as he had seen it answered" (XI, iii, 308). The demonstration is inquisitive. It elicits an "answer" from the other side. Time is understood spatially as Strether's "side" of his verbal-visual exchange with the lovers ("They were thus on either side, *trying* the other side" [308]). The boat "bumps at the landing place" and Strether assists his collaborators in "getting ashore".

In the Lambinet, Strether compensates for his previous recognition in Gloriani's garden that his life is lost. He becomes the writer of the unread book he carries in his back pocket, the improviser of a new pictorial script. He proves his newfound capacity for moral improvisation by handling his alarming encounter with the lovers with such poise and assertiveness. In The Golden Bowl, Fanny Assingham associates

immorality with stupidity, implying that morality corresponds to intelligence; such intelligence signifies an historical comprehending, experienced in the consciousness of him on whom *nothing* is lost -- he who sees "everything". A person is moral to the degree his point of view is comprehensive -- the degree that, representationally, he loses nothing. We could say that James would deem this same person the most heroic: he with the greatest "capacity for receiving straight impressions" ("Art of Fiction", 357). It is noteworthy that Strether *finds himself* "straightway taking" the couple in the row boat for "two very happy persons ... a young man in shirt-sleeves, a young woman easy and fair"; this is evidence of how, in the Jamesian mode, he acutely constitutes his "scene" through the active embrace ("straightway taking") of its elements. As Richard Hocks writes, "The most salient feature of the country recognition scene, and one not always sufficiently featured by James's critics, is that Strether actively and radically meets the discovery; he enters into a reciprocal relation with it, grafting meaning while receiving in kind; he empties every possible insight about himself, his previous assumptions, the thoughts of the two lovers in having to deal with *him*, and even the imagined responses of those back at Paris, into it. It is a recognition scene only in that sense, but in that sense it is recognition with a vengeance" (Hocks, 63).

Rowe argues that the frame of the Lambinet is effaced by Strether's "will for the unframed and spontaneous drift of his

tourism". The text suggests otherwise: "He really continued in the picture -- that being for himself his situation -- all the rest of this rambling day ... " (XI, iii, 305) Strether is aware of the frame throughout the day; his wandering may be construed as his desire to test his limits. This climaxes the novel-long process. The scene is a microcosm of the novel, removed from the core of the action in Paris. As apparently as it seems both rupture and escape, as Rowe argues, Strether's Lambinet pilgrimage is rooted in the previous action. The journey to the countryside indirectly continues Strether's walk to the Luxembourg gardens, where there is a museum where Lambinet landscapes can be seen and where Strether might have seen them on visits with Little Bilham, the "intense [read: historically situated] American" whose "intensity" derives from his paradoxical penchant for being an un-American *flaneur*, an analytic Thoreauvian transplanted in Paris. Strether's pilgrimage to Notre Dame also anticipates the Lambinet excursion. After meeting in the Cathedral, Strether and Madame de Vionnet dine on "omelettes aux tomates" and "straw-colored Chablis" which come, of course, from farms beyond the *banlieue* which Strether is careful to travel past before disembarking from his train. The Lambinet pilgrimage is undertaken to experience the roots of that profane communion meal.

Rowe describes the train window as a frame contextualizing Strether's "conscious decision to wander";

however, Rowe fails to acknowledge that this frame is opportunely readjusted (at various points annihilated and reconstructed) to register the scene of home wherein Strether can experience his (historical) "identity" (Rowe's term, 198). This reconstruction of frame and framed visual complex marks Strether's epic otherworld homecoming(s). Home is experienced intermittently as the mind houses itself in time. With God "dead", time becomes that to which we *come home*, our most utilizable fiction. Framing is as natural to Strether as to the Barbizon landscapist; the frame bounds the text of Lambert Strether.

James does not give the site of Strether's originary knowledge a name. Strether prefers not to know the name of the river around which his Lambinet (like previous otherworld landscapes with their Styx, Lethe, River of Light, Tigris and Euphrates) is set ("A river of which he didn't know, and didn't want to know, the name" [XI, iii, 302]). Rowe argues that Strether makes the Lambinet compass a "no-place" outside history where his "I" can ramble unconfronted by disturbing facts: "He fools himself that he has discovered a utopia where the self is anonymous, the place nowhere" (Rowe, 197). Rowe dismisses Strether's willed anonymity as a denial of historical circumstances, "a will toward Death, a Nietzschean ressentiment (or Freudian Thanatos)" (199). However, anonymity may only be a rite of identific denudation, a necessary stage of Strether's imaginative appropriation of the space and time

of the scene. Strether's dream of having something forbidden doubles as a dream of being some*where* forbidden -- a somewhere unnameable until he has the visceral experience that lends the place a name.

After Strether sits to dine with the lovers, his idealizations of his friendship with Madame de Vionnet become exposed. He cannot keep pace with her as she chatters in French and he later comes to appreciate that she is lying about her and Chad's intentions to take a day-trip to the countryside. Strether comes to realize that he cannot match Madame de Vionnet's ability to represent herself in her peculiar, stylish French. He cannot realize *the* compositional resourcefulness inhering in her native tongue: "the question of his own French had never come up for them". There is no producible, fathomable picture wherein Strether can conceive himself facile in French. If he could entertain this picture, Strether would consummate his Europeanness, becoming Eliot's re-born European American; failing to, he does not. The spirit, that is the language, of Madame de Vionnet do permeate Strether's self-representation to a point: he has had his picture of himself *in* relation to Madame de Vionnet (with "her rare unlikeness to the women he had known") when communing with her in her *Rue de Bellechasse* apartments haunted by the "ghost of the [First] Empire", of "Napoleonic glamour". But in an ironic reversal of Strether's earlier experience of possession, he now experiences the loss of *his* place in *the*

picture. Speaking "with an unprecedented command of idiomatic turns", "taking all at once little brilliant jumps", Madame de Vionnet "got, as [Strether] might have said, somewhat away from him".

The irony of Strether's inability to match Gallic idioms with Madame de Vionnet reflects the intermittent condition of homelessness intrinsic to Jamesian otherworld experience. James's inquirers pulsate between states of homelessness and "homing in". One would need to experience a sense of homelessness even to care about realizing a historicized psychic domicile. Moments of disorientation and bewilderment are rendered as dramatically as triumphs of attention, when, as William James says, by "the dumb turning of the will and tightening of ... heartstrings ... we say, 'Yes, I will even have it so!" (Principles, II, 578) The narrative of ironic rootlessness Georg Lukacs attributes to the nineteenth-century *bourgeois* loss of affiliation becomes collapsed within the yet more comprehensive narrative of a self turning to and away from objects allowing it an expansive relation to its world. "Home" and "homelessness" are spatio-temporal conditions defining points on the way of mental life. "Homelessness" describes loss of the metaphysical picture, the embrace of the admirable immensity, the quest for the next idiom of the visual. "Home" is compositional intensity: William James's judging thought, Strether's narrative reconstruction as he sits dressed (in the "habit of

composing") in his hotel room and projects his self-assessment through the dark, Adam's (and Milton's readers') entertaining the prophetic vision of history from the "top/of Speculation". We again note how Strether's otherworld account is introduced:

> When he reached home that night, however, he knew he had been, *at bottom*, neither prepared nor proof; and since we have spoken of what he was, after his return, to recall and interpret, it may as well immediately be said that his real experience of these few hours put on, in that belated vision -- for he scarce went to bed till morning -- the aspect that is most to our purpose. (311)

There follows the most precise definition of what, in mental terms, James means by "coming home": "He was at that *point of vantage*, in full possession, to make of it all what he could" (311). In the previous sentence, "it" refers to the situation between Chad and Madame de Vionnet but, more, the "everything" to which their virtuous attachment refers. The conditional phrasing ("all what he could") evokes the Gloriani garden speech when Strether says that, life being "at best a tin mould", "one lives as fine as one can". It also evokes Milly Theale's chastening thought in Regents Park that it "was perhaps superficially more striking that one could live if one would; but it was more appealing, insinuating, irresistible in short, that one would live if one could" (The Wings of the Dove, V, iv, 156). Living is here conceived as making of "something" a composition and Jamesian action refers to this scene of composing -- of Strether struggling in the dark to realize his experience in the idioms of the visual.

Strether completes the impression of the figures

encountered in the boat, figures with whom he dines and returns to Paris, by contemplating their time together. Filling out the picture, he locates himself in his "full impression", experiencing a homecoming in his mental state. "Home" is understood to be an attribute of his mental experience. As Strether relaxes in his Lambinet, his "tenseness" -- his psychic temporality -- dilates and expands. His self-narrative reforms. In the *Cheval Blanc*, the full impression becomes Strether's mental home: "Such a river [as the one in the scene] set one afloat almost before one could take up the oars -- the idle play of which would be moreover the aid to the full impression" (307). But this impression deconstructs when the lovers are recognized.

Later in his hotel rooms Strether experiences another impression as it superimposes itself: "Then it was that his impression took fuller form -- the impression, destined only to deepen, to complete itself, that they had something to put a face upon, to carry off and make the best of, and that it was she who, admirably, on the whole, was doing this" (XI, iv, 310). James's narrator pointedly stresses what Strether's midnight vigil means with a subtle introductory clause: "*When he reached home that night* ..." This housing in the full impression is intrinsic to the condition of the otherworld narrator. The paradox is that, no matter how instilled his temporary experience of "home", Strether is destined soon after to lose it. Recognizing that "It was a part of the deep

impression ... and not the least of the deep interest, that they *could* so communicate -- that Chad in particular could let her know he left it to her", Strether is re-excluded while "seeing". His complete appreciation of the lover's "virtue" [power] renews his sense of expulsion from the garden: "The very question, it may be added, made him feel lonely and cold" (313). He loses the feeling of a mental "home" then rallies by recognizing that "Verily, verily, his labour had been lost. He found himself supposing innumerable and wonderful things" (313). Making this recognition, he returns "home" yet again.

Rowe argues that impressions are pre-determined by a cognitive pre-disposition to see; I want to emphasize an interactiveness between the impressed and impressed-upon that he fails to account for in his Kantian exposition. The impression is a function of the "idea" -- an esthetic pre-disposal to see certain objects in certain ways; but the impression *out there* earns an agency over the impressed upon impressor, the "I". The "I" locks in embrace with its impression and finds this impression, its shade(s), to have an unexpected capacity to signify. The impressed-out shades show a capacity for response, engineering an interaction between the impressed-on impressing-out "I" and its impressions that Rowe, following Derrida, argues do not exist. Our critical question concerns where we locate this interaction between impressed "I" and impression: in some pre-cognitive locus called mind where a Kantian transcendental *schema* presides or

in a perceptual space where praxis is a function of interactions between "I" and its pictures, its shadowy impressions?

How Strether re-understands the "virtuous attachment" parallels how he newly decodes the Lambinet. Originally decoding the Lambinet from the perspective of the Boston gallery-visitor, Strether reads "virtuous" in Woollett terms to mean chaste. After passing through "his total little experience" and coming out the other side (of the Lambinet), he retrospectively conflates the European and American perspectives. To pursue Eliot's terms, he becomes "a European" only thereafter to return "home" to an adjusted "American" point of view. Becoming a European is a point along his way. An epistemological pose, "Europeanness" lets him reform an American point of view that is inquisitional, even death-like. Strether reads "virtuous" to mean empowered by intimacy and *preter*naturally communicative and then chooses to live his reading back in Woollett, a convert to a belief system that encompasses the differences of the two cultures and describes a third.

Strether is fated to be solitary even after he realizes his new identity as a citizen of his imagined Euro-American community. He cuts his Woollett ties and forms relations with Maria Gostrey, Chad, Madame de Vionnet, and the others only to forego these new relationships as well. Like Odysseus, Strether returns home having lost "all companions",

exemplifying a condition of loss in discovery that must be reinterpreted in view of Strether's (and James's) particular personal, sexual, and historical context. Strether's fate evokes that of the Dantesque pilgrim who cannot literally maintain his relations with guides or shades back in the world where he will relate his otherworld poem. These friends and relations constitute that sum vision that is "God" turned "Time". As the epic hero, Strether sustains his otherworldly figures in memory. He concludes his hotel room nightwatch by "supposing innumerable and wonderful things".

1. Seidel comments that "Difference is a form of illusion that James constantly portrays in his fiction and in his autobiographical and travel writing" (132). Contextualized in his larger study of exile and literature, Seidel's reading of James suggests that difference is the very condition inviting the imaginative literary enterprise. He later adds that "some Americans, like Waymarsh, are homeward bound in whatever direction they move; others are more comfortably exposed to 'another air'" (143). The key word in this diagnosis of Waymarsh is "bound". Strether, too, is moving homeward; but he is moving homeward as a consequence of his openness to "another air". In Jamesian otherworld narrative, a renewed, revised sense of homewardness develops out of the exposure to the "other air".

2. One of Clark's main purposes in his analysis of the prophetic wisdom Odysseus receives from his otherworld journey is to establish that the *Nekyia* was indeed originally part of the design of Homer's poem and that it was not fitted into the narrative as a separate fragment. Clark goes on to summarize the "information" Odysseus obtains from the shades with which he speaks: From Tiresias, Odysseus "obtained some extremely relevant information ... regarding his kingdom and future destiny". From Agamemnon's ghost, he obtained "natural information based on the experience that sent the Returning Hero to the grave (his murder by Clytemnestra), in the form of the practical hint to return home secretly". From his mother, Antiklea, Odysseus "learnt how his family and kingdom in Ithaca were disposed at the time of her death". Clark concludes that "the information, which is part ancestral, pertains then ultimately to the restoration of his

family and kingdom and serves to emphasise both the unity of the theme underlying the *Nostos* and the final Vengeance of Odysseus upon the Suitors". While the summary is indisputable, Clark fails to read the underworld narrative as a tableaux of culture at a given historical period that would reorient Odysseus by submitting him to a sequence of re-cognitions of the panoply of the very figures (the prophet Tiresias, the mother Antiklea, the warrior-King Agamemnon, the hero Achilles) out of which this culture was composed.

3. The idea that faith penetrates divine radiance in coming homeward is re-emphasized in the description of the pilgrim's vision: "ché la mia vista, venendo sincera,/e più e più intrava per lo raggio/de l'alta luce che da sé è vera". ("Because my sight, becoming pure, was able/to penetrate the ray of Light more deeply --/that Light, sublime, which in Itself is true" [XXXIII. 52-54]).

4. Here is an example of the phenomenon in The Odyssey. After communing with the shade of his mother, Antiklea, Odysseus receives the shades of a host of mistresses of gods and consorts of heroes, who swoop into view to sip blood from his votive pit. The swarm of women signify the history of love, erotic woe, motherhood, and progression of history via reproduction. The tableaux engenders in him a specific consciousness of women (who constitute a crucial category of otherness in Homer and, as well, in James).

At this point of his narrative, Odysseus, assuming that his audience is tired and would like to go to sleep, interrupts his recollection of the underworld journey. Only after Alkinoos and the members of his court implore him to resume, does he describe his encounters with Agamemnon and Achilles. The effect of the ensuing mental tableaux featuring the gored and bloody shade of Agamemnon is to revise the depiction of women effected by the preceding segment of underworld experience. Women are now regarded with a more ambivalent, less mesmerized eye (I do not intend to validate Agamemnon's excoriation of women but, rather, to show how conflict, ambivalence, and a moral complexity Henry James would admire all develop through the sequential narrative of pictures -- mental representations revising one another). Agamemnon relates his double betrayal, domestic (by Clytemnestra) and civic (by Aigisthos) and blames his fate on "the intrigues of women": "Let it be a warning/even to you. Indulge a woman never,/and never tell her all you know. Some things/a man may tell, some he should cover up" (XI. 441-442)

Thought is here represented as a procession of visions. The shades, either directly or indirectly, comment upon those that precede them. This phenomenon illustrates William James's analysis of thinking in his chapter on "The Consciousness of Self" in Principles of Psychology. James poses that the most recent thought (adopting the first person, he calls it "My present thought") experienced by a self absorbs the content of

its predecessors in the stream and expresses the accumulation in a revised form. James calls this latest thought the "judging thought", asserting that the thought, through its palpable presence, has a moral power: "Thought appropriates the past in a real way, and so long as the Thought has no grounds for repudiating it stronger than those which lead to its appropriation ... My present Thought stands thus in the plenitude of ownership of my past selves, is owner not only *de facto* but *de jure*, the most real owner there can be" (I, 360).

The appearance of Agamemnon functions in Odysseus's narrative like an after-thought. The effect of the picture constituted by the shade of Agamemnon and what this shade tells Odysseus is to incorporate the pictures that precede it and to provide the latest word (Not necessarily the truest or best). Completing the account of his murder, Agamemnon assures Odysseus that he need not fear a similar threat upon his return to Penelope. Then he reconsiders: "One thing I will advise, on second thought; stow it away and ponder it/in secret on your island; give no warning./The day of faithful wives is gone forever" (XI, 452-455). Agamemnon's thoughts collapse together, the successors revising the earlier ones in a process that resembles what William James describes.

5. J. A. Ward and Daniel Mark Fogel have explored these phenomena in similar terms. Fogel writes that Wards's commentaries "are the closest" to his own idea that the structure of James's romantic imagination is premised on a Hegelian "dialectic of spiral return". Fogel comments that Ward's "major thesis is that the novels attempt to reconcile a tension between 'free imaginative expansion' and 'lucidity of design', an 'open principle' and 'a closed principle'" (11).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

To summarize the major arguments of this project: the narrative of The Ambassadors and the life of Henry James read as epic otherworld quest narratives. The otherworld journey inculcates the Jamesian epic hero with a historical consciousness. His expanding sense of self-relation reflects his successive states of entrance in his otherworld. "Europe" is the Jamesian otherworld. In The Ambassadors, the continent is placed in quotations because it represents the imaginative space Lambert Strether must visit to claim his national heritage. By possessing and transforming otherworldly objects -- including the French language (witness the "new tone" Strether and Madame de Vionnet team to produce) -- Strether claims this heritage. The objects of the European otherworld provoke his attention and ferment his consciousness. The anti-thesis of Strether's native Woollett, Paris is the repository of the objects that convey freedom, value, and the historical sense. The people and things Strether knows in his otherworld are inscribed in his sense of self.

Otherworldliness is a cultural and epistemological concept intrinsic to understanding Henry James as a nationalist and supra-nationalist writer. The American engagement with otherworldliness is a key facet of the

Jamesian fictional reconception of "America". Otherworldliness is the provocative vagueness that a protagonist's interest focuses into discernible outlines and precise language. The drama of American interest in "Europe" is described through the figure of the self engaging European shades in a chiasmic verbal-visual exchange. Strether's environing visual world symbolizes the valued past. In appropriating its symbols, he reconstitutes himself. His verbal-visual otherworld resembles the epic otherworld of shades. The social world of Paris, France offers Strether immense representational potentialities. The vivid city becomes the abstract, intangible world of his imagination. Strether moves fluidly between Paris and "Paris". He "bumps" against "recognitions" and entertains questions from a building facade.

The Jamesian hero's relation to European people and things parallels the epic hero's relation to the shades of the dead. Both models of relation in turn parallel William James's model of the self experiencing innumerable "shades of [psychological] relation". The Jamesian hero's relations to the shades of his otherworld determine the composition of his self-portrait. His relations to European shades equip Strether with a vision of his cultural origins. Jamesian epic interprets European tradition in an American mode, revitalizing the spirit of the European epic.

Experiencing "Europe" as his otherworld, Strether

becomes converted to European culture as to a creed. Yet by becoming fully converted, by coming "so far through his total little experience that he comes out the other side", Strether ultimately loses "Europe" as an otherworld. Once "Europe" is appropriated, the Jamesian hero turns like a compass leg one hundred and eighty degrees to confront his native country as *a next otherworld.* Experience involves the reconception of alterity. The space of difference supplying the self its subjective depth, the otherworld is selected and re-selected, changing as the hero's imaginative experience evolves and his criteria for alterity alter.

As argued in chapter two, The American Scene reflects James's reconception of his otherworldliness; returning to the United States after twenty years abroad, James turns "America" into the Jamesian otherworld. "The Jolly Corner" further exemplifies this tendency. Spencer Brydon returns to the United States after pursuing his career in Europe and wonders how his life would have differed had he remained in his native country. The ghost that Brydon encounters in his childhood New York residence is his other self, the "improbably possible" self of an otherworld suddenly in haunting focus. "America" becomes a spectral landscape of difference, making Brydon (like Strether) dream beyond previous possibilities. Entering his "home", Brydon taps his walking stick on the tile floor to create the "effect" of a "dim reverberating tinkle as of some far-off bell hung who

should say where? -- in the depths of the house, of the past, of that mystical other world that might have flourished for him had he not, for weal or woe, abandoned it" (Tales, 324).

In this house of difference, Brydon encounters a "counter-history", both stimulus for his imaginative life and corrective for his actual career. Like Strether, Brydon is forced to see what he has always repressed: he "tasted probably, at this instant, tasted probably of a sensation more complex than had ever before found itself consistent with sanity" (327). Brydon tastes of this complex sensation because he has transformed his native land into an otherworld. Rather than suggesting exoticism, Brydon's otherworld connotes strangeness, psychological imbalance, the uncanny -- a sense of familiarity when experiencing unprecedented mental states. Uncanniness characterizes the hero's experience of epic homecoming, his permeation by an alien culture effecting his experience of subjective depths and historical intricacy.

As Brydon revives after fainting on meeting his ghost, he contemplates his journey: "He had come back, yes -- come back from further away than any man but himself had ever travelled; but it was strange how with this sense of what he had come back *to* seemed really the great thing, and as if his prodigious journey had been all for the sake of it" (336). The hero experiences his self-exile on native ground.

Brydon studies Alice Staverton's face, "her look ... more beautiful to him than the things of this world" (339). Inspection of the typed manuscript at the Houghton library reveals that James added in pen the phrase "more ... than the things of this world"; it is as though the theme of otherworldliness came to him as he was revising. Alice's face becomes Brydon's prized otherworld possession, his reward for surviving his otherworld adventure. James lends the themes of cultural difference the connotations of the supernatural.

I have limited my focus to The Ambassadors to ensure for a thorough explication of the text that best exemplifies my theory. However, many of my key points -- regarding "Europe" as the American otherworld, transgressive threshold crossings, rules of recurrent entrance, the self in relation to otherworld shades, the embrace of the shade motif, and epic homecomings -- apply to the two other novels of the *major phase* -- The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl. For instance, I could organize my reading of The Wings of the Dove around Milly's relation to the Bronzino painting, just as I organized my exploration of The Ambassadors around Strether's relation to the Lambinet landscape. In the Bronzino portrait, Milly encounters the Venetian self of the otherworldy European tradition that she comes to embody in death. "You're the first young woman of your time", Lord Mark tells her in her Venetian palace, illustrating James's

commitment to portraying an American woman representative of her nation's time. The "I" in the "otherworld" critical paradigm suffuses relations between the English and American characters in the novel. The Wings of the Dove begins by scrutinizing Kate and Densher to establish the otherworldly setting Milly will enter. At the close of the book, the equations of consciousness are varied to foreground the cultural perspective of the Europeans as they interpret the American historical bequest. Milly, the enigmatic subject of the English lovers' inconclusive analyses, comes to represent "America" as it functions as the European otherworld. She literally travels to the land of the dead (equatable with the "Europe" portrayed by Bronzino) and she returns "home" -- to memory, time, and language -- as Densher and Kate interpret her legacy.

My ideas about epic consciousness also apply to The Golden Bowl. The epic question of empire, raised in the novel's opening sentence ("If it was a question of an *Imperium*", Amerigo muses, "and if one wished, as a Roman, to recover a little the sense of that, the place to do so was on London Bridge, or even, on a fine afternoon in May, at Hyde Park Corner" [I, i, 43]), is explorable in terms of the confrontation between old imperial (Roman/European) and new imperial cultures (American). Maggie's struggle with her husband for power in their marriage becomes a battle for interpretative hegemony. Maggie puts to use the otherworldly

European capacity for the dexterous management of human relations as she wins Amerigo back from Charlotte (her rival hermeneut) and manages her relationship with her father. In its scope and nuances, Maggie's consciousness becomes as much a tribute to European tradition as the museum Adam Verver plans to open upon his return to American city. Given my penchant for reading Jamesian consciousness through the motif of the embrace of the shade, the scenes of embrace featuring Charlotte and the Prince, the Prince and Maggie, Maggie and Charlotte, and Maggie and her father invite rigorous inspection.

My focus on an epic consciousness could also be profitably applied to examining Henry James's entire career. The full trajectory of the creative development of Henry James, said by Susan Sontag to be the "immensest" American writer, would constitute the formation of an epic consciousness. I would not argue that early texts like The American be read as epics; rather, I would insist that James's imaginative enterprise be read in its entirety as endlessly expansive, treating of the immense, invested in the imperial colonizing of the otherworldly, and nationalistic. As examples of James's bewitchment by Europe, one can point to James's earliest memory of seeing the *Place Vendome* and his famous dream encountering a "visitant" in the *Gallerie d'Apollon*. In the dream -- "the most appalling yet most admirable nightmare" of James's life -- the

visitant is the American's European "other", an Emersonian "someone" representing the essence of the old world. At once impressive enough to fill James with panic and so elusive as to leave him grasping at shades, this "other" represents the complex American inheritance.

In addition to scrutinizing the appropriate biographical elements, one could examine the three (or, according to current critical opinion, four) important phases of James's career. Pertinent early fiction would exhibit the early stages of American acclimation to European otherworldliness. The Princess Cassamassima, with its emphasis on depicting London's "shady underworld", would be read as James's first venture into a narrative of epic scope and documentation, a mid-life thrust at representing the European social totality. The novels of the *major phase* would represent the culmination of James's lifelong pursuit of power and of nationalist delineation through art. Finally, the Autobiography and the critical prefaces to the New York Edition could be read as James's retrospective theorizing of the author's life-long otherworld venture, an epic meta-criticism of his epic process.

Another potential application of my reading strategies could help explain why James has influenced the development of some of the twentieth century's most esteemed African-American writers, including Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. I believe he was of great value to these

African-American writers because of the extraordinary way he engaged the problem of cultural difference. The Jamesian otherworld is a frame of mind the hero must reconcile himself to even as he recoils in preliminary intolerance and dread. In his portraits of reflective characters negotiating cultural difference and social conflict by the force of their own gradually cohering imaginative visions, James presented African-American writers an example for confronting the alien and alienating aspects of American society. The African-American otherworld is of course White America. The African-American composes his self as a result of his dealings in racial difference. He enacts a mad-crossing, a *varco folle*, situating himself imaginatively in Caucasian-American experience and discerning the American historical legacy that has led to race-relations as he finds them. In his late novels, James offers one blueprint for internalizing and reorganizing the Caucasian-American otherworld in the act of extending and reforming the African-American self.

I shall close with a final assessment of the epic function of James's late novels -- especially The Ambassadors. The novel functions to orient us to its historical context. Published in 1901, it portrays the present American experience. It invites Americans to assume their proper place in American cultural history. "Then there we are" are of course Strether's last words to Gostrey, the

final line of the novel. Strether's declaration answers directly the question Emerson poses at the opening of "Experience": "Where do we find ourselves?" In putting this question to us, Emerson reveals his intention to lend American cultural developments some direction. James assumes Emerson's role of revealing the improvised present. In The Ambassadors, he answers Emerson's question in a characteristically paradoxical way. We find ourselves *in transition*. As revealed by his epic, the historicized national moment is a state of transition. When Strether sees the Lambinet he is inspired to overstep the modesty of nature, to transgress cultural norms, to move from where he *is* to where he *wants to be*. The scene crystallizes the American yearning for new experience while reminding American readers that something is missing from their epistemology. Going where you want to be after all depends on knowing where you *were*. James reintroduces the value of the past in the American reconstruction of the present. The historical moment, the Emersonian "strong present tense", is a fictionalized fact. Answering the question "Where do we find ourselves?" at all depends upon our locating *where we were* and marshalling the expressive power of the past's vestiges.

The Ambassadors depicts "America" receiving its European historical bequest and exploring how to proceed. The opening and closing scenes of the novel demonstrate how

Strether's change exemplifies the evolution of his national culture. Strether concludes his otherworld journey by parting from Gostrey in her "compact and crowded little chambers" in the Quartier Marboeuf. Observing a Jamesian pun, we might say he "winds up" at Gostrey's; the term signifies both the completion of a stretch of experience and the winding of a watch. Strether's wind-up at Gostrey's shows how the otherworldly European environment epitomized by the decoration of her rooms supplies him with the taste of earlier ages, turning him into an American time-piece. His consciousness becomes the American present.

We appreciate his evolution from the initial scene where, accompanied by Gostrey, he walks the Roman wall at Chester. Strether and Gostrey tour the circular wall, its "girdle long since snapped" and "half held in place by careful civic hands". The scene represents Strether circling the perimeter of the cultural otherworld he eventually penetrates to the center. We can understand Strether's progress as the indirect, delaying progress of someone wandering the concentric Cretan labyrinth. The careful civic (European) hands preserving the Chester wall do precisely what Americans, characterized (in _The American Scene_) by their lack of "civic piety" cannot: preserve the traces of the past.

Touring the Chester wall, the uneasy Strether takes out his watch only to "look at the hour without seeing it". In

temporal terms, he seems lost -- a man without the cultural sense making for intensities. Conversely, in Maria Gostrey's apartments Strether moves from the perimeter of the otherworld and from a state of feeling peripheral, not *of* his times, to become the centerpoint of the otherworld narrative. Maria's "temple" of the "lust of the eyes" and "the pride of life", "the innermost nook of the shrine", proves the ideal place for a Jamesian American to be. "The circle" in which Maria and Strether stand is "warm with life, and every question between them would live there as nowhere else" (III, ii, 80). Gostrey's chambers become a place of hermeneutic repose. There the vestiges of "Europe" cohere in her American interpretation. Strether experiences Gostrey's premises like a man at home with the stimuli of his sensations. Gostrey's domain "built him softly round ... roofed him warmly over ... rested, all so firm, on selection" (V, i, 344). For the final time, Strether marvels at this evidence of the past-consecrating European aesthetic sense. He terms Gostrey's place a "haunt of ancient peace" and she asks him to "treat it as a haven of rest". However, Strether cannot remain permanently with Gostrey; rather, he must put his Europeanized consciousness to use on American shores. He returns home the kind of American he perceived little Bilham to be -- an "intense American". Strether undergoes the very transitions that epitomize the social and cultural developments of his native country circa 1900.

James depicts America at a threshold: America engages the European past to equip itself to confront its future.

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