

HENRY JAMES'S *THE AMBASSADORS*: ANATOMY OF SILENCE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
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## Abstract

HENRY JAMES'S *THE AMBASSADORS*: ANATOMY OF SILENCE

by

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This dissertation examines the use of silence in Henry James's novel *The Ambassadors*. James uses silence rich in meaning to portray the protagonist Lewis Lambert Strether's unfolding consciousness. James creates different types of silences that reflect a shift from the spoken or written word to alternate symbol systems. James's novel perches on the threshold of modernity, as his work reflects the ideas of a line of thinkers extending back from James and his brother, William, to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Sampson Reed, and Emanuel Swedenborg. At the same time, the novel draws on the contemporary ideas of Charles Darwin, prefigures modern narrative techniques, and even anticipates such current neuroscience theorists as Gerald Edelman and Antonio Damasio. Chapter one is an overview which contextualizes the novel, considering its link to Emersonian thought as well as to William James's description of consciousness, theories of silence, and Darwin's examination of the development of language in *The Descent of Man* and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. Chapter two considers the remnants of language and symbol systems, with the silences, *language as thing*, *resonance*, and *syntax* explored. A close reading of the novel demonstrates the artificiality and concreteness of language, with James ultimately moving away from those remnants.

Chapter three incorporates the current field of acoustic communication with an analysis of *vagueness*, *impression*, and *charged silence* as Strether searches them for what Wallace Stevens would term the “unalterable vibration,” or meaning. Chapter four charts the movement to physical representations of Strether’s consciousness emerging in moments of what James calls “*responsive arrest*,” and Strether’s *awareness after a fact*, examined in relation to current work by Edelman and Damasio. Chapter five describes James’s movement to silences that reflect physical expression. *Gesture*, *meeting of eyes*, and *recognition* reflect an awareness of Darwin’s view of the development of language from its physical and gestural nature. James develops an alternative to articulated language that portrays Strether as an emerging modern figure whose consciousness is attained through silence.

**For Charles, Theresa, Cara, and Francesca**

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## Chapter One: Why Silence?

“Let us be silent, for so are the gods. Silence is a solvent that destroys personality, and gives us leave to be great and universal” (Emerson, *Intellect*, 419).

What is silence? Is it the absence of sound, or is it, as John Cage suggests in *Silence*, sound that is not notated? Does silence imply that meaning is wanting, or perhaps, instead, that there is a depth of meaning to be plumbed? Throughout the last century, silence has come to represent a number of things, from William James’s description of the mystical state of mind as “ineffable” (*The Varieties of Religious Experience* 380) to John Cage’s unnotated sounds, with many subtle variations between. Silence has implications not only for philosophers and musicians, but also for all who examine the origins and nature of language and expression.

In the fiction of Henry James, for example, silence is so rich with meaning that in *The Ambassadors*, a 1903 major phase novel, he uses a series of modes of silence to demonstrate the protagonist Lewis Lambert Strether’s unfolding consciousness, shifting from the spoken or written word to alternate symbol systems. In fact, when writing to James about his “Scene in America” in May 1907, William James critiques his style, saying his “account of america [sic] is largely one of its omissions, silences, vacancies” (*The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 3, 338). While acknowledging that the “core of literature is solid,” William James urges his brother to write in his former, more direct style. I contend, however, that it is precisely Henry James’s omissions, from Strether’s refusal to name “the article produced” (II, 1, 48) back home in Woollett, Massachusetts, to vague sensation, to interpretations of Chad Newsome’s gaze to arrive

at understanding, that signal James's movement to writing which reflects his contemplation of the workings of consciousness and the richness in silence. Since language can be manipulated, it cannot be fully trusted to express truths. For example, Strether redefines terms so that the situation comes to mirror the language used to describe it. Language becomes just another method of expression, along with silence and alternate symbol systems, but it is not a preferred method. Ruth Yeazell's captures the complexity of James's method when she observes "the subject of [Strether and Maria's] talk is talk itself" (69), and talking results in their reexamining and redefining terms. Strether comes to understand the term "virtuous attachment," used by Bilham to describe Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship (75-6), not through language, but through a form of non-linguistic perception. Initially trapped within the traditional definition of "virtue," Strether must escape it, arriving at a sense of the adulterous relationship as indeed virtuous. Yeazell characterizes Jamesian dialogue as cryptic, allowing for both character's and the reader's questioning motive and fact, and creating meaning (65). She calls truth as Maria Gostrey tells it "inseparable from her personal manipulation of it" (71). Therefore, in order to arrive at cognition, one must interpret and surpass words. James's movement to silence, in this text and elsewhere, incorporating physical gesture and expression, reflects a progression in the changing use of and thinking about language through the nineteenth century.

Heralding Modernism, with its more extreme representations of the working of the mind, such as stream of consciousness, James depicts consciousness. F.O. Matthiessen makes a distinction between James's method and that of some of his contemporaries and Modern novelists when he observes

[‘the stream of consciousness’] was used by William James in his *Principles of Psychology*, but in his brother’s novels there is none of the welling up of the darkly subconscious life that has characterized the novel since Freud. James’ novels are strictly novels of intelligence rather than of full consciousness. (23)

While Matthiessen’s distinction may appear contradictory to this argument, I contend that Strether does come to consciousness, not of his “subconscious” life, but of meanings, connections, and relationships. The plotting of the levels of awareness changes, however, through the course of his novels. As Sharon Cameron observes in *Thinking in Henry James*, “James’s attempts to reconceive consciousness are neither single nor continuous” (1). This assessment is both accurate and significant. Cameron equates “thinking” with “not speaking” in *The Golden Bowl*, and asserts that by creating this connection, James predicts “how the relations between speech and thought, between one consciousness and another, hence between consciousness and power, are to be discovered.” In doing so, he deduces “what might be called a grammar of the relation between thought and speech,” and attempts to “anatomize consciousness” (11). The term “anatomize” is particularly appropriate, as in the nineteenth century there was a growing awareness of the relationship of the mind to the body and physical world. In *The Wisdom of Words* Philip Gura explores an aspect of this growing awareness in describing the theories of “Swedenborgian mystics and transcendental idealists [who] claimed that innate correspondences existed between the worlds of matter and spirit” and considers “whether or not the roots of all languages, supposedly based in sensory experience, might not originate in the intuitive experience available to all men?” (9). Linking its origins to

sensory experience reshaped how writers thought about language. Similarly, the growing awareness of man's animal nature as presented by Charles Darwin, especially in *The Descent of Man*, resulted in an understanding of expression through gesture rather than spoken language. For those like James, spoken language began to lose its authority as alternate modes of expression and meaning were recognized.

Cameron's appraisal, taken in context with contemporary nineteenth-century theories and concerns, informs my analysis of *The Ambassadors*. The completion of *The Golden Bowl* in 1904 follows the publication of *The Ambassadors* by one year, and develops from the representation of consciousness in the preceding work. James's understanding of consciousness as exemplified in *The Ambassadors* becomes the foundation of his further fictional theorizing of it in *The Golden Bowl*. Cameron suggests that consciousness is used as an instrument of power in *The Golden Bowl*. In order to wield this instrument, a character must be aware of it as such. When Strether is first introduced, he is not sensible of the fullness of consciousness, and the complexities of its workings. That fullness reverberates in the silences that James crafts. In *The Ambassadors* James also attempts to "anatomize consciousness," but in a much more tangible way, depicting it, as William James describes, as an awareness of one's relations to "the larger objects of our thought" (*Principles of Psychology I*, 245). If the Swedenborgians and Transcendentalists were concerned with expressing spiritual truths, Henry James, as an emerging modern figure, was concerned with expressing truths about consciousness, which, by the late nineteenth century, was seen as underlying spirituality. He presents this relationship in many ways, from symbol to syntax; among the ways is silence.

Just as there are many stages in William James's sense of unfolding consciousness, there are many different types of silence depicted by his brother. The kinds of silence range from information withheld between speakers in the text and information withheld from the reader, suggesting an absence or omission, to silence regarded as a positive phenomenon. This latter kind of silence is described by Bernard P. Dauenhauer in *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance*. As he observes, "Discourse arises within the broad range of experience by virtue of silence, expands in its several types and by virtue of silence, and culminates as a unitary domain by virtue of silence. In its unfolding, in turn, discourse makes it possible for silence to appear as senseful." As a "positive, senseful phenomenon," (77) an originary point of expression, silence modifies experience. Henry James makes use of a number of different positive silences, each with a nuance suggesting a fine distinction in emerging consciousness. But before discussing how consciousness is represented in James's nuanced silences, I would like to consider the subtleties of silence as suggested by others, working within the same traditions, if not the same moment, as James. One of the sources on which I shall draw in anatomizing James's silences is John Cage's collection of lectures and essays, *Silence*, compiled in its complete form in 1961. As both a work of art and an articulation of philosophy, it follows in some of the same theoretical traditions as James does, presenting silence concretely. For example, in his "Lecture on Nothing," Cage addresses the relationship between sound and silence, saying, "words make help make the silences" (109) (sic). While this seems to be in contrast with Dauenhauer's above-cited comment about discourse arising from silence, what is significant about both is the acknowledgment of the interrelationship of the two.

Cage's placement of the words on the page, moreover, emphasizes their codependence, as space, or silence, encroaches where one would expect to see words.<sup>1</sup> Silence takes form in James's writing as well, as will be explored in great depth in the following chapters.

Additionally, in "Experimental Music: Doctrine," when Cage addresses the perceived oppositions of sound and silence, his language is reminiscent of Ralph Waldo Emerson's. Cage writes, "If, at this point, one says, 'Yes! I do not discriminate between intention and non-intention,' the splits, subject-object, art-life, etc., disappear, an identification has been made with the material" (14). The reconciliation of opposites he suggests recalls Emerson's discussion of intellect in his essay "Intellect." There Emerson warns against the "detachment" of the intellect from its works, saying instead that it must have "the same wholeness which nature has" (425). Cage's identification with the material, and Emerson's separation of "the fact considered from *you*" (417) indicate arriving at truth, which could otherwise be lost or muddled.

Emerson writes, "Happy is the hearing man; unhappy the speaking. As long as I hear truth, I am bathed by a beautiful element, and am not conscious of any limits to my nature" (426). He is "hearing" truth literally from "the eloquent man" in whom "it seems something the less to reside" and metaphorically when he sees "the world reappear

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<sup>1</sup> A similar technique is used by Stéphane Mallarmé in his 1897 poem *Un Coup de Dés*, in which, according to Henry Weinfield, "one can picture the Master (seaman or poet), from the wreckage of experience, of phenomena, attempting, as by a leap of faith, to create an ordered world of some kind; such an attempt, however, must itself be governed by contingency" (266). The arrangement on the page, words spaced in a non-uniform pattern, allows the " 'blanks' " to "assume importance," according to Mallarmé's Preface to the poem (121). Additionally, the differences in type face and size privilege words which express contingency, such as, of course, the title, "A Throw of the Dice," the qualitative phrase "THOUGH IT BE," the repetition at the top and bottom of the page of "*AS IF*," and the enlarged single word "CHANCE." The technique and ostensible subject of the poem, a shipwreck, underscore the loss of order in the modern world and the attempts of the artist to restore it through manipulation of language and form, just as James does as he synthesizes modern philosophical and artistic concerns in his work.

in miniature in every event” (425). Emerson’s sense of hearing truth here correlates with that of with Sampson Reed, the Swedenborgian scholar whose aesthetics had a direct influence on Emerson. In “Growth of the Mind,” Reed writes

There is a language, not of words, but of things. When this language shall have been made apparent, that which is human will have answered its end; and being as it were resolved into its original elements, will lose itself in nature. . . .It is because we are unwilling to hear, that we find it necessary to say so much; and we drown the voice of nature with the discordant jargon of ten thousand dialects. (33)

Emerson’s and Reed’s work arise from the same foundation even though Reed’s work clearly connects to Swedenborgian religion and Emerson’s branches off into the more secular philosophy of Transcendentalism. Emerson is said to have “turned *Growth of the Mind* into a manifesto for himself, deriving from it the philosophic perspective that would permeate all his writing—the Swedenborgian concept of the correspondence between nature and spirit” (Shaw ii). Each addresses the distance from truth that is created under the cover of words.

For Henry James’s protagonist Strether, the truth can only be heard once the words are gone; in many instances in *The Ambassadors*, words serve to separate one from truth. Strether arrives at “wholeness” or truth, here represented as consciousness, only when he operates in silence. The language no longer distances Strether from truth as it did when he was made to interpret Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s “virtuous attachment.” In fact, while not presented in this exact context, the following passage, to some degree, illustrates this point. Relatively early in their encounter, Strether questions

Chad Newsome, the young man he has been assigned to bring back to Massachusetts, about what has kept him in Europe. Chad responds quite vociferously “Do you think one’s kept only by women?” This catches a rather staid Strether off guard, as “[Chad’s] surprise and his verbal emphasis rang out so clear in the still street that Strether winced till he remembered the safety of their English speech” (101). This, of course, refers to their being in Paris, where most bystanders would not necessarily understand their conversation. It is analogous, however, to words masking truth; Chad is indeed misleading Strether with his question. It is not until Strether transcends language and arrives at what Emerson calls a “universal language” that he can understand the truth. Strether begins to approach and recognize this state when he lunches with Madame de Vionnet, following their chance meeting at Notre Dame. In this scene, Strether feels that he has “traveled far” from his first night in London, when he required explanations. In Paris with Madame de Vionnet, “he had either soared above or sunk below [explanations]” and “saw reasons enough in the mere way the bright clean ordered water-side life came in at the open window.” Granted, Strether has still not arrived at consciousness as he is still misreading the relationship, but his consciousness is, as Emerson might suggest, “unfolding.” Strether is getting closer to Emerson’s sense of the “wholeness” of nature, especially as “proverbs sounded for his memory, in the tone of their words and the clink of their glasses, in the hum of the town and the splash of the river” (177). While ostensibly paradoxical, there are ways other than language to arrive at truth, or consciousness, in *The Ambassadors*. I will address this movement more thoroughly in Chapter 3, tracing a line of thinking which connects Emerson back to Emanuel Swedenborg through Sampson Reed, and forward to William James. While I

am not the first to make this connection, I shall demonstrate how Henry James translates theory into fiction.

The movement away from words returns us to silence, whose characteristics I shall now consider more fully. Bernard P. Dauenhauer, cited above, analyzes the subject of silence thoroughly. He categorizes different types of silence and considers the role of silence in discourse. Significant is Dauenhauer's argument that "the domain of discourse is widely experienced as either insufficient or incomplete, as unable to cope definitively with God, or with immediate perceptual experience, or with what it is to be a self, or with love, etc." (75). Identifying silence as an "act rather than a spontaneous performance" clearly likens the role of silence to, if not privileges it over, discourse, and implies deliberate intent. Silence assumes comparable weight in *The Ambassadors*. Dauenhauer categorizes silence as a "cut" in discourse, and as such shapes discourse and the relationship between "perceptual and predicative" experiences (82). By identifying silence as a "cut," Dauenhauer is not suggesting emptiness. Quite the contrary; he explains, "Discourse arises within the broad range of experience by virtue of silence, expands in its several types and shapes by virtue of silence, and culminates as a unitary domain by virtue of silence. In its unfolding, in turn, discourse makes it possible for silence to appear as senseful" (77). Even the silence he classifies as "terminal" silence does not end discourse; in fact, it reveals the limits of discourse and allows for subsequent, changed discourse (76). Dauenhauer's use of the term "unfolding" recalls Emerson's sense of "all our progress [as] an unfolding" (419). The interplay of silence and discourse and sense experience and thought mirrors the interplay of Strether's

consciousness and the world, from which he shapes meaning and ultimately finds expression through alternative modes.

While Sharon Cameron's analysis in *Thinking in Henry James*, addresses the role of thought and its connection to speech in many of James's works, *The Ambassadors* is not among them. In her discussions of *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove* she introduces concepts that invite elaboration. Cameron suggests that in *The Golden Bowl* James blurs distinctions between speech and thinking, and speech, called empty, must be "seen through." Meaning is ultimately "projected *onto* another" (109) as Maggie controls how much of her knowledge of his adultery she will reveal to Amerigo. By contrast, thinking in *The Wings of the Dove* is equated with looking; Milly Theale sees a thought and is then given words, or meaning for it. Cameron cites the scene in which Milly looks at the Bronzino portrait and sees herself in the image of the lady; the reflection "inspires . . . the thought of death" (129). The power equated with thought in each case is expressed in silence; I contend that silence has similar weight in *The Ambassadors*, with the emphasis on Strether's growing awareness. Silence is a positive phenomenon, a means for Strether to come to consciousness, not yet manipulate it. Again, the dating of the publication of the texts, beginning with *Wings* in 1902, followed by *The Ambassadors* in 1903, and finally *The Golden Bowl* in 1904 suggests that a progression or unfolding occurs.

Similarly, John Auchard introduces his analysis of James's work with the observation, "In James's fiction, vitality often derives from the force of silence. . . . Language itself becomes anti-language, and silence—not merely dumb tribute to the incommunicability of things—becomes charged expression and the major force of human

action” (8). Again, *The Ambassadors* is omitted from the discussion, but Auchard’s account of the purpose and effect of silence in *Wings* and *The Golden Bowl* magnificently captures James’s subtleties and movements within silence. Auchard characterizes the silence in *Wings* as approaching “the transcendence of the religious consciousness” (87), and in *The Golden Bowl* as “Opposed to the impulses of the flesh and even the spirit, silence means nothing so much as control” (149). This reading parallels Cameron’s sense of thinking, but again, does not account for the bridging silence that *The Ambassadors* provides. As Auchard notes, in *The Golden Bowl* James “offers a compromise. He presents, translated into words, the potential for dignity, for vitality, of a language of silence which might work to rejoin the pieces of a rapidly fragmenting world” (151). I agree with Auchard’s assessment, but maintain that Strether’s coming to consciousness about a fragmenting world, a falling away from the spiritual values, or even social mores that once held, characterized by Bilham’s “virtuous attachment,” must be accounted for in silence before an imposition or recreation of meaning is possible as suggested through the patterns and events in *The Golden Bowl*. *The Ambassadors* ends with Strether’s recognition and decision to return home, but he is unsure what he will do when he is there. He is, as he tells Maria, afraid of and “done” with ideas. He clearly is not prepared to use the language of silence he has discovered to control or enact change on others. The silence here provides a space for Strether to define himself in relation to a world which has shifted morally for him. The progression of these three texts parallels the progression of thought in the nineteenth century, away from the spiritual or mystical to an awareness of the physical, and ultimately to the psychological as emerging from the physical. Depicting the use of silence in *The Ambassadors* as a bridge between the two

other major phase novels establishes this text as illustrative of emerging nineteenth century theories, specifically the understanding of psychology with a physical basis, as presented by William James, and the awareness of man's animal nature and its relationship to expression, uncovered by Charles Darwin. The use of silence for expression will suggest the connection of mind and body, which emerges as significant scientific theory in the years to follow Henry James's writing.

A text exploring James's presentation of Strether as one of several characters who "end up as unusually excellent examples of human nature, or of 'fine consciousness'" (2) is Courtney Johnson, Jr.'s *Henry James and the Evolution of Consciousness*. Johnson also considers *The Ambassadors* through the seemingly disparate lenses of science and philosophy; the fields he explores, however, are unified field theory and meditation. Just as my work considers the concept of "wholeness" in the tradition of Swedenborg and Emerson as a starting point for Strether's consciousness, Johnson considers unity, ending with what he calls the "unified consciousness," which is arrived at through a "sufficient number of experiences of moving into and out of transcendental consciousness," which entail moving from the inactive, silent consciousness to the active, noisy consciousness of everyday living until "the conditions of that transcendent consciousness will persist and become dominant in the person or literary character during everyday life" (16). This process is later connected to the concept of a unified field theory of physics. In the unified field theory, all physical phenomena are explained by underlying unity. While Johnson's analysis resembles that being presented here in considering the relationship between science and philosophy, the silence Johnson addresses is "an immobility, a sense of completion, and a harmony with nature or the environment" (43). In Johnson's

analysis, Strether arrives at stability; it will be demonstrated here that rather than stability, Strether attains an *active* silence that comprises various means of expression and is tantamount to consciousness. Developments in scientific thought have implications for language as well. Just as Johnson sees physics underlying the presentation of character, Gillian Beer sees wave theory as underlying changes in language. Beer cites William James's *The Meaning of Truth*, written in 1904 and roughly corresponding with the composition of *The Ambassadors*: “ ‘Our mind has become tolerant of symbol instead of reproduction, of approximation instead of exactness, of plasticity instead of rigor.’ ” She agrees with William James's estimation, “we find a heightened awareness of the instability of language, certainly, and also—more strikingly—of the insufficiency of symbol and of algebra” (*Wave Theory* 199). This is tied into an understanding of the “relativity of knowledge” which Beer claims is “absolutely necessary to the emergence of modernism” (200). As the sense of an objective reality is replaced by an understanding of the relativity of the universe and perception, so too, must the symbol be replaced as an attempt to capture it. One cannot capture what is relative in language. Silence, as one method of expression among others in modernism, replaces the insufficient symbols previously used.

William James explicitly addresses language's insufficiency when he states in *The Principles of Psychology*, “language works against our perception of the truth. We name our thoughts simply, each after its thing, as if each knew its own thing and nothing else. What each really knows is clearly the thing it is named for, with dimly perhaps a thousand other things” (I, 241). Here James is discussing an awareness of thunder; his explanation forecasts the relationship that John Cage expresses between silence and

sound. James suggests that the term thunder is not sufficient to capture a sense of what that thunder is, i.e. “thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-with-it.” The thunder, or a thought, must be considered in light of its transitions as well, with William James calling that transition “no more a break in the *thought* than a joint in a bamboo is a break in the wood” (I, 240). Although William James describes this phenomenon metaphorically, Henry James circumvents this literary device in favor of silence, as the consciousness cannot be captured even through metaphor.

While the impact of William James’s thinking on Henry James’s fiction will be explored in greater depth in later chapters, it is significant to note here his depiction of the very physical nature of consciousness. As noted above, he writes of consciousness as awareness of the relation of the self to objects of thought, and argues that “the relations are numberless, and no existing language is capable of doing justice to all their shades” (I, 245). Before one can arrive at this stage, however, sensation must be experienced because “Sensations. . . first make us acquainted with innumerable things, and then are replaced by thoughts . . . sensations are *first* things in the way of consciousness” and both are preceded by nerve-current (II, 6). A major plot and thematic development in *The Ambassadors* is the moment that Strether first meets Chad. Strether is in a box at The Theatre de Comedie Francaise with Maria, discussing how the state of affairs is progressing. Chad, unknown to Strether, enters their box. As Strether faces Chad, he experiences a stage in the development of his consciousness, preceded by sensation. The vignette is introduced and concluded with reference to sensation; it opens with Strether’s “sense” of how Maria was always paying and being paid (85). It closes with his recognition of Chad and the observation that “his perception of the young man’s identity .

. . . had been quite one of the sensations that count in life; he certainly had never known one that had acted, as he might have said, with more of a crowded rush. And the rush, though both vague and multitudinous, had lasted a long time, protected, as it were, yet at the same time aggravated, by the circumstance of its coinciding with a stretch of decorous silence” (89). This significant moment illustrates what William James describes. The very physical presence of relations and knowledge is captured through Strether’s recognition of Chad, with all its reverberations. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, which will be discussed more fully in chapter 5, *Naturalized Silence*, Darwin writes, “the principle of the direct action of the sensorium on the body, due to the constitution of the nervous system, and from the first independent of the will, has been highly influential in determining many expressions” (81). It is in the moment of “decorous silence” that Strether becomes conscious of “lingering rearrangement” and emerging meaning, so that ultimately sensation and silence together create expression.

It is at moments such as the above that Strether begins to become aware of his place in a larger system. It is within this system that he must ultimately develop a self, or individual consciousness, and then must express it. Consciousness and its expression can be viewed through a Darwinian lens. George Levine observes that Sally Shuttleworth, in her 1984 text *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*,

shows that uniformitarian thought was allied to a conception of the self as unified and continuous, and thus to important elements of characterization and narrative form; she shows also that the psychology based on evolutionary biology introduces elements of discontinuity that in turn led

to revised notions of the self, and consequently of character in fiction, and of course of the way narratives move and are resolved. (*Darwin and the Novelists* 7)

Strether's development reflects these "elements of discontinuity." The sense of self he has when the text opens is challenged by his encounters and experiences, and then undergoes revision, so that by the end, he possesses a conscious self. William James addresses the continuity of consciousness in *Principles of Psychology* when he writes that despite felt gaps in consciousness, it remains "sensibly continuous and one" and "does not appear to itself chopped up in bits" (I, 238-9), hence his naming it the stream of thought. He then refers to the "common whole" as "*myself, I, or me.*" It is a sense of "I" that Strether must develop in relation to his awareness of consciousness in the course of the novel; Henry James's narrative flow reflects its emergence, including what might be called "gaps in consciousness." For example, after Strether's encounter with Chad and Madame de Vionnet on his ride to the countryside, Strether finally becomes fully aware of the nature of their relationship. James presents Strether's analysis of the situation upon his return home. At that point, "He then knew more or less how he had been affected—he but half knew at the time" (311). The sentence itself is divided, as is Strether's knowledge, and presumably, his sense of "I." As Strether relives the encounter in his mind, he examines what had been said in his presence, and speculates about what passed between Chad and Madame de Vionnet in order to keep up the appearance that they had planned to return home themselves at the end of the day. The narrative moves back and forth from Strether's revelation, to his speculations, to his earlier misreading.

He recognizes those gaps in consciousness, and their final resolution as he comes to awareness and develops a new social, moral and conscious sense of “I”.

The theory of evolution, while faced by resistance, transformed, and continues to transform, every discipline. In *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin explicitly addresses the subject of psychology and the mind, saying “in the distant future I see open fields for far more important researches. Psychology will be based on a new foundation, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation. . . . all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection” (488-9). The human mind, then, develops according to the same pattern of natural selection and adaptation as what had been seen as the purely corporeal. In their paper “Evolutionary Psychology: A Primer,” Leda Cosmides and John Tooby connect this thinking to William James’s observation in *Principles of Psychology* that man has more instincts than other animals, but tends to be blind towards them “because they work so well” (1), disputing the distinction made between man and other animals because of the ability to reason. They argue, in keeping with James, that there is no dichotomy between instinct and reasoning or innate and learned behavior; instead, genes are seen as “simply regulatory elements” which give rise to psychological behaviors which are adaptive in nature. James examines the relationship between the physical and the psychological in *Principles*, writing “In other words, however numerous and delicately differentiated the train of ideas may be, the train of brain-events that runs alongside of it must in both respects be exactly its match, and we must postulate a neural machinery that offers a living counterpart for every shading, however fine, of the history of its owner’s mind” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 128). In an unpublished article, Jonathan Schull examines the relationship

of Darwin's and William James's concepts, noting that James defines consciousness as "primarily a *selecting agency*" (I, 139), which clearly connects James's thinking to Darwinian theory (Schull 6). Henry James recognized Darwin's impact on psychology when he created in Strether a figure whose developing consciousness reflects the interaction of the physical and psychological, and how this interaction is rendered through modes of expression. Robert Richards calls William James's notion of the mind one

rest[ing] on Darwinian principles. The mind comes already outfitted with fixed sensory and emotional responses, instinctive reactions, and basic rational abilities; these constitute our evolutionary history. But the acquisition of new ideas is also Darwinian: spontaneous hypotheses, guesses, notions, etc., erupt in our pedestrian and scientific encounters with the world; those that survive the pitiless forces of reality live for another day. (417)

Strether's mind evolves according to the model Richards describes. Prior to his encounter with Chad and Madame de Vionnet, Strether responds to his environment in his customary way, that is, with his fixed sensory and emotional response; Strether is one who, in a sense, must survive in the environment of Woollett among and under the influence of Mrs. Newsome and her associates. It is not until he becomes receptive to the new milieu in which he finds himself that he begins to develop new ideas and, ultimately consciousness, which is continually in the act of becoming.

The reader observes Strether's actions in relation to how aware he becomes of his surroundings and reaction to them. He comes to confront a new environment with which

he must negotiate and to which he must adapt, and encounters new ideas, which become tantamount to his needing to solve moral and social issues in an adaptive way. The reader watches Strether's development, while he is not necessarily aware of what is happening in terms of his consciousness; remember that the process is not articulated in language for him. Ultimately, the reader is compelled to consider how language and expression are presented through his developing character; if details are not spoken, they must be conveyed in an alternative way in order to further the adaptation of the consciousness. The examination of James's methods in subsequent chapters will reflect George Levine's observation that

Darwinian science had an impact on natural theology, and in the process nature, society, narrative, and language itself were desacralized, severed from the inherent significance, value, and meaning of a divinely created and designed world. The Darwinian quest for origins was the signal and the authoritatively scientific means by which fact was severed from meaning and value, 'presence' became absence, and the world had to be reconstituted not from divine inheritance but from arbitrary acts of human will. (viii)

This is a particularly striking passage from which to consider Strether's developing consciousness. For Strether, presence does indeed become absence; to simplify, Strether's world is upturned. He abandons what he had set out to do, bring Chad back to the United States, because the social and moral system under which he operated no longer has meaning for him. Just as he begins to see Chad and Madame de Vionnet's

relationship as a “virtuous attachment,” thereby reexamining meaning, Strether reexamines values, which were, of course, a part of his sense of social order.

Strether’s emergent consciousness requires some method of articulation. Darwin writes of expression developed through habit. He equates language and gesture, observing “conventional expressions or gestures, acquired by the individual during early life, would probably have differed in the different races, in the same manner as do their languages” (*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 15). Additionally, these expressions and gestures appear to have developed in the same way, through sensory stimulus, and also through habit, which “played a large part in [the voice’s] employment” (84). William James addresses the role of habit in consciousness and expression via Darwin, calling living creatures “bundles of habits,” with some of those habits instinctual, resulting in “concatenated discharges in the nerve-centres, due to the presence there of systems of reflex paths” (I, 108). However, James does not deem consciousness mere habit; on the contrary, he writes “Consciousness, for example, is only intense when nerve-processes are hesitant. In rapid, automatic, habitual action it sinks to a minimum. Nothing could be more fitting than this, if consciousness have the teleological function we suppose; nothing more meaningless, if not” (I, 142). Hence one can see the development of James’s sense of the stream of thought, with its development of consciousness appearing in the alternation of substantive and transitive parts, with the substantive, or resting-places, occupied by “sensorial imaginations of some sort” and the transitive, or places of flight, “filled with thoughts of relations” with its goal “the attainment of some other substantive part,” consciousness (I, 243). The connection of sensation to consciousness is furthered to expression, as James likens its rhythm to that of

language, through which thoughts are expressed in sentences and “resting-places are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations.” This, then, brings us to Henry James’s representation of the process of coming to consciousness and its expression through the character of Lambert Strether, whose development must be conveyed through the writer’s tool, language. Just as habit has a physiological basis, so, too, has expression, whether it is articulated or gestural. Darwin’s project in *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* was to discover how habits “now rendered innate” had been acquired as “each expression demanded a rational explanation” (19). It will be demonstrated that in *The Ambassadors*, Strether, though not consciously, appears to require a rational explanation for each expression. For example, he must interpret deliberate verbal ambiguities, as when Bilham describes Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s relationship as a “virtuous attachment;” he must interpret his “impressions” and “ask himself soon afterwards . . . what had really happened” (137) when Maria Gostrey seems to abandon him after he misreads Chad’s relationship with Jeanne de Vionnet. The only way for him to decode the expression and communication of which he is in the midst is to step outside of it, and recognize alternative forms of expression. Strether is approaching unmediated consciousness; to do so, he must transcend the boundaries imposed by the social construction of language. In fact, Bernard Dauenhauer suggests that “a certain kind of silence is a necessary condition for any expression whatsoever” because “unless perception had occurred there would be nothing to express” (58-9). As the reader watches Strether, he steps away from discourse, and through various alternative modes, confronts meanings. This involves pausing, perching, interpreting impressions, facing meaning as well as those who present it and their method of presentation, among many

other methods. When he recognizes the need for and validity of approaching meaning, he becomes conscious of his consciousness, returning to “the same wholeness which nature has,” becoming part of the pattern of discourse and silence, meaning and interpretation. Articulated language is, as noted above, suggested through its use and absence as less than satisfactory. Its insufficiency is based on an understanding of language described by William James. In the “Stream of Thought” chapter of *The Principles of Psychology*, James addresses the relationship between thought and its expression, calling human speech “*signs of direction* in thought.” In James, speech is not unalterably linked with meaning. In fact, he observes “the relative unimportance of the means appears from the fact that when the conclusion is there, we are rarely able a moment afterwards to recall our exact words, though we can express it in different words easily enough” (I, 260). Speech’s lack of definitiveness can be considered in Darwinian terms. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin locates the origin of language in “the imitation and modification of various natural sounds, the voices of other animals, and man’s own instinctive cries, aided by signs and gestures” in a non-deliberate way; “it has been slowly and unconsciously developed by many steps” (379-380). Darwin’s sense of language mirrors his sense of human development: words, too, emerge as a result of natural selection culminating in “the survival or preservation of certain favoured words” (385). Darwin’s depiction of language reappears in William James’s description of the mind’s focusing on things, or the substantive points of language. James calls these moments of attention, saying the mind “selects again” from among “certain of the sensations to represent the thing most truly, and considers the rest as its appearances, modified by the conditions of the moment” (I, 285). Modification by momentary conditions reminds one of the above-

noted description of William James's sense of the "great man" who both modifies and is modified by his environment. It is clear that natural selection is applicable to virtually all aspects of human existence, from psychological development to social development to the creation of a shared language.

An intrinsic characteristic of natural selection is accidental variation. If words are selected just as physical characteristics of humans, at times without clear or concrete explanation, why not then spoken language as a variant of other possible modes of communication? When Henry James employs silence, it is, again, not an empty silence, but one filled with potential energy of expression, a variant of articulated language. After all, as Darwin suggests, "every language has to be learnt" despite humans' "instinctive tendency to speak" (*Descent of Man* 379). The selection of language suggests a relationship between the development of reasoning abilities and the development of the brain. Just as "the greater number of the more complex instincts appear to have been gained in a wholly different manner, through the natural selection of variations of simpler instinctive actions," so too are reasoning and language developed. The similarities in Darwin's and James's vocabularies are striking: both, of course, speak of variation, and both attribute the "intellectual progress of man" (Darwin, *Descent of Man* 363) to attention.

Gerald Edelman, a contemporary neuroscientist who sets out "to describe a biological theory of how we come to have minds" (1) examines the physical matter, the brain that underlies mind, which is applicable to a discussion of silence as communication and Strether's coming to consciousness. Edelman describes the emergence of consciousness, calling language a function of "higher-order consciousness"

which “requires the continued operation of the structures serving primary consciousness” and involves the ability “to construct a socially based selfhood, to model the world in terms of the past and the future, and to be directly aware. Without a symbolic memory, these abilities cannot develop” (125). A connection between the evolution of the brain, consciousness, and speech emerges. Strether has, of course, “the evolutionary acquisition of the capability for language,” but comes to construct a “socially based selfhood,” one that he sees as “right,” only once he has come to read what is communicated beyond language.

What is interesting is the connection between the more abstract concept of mind and the physical matter of the brain ; the evolutionary development of Strether’s consciousness anticipates the evolutionary sense of the mind and brain . As Eugene Taylor suggests in his discussion of William James’s analysis of the mind/body problem, James “maintained that while science had set the stage for a more sophisticated handling of the problem, the very presuppositions of science were being called to account by the analysis. This meant for [William] James that one place to look for a solution was beyond language, but nevertheless within the realm of experience” (4). Henry James, seeming to have this sense already, has Strether evolve through experience; in “Project of the Novel,” Henry James addresses Strether’s consciousness which emerges in the midst of “sensations, impressions, a whole inert or dormant world of feeling or side of life” (556), terms used by William James in *Principles of Psychology*. Of course, much of Strether’s development is dependent upon his interaction with and observation of Chad, whose character acquires metaphoric value. James says that “Chad’s case becomes for him a concrete case in a kind of big general question that his actual experience keeps

more and more putting to him” (560). While Strether does not experience what Chad does, his observations and growing awareness become *his* experience. Strether becomes “conscious of his evolution; he likes it—wouldn’t for the world not have had it; albeit that he fully sees how fatal, in a manner, it has been for him” (*Project of the Novel*, 568). James deems Strether’s evolution “fatal” because he is no longer the Strether who started out from Woollett, and cannot, in good conscience or consciousness, perform the task for which he had been sent. Ultimately, according to James, Strether “does his best to get, as it were, into relation. He sees and understands, and such is the force in him of his alien and awkward tradition, that he has, almost like a gasping spectator at a thrilling play, to *see* himself see and understand” (572). This is the “relation of the mind to other things” that William James describes; it is a negotiation that will be addressed more specifically in the analysis following which traces how Henry James employs particular silences in the text of *The Ambassadors*.

Significant, as well, is how Strether’s negotiation relates to William James’s sense of the social evolution of man, as presented in “Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment.” While Strether is not drawn as a “great man” *per se*, his development mirrors that of the great man whose environment “*selects* him. And whenever it adopts and preserves the great man, it becomes modified by his influence in an entirely original and peculiar way” (5). Schull also notes the connection of James’s sense of social selection and Darwinian philosophy (4). James addresses this further in *The Principles of Psychology* when he again uses Darwinian concepts to describe the relationship between the mind and the brain: “Every scientific conception is in the first instance a ‘spontaneous variation’ in someone’s brain. For one that proves useful and applicable there are a

thousand that perish through their worthlessness” (II, 636). Robert J. Richards explains the process succinctly when presenting “William James’s Psychological and Moral Uses of Darwinian Theory,” saying “the mind comes already outfitted with fixed sensory and emotional responses, instinctive reactions, and basic rational abilities; these constitute our evolutionary legacy” (417). As such, the mind is separate from but dependent upon the physical structure of the brain which provides the framework for response. Richards further discusses James’s description of the material, social, and spiritual selves “as the inherited products of a long evolutionary history” (420). He cites James in *The Principles*, (I, 324): “All minds must have come, by the way of the survival of the fittest, if by no directer path, to take an intense interest in the bodies to which they are yoked, altogether apart from any interest in the pure Ego which they also possess.” This description is reminiscent of the depiction of the “great man” who is both influenced by and influences his environment. The mind experiences attention and selection; Strether’s changes in response to Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s relationship, Maria Gostrey, Bilham, and Paris are paradigmatic of physical, psychological, and social evolution, realized without verbalization. As Strether negotiates his way through his new environment, his consciousness undergoes discrete moments of development, communicated to both the reader and other characters through a series of silences. The silences allow for a range of communication which bypasses language in favor of alternate modes which may capture the perception more adequately. In *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire* Edelman addresses the role of the body-brain and the environment in creating cognitive models. According to Lakoff, “cognitive models involve conceptual embodiment and . . .conceptual embodiment occurs through bodily activities *prior to*

*language*” (246). This contemporary understanding of the brain and the mind mirrors Strether’s development. Edelman concludes that “gestalts, mental images, bodily movements, and the organization of knowledge must all to some degree be the result of evolutionary and developmental constraints” with the “bases for truth and knowledge com[ing] from” the “conceptual apparatus contained in real brains,” which are “symbol manipulator[s]” (239). If, as Edelman says, “the appraisal of meaning and truth comes from this path. . . . the mind is not transcendental. There is no God’s eye view of the world” (241), the mind arises from its physical foundation.

In *Descartes’ Error*, Antonio Damasio, who praises William James’s assessment of the connection between emotion and its physical foundation, describes the process by which he sees subjectivity, “a key feature of consciousness” (236), emerge. This “arises out of the content of the third kind of image,” namely, the image of an object in relation to the organism’s response to the object. Here, of course, Damasio connects the sensory body and the more abstract concept of mind. From the state of subjectivity, a “nonverbal narrative document of what is happening to those protagonists . . . can be accomplished without language” (243). Humans have what Damasio terms a “refined form of subjectivity” within which language provides the ability for a “second order narrative,” resulting not in what Damasio calls “the self,” but the “I.”<sup>2</sup>

Strether’s consciousness develops in this fashion; the reader witnesses his mind “forming neural representations which can become images, be manipulated in a process called thought, and eventually influence behavior by helping predict the future, plan

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<sup>2</sup> The “refined subjectivity” within language can be seen in the opening of Thoreau’s *Walden*, in which the pronoun “I” is used 19 times in the first two paragraphs. Thoreau employs the first person narrative because “I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well” (325). Thoreau has clearly established a sense of subjectivity in relation to what he terms, “the narrowness of my experience.”

accordingly, and choose the next action” (Damasio 90). This happens for Strether wordlessly, images and impressions are nonverbally translated as his sense of self is being redefined in relation to his stimuli. This is exemplified in the following, and final, exchange between Strether and Maria Gostrey, when he tells her he is returning to America and Mrs. Newsome. Strether tells Maria that Mrs. Newsome has not changed, but “I do what I didn’t before—I *see* her.” Of course, this is in the metaphoric sense of seeing, a creation in the mind. Their conversation continues:

“I know. I know. But all the same I must go.” He had got it at last.

“To be right.”

“To be right?”

She had echoed it in vague deprecation, but he felt it already clear for her. “That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself.”

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

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

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

“That’s the way that—if I must go—you yourself would be the first to want me. And I can’t do anything else.” (345)

The above illustrates Strether’s development. He can form images, engage in a process of thought, and plan accordingly. All this is done without James stating it explicitly to

the reader or Strether stating it to Maria. Maria's evocation of Strether's "impressions" is reminiscent of language used by William James; so too is Strether's desire "to be right," which is the result of following one's instinct. William James writes "every impulse and every step of every instinct shines with its own sufficient light, and seems at the moment the only eternally right and proper thing to do" (*Principles of Psychology* II, 387). After negotiating his environment and relations to others, Strether can successfully read or interpret the relation of his mind to others, and envision the result of his actions.

Additionally, Maria's depiction as "honest and fine" seems to contradict Strether's comment that it is she who would make him wrong. The paradox exemplifies the limitations of spoken language as Maria, too, acknowledges this statement as a truth. Now Strether can be "right;" he can reach understanding and a moral, as well as conscious, sense of self, one not defined by language and meaning externally imposed.

In fact, just prior to this encounter he pleads with Maria "in various suggestive and unspoken ways for patience and understanding" (342). He has achieved consciousness. Before this, even with language Strether could not read situations or people. Edelman describes higher-order consciousness as "an inner life," which is highly individual and tied to affect and reward, "based on the emergence of language in a speech community" (133). Language, with grammar and syntax, can only emerge once the brain has "reentrant structures that allow semantics to emerge *first*" (130). Therefore, it would appear that this allows for an alternative to spoken language to emerge, for example, James's grammar of silence. If, as William James says "no existing language is capable of doing justice" to all the relations we "feel to exist between the larger objects of our

thought,” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 245) what will? Henry James suggests a number of ways.

James’s grammar chronicles Strether’s development as it unfolds. Neither Strether’s development nor James’s depiction follows a linear path. Strether’s consciousness emerges through the shifting uses and awareness of silence, beginning with symbol and ending with recognition, mirroring Emerson’s sense that “all our progress is an unfolding, like the vegetable bud. You have first an instinct, then an opinion, then a knowledge, as the plant has root, bud, and fruit” (419). James’s portrayal falls within the line of thinking that extends from Goethe, through Emerson, to Alfred North Whitehead. Goethe writes of a sense of “evolution toward a state of perfection [which] is the goal of intensification. . . Driven by inner forces and outer environment, it changes in a spiraling cycle” (Miller, *Goethe: Scientific Studies* xiii). Perfection in humankind mirrors that in all of nature, as Goethe asserts “Nothing happens in living nature that does not bear some relation to the whole. . . All things in nature. . . work incessantly upon one another” (15-16). Similarly, Whitehead depicts the wholeness of the universe. In *Science and Philosophy*, he presents mental cognition as “the reflective experience of a totality, reporting for itself what it is in itself as one unit occurrence” (148). While he calls consciousness the “function of knowing,” he qualifies it, calling “what is known . . . a prehension of aspects of the one real universe. These aspects are aspects of other events as mutually modifying, each the others” (151). James is clearly part of a philosophical line which understands consciousness within a larger organic system, arrived at through an evolutionary process, mirroring the natural world of which it is a part. James’s grammar reflects a different type of silence for each stage of

emergent consciousness. For discussion purposes, these modes of silence will be grouped in like categories within each chapter.

The first grouping includes those with residual associations with language and sound. In the mode labeled *language as thing*, for example, the reader witnessing Strether's reaction, learns that he receives a telegram, but not what it says. The reader is thereby presented with a level of meaning, if not language. The written and spoken word does, at times, take on physical presence, becoming the "terministic bridge" described in Kenneth Burke's discussion of Emerson. In his essay "I, Eye, Ay—Concerning Emerson's Early Essay on 'Nature,' and the Machinery of Transcendence," Burke defines transcendence as the 'building of a *terministic bridge* whereby one realm is *transcended* by being viewed *in terms of* a realm 'beyond' it" (187). Just as Emerson's method makes it possible to view the realm beyond the here and now through the terms of the here and now, James allows the reader to transcend the object containing the written word, such as a telegram or receiving card, and arrive at meaning. This process is tantamount to what Burke sees Emerson doing, using "commodities" or "*instrumentalities*" to carry out a "unitary purpose." Similarly, in this grouping, musical rhetoric is manipulated in a category called *resonance*, where "tone" and "note" reverberate with meaning, intimations, and vibrations into which Strether taps. Finally, James's use of *syntax* is explored, as he uses the mapping of language to make the reader aware of its concreteness and artificiality, reflecting the movement of Strether's consciousness, only to move beyond represented language again. This use of syntax is unique in that it is not like the generative grammar described by Noam Chomsky, in which "syntax is independent of semantics" (Edelman 243). On the contrary, the syntax

James employs is not only closely intertwined with semantics, but grows from it. The meaning is presented in a concrete manner through the structure of the sentences. A clear example of James's method is found in the description of Strether and Madame de Vionnet's interaction over lunch. Consider the structure of the following sentence: "The sense that he had had before, the sense he had had repeatedly, the sense that the situation was running away with him, had never been so sharp as now" (176). This is a periodic sentence, which is not syntactically complete until its end, and expands, creating for the reader a sense of movement. The sentence runs away as Strether's sense of the situation does. It is difficult to rein in structurally, mirroring Strether's inability to grasp exactly what is happening to him. As such, the syntax is inextricably linked with meaning.

The movement away from the concrete and artificial is seen in the next grouping, which was developed from Sampson Reed and Ralph Waldo Emerson's thinking, and furthered in William James's writing. These modes, which I name *impression*, *vagueness*, and *charged silence*, reflect presences and meanings into which Strether taps. These silences have both mystical and psychological ramifications. While impression and vagueness, in familiar usage, are disparaged as imprecise, they are crucial to William James's and Emerson's sense of the mystical. For William James, "vague impressions of something indefinable" signal intuitions, which the consciousness ultimately "absolutely knows" (*Varieties of Religious Experience*, 73). Emerson, too, urges his reader to "trust the instinct" and assigns to logic the role of "unfolding. . . the intuition" (*Intellect* 419). These descriptions of intuition and instinct, as well as Darwin's, will be examined fully as the chapters unfold; when Strether encounters these particular silences, he employs both his senses and intuition, until he reaches "a deeper level of nature than the

loquacious level which rationalism inhabits” (James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 73). In order to arrive at the moral awareness he ultimately reaches, Strether must negotiate the vagueness, which contains meaning without words.

The next set of silences indicates Strether’s growing reflection. Once he can interpret impression and vagueness, he arrives at a new stage of consciousness which is more suggestive of articulation. The modes *awareness after a fact* and *responsive arrest* have their basis in William James’s description of the awareness of thought. At this point, one becomes conscious of the self as the seat of thinking. It is almost as though Strether comes face to face with thinking itself, distancing himself from language in order to contemplate meaning clearly. Meaning, or “a still sharper sense” assumes real physical presence in these moments of silence. When in conversation with Maria Gostrey, Strether finds that “it had broken as with a slight arrest into the current of their talk, and it held him a moment longer” (292). Strether is placed in relation to the aforementioned “objects of thought” and, as such, approaches consciousness. Through these moments, the reader discerns James’s awareness of the physical basis of thought, grounded in the theory and language of William James’s description of the “stream of thought,” while prefiguring later theorists.

Finally, the last set of silences denotes a culmination of Henry James’s thought about language and silence; here, several representations may be expressed through each example, but they share a sense of language “multiplying its forms of representation” (Gura 63). Gura schematizes a nineteenth-century shift towards symbolic language, tracing Emerson’s call for the naturalization of language; similarly, James’s rendering of the methods *meeting of eyes*, *gesture*, and *recognition*, establishes them within the range

of expression suggested by Darwin in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. James takes us further, however; while Strether may start with gesture, such as when “a single gesture from [Maria Gostrey] could pass for him as a vivid answer” (194), he progresses to the point where he can, as Emerson describes, encounter the “unfolding of intuition.” *Recognition* is the most complex of these categories, in which we see a grammar that combines several types of silence. Ultimately, Strether perceives, and finally expresses his understanding of his moral and social consciousness to Maria Gostrey, albeit in a manner seemingly vague to the reader, but clear in terms of his development. He comes to intuit and encounter his place in the larger stream of thought and morality as he learns what it means “to be right” without the benefit of articulated language.

What is so striking about *The Ambassadors* is the complexity of the characterization of Lewis Lambert Strether. He is conscious man, aware of his connection to his animal/natural state, no longer needing articulation as consciousness, developing and transforming from the mystical as the new sublime, emerges in silence.

## Chapter Two: Token Words

Strether's final standpoint that he must return to the States "to be right" is a signal both to the reader and Maria Gostrey that he has realized consciousness, not just of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship, but also of the nature of his own relationships with Mrs. Newsome and Maria Gostrey, and that he has succeeded in piercing language and appearances to arrive at meaning. The reader may question what "rightness" means. Emerson uses the example of the word "right" in his chapter "Language" in *Nature*, to illustrate the word as a natural fact, with right derived from the root for "straight" (20). Viewed through an Emersonian lens, this can be seen as a return to "wholeness," as the human condition should be one of connectedness with the universe. "Wholeness" or "rightness" is addressed in *Nature*:

A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth, and his desire to communicate it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. . . . In due time, the fraud is manifest, and words lose all power to stimulate the understanding or the affections. . . but wise men pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things; so that picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it, is a man in alliance with truth and God. (22-3)

By simply acknowledging his need “to be right,” Strether is expressing his recognition that a corrupt language has been used to manipulate people and situations, and that he must go beyond even Emerson’s “picturesque language” to silence, the system by which he will come to awareness. Strether’s bypassing picturesque language does not render Emerson’s observations irrelevant for this text. Because existing symbol systems fail for Strether, however, he must circumvent them to arrive through silence at both the meaning and condition, or natural fact, of rightness. Emerson prefigures this when he writes in “Intellect” of the unfolding of the intuition, declaring that “its virtue is as silent method; the moment it would appear as propositions, and have a separate value, it is worthless” (419). Throughout *The Ambassadors*, the propositions remain as the tokens of a language that works against the truth, and inhibit Strether’s awareness from emerging out of intuition. This chapter addresses remnants of language and other symbol systems through James’s use of them in the text, and Strether’s reading of them.

Kenneth Burke discusses the nature of one’s relationship with language, observing that “language referring to the realm of the nonverbal is necessarily talk about things in terms of what they are not—and in this sense we start out beset by a paradox” (5). He describes language as a tool created by humans, and notes that as a result, man is “separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making” (13). The natural condition can be seen as man’s physicality, as well as “wholeness” in the Emersonian sense. James manipulates the emerging modernist self-consciousness about the nature of language as a subject. It is presented somewhat humorously when the

narrator, clearly choosing to gloss over some details, summarizes, “if we should go into all that occupied our friend in the watches of the night we should have to mend our pen” (91). Strether unknowingly faces the paradox of language and ultimately reconciles it through silence, but before he can do so, he must address the remnants of language and other existing symbol systems that surround him and separate him from truth. The paradoxical nature of language is encapsulated in Burke’s description of terministic screens: “Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality” (45). Like a photograph, a term simultaneously captures and distorts an image. To get to the reality, one must transcend the screen. In his discussion of Emerson’s work, Burke identifies terministic bridges, which allow for transcendence. Burke defines transcendence as “the building of a *terministic bridge* whereby one realm is *transcended* by being viewed *in terms of* a realm ‘beyond’ it” (187). In transcending, one arrives at “‘highly’ generalized terms like ‘entities’ or ‘beings’—whereupon all that is left is a further step to something like ‘Pure Being,’ or the One, or First, or Ultimate” (190), or for Strether, perhaps, the condition of rightness. But, how is this transcendence to be achieved? For Emerson, “even the crudest of sensory perceptions can be treated as the revealing of nature’s mysteries” (Burke 192), and then represented through imagery. James, however, must leave the image behind. In fact, it becomes clear that the bridge must lie elsewhere, as suggested when Strether meets the artist Gloriani at Chad’s, when “the famous sculptor seemed to signal almost condolingly, yet oh how vacantly! as across some great flat sheet of water. He threw out the bridge of a charming hollow civility on which Strether wouldn’t have trusted his own full weight a moment” (156). The

language of this passage suggests the failure of words as conveyances of meaning: the bridge will not hold, the word has no substance and is merely a “civility,” a word which resonates with his relationship with Mrs. Newsome.

This scene is not the first in the novel to address the nature of the word. In fact, the word is, for the reader, paradoxically under scrutiny by its absence from the novel’s very opening. Upon his arrival in Chester, Strether has a question about his friend Waymarsh, and is given a telegram from him, which is not replicated for the reader. Instead, it is summarized, so instead of the concrete communication, the reader has Strether’s “wholly instinctive” reaction to it. The telegram can be viewed emblematically; it is what remains of a prior symbol system, but because it is not adequate, its contents are not revealed to the reader. In fact, despite the telegram, Strether is not quite sure how to “read” Waymarsh, a situation that lingers and even escalates throughout the work. One must get to meaning, but the word does not serve as the bridge. The novel opens with self-conscious references to symbol systems; of course, the word, but there is also reference to what Strether was missing by his delay in seeing Waymarsh: “the first ‘note,’ of Europe” (17). The word “note” is repeated three times in as many sentences; the musical rhetoric evokes another symbol system that reverberates with meaning. This symbol system, too, will be presented in the novel and later in this chapter as inadequate as it too is a token that may misrepresent.

Strether’s attempt to “read” Waymarsh through his telegram is emblematic of the physicality of language that lingers in the text. When Strether first speaks with Chad, it is said that “he had frequently, for a month, turned over what he should say on this very occasion, and he seemed at last to have said nothing he had thought of” (95). Of course,

one may read “turned over” metaphorically as “considered.” Metaphors, however, often have their origins in the physical; Strether considers by examining, lifting, and turning the word itself. Finally, he says something other than he had planned; the word, so to speak, is inverted.

The remnants of language take on life when Strether and Maria Gostrey first meet. They exchange cards, an act that is, of course, a common civility and would seem to have no greater significance. James’s description of the exchange, however, renders it greater. After taking her card, Strether put in into his pocket and “it was positively droll to him that he should already have Maria Gostrey, whoever she was—of which he hadn’t really the least idea—in a place of safe keeping.” He then thinks of the card as “the little token he had just tucked in” (22). The card, then, resonates with life, and the token becomes interchangeable with the self. Significantly, though, Strether, again, cannot read the token or the person. When he presents his card to her, however, it is even richer. She reads it over and “‘I like,’ she observed, ‘your name. . . . It’s the name of a novel of Balzac’s’” (23). The token of Strether’s card not only encompasses Strether, but also reverberates with literary past. When Maria then deems the novel “an awfully bad one,” she may appear to be passing judgment on Strether’s character also.

As they come to know one another better, the question of identity becomes tied even further into the written word. Strether describes, in a halting, incomplete manner, Mrs. Newsome’s business concerns. He tells Maria that he is involved with “the Review.” When she asks for more detail, he tells her only that it is green; she reads it symbolically, he means it literally. When she says that he “effaces” himself by not putting his name on the cover for himself, Strether replies, “that’s exactly what I do put it

on for. It's exactly the thing that I'm reduced to doing for myself. It seems to rescue a little, you see, from the wreck of hopes and ambitions, the refuse-heap of disappointments and failures, my one presentable little scrap of an identity" (51). This passage is so powerful because it contains not only Strether's sense of self as a failure, but also resonates with the weight of the written word. It can confer identity on one who, in his own estimation, has none. It also confers the weight and value of the literary past. Significantly, the reader is never told the contents of the Review; one may reduce it to a symbol of the clichéd admonition that one must not judge a book by its cover. In the hands of Henry James, however, it is far richer than that. It becomes a symbol of the sense of self that Strether has at the outset of his voyage; the sense of self he would like to convey; the value of the word as symbol; and, the inadequacy of the symbol. It is a particularly poignant moment in the novel when Strether's sense of failing is revealed, culminating in the statement, "He was Lambert Strether because he was on the cover, whereas it should have been for anything like glory, that he was on the cover because he was Lambert Strether" (62). This resonates with hollowness, of Strether's character, of the Review, and of how society judges accomplishment. Again, because the contents of the Review are never revealed to Maria or fully to the reader, it becomes part of a symbol system that does not work; representative, perhaps, of Emerson's "corrupt language" which separates from rather than fastens to the truth. Strether becomes the name on the cover, a hollow identity. In his essay *What Are the Signs of What?*, Kenneth Burke describes the views of the naturalist and supernaturalist regarding language, concluding that if the "views of the natural would embody the forms of language . . . things would be the signs of words" ( 379) an inversion of Emerson's statement that words are the signs

of things. Through the Review, Strether himself becomes a sign of a word, i.e. his name as it appears. This is the language failing; in order to get to the reality of Strether and his sense of what it means “to be right,” the remnant of the token word must be pierced.

The token of the word as symbol is taken even further as Strether contemplates, and contrasts with the Review, the “lemon-coloured volumes” he sees in shop windows, a dozen of which he had brought back from Paris many years earlier. They, too, fail to convey meaning as written works, but as volumes that, unlike the Review, pay “tribute to letters,” symbolize Strether’s failure in creating a “temple of taste” as he never even had the books bound. They remain, instead, “stale and soiled” (63). The physical presence of the books serves as a reminder to Strether of the unfulfilled promise of the past, and he is conscious of their physicality. While “Strether’s present highest flights were perhaps those in which this particular lapse figured to him as a symbol, a symbol of his long grind and his want of odd moments, his want moreover of money, of opportunity, of positive dignity” (63), neither the books nor the “highest flights” contain a sense of who he is, only of what he has not accomplished. This phrasing cannot help but remind one of William James’s description of the stream of thought as “an alternation of flights and perchings” with “the places of flight [as] the ‘transitive parts,’ of the stream of thought” (*The Principles of Psychology I*, 243). As James presents it, the transitive parts serve to lead from one substantive part to another. That is not all, however; he writes of the attempt to analyze the transitive parts, which, if stopped, are then annihilated. He describes the transitive parts as containing “numberless” relations, saying “no existing language is capable of doing justice to all their shades” (245). Strether’s flight indicates an attempt at consciousness, but as a flight in William James’s sense, it cannot capture

the relations in feelings or relation of self to the larger world. Significantly, it especially cannot be done in language. The passage cited above conveys emptiness, or to use James's word, want. The repetition and mirroring of the word "symbol" serves to underscore Strether's self-analysis; as such, it takes on even greater physical presence: symbol as symbol. It cannot function as a means of communication, however, because it does not impart meaning, only failure. The token of an existing symbol system must be transcended.

The connection of person to written word is further made when Strether later enters Sarah Pocock's room. Mrs. Pocock, Mrs. Newsome's daughter, has come on her mother's instructions to accomplish what Strether has failed to do, bring Chad home. Her presence, therefore, only exacerbates Strether's sense of humiliation. Strether sees a letter from Mrs. Newsome to her daughter, and

It brought home to him the scale on which Mrs. Newsome—for she had been copious indeed this time—was writing to her daughter while she kept *him* in durance; and it had altogether such an effect upon him as made him for a few minutes stand still and breathe low. In his own room, at his own hotel, he had dozens of well-filled envelopes superscribed in that character; and there was actually something in the renewal of his interrupted vision of the character that played straight into the so frequent question of whether he weren't already disinherited beyond appeal. It was such an assurance as the sharp downstrokes of her pen hadn't yet had occasion to give him; but they somehow at the present crisis stood for a probable absoluteness in any decree of the writer. 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 and take his punishment. (246)

This is a lengthy and significant passage in relation to both the sense of the physical presence of the word and its relation to character, and Strether's "unfolding" sense of himself, his reading of the situation, and his relationship with Mrs. Newsome. Much as in the earlier description of Maria's calling card, the words here become character, with James self-consciously manipulating, again, the word "character" itself referring to both the written letter and the person of Mrs. Newsome. The physical presence of the word has many levels here. Strether reads the "downstrokes" of the name, not the meaning of the words, as an admonition and indictment of his failure to act according to Mrs. Newsome's wishes. Despite the words, however, communication is not adequately accomplished. He still withholds information from Mrs. Newsome; she bypasses him to communicate with Sarah. In fact, the number of words seems to increase in inverse proportion to the meaning they convey. At an earlier moment, when Strether learns that the Pococks are to be dispatched to Europe, he responds somewhat misleadingly to Mrs. Newsome in a cable that he appreciated her action and that he would be writing to her. He contemplates: "but he was of course always writing . . . Wouldn't the pages he still so freely dispatched by the American post have been worthy of a showy journalist, some master of the great new science of beating the sense out of words? Wasn't he writing

against time, and mainly to show he was kind?—since it had become quite become his habit not to like to read himself over. . . . He might have written before more freely, but he had never written more copiously” (194-5). James presents here the chasm between the word and meaning. The words, in their copiousness, a word used in both this and the above-cited passage, both “reflect” and “deflect” reality, as Burke suggests. The Modernist self-consciousness about and manipulation of language is reflected in this passage, so that it becomes meaningless in terms of conveying reality, and a tool in social situations. Additionally, Strether is said to prefer not to “read himself over,” so the word becomes equivalent to character once again. The symbol system remains, but the more it multiplies in volume, the less meaning it has, and thereby does not allow for transcendence. As representative of character, the word can also mask and allow for misreading.

There are many moments in the text when, in addition to the sense of character they adopt above, the words take on physical presence, but remain unspoken. When Sarah Pocock meets Madame de Vionnet for the first time, for example, they allude to visiting Chad’s. Strether anticipates Sarah’s response, “he guessed that for five seconds these words were on the point of coming; he heard them as clearly as if they had been spoken; but he presently knew they had just failed . . . This left [Madame de Vionnet] free to reply only to what had been said” (221). This passage manipulates words, silence, and meaning brilliantly. The words, which have not been spoken, have a real presence and weight. In fact, Madame de Vionnet is prepared to respond to them. It would seem that if they are not spoken, they cannot convey meaning. On the contrary, they are present in their absence, inviting first one response, then by their failure, another. The

symbol system as it has conventionally operated is not working. This calls into question the role of the terministic bridge, which, as defined above, allows for transcendence by viewing one realm in terms of the realm beyond it, and can be accomplished for Emerson through imagery. By contrast, language, which should function as the bridge in the context described above, serves only to deflect attention from the reality, if you will, of the situation. This separates them all from the realm in which Strether is to acknowledge the truth of the situation and “be right;” the words that are spoken are incomplete, and those that remain unspoken encapsulate the makeup of the relationships among the participants. In presenting language in this way, James illustrates the paradoxical nature of language. With their physical weight and presence, the token words contained in the text should be the quintessence of meaning. Paradoxically, it is precisely by their presence that they call attention to their malleability, becoming remnants of a system that no longer holds up as the words adopt other functions. This is a moment that signals the move to silence as an alternate symbol system.

Before silence can be attained, however, other symbol systems are explored. Just as the word is a traditional method of conveying meaning, so too are music and visual art. As the word fails, James puts forward other systems which have been established means of communication. Because of the lingering reverberations associated with it, the art of music is a particularly appropriate method for conveying meaning. Its richness is not only in the notes played, but as explored by John Cage, is in the silences as well. In *Lecture on Something* he writes, “And no silence exists that is not pregnant with sound” (*sic*) (135). Sound reverberating through the silence conveys a sense of



being. The poet enters into silence” (46). Just as the token words remain, however, the tokens of the symbol system of music linger in the text.

In his description of Strether in *Project of Novel*, James writes, “It has all come over him since his disembarkment at Liverpool that he responds to his holiday more even than he had expected, and that he is now responding—after the first few days—to a still quicker tune” (553). In the course of the novel, the “quicker tune” becomes associated with silence. During the period when, sensing his failure, Mrs. Newsome stops writing to Strether, he realizes “the increase of his darkness, however, and the quickening, as I have called it, of his tune, resided in the fact that he was hearing almost nothing. [ . . . ] He had never so lived with her as during this period of her silence; the silence was a sacred hush, a finer clearer medium” (195). The language of music is used interchangeably here with the references to silence, so that the two become intertwined. The reference to the “sacred hush” elevates silence to a means of transcendence, the “finer clearer medium” approaching the sublime. The passage calls to mind Emerson’s dictum in *Self-Reliance*: “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string” (260). The vibration, or music, is a link to universal wholeness. In *The Ambassadors*, meaning takes form through the rhetoric of music, but its essence exists ironically through silence.

The connection of musical rhetoric to silence and meaning is strikingly made in a passage surrounding, but never fully revealing, the contents of another telegram. This telegram arrives midway in the text and Strether’s adventure, and delivers, the reader learns after several pages, an ultimatum from Mrs. Newsome. She informs Strether that if he does not immediately return to the States, she will send the Pococks to join him and Chad. The scene involves Waymarsh again; Strether, however, does not reveal the

contents of the telegram to Waymarsh, not even referring to it even though Waymarsh has seen Strether reading it. They eat their dinner in near silence:

Our friend had moreover the consciousness that even less than usual was on this occasion said between them, so that it was almost as if each had been waiting for something from the other. Waymarsh had always more or less the air of sitting at the door of his tent, and silence, after so many weeks, had come to play its part in their concert. This note indeed, to Strether's sense, had lately taken a fuller tone, and it was his fancy to-night that they had never quite so drawn it out. Yet it befell, none the less, that he closed the door to confidence when his companion finally asked him if there were anything particular the matter with him. 'Nothing,' he replied, 'more than usual.' On the morrow, however, at an early hour, he found occasion to give an answer more in consonance with the facts."

(183)

One might question why the passage is included; Waymarsh and Strether do not discuss the contents of the telegram, and it would appear to have no bearing on the situation with Mrs. Newsome that Strether dined with Waymarsh. It does, however, recall the opening telegram from Waymarsh, again one whose contents are undisclosed. Through this emblem, Strether and Waymarsh's changing relationship is charted; as their silence deepens, Strether is able to read Waymarsh more clearly. Additionally, the rhetoric of music is clearly employed, and here, again, is used to describe their silence. The references to concert, note, and tone underscore the reverberations of meaning that are exchanged between the two; the

use of the word “consonance” toward the end of the passage suggests both harmonic sound and agreement. The notes and remnants of the symbol system are there, but again, are ultimately bypassed in favor of the silence that reveals the depth of the situation. Finally, in discussion with Maria Gostrey, Strether anticipates confronting Waymarsh about his belief that Strether should return, in effect, a betrayal of Strether. He tells Maria, “any discussion we may have will bring us quite together again—bridge the dark stream that has kept us so thoroughly apart” (191). The language here recalls both William James’s stream of thought and Burke’s description of the terministic bridge. James defines the “object of every thought” as “neither more nor less than all that the thought thinks, exactly as the thought thinks it, however complicated the matter, and however symbolic the manner of the thinking may be.” He makes the further point that “*however complex the object may be, the thought of it is one undivided state of consciousness*” (*Principles of Psychology I*, 276). Strether and Waymarsh appear to contemplate an object of thought; however, at this stage of their relationship and the situation with Chad, they are on other sides of the stream. If the stream of thought is individual consciousness, they must arrive at a way to view the object in consonance. When that happens, they will, in effect, have found their terministic bridge. For Strether, it may also involve the need “to be right,” which he has not yet articulated. He is aware, though, that his emerging sense of being right is not the same as Waymarsh’s. Strether may find transcendence to meaning through discussion with Waymarsh, but only after they have arrived at understanding, or consonance, through silence. Their relationship

evolves, just as symbol systems are recognized and rejected in favor of silence. William James even likens the effect of neuroses on the consciousness to the “‘overtones’ in music,” noting that “different instruments give the ‘same note,’ but each in a different voice, because each gives more than that note, namely, various upper harmonics of it which differ from one instrument to another” and blend with the basic note. So, too, do the “brain-processes at every moment blend with and suffuse and alter the psychic effect of the processes which are at their culminating point” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 258). The rhetoric of music, silence, and the stream of thought are used together to signal the consciousness emerging through resonance for Strether.

Finally, in his *Project of Novel*, Henry James indicates that Strether recognizes the conclusion of his affairs in Paris through sonic metaphors. Strether, he writes, “recognizes that his hour has sounded. The sound is like the bell of the steamer calling him, from its place at the dock, aboard again, and by the same act ringing down the curtain on the play” (573). The bell reads and signals the depths, and brings the situation to an end. It, too, resonates.

The symbol system of music cannot fully express meaning; on the way to silence, other systems are explored. James progresses through different symbol systems as Strether intuits the limitations of others. Another system represented is visual art. It is introduced early, and significantly, in the novel when Strether visits the sculptor Gloriani at a gathering in his garden. When he arrives, Strether has “the sense of names in the air, of ghosts at the windows, of signs and tokens, a whole range of expression, all about him, too thick for prompt discrimination” (120). It is this moment which initiates Strether’s

examination of the situation. When Strether meets Gloriani, he is struck by “the medal-like Italian face.” Not only is Strether aware of Gloriani’s art, but likens Gloriani to a work of art himself. Again, there are layers and levels of representation. In fact, Strether sees Gloriani’s eyes as “the source of the deepest intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed,” the rhetoric similar to that of music noted above. It is through discussion and contemplation in this art dominated setting that Strether is inspired to exhort Bilham to “Live!” (132). This moment is cited by James in his Preface to the text as “the whole case” of the novel (1); as a result of this moment of crisis for Strether, his consciousness ultimately evolves. Interestingly, the entire scene was modeled by James on an incident reported to him by his friend Jonathan Sturges, and a discussion he had with William Dean Howells, who tells him “You are young. Live!” The exchange becomes the inspiration for the novel and character of Strether (*The Complete Notebooks of Henry James* 141). Here, life inspires art which, in turn, inspires life. It is a multifaceted scene that Strether begins to read, but at this point in his development, finds “too thick for prompt discrimination.” He must ultimately go past the artistic discourse to arrive at understanding.

*In Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance*, Bernard P.

Dauenhauer examines artistic discourse in relation to silence. He describes the failure of artistic discourse to capture a universe called “unencompassable in discourse.” As a result, it will have to yield to another utterance, “thus, the new utterance itself at the very moment of its origin, is infected with that silence which reveals not merely the finitude of previous artistic discourse but precisely its own finitude” (48). Dauenhauer describes an unfolding here, what he calls a “fore-and-after silence,” with silence as a positive

phenomenon allowing for evolution of expression. This description captures the essence of Strether's movement through myriad symbol systems, including that of visual art. Because symbol systems are indeed finite, they must give way to new systems, or utterances, and silence, according to Dauenhauer, becomes "the background against which an utterance or sequence of utterances unfolds." Such a representation may be seen in what is arguably the most crucial scene in the novel: Strether's journey to the countryside, during which he encounters Chad and Madame de Vionnet and recognizes the true nature of their relationship.

Strether takes the train without a clear destination in mind; he is in search of a place reminiscent to him of "a certain small Lambinet that had charmed him, long years before" (301), and which he never purchased. He attempts to capture the essence of his romanticized vision of rural France, called "a land of fancy for him—the background of fiction, the medium of art, the nursery of letters; practically as distant as Greece." When he finds the right stop, he gets off the train, and

the poplars and willows, the reeds and river—a river of which he didn't know, and didn't want to know, the name—fell into composition, full of felicity, within them; the sky was silver and turquoise and varnish; the village on the left was white and the church on the right was grey; it was all there, in short—it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet. (302)

Strether enters a work of visual art and has "the sense of success, of a finer harmony in things . . . this moreover was what he had dropped to, and now he was touching bottom" (303). The language here also echoes musical rhetoric; his touching bottom creates the

sense of sounding. The arts would seem to get him to consciousness. Then, “in midstream of his drama” Strether approaches the river, and sees Chad and Madame de Vionnet in a boat. The moments before his sighting are described in terms of the drama where “the play and the characters had, without his knowing it till now, peopled all his space for him” (306). The artistic discourse seems to give Strether a heightened awareness; the scene becomes rich with reverberations and intimations that will be more fully examined in terms of other silences. He is not fully prepared, however, for what he sees, as “such a river set one afloat almost before one could take up the oars” (307); his consciousness cannot yet permeate the discourse of the scene.

Strether sees Chad and Madame de Vionnet; they spot him almost simultaneously. In fact, as Strether replays the encounter in his mind, it appears Madame de Vionnet had spotted him first, and tells Chad, “bid[ding] him keep still.” The scene seems to freeze momentarily, like a painting or dramatic moment, with Strether perceiving “they were thus, on either side, *trying* the other side, and all for some reason that broke the stillness like some unprovoked harsh note” (308). The silence underlies the artistic rhetoric; they are in the stream of consciousness together, but Madame de Vionnet attempts to manipulate the reality of a situation that Strether sees “as queer as fiction, as farce.” Strether decides to take control and call to them, forcing them to acknowledge his presence. Of course, they do meet and dine together, and Madame de Vionnet and Chad must return to Paris, pretending that they had not intended to spend the night in the countryside. Strether realizes that “fiction and fable *were*, inevitably, in the air” and “It had been a performance, Madame de Vionnet’s manner” (311). In addition to recognizing the artifice of the situation, he comes to recognize the reality: “they hadn’t

been alone together a moment since and must have communicated all in silence. It was a part of the deep impression for Strether, and not the least of the deep interest, that they *could* so communicate” (312). A critical moment, indeed, for Strether, as he finally confronts not only the nature of their relationship, but also how to communicate. He had been reading the artistic discourse, but discovers that he must ultimately go past it, as Madame de Vionnet and Chad had on their boat in the river. As a climactic scene in the novel, it is rich with many different modes of silence that will be addressed in greater depth in subsequent chapters.

Finally, references to the remnants of symbol systems, merged with other techniques, occur throughout the novel as Strether’s consciousness unfolds. Earlier, when Strether meets and then dines with Madame de Vionnet at Notre Dame, the language used suggests artistic discourse, and manipulates syntax to imply greater depth of meaning. Before spotting Madame de Vionnet, Strether is in Notre Dame, trying to “reduce it in fact to the convenient terms of Victor Hugo” (173), that is, he is using the world of artifice to order reality. Significantly, in the Modernist tradition, the secular world of art supplants the spirituality implied by the setting of the Cathedral; later, art will be supplanted by consciousness expressed through silence. Strether sees and speaks with Madame de Vionnet, telling her about his purchase of the seventy volumes of Hugo; at this point, the diction and syntax become visibly manipulated. James repeats words:

He had spoken of the great *romancer* and the great *romance*, and of what, to his imagination, they had done for the whole, mentioning to her moreover the exorbitance of his purchase, the seventy blazing volumes that were so *out of proportion*.

*‘Out of proportion to what?’*

“Well, to any other *plunge*.’ Yet he felt even as he spoke how at that instant he was *plunging*. He had made up his mind and was impatient to get into the air; for his *purpose* was a *purpose* to be uttered outside, and he had a fear that it might with delay still slip away from him. (174) (italics added)

The repetition of the words “romance,” “proportion,” “plunge,” and “purpose” call attention to the artifice and self-consciousness of the situation, Strether’s emerging consciousness, and the process of writing the text. There is a sense of mirroring words and holding them up to scrutiny, with the word “plunge” having further reverberations in terms of sounding and exploring consciousness. The words are tokens that James offers to the reader, and the artifice signals the fuller meaning that lay elsewhere. Madame de Vionnet communicates silently in this significant scene in which Strether, without explicitly saying so, offers himself as a source of support to her. It is done, instead, through the discussion of Hugo and the offer to dine together. James’s syntax here brings the reader further into a circle of communication, as he repeats, “The sign would be that—though it was her own affair—he understood; the sign would be that—though it was her own affair—she was free to clutch” (175). At first reading, one may be tempted to reread, to check if an error was made; then, however, it is clear that the reader is drawn into the whirlpool of meaning that Strether and Madame de Vionnet communicate through the “sign.”

The scene reverberates with literary and musical rhetoric; he first sees Madame de Vionnet in the Cathedral, but does not realize it is she as she is deeply involved in her

thoughts with her back to him. Strether is reminded, however, of “some fine firm concentrated heroine of an old story, something he had heard, read, something that, had he had a hand for drama, he might himself had written” (172). When Madame de Vionnet finally greets a confused Strether, she is said to use “an art of her own” (173), all of which is surrounded by the discussion of Victor Hugo. Strether experiences reality through the lens of artifice, and “ancient proverbs sounded, for his memory, in the tone of their words and the clink of their glasses, in the hum of the town and the splash of the river” (177), with sound suggesting fuller meaning. That, combined with the self-consciously distancing syntax of such sentences as “He supposed himself to have supposed that Chad might have taken her” to the restaurant indicate Strether’s attempts at using symbol systems, the remnants of which remain in the text, as terministic bridges.

While Strether attempts to arrive at consciousness, he also remains distanced from it. The approach to and separation from consciousness are captured in the syntax used. Ruth Yeazell addresses what she calls James’s characters’ “passion for delay,” because it is in staying removed from consciousness that they remain safe. The flirtation with consciousness is revealed in the syntax. As Yeazell writes, “it is in the very shape and form of the Jamesian sentence that the terror of full consciousness most makes itself felt” (22). The physical movement of the sentences reflects the movement towards and pulling away from knowledge. Yeazell describes, “even as Strether has lingered so long in Paris, postponing all final confrontations, so too does his mental syntax characteristically hesitate and delay” (24). The state of consciousness is connected, for Strether, to moral awareness, what Martha Nussbaum calls “perceptive equilibrium.” The term names “an equilibrium in which concrete perceptions ‘hang beautifully together,’ both with one

another and with the agent's general principles" (183). Nussbaum suggests that Strether is somewhat bewildered and hesitant, indicating "marks of fine attention," a term evocative of William James's work. Paradoxically, the dense and sometimes circular sentences suggest clarity; as Nussbaum explains, "the fullness, the density, of the narrative style is itself the fitting expression of a certain sort of moral imagination. Indeed, James recalls to us that even the novel, with all its richness, can actually express but a fraction of the crowded consciousness of someone who is really making an effort to *see*" (185). Hence the dependence on silence and alternate symbol systems. By contrast, those who are not making an effort to see speak more directly. Nussbaum calls the "sentences of Woollett. . . crisp, 'straight,' and, as Strether says, 'pat.'" When Strether discusses the situation with Jim Pocock on the latter's arrival in Paris, "he felt on the spot that this *was* the real word from Woollett" (217). The directness is in marked contrast to the understandings that are veiled and revealed slowly to Strether, emerging from the vagueness and complicated syntax. They reflect, as Nussbaum suggests, the fact that Strether and the Woollett contingent do not perceive the same reality (184).

As Strether begins to emerge from the vagueness to understanding, the syntax changes and reflects exigency. When he answers a request to see Madame de Vionnet after the outing in the countryside, for example, Strether feels that sternness is appropriate. This sense is syntactically represented in his thought that they should meet in an uncomfortable place so that there would be the sense "that somebody was paying something somewhere and somehow" (315). The repetition of the word-part "some," and the absence of commas or pausing suggest sternness, as if the words are striking with punitive force.

The forceful syntax of Strether's thoughts takes time to develop. Early in the novel, when Strether arrives in Paris and has yet to reunite with Chad, Strether begins to become aware of the effect Paris has on him, and that effect is conveyed to the reader. Strether reaches Chad's house, and "had at this very moment to recognize the truth that wherever one paused in Paris the imagination reacted before one could stop it" (69). The reader is made to pause here as well, as Strether looks up and contemplates Chad's balcony, and sees a young man smoking. The young man, who is to remain unnamed for several pages, spies Strether. The reader is told "This was interesting so far as it went, but the interest was affected by the young man's not being Chad." Again, the significant information of this sentence is withheld until its end. Only moments pass, but a great deal happens in Strether's recognition. He is aware of the time passing, and of being watched: "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" (70). Notice the mirroring effect and rapidity of the syntax. Strether and the young man, who is John Little Bilham, face each other, as the two parts of the sentence mirror one another. Also repeated is the phrase "perched privacy," suggesting William James's substantive moments in the stream of consciousness. Strether recognizes, at that moment of perching, that he shares something with the young man, a place in Chad's home. This knowledge emerges from within the reaction of Strether's imagination to Paris. The term "perching" resonates, as several significant scenes in the novel take place around balconies: this scene, Strether's first encounter with Chad in the balcony at the theatre discussed earlier in chapter one,

and Strether's final approach to Chad's balcony at the end of the novel, to be addressed later. The perching moments involve watching and recognition, and the syntax echoes it.

While this is Strether's first introduction to Little Bilham, he becomes a significant figure for Strether. In fact, it is through Bilham that Strether has a sense of what it means to be American, questions how he has lived his own life, ultimately exhorting Bilham to "live," and reconsiders his definition of morality when Bilham terms Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship "virtuous." Soon after Strether's first meeting with Bilham, he and Maria Gostrey meet Bilham at the Louvre. The narrative flow of the scene, which runs from pages 83 to 85, serves as a paradigm of the mind's construction of knowledge, what William James calls "a thorough-going dualism" which "supposes two elements, mind knowing and thing known," and is "constituted by a new construction that occurs altogether *in the mind*" (*Principles of Psychology* I, 218-219). Bilham becomes a signal of recognition for Strether, becoming objectified through a distancing process, partially achieved through syntax. It is also accomplished in part by the narrator's detached tone; he objectively observes and reports, with earlier first person intrusions and allusions to "poor Strether" or "our hero" clearly replaced by an objective, impersonal tone. In addition, the reader is further removed from the inner workings of Strether's mind as he views the scene in a way which resembles drama: the reader *watches* Strether watch Bilham. There are references to events of which the reader is unaware, namely that plans for the visit to the Louvre had been made with Maria Gostrey at Chester. The reader is distanced from complete knowledge, just as the words alone keep complete knowledge from Strether. The syntax is another remnant of a symbol system that supplements an incomplete spoken language. The distancing created by the

absence of detail is underscored by the physical distancing created by the sentence constructions.

Maria murmurs to Strether that Bilham is one of them, and from that point, the two “proceeded and paused and while a quick unanimity between the two appeared[ . . .]”. The acts of proceeding and pausing are significant in tracing Strether’s ultimate apprehension of consciousness. The reader sees Strether moving and halting, with the adjective “quick” suggesting lurching, as moments of near recognition, and then loss. The subordinate clause itself lurches into the sentence; the reader is set up to expect another verb because the coordinating conjunction “and” was used earlier and establishes a rhythm. Strether undergoes the process described by William James, the “duplication of the object by an inner construction,” while pausing and proceeding, combining his impression of Little Bilham with Maria Gostrey’s assessment, to create “the conception of an American intense as little Bilham was intense.”

The rapid movement of the passage suggests William James’s concept in “The Stream of Thought” of “a bird’s life . . . made of an alternation of flights and perchings. The rhythm of language expresses this [ . . .]” (243). The language of movement and halting reflects this, as does the rest of the line. The narrator’s observation that “a quick unanimity between the two appeared to have phrased itself in half a dozen remarks[. . .]” is a movement, a transition, which reflects a merging and splitting: the *two* become *one* mind through *half* a dozen remarks. The construction of unanimity appears to occur independently of Strether; he is passive as it “phrased itself,” part of the “new construction” of which William James writes. The new construction is later referred to as

a moment of “light,” which is also suggested by the merging and splitting imagery created by the one-two-half reference.

Distance between the mind and its new construction is further emphasized as the line continues. Significantly, James uses a dash, causing a leap to the apprehension the “Strether knew that he knew almost immediately what she meant.” The rhythm of this line reflects its meaning. There is a distancing effect through the use of the subordinate clause, which also creates ambiguity. Why not, simply, “Strether knew almost immediately . . .”? The use of the pronoun “he” in the subordinate clause gives the reader the sense that there might be another “he.” Upon closer analysis, however, it is evident that “he” refers to Strether. What the sentence construction appears to represent is the construction of knowledge according to William James’s model, as Strether is distanced from his own observation. “That he knew” is a noun clause functioning as the direct object of the verb “knew,” which creates a layering effect, showing Strether’s mind in the process of apprehending some knowledge created by the interaction of the object (Bilham and Maria’s comment) and his mind. This is followed by “and he took it [. . .]” which refers to his knowing almost immediately, giving it a physical presence as the direct object of the transitive verb “took.” Like the earlier merging and splitting, pausing and proceeding, levels of awareness are created, both in the presentation of the language, i.e. syntax, and within Strether’s mind. The levels are reminiscent of William James’s theory that “knowledge becomes . . . an ultimate relation that must be admitted, whether it be explained or not” (*Principles of Psychology*, I 216). Strether does not seek to explain the knowledge, but merely becomes aware of grasping it, as some object outside of himself.

In fact, he thinks of his knowledge of Maria's statement that "he's one of us" as a "sign that he had got his job in hand," just as Bilham is a signal, and later, a specimen.

The succeeding sentence serves to illustrate further William James's theory about the rhythm of language. He expands the metaphor of the bird in flight, suggesting that "resting places are usually occupied by sensorial imaginations of some sort [ . . . ]. Let us call the resting places the 'substantive parts,' and the places of flight the 'transitive parts' [ . . . ] it then appears that the main end of our thinking is at all times the attainment of some other substantive part" (243). This is the process that Strether is apparently working through. The sentence begins, "This was the more grateful to him," leading the reader to question "what was?" "This" is further explained by the clause "that he could think of the intelligence now serving him as an acquisition [ . . . ]". Strether is both distanced from his "intelligence" and is brought to that point of rest at which the mind attains knowledge. The relative pronoun allows Strether to reach the substantive part, which is, for him, intelligence as an "acquisition," i.e. some construct outside of himself. It becomes, in itself, an object that Strether tentatively grasps, much like the unanimity that had heretofore eluded him.

As the passage continues, Strether's uncertainty is indicated. In the following line, the reader is shown Strether's awareness of knowledge, followed by self-doubt, another example of leveling. This is achieved by both sentence structure and content: "He wouldn't have known even the day before what she meant—that is if she meant, what he assumed [ . . . ]". The timeliness of the revelation is indicated by the adverb "even," which suggests immediacy, and William James's observation that "some [thoughts] are always things known a moment ago more clearly; others are things to be

known more clearly a moment hence” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 241). The adverb is the transitive part that carries Strether to another substantive part. Certainty is undermined by qualification: the dash seems to underscore the tentativeness, reminiscent of the earlier starts and stops. This is further emphasized by the use of the conjunction “if” which serves to introduce yet another clause which qualifies that which it follows. The reader witnesses Strether’s self-questioning, “if she meant, what he assumed [. . .]”, which is subjective, with the use of the relative pronoun “that” leading again to the substantive “they were intense Americans together,” which had remained unnamed in the preceding clause, allowing for further qualification and fixing of meaning. This, again, gives a sense of the merging hinted at earlier. Here it appears to be a complete moment of recognition for Strether, but the object of knowledge, intense Americans, needs to be further clarified for the reader. This can be done through consideration of the “signal,” Bilham.

A sense of movement is further emphasized as Strether recognizes that “he wouldn’t have known even the day before [. . .]”. It is a knowledge he arrives at by fits and starts, over time, as the mind travels in flight. In addition, he gets to the substantive having “just worked round,” giving a sense of tentative approach, which is strengthened by the interposition of the significant phrase, “and with a sharper turn of the screw than any yet” which fixes the movement. The new substantive is arrived at and rested on. What he has worked round to is “the conception of an American intense as little Bilham was intense,” which is signaled earlier on by the approach of little Bilham. Here, finally, the signal becomes “his first specimen.” The use of the word specimen evokes the earlier references to merging and splitting, as a specimen is cut open and analyzed. The tone

and structure of the description remains objective and analytical: “The young man was his first specimen; the specimen had profoundly perplexed him; at present however there was light.” The repetition of “specimen” underscores the definitive nature of scientific observation; the use of semi-colons to link independent clauses implies clarity and order, unlike the vagueness suggested at other points. Bilham, a young, diminutive “artist-man” comes to embody the American for Strether as several impressions fuse. As he sees little Bilham approach, he hears Maria Gostrey murmur, and he recognizes that “in Bilham’s company contrarities in general dropped.” While Strether had at first thought of Bilham’s “serenity” as European, he comes to view it as “being more American than anybody.” His first recognition is referred to as “light,” suggesting the merging of the earlier splitting that occurs with his first conception of Bilham. Strether recognizes that he can “like his specimen with a clear good conscience” because in him he represents “a special little form of the oldest thing they knew.” He embodies, then, the old values with a new self-satisfaction and passion for one’s life. Bilham looks at a world “in respect to which he hadn’t a prejudice.” All is stripped away in Strether’s newly-formed view of Bilham’s singularity.

“Fusion” is a concept suggested by the narrator, who uses the term when he speaks of Strether’s “scheme”: visiting the Louvre with both Maria Gostrey and Bilham. “Fusion” appears to be the key to Strether’s acquisition of knowledge. Through fusion, unanimity is achieved, and Strether recognizes in Bilham, oneness. As his specimen is cut open and analyzed, Strether recognizes that Bilham can fuse contrarities, a sense of which is recalled in Bilham’s approach. Strether is standing before a Titian portrait of a young man, described as “overwhelming,” when he turns and sees Bilham. A

connection, or fusion, is made for the reader between the two: an old, grandiose work of art, and a young, diminutive maker of art. It is observed that Strether had already visited the Luxembourg Museum, which houses contemporary artists, with Bilham. The rest of the “scheme” involves a visit to the Louvre, and the old masters. Through Bilham, Strether can experience extremes, just as Bilham himself embodies extremes: he lives temporarily in luxury in Chad’s home, while retaining “his own poor place, which was very poor: and which gave him, to Strether, an odd and engaging dignity.” Bilham’s life further fuses contrarities as he had originally come to Paris to study painting, but “study had been fatal to him.” Despite this, Bilham maintains dignity and identity. This recognition causes Strether to “take hold,” and form a “new construction,” i.e. knowledge.

With the recognition of the fusion of contrarities in Bilham, Strether again feels a link to Bilham, earlier hinted at when Strether feels that Chad’s “was the only domicile, the only fireside, in the great ironic city, on which he had the shadow of a claim” (70). The ultimate “work[ing] round,” then, is an awareness, perhaps of the contrarities in himself: Strether is not the grand, old, unbending American as personified by Waymarsh; he comprises contrary emotions and pulls, which are acceptable and even good to him in Bilham. Having gotten “his job in hand” does not mean that he can perform the task of bringing Chad back; instead, it signals the beginning of the creation of identity through knowledge. The old view of a dispassionate, unchanging American can fall away in Bilham’s presence, validating the extremes within Strether. Finally, “there was light” as Strether’s mind apprehends that Bilham is a “special little form of the oldest thing they knew.” Bilham’s failed attempt at study does not ultimately destroy him, as Strether’s

failed “mission” to retrieve Chad does not ultimately destroy him. Rather, this adventure has helped define Strether. At the end, “unanimity” of his contrarities is achieved, and communicated to the reader through the language and syntax. Even as an American he can make choices based upon the intensity of passion that he learns to accept, and therefore, he learns to live, just as he exhorts Bilham to do.

Strether’s recognition occurs when Bilham, as a signal along with other impressions, strikes Strether’s mind, causing a totally new construction, i.e. the apprehension of the object. Strether’s recognition is reflected in the language of the passage that reports it, so that the reader can recognize the approach to cognition. Ultimately, the light is arrived at, and the language itself fuses when “the ultimate relation . . . must be admitted,” as William James suggests. The passage ends, “But it now for the time put Strether vastly at his ease to have this view of a new way,” calling attention to the concept of time, with the juxtaposition of “now” and “for the time” suggesting immediacy and transience, as Strether is en route to other understandings. He accepts “a new way” which is empty of prejudice; this is the light that he sees, and that is represented by the passage’s ending in an unqualitative manner, bringing together the fragments of Strether’s earlier impressions and uniting them in a “new construction,” something like a sentence, i.e. that of being “more American than anybody.”

It is impossible to separate completely a discussion of meaning and syntax, as, of course, they work together, but the syntax here becomes a physical presence. Much like the telegrams and calling cards, the sentences themselves become remnants through which one can see the text constructed.

Just as, at times, the syntax of the text becomes circular to convey the circuitousness of meaning, the narrative comes full circle. In a somewhat symmetrical scene, toward the very end of the novel, Strether once again approaches Chad's balcony, and "it was as if his last day were oddly copying his first" (333). While the situation appears the same, there is, however, a major difference. This time, instead of mistaking Bilham for Chad, Strether mistakes Chad for Bilham. Just as Strether's consciousness emerges a bit at a time, with slight alterations, so too does the scene, materializing as Chad does: "it quickly defined itself in the tempered darkness as Chad's more solid shape." This scene takes place after their meeting in the countryside, when Strether finally fully understands the situation. In the first scene, he thought he knew Chad, but was wrong. It was Bilham, whom Strether came to understand. Now Strether can read Chad's character also. Interestingly, he recalls Maria Gostrey's assessment that Chad had been "absent and silent." It is in the state of silence that Strether experiences real enlightenment. Strether's state of mind and the magnitude of his feelings are conveyed through the sentence constructions. This scene symmetrically complements the earlier balcony scene; the sentences symmetrically complement one another. The parallel structure of "Chad's was the attention that, after he had stepped forward into the street and signaled, he easily engaged; Chad's was the voice that, sounding into the night with promptness and seemingly with joy, greeted him and called him up" implies climbing. The sentences are delayed by the interruption of the subordinate clauses, in the first by another subordinate clause that acts as the signal that is described. The second is interrupted by a participial phrase that sounds a greeting. Notice, however, that the reader is not told how Chad's attention is engaged or what his greeting consists of. The

interrupted sentences create a zig-zag effect. The reader climbs, in effect, the syntax as Strether climbs the stairs to Chad's apartment. The paradoxical nature of language described by Kenneth Burke is again evident here; the obviously malleable syntax is one of the "instruments of his own making" that can separate man from his "natural condition" (13).

As Strether climbs, which in itself suggests transcendence, he imagines what Chad had done when he was gone from Paris. The reader is not told what actually happened, again, a silence, "though the visitor's [Strether's] fancy liked to fill it out." The flight of fancy takes Strether to consciousness, and to the apartment. As he climbs,

Strether paused anew, on the last flight, at this final rather breathless sense of what Chad's life was doing with Chad's mother's emissary. It was dragging him, at strange hours, up the staircases of the rich; it was keeping him out of bed at the end of long hot days; it was transforming beyond recognition the simple, subtle, conveniently uniform thing that had anciently passed with him for a life of his own. (333-334)

This passage is rich with reverberations. The word "flights" conveys dual meaning, both as the stairs Strether climbs, and the flight of the consciousness in William James's earlier cited description of the stream of thought as "an alternation of flights and perchings." Strether perches breathlessly on the landing, i.e. his moment of wordlessly articulated consciousness. He sees himself objectively, hence the distancing technique of referring to himself in thought as "Chad's mother's emissary." It is the interaction with the object personified. Once again, the parallel structure builds; the sentences become longer as Strether climbs, and the reader climbs along. The terministic bridge is not in

the word, but in the syntax and the silence that come to reflect Strether's consciousness. Again, in this novel, the word is not sufficient, so Strether must negotiate the remnants of whatever symbol systems are available to him.

Each of the symbol systems addressed here, the physically present tokens, the evocation of visual and musical art, and the manipulation of syntax, serves as attempts at building terministic bridges which will allow Strether to transcend one realm in order to achieve a state of rightness, which he can only do when he understands its meaning. They still, however, have characteristics of terministic screens in that they alone do not convey meaning; the "flight" to consciousness is only suggested once Strether has learned to read, or read beyond, the token words.

### Chapter Three: The Unalterable Vibration

“To be right” is the response Strether gives Maria Gostrey at the end of *The Ambassadors*, when she asks why he must return to Woollett. After all, the life he had established there would no longer be possible, with his having failed, in effect, in the mission conferred upon him by Mrs. Newsome. His reason has, of course, moral ramifications. One cannot use the word “right” without suggesting a moral sense. He calls it is his “only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself.” Maria counters, “But with your wonderful impressions you’ll have got a great deal” (344). In this final exchange between the two, Strether and Maria succinctly articulate Strether’s experience. He has come to consciousness, ultimately able to verbalize his motivations and identify his “logic.” In *Intellect*, Ralph Waldo Emerson calls logic “the procession or proportionate unfolding of intuition; but its virtue is as silent method; the moment it would appear as propositions, and have a separate value, it is worthless” (419). The impressions that Maria observes he has garnered are connected to Emerson’s sense of intuition, or knowledge of which he has become aware. Strether’s single response to Maria epitomizes what has happened throughout the novel: the unfolding through the senses of emotional, social, and psychological relations which have a moral dimension, and thereby spiritual ties, expressed through a “silent method.” The methods to be explored in this chapter include vagueness, impression, and charged silence. Inherent in understanding these silences is an awareness of the nature of sound, as each conveys meaning in an alternative manner. Current work on acoustic communication demonstrates how sound “defines the relationship of the individual, the community and ultimately, a culture, to the environment and those within it” (Truax 4). Barry Truax’s

work expands on the energy transfer model of sound, in which “the energy originates with a vibrating object that radiates its energy to the air or through any object with which it is in contact” (5). Although the focus of this discussion is on silence, sound theory is significant in that each of these silences resonates with meaning, ultimately allowing Strether to know what it means to be right.

Martha C. Nussbaum calls *The Ambassadors* a “major work in moral philosophy” which addresses “what it is to be assailed by a perception” (172). Strether, though perhaps at first overwhelmed, has been shaped by his perceptions, learning to read and communicate through vagueness, impression, and charged silence. The language used on the final page of the novel and the modes of silence place this within the Emanuel Swedenborg—Ralph Waldo Emerson—William James tradition of identifying the senses as means of expressing the spiritual. This chapter addresses the acknowledgment of the relationship between the material, spiritual, and rational worlds, i.e. a theory of correspondences becoming knowledge, through the movement to these modes of silence.

In “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,” Wallace Stevens writes of the “deepening need for words to express our thoughts and feelings” which “makes us listen to words when we hear them, loving them and feeling them, makes us search the sound of them, for a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration, which it is only within the power of the acutest poet to give them” (663). Stevens emphasizes that words are sounds, and that “a poet’s words are of things that do not exist without the words” (663). As with the poet’s words, the sounds of the silences Strether hears, the vagueness, impression, and charged silence that speak to him, convey to him meaning inherent in them that he comes to recognize in the course of his experiences.

Richard Poirier says that through his description of words, Stevens does not give them the position once occupied by God, but “deifies the *activities* by which a sense of these things and a feeling for them might, on occasion and very rarely, be produced” thereby generating “a corresponding activity in us only because we are aware of a ‘deepening need’” (*Poetry and Pragmatism* 160-1). Strether’s engagement with silences becomes the activity through which he can recognize meaning. Poirier earlier discusses the use of the language of daily life in poetry, saying that while it “creates structures we can believe in, it just as beneficially creates gaps in those structures,” and that when a word is “used as the sign of a thing it creates a sense of the thing’s absence more than of its presence” (149). This description of language recalls Emerson’s in *Nature*, derived from Swedenborg’s Theory of Correspondences, of words as signs of natural facts. The gaps, abounding with the reverberations of meaning, are not empty. In “The Stream of Thought” William James describes the “overtones” of words:

Now I believe that in all cases where the words are *understood*, the total idea may be and usually is present not only before and after the phrase has been spoken, but also whilst each separate word is uttered. It is the overtone, halo, or fringe of the word, *as spoken in that sentence*. It is never absent; no word in an understood sentence comes to consciousness as a mere noise. (*Principles of Psychology* I, 281)

Language, according to Poirier, embodies “whatever it was that stood in the way of transparency,” but he posits that Emersonian-Jamesian Pragmatism allows that “language, and therefore thinking, can be changed by an individual’s acts of imagination and by an individual’s manipulation of words” (135). Stevens cites Croce’s description

of language as “perpetual creation” (663), manufacturing both “reality” and the subject’s understanding of it. Strether’s navigation and movement through the silences results in his change in thinking; his method of communication has also changed. By the end of the novel, Strether is capable of reading “the quaver of [Madame de Vionnet’s] quietness,” aware that “there was always more behind what she showed” (321). The vibration, or quaver, is the language of sound-silence, the changed method of communication.

Somewhat similarly, Ross Posnock parallels Strether’s “gropings” early in the novel (*The Ambassadors* 9) with the “surrender to impressions” that James recounts in *The American Scene*. Posnock observes that when Henry James writes of disembarking, he has a

sense of being floated by sensations. He feels imbued with the vulnerability of a child innocent of language, and the cognitive grids and categories that fix experience even as they render it intelligible. Indeed, legibility is precisely what James, as usual, seeks to make problematic.

(89)

His feeling is described by Posnock as “pre-rational pure experience,” which one might link to a romantic, Emersonian sense, a privileging of sensation over ordering. Posnock, too, implies a connection to the Emersonian view of life as process, aligning it with James’s assessment late in *The American Scene* of the United States as “perpetually provisional” (87). Remaking oneself is an Emersonian concept, as he suggests all things spiritual and natural are in flux. In *Compensation* he writes,

The changes which break up at short intervals the prosperity of men are advertisements of a nature whose law is growth. Every soul is by this

intrinsic necessity quitting its whole system of things [. . .]. In proportion to the vigor of the individual, these revolutions are frequent, until in some happier mind they are incessant, and all worldly relations hang very loosely about him, becoming, as it were, a transparent fluid membrane through which the living form is seen, and not, as in most men, an indurated heterogeneous fabric of many dates and no settled character, in which the man is imprisoned. Then there can be enlargement, and the man of today scarcely recognizes the man of yesterday. (301-2)

Taking Emerson's language even further, Posnock observes, "a year before his creator," in James's observations about his country in *The American Scene* (1904), "Strether quite unexpectedly found his self open to remaking and renewal" (87). Strether advances, to the point where he "gains sufficient 'momentum' to 'toddle alone' and delights in what he calls his 'surrender . . . to youth, an echo of his creator's 'surrender to impressions' (Posnock 89). Clearly, this rhetoric of youth and rebirth suggests a new life through a return to a more primordial sense of self, one which understands its relation to a universe larger than the social milieu through which Strether previously defined himself, and which allows for Emerson's "revolution" of the soul. Additionally, while Strether's development obviously predates current sound theory, considerations of acoustic communication inform Strether's change. Barry Truax describes the relationship between the listener and his environment:

The exchange of acoustic information in a soundscape can also be thought of in terms of 'feedback' concepts to describe the types of communicational relationships produced by "hi-fi" and "lo-fi"

environments. The sound made by a person takes on the characteristics of the environment through the processes of reflection and absorption described earlier. Therefore, what the listener/soundmaker hears is a simultaneous image of self and environment. (23)

Truax's explanation is particularly fitting to Strether, as his development occurs in relation to his reading of the "voice of Paris" and the "vibrations" and "quavers" he comes to recognize in it and those whom he encounters. According to Truax, "the way in which a sound functions for the listener depends on its social and environmental context" (27), therefore, it is impossible to separate the sound from the place and social milieu, all factors which contribute to Strether's emerging, fluxional sense of self. Viewed in this way, the acoustic relationship is seen as "highly interactive"; it has a role in "mediating or creating relationships between listener and environment" (Truax 12-13). Only by reading the vibrations in their environmental and social context does Strether derive a sense of what he needs "to be right."

The process of renewal and reexamination applies to the James family as well. Following a crucial spiritual crisis in 1844, Henry James, Sr. turned to the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg for comfort. The elder James's adoption of Swedenborg's philosophy helped to shape the entire family's thinking. James was attracted to Swedenborg's application of scientific method to religious thought, and his "belief that the physical world possesses a deeper spirituality which is here and now merely clothed in matter" (57); Paul Jerome Croce calls William James's Pragmatism a secularization of his father's Swedenborgian outlook, "with a psychological rather than spiritual

explanation of larger purpose” and an awareness of “the way relations influence perception and meaning” (59). Strether comes to understand this too, and in his *Project of Novel*, Henry James identifies the impact of this on Strether, saying “sensations, impressions, a whole inert or dormant world of feeling or side of life, find themselves awake and sitting up around him; and so, in short, he goes on” (556). His use of personification elevates the sensations to the same position of the mind with which they are in relation. When Henry James writes *The Ambassadors*, he considers the effect relationships and perceptions have on Strether’s understanding, both of concrete meaning and experience, and their moral implications. James represents in fiction his hero’s successful attempt to achieve what Nussbaum terms “perceptive equilibrium,” which she defines as “an equilibrium in which concrete perceptions ‘hang beautifully together,’ both with one another and with the agent’s general principles; an equilibrium that is always ready to reconstitute itself in response to the new” (183). This echoes Emerson’s above-cited language in *Compensation*, where he describes “worldly relations” as “hanging loosely” about one. That, too, culminates in the process of remaking the self. In *Heaven and Hell*, Swedenborg describes “equilibrium,” writing “that any thing may exist, there must be an equilibrium of all things . . . equilibrium is between two forces, one of which acts, and the other reacts” (*Compendium* 91). Through his ultimate acknowledgment of and reaction to his concrete perceptions, Strether is able to remake himself.

As James writes in his Preface to *Roderick Hudson*, “Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so” (vii). Relations are critical in *The Ambassadors*, and for Strether, because they are precisely

what Strether must come to understand. His comprehension of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship, and his and Mrs. Newsome's, among others, signals his emerging consciousness and moral sense. Croce cites R.W.B. Lewis's idea of James's paradoxical theory that "religious seekers must resign their moral conscience and realize their vanity and limitations before a more complete spirituality can be achieved" as a "doctrine of a 'fortunate fall' from innocence toward the salvation of spiritual understanding and social connectedness" (59-60). The spiritual is not purely a concern of the individual, but of one in a larger context; it is the process of understanding this connectedness of the spiritual, social, psychological, and physical worlds that marks James's and Strether's Emersonian progression.

The principal idea of Swedenborg's that was developed by Sampson Reed and passed along to Emerson is the Doctrine of Universal Correspondency. This asserts,

bodies are the generation and expression of souls; that the frame of the natural world works, moves and rests obediently to the living spiritual world, as a man's face to the mind or spirit with. Now this plainly makes all things into signs as well as powers; the events of nature and the world become divine, angelic, or demoniac messages, and the smallest things, as well as the greatest, are omens, instructions, warnings, or hopes.

*(Compendium 51)*

Swedenborg's sense of correspondence counters the senior James's concept of "selfhood," which James saw as keeping "our manhood so little and so depraved," and resulted in his "vastation," or crisis. By contrast, Swedenborg's view of the "other world [. . .] furnish[ing] the true sphere of man's spiritual or individual being, the real and

immortal being he has in God,” while “*this* world [. . .] furnish[es] only a preliminary theatre of his natural formation or existence” spoke to the senior Henry James’s sense of the connectedness of the spiritual and physical worlds. He was then given, as Croce notes, a “sense of personal mission, answering ‘the question of human regeneration,’” guiding him in “instructing his children, [and] for writing his essays to reform religion and society” (Croce 54-5). James particularly sought to influence William’s thinking and study. In 1844, William experienced a spiritual crisis, much as his father had. Croce views his reaction to his father’s “unflinching fervor,” which William found “constraining, overconfident, and unsuited to the intellectual challenges of his generation, especially in the culture he encountered in his scientific education” as a catalyst for the crisis (66).

The changes in thinking that the younger Henry James later came to chronicle through fiction, a movement to relations rather than fixity, became a source of William’s sense of turmoil. His search and study, including his appraisal of Darwin’s work, led William ultimately to accept scientific thinking that was based on probability and plausibility, and not certainty. William James and the other participants in The Metaphysical Club came to see “that neither scientific theory nor religious faith could generate conventional forms of certainty, and they searchingly asked whether there could be any other basis for belief and action. They answered. . . that scientific method approaches certainty and provides a modern model for belief and basis for action” (Croce 154). The modern model, however, cannot provide certainty, but an approach to it, as theory, especially Darwin’s, is seen as not provable, but observable and offered to be tested. As Croce describes it, William James “sought to legitimate belief without

certainty” (10). He was greatly influenced by the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, who saw Darwin’s theories as probabilistic, both in the randomness of natural selection and in the impossibility of proving the theory of the origin of species. Belief, then, is mapped “on a continuum of decreasing uncertainty; as doubt recedes, belief emerges as a tentative truth, a provisional certainty. This view of belief reinforces his pragmatic emphasis on habit and action” (Croce 210). Peirce repeatedly refers to “habit which will determine our actions” (Croce 208); later, William James describes habit as rooted in the physical, and having ethical implications. He writes, in fact, “habit . . . alone keeps us all within the bound of ordinance,” and the “greatest thing is to make our nervous system our ally” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 121), ultimately connecting the moral to the physical. One’s behavior, then, is based on the physical patterns that are created, emerging from a belief system which, itself, develops according to decreasing uncertainty rather than a clear sense of certainty. Therefore, behavior is not fixed; a key word used by Croce is “provisional,” which reverberates for so many of the ideas presented here. Through Darwin, James came to accept the idea that “chance characterizes all attempts to read the deepest workings of the universe” (Croce 175). He does not reject either scientific knowledge or religious belief; in fact, Croce claims that “finding a way, despite those limitations, to attain truth and its positive fruits was the challenge of his adulthood” (220).

The above is the central idea illustrating the interconnectedness of this group of thinkers, beginning with Swedenborg, who connects the body with the spiritual world. In *Heaven and Hell*, he explicitly delineates “the correspondence of the two kingdoms of heaven with the heart and lungs, [which] is the general correspondence of heaven with

man; but there is a less general one with each of his members, organs, and viscera” (*Compendium* 177). He addresses this topic as well in *Arcana Celestia*, writing of the “given correspondences” between things “spiritual and natural,” and the “things which are of the mind are spiritual, but those which are of the body are natural” (*Compendium* 304). Swedenborg also discusses the use of gestures, saying they represent “those things which are of the mind,” and are, therefore, what he terms correspondences. The use of gesture as an alternative to articulate language will be addressed in Chapter Five, considered especially in Darwinian terms, but it is evident here that the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual are connected.

Developing from Swedenborg, Sampson Reed establishes his belief that

the natural world was precisely and perfectly adapted to invigorate and strengthen the intellectual and moral man. Its first and highest use was not to support the vegetables which adorn, or the animals which cover, its surface; nor yet to give sustenance to the human body;—it has a higher and holier object, in the attainment of which these are only means.

(*Growth of the Mind* 30)

Reed also addresses the nature of language and reason. From Reed’s theory of the connectedness of the natural and spiritual worlds, of course, Emerson’s ideas become evident, seen especially in his statement “every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind” (22). Emerson’s sense of correspondences or relationships also reflects the process of continual growth and remaking, as described in the earlier cited passage from *Compensation*.

The expression of the connection becomes significant for both William and Henry James. William James writes about both the psychological and mystical aspects of one's relationship with a larger system. In *The Principles of Psychology*, he describes consciousness as "from our natal day, . . . a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations" (I, 224). The mind is placed in connection to what is "other," following Swedenborg's sense of correspondences. Writing earlier in terms that William James seems to echo, Sampson Reed describes "the most perfect understanding of a subject" as "simply a perception of harmony existing between the subject and the mind itself." Reed, Emerson, and William James address the role of reason, with Reed declaring that syllogistic reasoning is passing away, and "the mind requires to view the parts of a subject, not only separately, but together; and the understanding, . . . by which a subject is presented in its just relations to other things, takes the name of reason" (43). To James, the mind is "at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities. Consciousness consists in the comparison of these with each other, the selection of some, and the suppression of the rest by the reinforcing and inhibiting agency of attention" (*Principles of Psychology* I, 228). Throughout *The Ambassadors*, Strether is as one lost in the theatre of possibilities, until he can sculpt a reality from what William James calls "the primordial chaos of sensations." James addresses rationalism in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, seeing it in opposition to mysticism. He finds it unsatisfactory for expressing "one's whole mental life," able only to account for a "relatively superficial" part of it (73). Instead, he grants primacy to intuition, saying "articulate reasons are cogent for us

only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion” (74). Ross Posnock says that Henry James is “open to what William calls ‘the blooming, buzzing confusion’ of primordial experience” and “sets aside conventions of control as he lets the world of objects take the lead and relaxes (without banishing) the possessive, instrumental thrust of imperial subjectivity” (86). The “primordial experience” is what is negotiated and expressed in *The Ambassadors* through the silences depicted here as vagueness, impression, and charged silence. While one may be connected to the experience, reason and rationalism fail as means of expressing it.

Swedenborg’s Doctrine of Correspondences is not the only one of his ideas to have significance for the younger Henry James’s writing. Swedenborg addresses the nature of speech in addressing spiritual truths, especially in his discussion of angels and angelic spirits. It is possible for man to communicate with the spiritual world, “when the spirit of a man is in society with spirits in their world, then it is also in spiritual thought and speech with them” (*Compendium*, 91 *True Christian Religion* 475). However, Swedenborg ranks above that the speech of angels, which he terms “ineffable” because it “does not consist of things represented by any ideas, such as those of spirits and of angelic spirits, but is the speech of ends and consequent uses, which are the principals and essentials of things” (*Compendium* 196; *Arcana Celestia* 1645). Swedenborg says that in his experience, when he has returned to the “light of the external or natural man,” he could not express “by terms, and not even comprehend . . . by ideas of thought” those things “which the angels see and think in the light of heaven” (*Compendium* 202; *Arcana Celestia* 9094).

William James also writes of the mystical as ineffable in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; those who have experienced it say “it defies expression . . . no adequate report of its contents can be given in words.” Additionally, it has a noetic quality, states of knowledge “into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect” (380-1). In *The Principles of Psychology*, James writes about consciousness that “language works against the perception of truth” (I, 243). This perception lies not in the words themselves, according to Richard Poirier, but instead to “our habitual way of ordering them” (143), what James sees as an emphasis on the “resting places” or “substantive parts.” Instead, James would have us focus on the “transitive parts” which are “filled with thoughts of relations, static or dynamic, that for the most part obtain between the matters contemplated in the periods of comparative rest” (243). Poirier observes that the grammar William James calls for makes “us aware that the relations between things are as important to experience as are the things themselves” (152). It is the movement through, not the stopping at, a point that is significant; in fact, James writes “it is the reinstatement of the vague to its proper place in our mental life which I am so anxious to press on the attention” (I, 254). This point brings together the mystical, the psychological, and means of expression. If, as Poirier notes, the “invention of consciousness is simultaneous with the invention of language, which, in turn, measures both the restraint upon and the expression of human freedom,” methods of expression may be reinvented in order to express new insight into the nature of the consciousness. James calls for a “re-instatement of the vague to its proper place in our mental life” which would acknowledge that “every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it. . . . The significance, the value, of the image is all in this halo

or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it” (254-5). The halo or penumbra is representative of relations. As William James moves from the idea of certainty to belief within uncertainty, the concept of the vague emerges. Henry James creates Strether as one who ultimately experiences insight through the seemingly ineffable, but actually a reading of relations, or vagueness.

There is more to the concept of vagueness than merely lack of clarity. Posnock depicts Henry James’s sense of vagueness:

one implication Henry James draws from equating feeling and action is his acute sense that ‘the varieties of his [William’s] application had been as little wasted for him as those of my vagueness had really been for me’. Rather than being a passive escape from action, vagueness has varieties of application. Indeed, vagueness, at a certain pitch, is application, just as ‘passion’—as Henry says with reference to George Sand—which can always dependably ‘vibrate,’ ‘becomes to that extent action.’ (45)

The word vibrate is particularly evocative, especially as one recalls Emerson’s adjuration in *Self-Reliance* to “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string” (260). The iron string implies a connection to “the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events.” It suggests an acceptance of what is “right,” and the recognition that one might find it through harmonious reverberation. James evidently draws on this imagery in depicting Strether’s ultimate recognitions, which may come to be seen in light of Stevens’s later sense of the “unalterable vibration.” Viewed as such, vagueness allows one to become poised for understanding; while silent, the

vagueness contains connection and meaning which can be termed “vibration” and results in consciousness. Stevens cites C.E. M. Joad’s description of reality:

‘every body, every quality of a body resolves itself into an enormous number of vibrations, movements, changes. What is it that vibrates, moves, is changed? There is no answer. Philosophy has long dismissed the notion of substance and modern physics has endorsed the dismissal. . . . How, then, does the world come to appear to us as a collection of solid, static objects extended in space? Because of the intellect, which presents us with a false view of it.’ (658)

Stevens continues, “the poet has his own meaning for reality” expressed in the word which, he says, “adapts itself instantly” (658). Ultimately, however, “words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds. . . . A poet’s words are of things that do not exist without the words” (663 ). The sounds are the “unalterable vibration” that has been alluded to earlier. Hearing the vibration is hearing its reality. Different types of listening are identified in contemporary sound theory, but they share what Truax calls the “most basic function,” “the survival value implicit in detecting information about the environment through acoustic cues” (21).

One learns not only about the environment through vibration, but also about the self. Truax emphasizes the relationship between the self and the environment, describing, as noted earlier, the “sound of the self” as “ultimately intertwined with the environment.” This happens as one adjusts his speech in

relation to how it absorbs, reflects, or reverberates other sounds in the environment. As such,

the listener cannot tell if the voice is activating the space, or if the vibration of the space is activating the resonances of the body. In such a situation, sound mediates a *unity* between self and environment.

Language creates a division between the two concepts; acoustic experience in which the human sound is reflected back to the listener imbued with the image of the environment unites them. (38)

Truax's description is particularly enlightening in consideration of Strether's development, as he approaches the state of "perceptive equilibrium," a harmonious relationship with his environment that enables him to make moral decisions. Whereas language may have had a divisive, or sometimes misleading, influence, the vibrations or vagueness allows for redefinition through the environment. Strether's listening comes to permeate vagueness to recognize the vibrations that challenge his earlier stable sense of identity.

Vagueness spans the entire novel, with references beginning virtually immediately. On page 18, the word is used in terms of Strether's intentions regarding Waymarsh:

That he was prepared to be vague to Waymarsh about the hour of the ship's touching, and that he both wanted extremely to see him and enjoyed extremely the duration of delay—these things, it is to be conceived, were early signs in him that his relation to his actual errand might prove none of the simplest. He was burdened, poor Strether . . . with the oddity of a

double consciousness. There was detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference.

Here, vagueness is initially used to imply indirectness; Strether is enjoying his freedom while awaiting Waymarsh, so may not fully disclose his arrival time to Waymarsh. While this appears to be a rather banal use of the word, what follows invests it with greater depth. The word “relation” signals its complexity and fullness: this is perhaps the beginning of Strether’s growing awareness of his own consciousness, here referred to as “double.” Hidden in the vagueness of the information Strether plans to reveal to Waymarsh is the truth, about his relation to his surroundings, his “errand,” and a sense of the significance of what will be revealed to himself.

The word reappears changed at the end of the novel, after Strether’s discovery of the truth about Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s relationship. In revealing their plans to return to Paris to Strether, Chad and Madame de Vionnet are not direct, with Madame de Vionnet implying that their plans were “almost unnaturally vague” (310); this, of course, is misleading as the full nature of their relationship lay within those plans. Strether later recognizes the “*lie* in the charming affair,” and then “almost blushed, in the dark, for the way he had dressed the possibility in vagueness. . . He had made them . . . momentarily pull it for him, the possibility, out of this vagueness.” While the vagueness had been operating as a screen blocking meaning, its richness is revealed, and Strether moves from “trying all along to suppose nothing” to finding “himself supposing innumerable and wonderful things” (313). This is not, of course, a mystical state,

but has connections to the psychological, as Strether comes to realizations about the relative nature of truth; in Emersonian and Swedenborgian terms, the vibration of truth to which he can fix himself is there. Recalling Poirier's comment about the invention of language coinciding with the invention of consciousness, one can see Strether learning to interpret the language of vagueness when his consciousness reveals "innumerable and wonderful things." The relations are established, with a suggestion of the Doctrine of Universal Correspondency, as all things are signs, and the "events of the world" are messages.

These two references to vagueness are not, of course, the only ones. There are many more, with Strether reading them to varying degrees, culminating in his final understandings. The earlier references reveal a struggling Strether, unable to penetrate the vagueness. For example, an important event for Strether is his visit to Gloriani's garden. The introduction to the sculptor is an important step in Strether's redefinition of his sense of self. However, when he first meets Gloriani, Strether is overwhelmed. The entire passage leading to the meeting is significant for its associations, especially in light of what it suggests in connection to the spiritual:

Strether had presently the sense of a great convent, a convent of missions, famous for he scarce knew what, a nursery of young priests, of scattered shade, of straight alleys and chapel-bells, that spread its mass in one quarter; he had the sense of names in the air, of ghosts at the windows, of signs and tokens, a whole range of expression, all about him, too thick for prompt discrimination. (120)

This instance of vagueness cannot be read by Strether; in fact, he sees Gloriani's face as "an open letter in a foreign tongue." It is a very rich illustration of all that might be contained within; the evocation of religious imagery suggests an earlier conception of spirituality than that to which Strether is moving. Additionally, it is a dynamic force that Strether must penetrate and fix upon. This will become possible as he learns to find relations in the transitives later in his development.

A critical moment in Strether's evolution occurs with the arrival of Mrs. Newsome's telegram announcing her dispatching the Pococks unless he returns, with or without Chad. This is a defining moment for Strether, who "had attached himself to sounds and suggestions, vibrations of the air" (182). This is his reaction to and reading of Paris and all that it contains. Sound theory is particularly applicable here, as Strether's reaction presages Truax's depiction of sound and its association with place. He explains,

the sound pattern has connected with layers of associations built up over the years, and frequently these associations have a predictable fixed quality, namely that a particular pattern of sound always produces the same response . . . These habitual response lead to certain types of behavior, and hence to a particular relationship of the person to the environment. Thus the pattern of sound *mediates* that relationship. (30)

Truax points out that the process can be modified, which happens for Strether. Again, Strether is responding to his newly emerging sense of unity with Paris, and modifies his sense of self through it, as contemporary theory might suggest (Truax 38). Truax describes the "acoustic community" in terms of language,

indicating that “the complexities involved in ascribing meaning to such sound sequences suggests that environmental sound can function as a ‘language’ within a soundscape” (79). A “soundscape,” we recall, is the system of the listener and the environment (65). He describes “*sound symbolisms*” (80) within the soundscape, coherent patterns of sound that “may take on special significance” (80). As such, they have the associations that confer upon them the status of symbol. Strether’s associations with and reading of Paris are heightened through his experience of its sounds. The language he is hearing may not be finely articulated, but it is on the strength of the “vibrations” and his changing relationship with Paris that Strether crumples Mrs. Newsome’s telegram, and withholds information from a watchful Waymarsh. This is followed by a “vague walk,” after which he returns to his room, destroys an unfinished letter he had been writing to Mrs. Newsome, deems it a “sacrifice,” and “slept. . . the sleep of the just” (183). While there are several silences implicit here, including the unreported letter and telegram and the unspoken words and glance between Strether and Waymarsh, it is the vibration of Paris and the vagueness of his walk that enable Strether to disregard Chad’s offer to return. He has begun to negotiate William James’s “teeming multiplicity of objects and relations” to arrive at that which is represented by them, the truth, be it psychological or spiritual, that is represented by the relations. His concept of how both he and Chad are expected to behave, and its contrast with what he is in the process of discovering in Paris are contained in the “vibrations in the air,” the sounds of which are mediated by his evolving consciousness.

Vagueness takes on more complexity when Madame de Vionnet confides in Strether that she and Chad are arranging her daughter's marriage. Strether is unclear throughout the discussion as to Madame de Vionnet's references; he does not know if "we," for example, means Madame de Vionnet and her husband, or Chad. Much of the scene involves Strether's clarifications. He is described as "vaguely and confusedly troubled" by the revelation, which contains greater "depths" than he had anticipated. Finally, Strether sees the news "through something ancient and cold in it—what he would have called the real thing" (238). The "real thing" may be how Strether's "heart vibrates to that iron string," the metaphor Emerson uses in *Self-Reliance* to indicate a connection to what may be called truth. Through the vagueness and lack of clarity lies the connection to Emerson's "iron string," which has, for Strether, an unsettling effect. The language here suggests a primordial truth, and Strether's reading of it. Even though he may read the truth, he is not comfortable with it in this encounter, perhaps because it is not what he later deems "right." The scene is presented in very physical terms, with Strether figuratively placed in the depths of communication, miscommunication, and understanding. He is described as having "struck himself at the hotel, before Sarah and Waymarsh, as being in [Madame de Vionnet's] boat" (239), but through this encounter is unsure where that actually is. The depiction, in fact, suggests his being out of the boat, perhaps even in over his head. Strether's vagueness and confusion leaves him feeling "as if he had even himself been concerned in something deep and dim. 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” (238). It is as if Strether is swimming in vagueness until he feels the shock of Madame de Vionnet’s news and his earlier misreadings, and grasps “the real thing.” He hastily responds, and “having said the proper thing, he wanted to get away.” Strether is searching for perceptive equilibrium, the “right” response to what is revealed. As the scene ends, the truth “flashed for Strether the next moment a finer light, and the light deepened as she went on” (239). Strether emerges from the depths of vagueness in which he had been swimming, and finds, through the light, the unalterable vibration of the truth.

Strether begins to be able to express his understandings, again represented through the use of light imagery, as the novel progresses. In conversation with Sarah Pocock about his, and Chad’s, duty to their obligations, with Sarah questioning Strether’s actions, Strether “found himself just checking a low vague sound” which he likens to a “growl.” This is quite out of keeping with any prior exchanges Strether has engaged in, and lends an actual physicality to the scene. Additionally, Sarah’s response is presented in almost violent terms. Strether realizes that Sarah fails to recognize Chad’s “transformation,” and “everything that had lent intention to this particular failure—affected him as gathered into a large loose bundle and thrown, in her words, into his face.” Strether catches his breath, and responds to Sarah Pocock in language that recalls the vague and William James’s “primordial chaos of sensations,” telling her, “everything has come as a sort of indistinguishable part of everything else [. . .]. Our general state of mind had proceeded, on its side, from our queer ignorance, our queer

misconceptions and confusions—from which, since then, an inexorable tide of light seems to have floated us into our perhaps still queerer knowledge” (277). The phrasing places them within chaos and confusion, but Strether is finally able to see light that emerges as he reaches the unalterable vibration through a very physical representation of communication.

Finally, when Maria later tells Strether “there were moments . . . when you struck me as grandly cynical; there were others when you struck me as grandly vague,” and he responds, “I had phases. I had flights” (330), vagueness is seen in terms established by William James. Strether has been able to read the transitive states, and has seen light, suggesting knowledge on both the levels of consciousness and spirituality. Strether has learned to recognize meaning through terms in which Truax later describes the language within a soundscape. Truax accounts for environmental sound’s functioning as language, but calls those languages “localized, even idiosyncratic,” with the information encoded “in terms of a holistic image that can be recognized as a ‘gestalt’ or analyzed for some particular qualitative feature” (79). Strether reads the “gestalt” and describes his understanding to Maria. Regarding his initial misreading of Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s relationship, Strether cites Bilham’s terminology, saying “it was but a technical lie—he classed the attachment as virtuous. That was a view for which there was much to be said—and the virtue came out for me hugely” (330). Strether extracts the sense, his changing perception of “virtue” rather than the denotative meaning of it. When Maria questions the basis for his judgments, he replies that they were centered upon “[Madame de Vionnet’s] beauty of

everything. The impression she makes. She has such variety and yet such harmony.” Despite “the irritations they flooded over,” Maria calls Strether “complete.” He has been able to determine the sense of things beyond their words, reconciling apparent contradictions to arrive at meaning. Connections have been revealed and recognized both to the stream of thought and beyond that to a sense of Swedenborgian spirituality. Swedenborg writes in *Divine Love and Wisdom*,

there are in the brain innumerable substances and forms in which every interior sense, which has relation to the understanding and the will, resides. All the affections, perceptions and thoughts there, are not exhalations from the substances, but they are actually and really the subjects, which do not emit any thing from themselves, but only undergo changes, according to the influences which affect them. (*Compendium* 15)

Swedenborg’s concept of the correspondence of the physical to the abstract is translated into psychological terms as William James describes consciousness. Strether’s interaction with the vague shows his change according to the influence that affects him, with the recognition of the gestalt signaling the unalterable vibration.

In *Nature* (1836), Emerson describes a similar connectedness, calling Spirit an “ineffable essence” that “puts [nature] forth through us” (40-41). As Sampson Reed sees it, “everything which surrounds us is full of the utterance of one word, completely expressive of its nature.” This is the “language, not of words, but of things” (33). It is this language, in vagueness, that Strether comes

to experience in Paris. Knowledge has been created and recognized by Strether. In a late and lengthy encounter with Madame de Vionnet following their surprise encounter in the countryside, Strether finally fully reads the truth. The exchange is the subject of the first two chapters of Book Twelfth. As Book Twelfth opens, Madame de Vionnet summons Strether by letter the day following their climactic meeting. As is often the case in this novel, her identity is not revealed until some time into the chapter; the reader knows Strether receives a letter that he assumes is from Chad, and learns as Strether opens it that it is from Madame de Vionnet. Again, the knowledge is revealed to the reader as it is to Strether. The language throughout the pages is rich with reverberations, as Strether approaches the unalterable vibration through vagueness. Again, there is reference to the life of Paris,

the something in the air of these establishments; the vibration of the vast strange life of the town, the influence of the types, the performers concocting their messages; the little prompt Paris women, arranging, pretexting goodness knew what, driving the dreadful needle-pointed public pen at the dreadful sand-strewn public table: implements that symbolized for Strether's too interpretative innocence something more acute in manners, more sinister in morals, more fierce in the national life. (314-315)

Through his correspondence, Strether is himself a part of Paris, seeing himself and those around him as "mixed up with the typical tale of Paris," and his reading of it deepens even further. The vibrations become tangible, as Strether is

conscious of the day changing to “heat and eventual thunder” as he awaits his meeting with Madame de Vionnet. The tension mounts for Strether as he approaches her home. He anticipates that she wished “to assure him that *she* now took” all responsibility, which, too, he felt was “in the air.” Arriving in her formal room, Strether sees “a pair of clusters of candles that glimmered over the chimney-piece like the tall tapers of an altar.” The imagery suggests Strether’s sacrifice for Madame de Vionnet. He struggles to make sense of his situation and “the vague voice of Paris” as he sees the truth as “queer beyond words,” but again attributes it to the “effect of the thunder in the air, which had hung about all day without release.” Release is not yet imminent as Madame de Vionnet is a mistress of controlled communication; Strether feels the “associations of the place” in the “quietness of her own note as the centre.” The note has both quietness and timbre, and as seen in the discussion of acoustic communication, a mediation that reflects the environment. As their interview proceeds, Strether reads and revises the impressions he has had of Madame de Vionnet. He begins to see things in contradictory terms; for example, she is different from the preceding night, but “there was nothing of violence in the change—it was all harmony and reason.” The oppositions perplex him; he wonders how she would explain her and Chad’s “fraud,” and comes to realize “that their eminent ‘lie,’ Chad’s and hers, was simply after all such an inevitable tribute to good taste [. . .]” . Lines between truth and deception are blurred, and the language reflects it. Strether realizes that “he could trust her. That is he could trust her to make deception right. As she presented things the ugliness—goodness knew why—

went out of them. . . She let the matter, at all events, lie where it was. . .” (318-319). Through this passage, trust is equated with deception, and ugliness and goodness are juxtaposed, while the use of a pun keeps the “lie” alive.

As Strether’s interview with Madame de Vionnet comes to a close, there is a definite movement away from the thunder in the air. As the image is filled with sound, Strether is somewhat lost in its vibrations. As he recognizes all that is inherent in her communication, Strether acknowledges that “strikingly sincere as she let these things come from her, she yet puzzled and troubled him—so fine was the quaver of her quietness. He felt what he had felt before with her, that there was always more behind what she showed, and more and more again behind that” (321). Beyond the vagueness and sound is the unalterable vibration; it is through such moments as a recognition of the “quaver of quietness” that Strether arrives at the language of things. The truth of that language lies deep within the vagueness and soundscape. By negotiating it in Paris, and through conversation with Madame de Vionnet, Strether learns to read it. Madame de Vionnet acknowledges that Strether takes with him an impression of her; he takes time to respond to her question about his leaving because “his last impression was more and more so mixed a one. It produced in him a vague disappointment, a drop that was deeper even than the fall of his elation the previous night” (322). Ultimately, impression is critical in Strether’s development, as Maria Gostrey tells him at the novel’s end, “With your wonderful impressions you’ll have got a great deal” (345). As he taps into the unalterable vibration beneath the vagueness, Strether is also negotiating his way through his impressions. He leaves Madame de Vionnet

with an ambiguous statement, “Ah but you’ve *had* me!”, implying both possession and duplicity, but does so “with an emphasis that made an end” (324) as he is prepared to read his impressions and finally, “to be right” (345).

Once Strether comes to understand somewhat the nature of vagueness, he must go further. As cited above, Posnock addresses James’s acceptance, for Strether, of the “‘blooming, buzzing confusion’ of primordial experience.” He also notes, however, that “his project simultaneously manages to accept the obligation of order and selection (what he calls the ‘treating,’ not the ‘feeling,’ of impressions) and to devise a way to resist the potentially coercive rationality of the ordering impulse” (85). Citing “impression” is particularly significant, because impression becomes yet another type of silence. It is the silence through which Strether can somewhat approach a degree of fixity within vagueness, while still surrendering to experience. Impression as used in *The Ambassadors* must be viewed in relation to its definition by way of the thinkers cited earlier. Sampson Reed’s depiction of impression is particularly valuable in light of Strether’s development. Reed describes impression’s significance:

Every one must have remarked, that a peculiar state of feeling belongs to every exercise of the understanding; unless somewhat of this feeling remained after the thought had passed away, there would be nothing whereby the latter could be recalled. The impression thus left, exists continually in the mind . . . These impressions go to comprise the character of an individual. (27)

Strether's remaking is, to a large degree, a result of the impressions he has garnered from a sharper focus on, or attention to, the elements of the vague. In *The Principles of Psychology*, William James describes the varieties of attention, including attention to objects of sense or represented objects, immediate or derived attention, and passive or active attention. What is most applicable to Strether is James's comment that "each of us literally *chooses*, by his ways of attending to things, what sort of a universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit" (I, 424). Through his silent reaction to soundless impressions, such as that of Paris, and his impression of Madame de Vionnet's manipulation of him, Strether achieves a greater degree of consciousness. From this point, Strether can then "reason," which, according to Sampson Reed is "beginning to learn the necessity of simply tracing the relations which exist between created things" (43) and to William James is "another form of the selective activity of the mind" (*Principles* I, 287), all of which is done, for Strether, silently. Posnock sums it up nicely when he observes that Strether "violently repudiate[s] instrumental rationality, making the logic and value of groping incommunicable save to Maria's (and the reader's) intuitive understanding" (246). Strether's logic emerges silently through his attention to and reading of impressions. As cited above, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* William James observes that in "the metaphysical and religious sphere, articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion. Then, indeed, our intuitions and our reason work together" (74). Interpreting impression, then, is a necessary focusing act.

Posnock's citing of Maria's role underscores her importance in Strether's development. Remember that she and Strether meet at the novel's outset. After their initial time together, Strether feels "she knew even intimate things about him that he hadn't yet told her and perhaps never would. He wasn't unaware that he had told her remarkably many for the time, but these were not the real ones. Some of the real ones, however, precisely, were what she knew" (22). One often has "first impressions" upon meeting someone new, but they are also often inaccurate. Maria, however, really knows Strether through her impressions and what he does not articulate, perhaps better than Strether, or the reader, knows himself. Interpreting impression is a movement towards consciousness. If, as Martha Nussbaum says, the novel "began with a question, [and] ends on just such a moment of surprised arrival" (181) with Strether's "Then there we are!" it is because he is finally able to read impression. Of course, as cited on the opening page of this chapter, Maria acknowledges Strether's final impressions, confirming for the reader their accuracy and, therefore, Strether's success.

Impression means more for Strether than mere silent awareness; Nussbaum cites the crucial scene in Gloriani's garden and discussion with Bilham as indicative of its depth. She, of course, discusses the role of perception in terms of moral awareness, but also deems "the life of perception . . . to Strether—and to us—to be richer, fuller of enjoyment, fuller too of whatever is worth calling knowledge of the world. In one of the novel's most famous passages [Gloriani's garden] he connects immersion in impressions with being really alive, having one's life; and he passionately urges Little Bilham not to miss that adventure"

(181). It is from this point on that Strether begins to be aware of his impressions, consciously attempting to read them as one reads a telegram, as they convey life and meaning.

Strether's attempts at reading impression become more successful when the Pococks arrive. Recall that he is increasingly aware of the "vibrations of the air" of Paris upon receipt of Mrs. Newsome's telegram announcing their planned visit; while still not reading fully accurately, Strether experiences more clarity of consciousness. He reads the Pococks, his relationship with them, and his standing in Woollett, upon their arrival:

It was in the cab with Jim that impressions really crowded on Strether, giving him the strangest sense of length of absence from people among whom he had lived for years. Having them thus come out to him was as if he had returned to find them, and the droll promptitude of Jim's mental reaction threw his own initiation far back into the past. (211)

Strether's estrangement from the Woollett crowd is indicated by his reaction to impressions, which are not recorded for the reader to share. It is enough to learn that Strether begins to see everything differently, including his relationship with the Pococks and, by extension, Mrs. Newsome, and his understanding of Chad, Madame de Vionnet, and Paris. The change in his reaction challenges his earlier held beliefs and understandings, directing Strether towards perceptive equilibrium as he recognizes the connections among and interworkings of people and situations.

Based on his emerging impressions, Strether reevaluates everyone. Soon after the previous incident, he speaks with Madame de Vionnet about Chad and the Pococks. The situation has become complicated by his changing relationships, evident in the way “his impressions, though multiplied, still baffled him” (228). Impression demands attention and interpretation. From the midst of these impressions, Strether emerges further allied with Madame de Vionnet, arriving there by unspoken means. While withholding information from Madame de Vionnet about his changing relationship with the Newsome family might appear duplicitous, Strether is amassing impression, and as a result, “it ended up by being quite beautiful between them, the number of things they had a manifest consciousness of not saying” (230). The phrasing sounds ironic: again, it is consciousness without language to express it, exemplifying the growth of expression through silence. It is within changing relationships that Strether ultimately defines himself. As Ross Posnock observes, Strether’s “impulse of ownership is compromised by a ‘letting go’ of self that makes him less an entity to be possessed than a nexus of relations to others” (227), much like Paris which “eludes definition and demands relation.”

Strether is in the process of remaking himself, exemplifying William James’s depiction of consciousness as a “teeming multiplicity of objects and relations,” in which even simple sensations are seen as “elements of thinking” that are experienced as the result of “discriminative attention, pushed often to a very high degree” (I, 224). Posnock’s description of “the reciprocal entwining of hoarding and openness” which “shapes Strether’s behavior, anchoring his act of ‘giving up’ to the social world that has defined him” (227) may be seen as

consistent with William James's view of consciousness. After all, James asserts, "knowledge *about* a thing is knowledge of its relations" (259); Strether further garners impressions, and through "discriminative attention" to relations, his consciousness emerges. His consciousness flows in the way James describes, as former stages of consciousness "[melt] into each other like dissolving views," until "they are but one protracted consciousness, one unbroken stream" (247-8). A significant moment occurs for Strether on Chad's balcony. Posnock discusses the importance of the balcony as metaphoric of what he calls "Parisian indeterminacy," in that it is "neither wholly public nor private." Two balcony scenes have been discussed in terms of their syntactical and symmetrical structure in Chapter Two, but yet another balcony scene signals Strether's growing awareness of impression. Upon Strether's return to Chad's following his visit to the Pococks, it becomes clear to Strether that he and Sarah disagree about Chad's development, and "it [the entire Parisian experience] probably *was* all at an end" (280). Posnock cites the scene as signaling Strether's "profoundest realization of freedom from the confines of the monadic ego" (230). There is symmetry, as Strether leans over the balcony as he had seen Bilham do on his first visit to Chad's. Posnock observes, "Strether's responsiveness on the balcony transmutes loss into rapt awareness;" the awareness emerges through Strether's capacity to read his impressions of Paris as "Strether found himself in possession as he never yet had been" (281). As Strether continues to wait for Chad, moving from the balcony within the apartment, from the "perched privacy" of observing the street

below him to contemplation of the inner workings of consciousness, he is confronted by his impression:

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 in the far past. 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. (281)

This passage mirrors Strether's development. There is the movement from outer to inner, suggesting the connection between the external world and the internal, the physical and the spiritual. James's choice of the word "communicated" to describe the passage from the balcony to the rooms suggests the lingering voice. But, like William James's stream of thought, the voices have changed, or rather, Strether has. The voices crowding in on him suggest impression being read; the remade voices "fail audibly to sound" for the reader, who must again interpret silence. William James says, "the *Object* of your thought is really its entire

content or deliverance, neither more nor less” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 275); to Strether, the remade voices contain the entire content, including his knowledge of self, place, others, and the relations among all of them. To consider this in terms later addressed by Barry Truax, what Strether hears from the balcony has become a “sound symbolism” in that it “mediates the relationship of the person to the environment” and thereby has “come to symbolize that relationship” (Truax 80). The voices of Paris symbolize all he has internalized throughout his visit, the changing view he has of relationships, and what he will ultimately come to see as “right.” He becomes aware, yes, of his loss of youth, as Posnock emphasizes, but also of his change, of the “wide late life of Paris” which was “in the outside air as well as within” (282) and which contributes to his emerging “perceptive equilibrium.” It is shortly after this point that Strether will go to the countryside and confront the truth about Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s relationship; he is preparing to read that truth as he interprets his impressions and the voices in which they speak to him.

As he often does, Strether follows these visits with one to Maria Gostrey, who serves as his means of working things through, or as a “ficelle,” as James calls her in the Preface (12), the thread leading him out of the labyrinth. It is to her that Strether says, upon attempting to examine his motivations, “I can’t separate—it’s all one; and that’s perhaps why, as I say, I don’t understand” (294). Ross Posnock sees this moment as a refusal to sort out, calling it the “note that makes Strether’s ‘relish quite so like a pang’” (230). While Strether says he does not understand, and cannot articulate what has happened, and Posnock sees a

*refusal* (italics added) to understand, instead it appears that the oneness does not need to be understood. Strether is experiencing unity of experience; William James addresses unity in both psychological and mystical terms. In “The Stream of Thought,” he addresses the conflicting ideas of unity and discrete elements of the subjective stream in relation to ego. James rejects the idea of manifold coexisting ideas, writing “*Whatever things are thought in relation are thought from the outset in a unity, in a single pulse of subjectivity, a single psychosis, feeling, or state of mind*” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 278). He uses similar terms to describe mystical consciousness in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: “The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity” (388) upon implementation of stimulus. Strether experiences a degree of oneness, the connection of the physical and spiritual worlds suggested by Emerson and Swedenborg, and is approaching consciousness. He does so when he reads the voices of impression, and Paris, which becomes a “sign of a natural fact,” speaks to him and contributes to his remaking. His remaking reflects an awareness of his conflicting motivations, including both his desire to please Maria Gostrey and his moral commitment to Mrs. Newsome, as well as his recognition of the possibilities of Paris. Because the voice of Paris is “ineffable,” Strether recognizes it through the impressions amassed during his journey, culminating in the inaudible voices of the balcony scene with the silence becoming even more of a physical presence, and oppositions are reconciled.

After his revelation in the countryside, Strether's impressions take on an even stronger physical presence. As he reviews what he has discovered, for example, "his impression took fuller form—the impression, destined only to deepen, to complete itself" (310) of the reality of the situation. Then, "it was a part of the deep impression for Strether, and not the least of the deep interest, that they [Chad and Madame de Vionnet] *could* so communicate" (312) in silence. Not only is Strether's impression taking form, but so is an awareness of what happens within silence. Awareness of the physicality of impression leads to another type of silence employed: charged silence. While this type is present throughout the novel, it is most strongly represented at the end, when Strether is most conscious of the workings of silence. While the group is still in Chester and taking a stroll early in the novel, Strether is aware, for example, of "the element of stricken silence. This element indeed affected Strether as charged with audible rumblings, but he was conscious of the care of taking it explicitly as a sign of pleasant peace" (37). The silence described here, accompanying Strether's walk with Maria and Waymarsh, has depth that may be read, but Strether does not have the ability to do so yet. By accepting it as a sign of peace, Strether is revealing his incapability, or refusal, to recognize the relations suggested by the "audible rumblings." Strether's misreading augers what is to follow, a series of misinterpretations before his eventual realization.

Charged silence changes, of course, with Strether's development. While Maria, Strether's interpreter, is away, Strether must learn to read as he finds himself "in presence of new facts." When upon her return he does fill Maria in

on recent developments, “they had, in the matter that so much interested them, come so far as this without sounding another name—to which however their present momentary silence was full of a conscious reference” (193). While he is not yet interpreting, Strether is, at least, conscious of the presence within the silence, an indication that there is something that demands attention within the seeming gaps. The “conscious reference” within the silence is a gap similar to those William James describes as “intensely active” gaps in our consciousness when, for example, we are trying to recall a forgotten name. James writes,

namelessness is compatible with existence. There are innumerable consciousnesses of emptiness, no one of which taken in itself has a name, but all different from each other. The ordinary way is to assume that they are all emptiness of consciousness, and so the same state. But the feeling of an absence is *toto coelo* other than the absence of a feeling. It is an intense feeling. (*Principles of Psychology* I, 251-2)

While it may appear that James is describing simply the attempt to capture the sound of a forgotten word, he accounts for the presence of reverberations in silence of which consciousness is aware. It is only when Strether acknowledges the “intense feeling” that resounds in the gaps that he approaches a sense of self.

Finally, Strether and Maria’s last conversation, during which he recognizes that “it rested, all so firm, on selection. And what ruled selection was beauty and knowledge,” is set up so that “they fronted each other, across the table, as if things unuttered were in the air” (341). Strether is ready for confrontation, and though in silence, explication, as he can finally read the unuttered expressions

between them. This, of course, gives silence an even stronger physical presence and energy than it has ever had.

This scene does nothing to further plot for the reader. Posnock cites James's commentary on it, in the preface, where he calls it a "delightful dissimulation" which "has 'nothing to do with the matter (the matter of my subject)' but 'everything to do with the manner (the manner of my presentation of the same).' In short, the scene's function is purely technical and adds 'nothing whatever' in terms of content" (248). Its significance is in its revelation of James's method of communicating consciousness, and Strether's apprehension of it. The reader learns that Strether has come to recognize the relations among people and things, as well as between himself and that which interacts with his consciousness in order to help shape it. In Sampson Reed's description of the language "not of words, but of things," he asserts, "it is because we are unwilling to hear, that we find it necessary to say so much" (33); Strether has become willing, and able, to hear the language that expresses connections. This, then, becomes Strether's unalterable vibration, or iron string, as he attains consciousness and the state of perceptive equilibrium. In his "Project of Novel," Henry James says that in the end, Strether acts "on full reflection." His decision to support Chad's change and his refusal to urge him to return to Woollett is a conscious choice made with an awareness of what he is himself to lose by his position. James describes Strether's reflection as thus: "No, I'll be hanged if I purchase the certainty of being coddled for the rest of my days by going straight against the way in which all these impressions and suggestions of the last three

months have made me feel, and like to feel, and want to feel” (570). Not only is Strether conscious of his change, but also of the role of impression in creating his new sense of identity in the relation of his subject and his mind, as Reed might phrase it.

With the emergence of Strether’s consciousness, then, comes the emergence of a new Strether, one who is aware that his earlier stable identity, as Posnock describes it, was “a mere convenience, rather than an essence” (227). Posnock cites James’s sense of “bewilderment” as the “highest degree of feeling” (238). By the novel’s end, Strether is willing to abandon his stable identity, and embrace change, in himself and his perception of others, ultimately being defined through change, including becoming so “marginal,” as Posnock calls him, that “he has no language to describe his intentions” (244). While Posnock sees this condition and “freedom to dwell in indeterminacy, to hoard impressions” as being closely aligned with a capitalist economy, Strether does not appear to be operating with the intention of maintaining his place within Woollett’s capitalistic system as he has rejected the particular identity circumscribed by his previous life and relations there.<sup>3</sup> Instead, Strether is seeking “to be right,” a condition imbued with moral implications, and his loss of language and social standing indicates an Emersonian loss of ego; Strether can stand “on the bare ground” until “all mean egotism vanishes” and “become a transparent eye-ball” until “the currents of the Universal Being circulate through” him (*Nature* 10). By rejecting stable identity

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<sup>3</sup> Posnock cites George Simmel’s *The Philosophy of Money*, in which he describes “the inherent laws of possession,” in relation to the “dialectic of the self’s hoarding and expansion.” He suggests that those who desire to own money attain freedom; Posnock sees Strether’s hoarding of impression as consistent with this philosophy.

and accepting his position within vagueness and the language of impression and charged silence, Strether has insights such as those suggested by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* that remain inarticulate, but “carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time” (381). Able to penetrate the vagueness and become attuned to the unalterable vibration, Strether’s awareness is one of consciousness. He has emerged as a modern figure conscious of, though not articulating, what it is to be right in his social milieu, and has moved to that point through silence with real physical presence. As will be shown, the physical realm takes on even greater significance for Strether as the connection between it and the psychological becomes even more pronounced in additional silences to follow.

## Chapter Four: Arresting Moments

Thought is an abstraction; William James, however, gives physical presence to thought, claiming “we think; and as we think we feel our bodily selves as the seat of the thinking” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 241-2). Describing thought in this way redefines consciousness. While pioneered by William James, this type of thinking has firmly taken hold throughout twentieth-century and contemporary examinations of consciousness, influencing such current theorists as Gerald Edelman and Antonio Damasio. For the reader of *The Ambassadors*, it underlies silences apparent in the work, moving from the more mystical or psychological silences examined earlier, to types which reverberate with physicality. These types, “responsive arrest” and awareness after a fact, mark the movement to Henry James’s representation of one’s physical nature and its place in thought. In addressing his brother’s work, William James looks for “great vigor and decisiveness in the action” (*Selected Letters*, 22 October 1905, 463); the vigor is found in Strether’s coming to consciousness through physical means. In the novel’s climactic scene, upon sighting Chad and Madame de Vionnet in a boat upon the river, Strether is brought to his feet (307), a moment signaling the birth of consciousness through the physical. James actually uses the term “responsive arrest,” and illustrates the concept of awareness after a fact early in the novel, introducing the reader to these moments of silent communication as Strether is introduced to Maria Gostrey. In their very first encounter, Strether and Maria stroll throughout Chester, “constantly pausing, in their stroll, for the sharper sense of what they saw” (25). The pauses indicate perching, much like that described by William James in his “Stream of Thought” chapter. In his analogy of thought to the “flights and perchings” that make up a “bird’s life,” the perchings are the

“substantive parts” or “resting places. . . usually occupied by sensorial imaginations” which “can be held before the mind for an indefinite time” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 243). In the novel, they are moments that Strether encounters on his journey towards recognizing the relations among things. His and Maria’s pauses are preceded by Strether’s “sharp sense” (17) and “sharper survey” (20), culminating in “another of those responsive arrests that we have had so repeatedly to note” (27) when they come face to face with Waymarsh. This is the first of many moments of consciousness that Strether encounters in the novel, and its representation takes on physical attributes, as if Strether is held by the “oddity of a double consciousness” (18) of which he increasingly becomes aware. He knows that he is “always considering something else; something else, I mean, than the thing of the moment” (26). The repetition of “something else” confers a separate identity on the object of his thinking. Through these early hints of revelation, James introduces both the reader and Strether to a physical awareness of consciousness, establishing the centrality of this method of representation in the novel.

Alfred North Whitehead, writing in 1925, describes the connection of the mind to the natural world:

The effect of physiology was to put mind back into nature. The neurologist traces first the effect of stimuli along the bodily nerves, then integration at nerve centers, and finally the rise of a projective reference beyond the body with a resulting motor efficacy in renewed nervous excitement. (*Science and the Modern World* 148)

The return of the mind to the physical world necessitates consideration of how the resulting “renewed nervous excitement” translates into consciousness. Whitehead calls

consciousness “the function of knowing” aspects of “one real universe” (150). The process of knowing, for William James, also begins with the physical world, with sensations, which “first make us acquainted with innumerable things, and then are replaced by thoughts which know the same things in altogether other ways” (*Principles of Psychology* II, 6). Needing no precedent, sensation is the first step in consciousness. The mind, however, must proceed from sensation. William James addresses the subsequent stages of knowing in “The Stream of Thought” chapter, charting the mind’s selection from among sensations to represent an object. Ultimately, one comes to “know” the thing, but James warns, “language works against our perception of the truth” because each thought knows the thing it is named for, and nothing else. This is not sufficient, as he says “some of them are always things known a moment ago more clearly; others are things to be known more clearly a moment hence” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 241), as when Strether is “always considering something else . . . than the thing of the moment.” Duration and physical presence play roles in knowing and thinking. Therefore, the physical world must be accounted for when considering knowledge.

Despite their different disciplines and styles, Henry James was aware of the work his brother had done in the field of consciousness. In their correspondence, the two address one another’s writings, with Henry indicating in his letter of April 21, 1884 that he had “attacked your two Mind articles,” one of which, “On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology,” John J. McDermott calls “the most important of William James’s early essays, for it became the basis of the famous chapter ‘The Stream of Thought’ in his *Principles of Psychology*” (Introduction to *William and Henry James*:

*Selected Letters* xiii). In return, William read and commented on Henry's writing, often critiquing his style. After reading *The Golden Bowl*, for example, William implores Henry to write a book "with no twilight or mustiness in the plot, with great vigor and decisiveness in the action, no fencing in the dialogue, no psychological commentaries, and absolute straightness in the style" (*Selected Letters*, 22 October 1905, 463). In response, Henry acknowledges the "different ends" of their "respective intellectual lives," but also indicates that he has read William's recent writings and "philosophically, in short, I am with you" (*Selected Letters*, 23 November 1905, 467). While these particular letters follow the publication of *The Ambassadors* by several years, it is clear that each contemplated the other's theories and approaches. What William may have termed Henry's "fencing in the dialogue" or "psychological commentaries" appear to be Henry's rendering in fiction his representation of consciousness and communication. Just as William James allows for the physical aspect in knowledge, Henry James presents consciousness in concrete moments. While Strether's growing awareness lacks exclamation, it is captured for readers in silent moments of arrest, during which elapsing duration is made explicit, and Strether's understanding occurring after events, in reflection. There are points in the novel where Strether is said to be "perching there," borrowing William James's rhetoric in describing the life of the mind, or becoming aware of knowledge in an almost confrontational way, as it becomes distinctly separate from the event. It is in these moments that Henry James clearly anchors thought in the physical world. In both the novel's climactic scene and several examples of Strether's wandering through Paris, approaching the balcony and even climbing stairs, Strether's physical

movement reflects the “renewed nervous excitement” that Whitehead names. In each case, the physical movement indicates the arrival at consciousness.

James establishes a distancing effect between thought and narration, created as Strether virtually witnesses the emergence of his understanding, in a way perhaps influenced by the thinking of William James. William James, according to Paul Jerome Croce, was in turn inspired by both Charles Darwin and Charles Sanders Peirce. Darwin’s thinking, as examined by Chauncey Wright, places thought in the physical world, showing “connections between animal and human intelligence and propos[ing] that even human consciousness is a product of natural selection and evolution” (Croce 169). William James was familiar with his friend Wright’s *Evolution of Self-Consciousness*, in which, says Croce, Wright attempted to provide the certainty that religion lacked through science. James was uncomfortable with what Croce calls Wright’s “quest for certainty,” but his connection of human consciousness to natural selection and evolution is significant in establishing the mind’s physicality, a concept that will be examined more fully in chapter 5. Likewise, William James finds that Peirce’s ideas expressed in articles in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* “interest me strangely;” further, Peirce’s view that the mind cannot “refer . . . immediately to its object,” and that the mind “can never reach the essences of things, but only come to know them in mediated ways” (Croce 214) comes to reverberate for Henry James’s representation of consciousness expressed in the silences indicated herein.

The ideas inspired by these theorists, who clearly considered and reflected upon one another’s work, evolves into current analyses of the connection of the mind and the brain, those of Edelman and Damasio, as noted earlier, as well as in the work of Daniel

Dennett, Francis Crick, and Christof Koch and many other contemporary researchers, all acknowledging their debt to William James<sup>4</sup>. Gerald Edelman observes that William James's greatest achievement is "pointing out that consciousness is a process and not a substance" (37). The process, as described by Edelman, has its roots in the embodied mind. In fact, he implies that his thesis that "mind is a special kind of process depending on special arrangement" is inspired by James (6-7). He explains, "nerve signals in the form of electrical discharges occur at the membranes of neurons" (22). The brain has what Edelman calls "evolutionary morphology," with maps that 'speak' back and forth to one another. He describes nervous system behavior as being "self-generated in loops; brain activity leads to movement, which leads to further sensation and perception and still further movement. The layers and loops between them are the most intricate of any object we know, and they are dynamic; they continually change" (29). While this description of nervous system behavior aptly describes the creation of Strether's consciousness, it mirrors what's been referred to in these pages as his "negotiation," as Strether ultimately comes to recognize and confront knowledge. His negotiation is done silently, as the loops in the nervous system allow for perception that builds and changes continually. Edelman considers the study of the mind from earlier philosophers, including Descartes, whom he describes as having "sidestepped biology" in his "conclusion that there was a thinking substance." In his belief that "his conclusions depended on himself alone and not on other people," Descartes neglects what Edelman believes: "that to be

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<sup>4</sup> For example, in Crick and Koch's article "A Framework for Consciousness," they describe the neural activity in the front of the brain as "largely unconscious." They cite a proposal that "humans are not directly conscious of their thoughts, but only of sensory representations of them in their imagination" (120). While acknowledging that there is "no consensus about this" theory, the language suggests William James's concept of knowing things "a moment ago more clearly" while "others are things to be known more clearly a moment hence."

aware and able to guide his philosophical thought, he needed to have language” (34-35). Edelman’s view of language involves process; he says that while an interlocutor is necessary, it may even be “the memory of someone in one’s past, an interiorized interlocutor.” Considered in these terms, James’s deliberate silences constitute a complex lexicon unto themselves as Strether’s “articulation” is based in the process of his mind. The depth of the work can only be understood through the reader’s interpretation of that language.

Early in the novel, Strether’s “ability to have concepts” (Edelman 108), is revealed to the reader through glimpses of his assessment of himself, Waymarsh, and Mrs. Newsome. These perceptions—that he is a failure, that Waymarsh “*was* a success” because he “had held his tongue [regarding his relationship with his wife] and had made a large income” (31), and that Mrs. Newsome “*is*—wonderful” (45)—require Strether’s later re-examination. While the details upon which his judgments are based are often revealed through exchanges with Maria Gostrey, his re-evaluations and conclusions are not. Strether’s view of each changes, however, but not through discussion. Instead, the changes occur through Strether’s consciousness, as his silent interlocutions mark evolution. His discovery, for example, made through a silent glance, that Waymarsh has been in contact with Mrs. Newsome, resulting in her exigent request that Strether return, reveals that Waymarsh has not necessarily held his tongue (190), and leads to their further estrangement. Mrs. Newsome’s resulting cessation of communication results, ironically, in Strether’s feeling that he knows her, that “he had never so lived with her as during this period of her silence; the silence was a sacred hush, a finer clearer medium, in which her idiosyncrasies showed” (195). She is no longer “wonderful,” but is, instead,

“cold.” Her silence forces Strether to make a judgment about her; his recognition of Mrs. Newsome’s provinciality shapes his later assessment of Chad and the decisions he must make about his relationship with both. His reaction is couched in animate terms, as he “lived” with her through her silence; it indicates a movement and turn in his perception. Strether comes to speak to Maria about Mrs. Newsome after this, but the discussion follows the workings of Strether’s interior interlocutor. These moments lead to his final reassessment, the recognition that he, no longer perceiving himself a failure, is “right.”

Using terminology reminiscent of both Darwin and William James, Edelman describes the brain as a “selective system” which can account for psychological functions such as perception, memory, and consciousness (80). He supports neural Darwinism, describing what he calls the theory of neuronal group selection (TNGS) which, he claims, will “provide a bridge between psychology and physiology.” Edelman proposes that maps in the brain lead to generalizations of perceptual responses, “even in the absence of language,” and account for the emergence of language (82-3). The significance of Edelman’s work for a study of *The Ambassadors* lies in the physiological brain maps, which interact by what he calls “reentry,” or signaling between resulting maps of the brain (83). From this, memory and conceptual capabilities develop, and may exist before speech. Edelman distinguishes between primary and higher-order consciousness; primary consciousness, which he also calls the “remembered present,” is the condition “of having mental images in the present.” Edelman’s conception of primary consciousness meets, as he notes, William James’s requirements for consciousness, “it is individual. . . , It is continuous and yet changing . . . , and it is intentional.” Its

intentionality, a term Edelman credits early in his book to the German philosopher Franz Brentano, lies in its always having an object (5), or “referring necessarily to internally given or outside-world signals derived alternately from things and events” (121).

Edelman’s description of “the self and nonself components,” the “constant interaction between self and world systems,” and “the occurrence in real time and *in parallel* of perceptual categorizations for *each* sensory modality via the cortical system” (120-121) is applicable to the negotiations in which Strether participates as he silently approaches moments of cognition. The emergence of primary consciousness results from what Edelman calls the “evolutionary development of the ability to create a scene” (118), based on an ongoing process of “self-categorization” built by “matching past perceptual categories with signals from value systems, a process carried out by cortical systems capable of conceptual functions. This value-category system then interacts via reentrant connections with brain areas carrying out ongoing perceptual categorizations of world events and signals” (119-120). Even primary consciousness necessitates constant interaction with the physical world for the creation of scenes, without yet the awareness of the process. A moment crucial in the development of Strether’s consciousness, and clearly representative of a created scene, is the event in Gloriani’s garden, discussed in chapter 2 in terms of the significance of its rhetoric of art and music. As noted there, Henry James saw this scene as the moment of Strether’s crisis; in his exhortation to Bilham to “Live!” he begins his journey to consciousness. In the context of primary consciousness, Strether constructs a scene from the impressions he has garnered, categorizes himself and the others, and reacts to “my impressions of Chad and of people I’ve seen at *his* place—well, have had their abundant message for me, have just dropped

*that* into my mind” (132). While the scene has had an effect on Strether, the effect is almost imposed; he is not yet “conscious of being conscious” which comes with higher-order consciousness. As a tableau, or somewhat still scene, it inspires a reaction from Strether; Strether’s exhortation to “Live!” involves more than a search for lost youth. The complexity of Strether’s discovery is to come later, with movement, and an understanding of “relations.”

Similarly, Strether’s first meeting with Miss Barrace elicits a surprising response from him. Bilham introduces Miss Barrace to Strether, and in response to signals that he cannot quite read accurately, Strether asks “himself if the occasion weren’t in its essence the most baited, the most gilded of traps” (76). Strether is not even sure why he would see it as a trap; in fact, “he blinked in the light of a conviction that he should know later on” (77), perhaps after he has achieved higher-order consciousness. He knows his initial reaction to the object, and while responding to a signal, is not conscious of what it signifies. He constructs a scene inspired by Miss Barrace, but it is only “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” (78). Strether is approaching movement as he “pull[s] himself up,” so the process away from the tableau to awareness is underway.

The moments signaling primary consciousness are necessary stages in the evolution of higher-order consciousness, which by contrast, “involves the recognition by a thinking subject of his or her own acts or affections. It embodies a model of the personal, and of the past and the future as well as the present. It exhibits direct awareness—the noninferential or immediate awareness of mental episodes without the

involvement of sense organs or receptors. . . . We are conscious of being conscious” (Edelman 112). Strether does become “conscious of being conscious,” but while the expression of “an inner life, based on the emergence of language in a speech community, becomes possible” (133), Strether’s higher-order consciousness is expressed through very concrete representations of his awareness of thought, and of what Edelman calls a “socially based selfhood” (125). Edelman writes that as a “somatic selective system,” the brain “uses value constraints to project the future in terms of categories and goals,” and “our language and ideas of meaning go far beyond the rules of grammar” despite our being “limited in our thought by the way in which we are constituted as products of evolutionary morphology” (161). Strether’s expression and awareness are based on a sense of meaning that “takes shape in terms of concepts that depend on categorizations based on value. [Meaning] grows with the history of remembered body sensations and mental images” (170). Significant illustrations of Strether’s higher-order consciousness appear later in the novel and his development. The pivotal event of seeing Chad and Madame de Vionnet crystallizes everything for Strether, both in terms of understanding them and himself. Upon his return to Paris, he reflects upon what has happened. His reflection itself indicates another level of consciousness. Significantly, he mentally reviews Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s hurried exchange in the boat, and “it was a part of the deep impression for Strether, and not the least of the deep interest, that they *could* so communicate” (312) as they make a rapid-fire decision as to how to address Strether’s sighting them. After confronting their consciousness, Strether confronts his own, as “he almost blushed, in the dark, for the way he had dressed the possibility in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll. He had made them—and by no fault of their

own—momentarily pull it for him, the possibility, out of this vagueness; and must he not therefore take it now as they had had simply, with whatever thin attenuations, to give it to him?” (313). Strether stands back and assesses the accumulated images, and recognizes what he had not been able to earlier about Chad and Madame de Vionnet, and his own understandings. He is fearful of Maria Gostrey’s reaction as he anticipates her saying “‘What on earth—that’s what I want to know now—had you then supposed?’ He recognized at last that he had really been trying all along to suppose nothing. Verily, verily, his labour had been lost. He found himself supposing innumerable and wonderful things” (313). The suppositions follow what Edelman might term Strether’s “interaction between self and world system” (120) as his consciousness takes shape in relation to his latest discovery and reevaluation of his surroundings. Later that morning, Strether once again wanders the streets of Paris, which have spoken to him throughout his time there, the “vague voice of Paris” that was discussed in chapter 3 in relation to the unalterable vibration. His walk is familiar to him as he goes once again to the *Postes et Tèlègraphes*, but now “the something in the air of these establishments; the vibration of the vast strange life of the town” has new meaning as the signal, while the same, becomes fuller for Strether. He recognizes that “he was mixed up with the typical tale of Paris” (315) as it contributes to Strether’s higher-order consciousness through his awareness of his physical surroundings. The tale of Paris, and Strether’s reading of it, is overflowing with the richness of Chad’s change, Strether’s change, and the recognition of Woollett’s, and by extensions Mrs. Newsome’s, provinciality, along with an emergent sense of what it means to be “right.” As meaning grows for Strether, he truly becomes an ambassador, not merely one who is doing Mrs. Newsome’s bidding, but one who can make judgments

based upon his perceptions and consciousness, and can deliver an informed message gleaned from his experience.

In his section titled “Attention and the Unconscious,” Edelman cites William James’s definition of attention, concentrating on what James called ““the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought”” (141). Edelman credits the development of attention to “evolutionary pressure on an animal to select one out of a set of appropriate actions,” (141) once again placing the development of consciousness within the physical, and ultimately, social world. Once Strether becomes aware of his consciousness, it is necessary for him to select appropriate action, deciding whether to return to the United States or stay in Paris, as well as choosing whether or not to encourage Chad in the direction requested by Mrs. Newsome. He makes the decision that “he must do both things; he must see Chad, but he must go. The more he thought of the former of these duties the more he felt himself make a subject of insistence of the latter. They were alike intensely present to him as he sat in front of a quiet little café into which he had dropped on quitting Maria’s entresol” (332). Not only is Strether aware of his choices, but they also acquire physicality through his contemplation. From here, Strether again walks through Paris, this time passing by Chad’s house “as if his last day were oddly copying his first” (333), but this time Chad, not Bilham, is on the balcony, and calls to Strether, whose perambulations mark his awakened consciousness. Strether quickly recognizes that it is “Chad’s more solid shape; so that Chad’s was the attention that, after he had stepped forward into the street and signaled, he easily engaged; Chad’s was the voice that, sounding into the night with promptness and seemingly with joy,

greeted him and called him up” (333). The description is in marked contrast with his earlier mistaking Bilham for Chad. His physical movement through Paris and the countryside, and metaphoric movement through his mind, allowing for the growth of consciousness, results in Strether’s being able to see Paris and Chad accurately. As he climbs the steps, signaling his ascension to higher-order consciousness, he sees “what Chad’s life was doing with Chad’s mother’s emissary” as his awareness is intertwined with the physical representation of his social world. Coming at a final stage in Strether’s development, his ascension is a culmination of moments of “responsive arrest” and “awareness after a fact” that are remembered and re-experienced as he relives bodily experiences and images.

Edelman’s consideration of George Lakoff’s *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* is useful in illustrating the connection between silence and consciousness. Lakoff describes language as emerging from “cognitive semantics,” proposing that meaning results from the “intrinsic workings of the body and the brain.” As Edelman explains,

meaning is already based in embodiment by means of image schemas, kinesthetic schemas, metonyms, and the categorical relations that underlie metaphor. But this is not enough: Language is supposed to be characterized by *symbolic* models. These are models that pair linguistic information with the cognitive models that themselves make up a *preexisting* conceptual system. Inasmuch as preexisting conceptual models are already embodied through their link to bodily and social experience, this link is not an arbitrary one. (247)

His view of “idealized cognitive models,” that use conceptual embodiment, occurs “through bodily activities prior to language” (247), so that language “can be understood in terms of bodily functioning” (250). According to this model, language emerges from bodily experience, rather than being imposed by a “God’s-eye view.” As such, Strether’s “language” may first emerge through a syntax of silence. His conceptualizing occurs in concrete terms, with his understanding conveyed through his language of silence. While the more physical representations of sensation and gesture will be addressed in chapter 5, his concrete conceptualization accounts for his silent cognition. The emergence of Strether’s recognitions during his repeated walks through town and the images he creates reflects the physical basis of cognition. Finally, as Strether approaches his sense of what he must do to be right, he consciously withholds language and information from Maria Gostrey, as he considers their situation in metaphoric terms. While waiting to hear from Chad after discovering the truth, Strether spends a great deal of time with Maria; the two “said for the time no further word about the matter” as their roles change and he shows Maria through Paris. Strether has a “final appreciation of what he had done,” and sees himself and Maria as “Babes in the Wood” as he awaits a final meeting with Chad. He considers the “reckoning . . . which also faced him” and which he would “float to it duly through these caverns of Kubla Khan” (326-327). The allusion to floating on the river Alph evokes Strether’s own stream of consciousness. The metaphoric and physical representations signal his contemplation of a Woollett where “everything there changed for him.” His understanding stands in marked contrast to an early moment of knowledge inspired by sensation. Strether meets Chad for the first time in a box at the theatre, foreshadowing their final encounter in Chad’s balcony. At their first meeting, Strether is

surprised by Chad, much as he will be in the later encounter. He realizes that “they were in presence of Chad himself” through sensation. It is, in fact, a significant sensation, viewed by Strether in retrospect as “quite one of the sensations that count in life; he certainly had never known one that had acted, as he might have said, with more of a crowded rush” (89). This is an early example of Strether’s recognizing a moment of his consciousness prompted by sensation but fully appreciated after its completion; the incident is somewhat overwhelming for him as he relives it for several days. He will later come to recognize such moments as his consciousness emerges, following the same physical patterns, both in Paris and in his sensory path, recalling the “renewed nervous excitement” that Whitehead later comes to name. In the absence of articulation, meaning is embodied.

The process Strether is participating in will ultimately lead to the creation of his metasef, a term coined by Antonio Damasio, another contemporary theorist, in addressing the creation of subjectivity and the self. Using the metaphor of the body as a landscape, Damasio describes “the body ‘structure’ [as] analogous to object shapes in a space, while the body ‘state’ resembles the light and shadow and movement and sound of the objects in that space” (xiv). Damasio accounts for both thought and feeling, with feeling arising as a “momentary ‘view’ of a part of that body landscape. It has a specific content—the state of the body, and specific neural systems that support it—the peripheral nervous system and the brain regions that integrate signals related to body structure and regulation” (xiv). Damasio considers the brain as a collection of systems that addresses both the “goal-oriented thinking process we call reasoning,” and the “response selection we call decision making” (70), implying a connection between the two, which are

intertwined and have a biological base. As such, “a brain design likely to have prevailed in natural selection may have been one in which the subsystems responsible for reasoning and decision making would have remained intimately inter-locked with those concerned with biological regulation,” with both intrinsic to survival (85). In this view, thought and feeling are physically based, and the “organism constituted by the brain-body partnership interacts with the environment as an ensemble,” much in the way we have seen Strether’s thoughts inspired by his sensation, or feeling, and reaction to his environment. The interaction results not just in external, physical response, but may also “generate internal responses, some of which constitute images.” The internal responses become the basis for the mind (89).

Feelings are described as a means of communicating signals to others; they are a necessary part of the “metaself construction” that Damasio presents. As with Edelman’s sense of consciousness, the metaself, too, is a process. The metaself as Damasio portrays it is “a schematic view of the main protagonists from a perspective external to both [i.e. images or organism responses to images]. In effect, the third-party view constitutes, moment-by-moment, a nonverbal narrative document of what is happening to those protagonists (i.e. the ‘unfolding’ of the consciousness). The narrative can be accomplished without language” (243). While he does distinguish between the creation of the “self” and of the “I,” with language being necessary for the “I,” Damasio creates a schematic through which one might view the emergence from a neural basis of Strether’s sense of consciousness and self as he perches on the edge of concrete recognitions and his consciousness. Damasio says William James would be pleased to discover this representation of the metaself. In *The Feeling of What Happens*, Damasio calls language

merely one translation of consciousness; language, he says, cannot develop from nothing, so there must be underlying concepts to language (108). It is, however, “a major contributor” to a high-level form of consciousness which Damasio terms “extended consciousness.”

The first representation of Strether’s consciousness is through its unfolding, what Damasio calls its “nonverbal narrative document,” which is “accomplished without language, using the elementary representation tools of the sensory and motor systems in space and time” (243). For example, early in the novel, a simple response to Maria Gostrey’s initial question to Strether yields much more than he realized. Maria, watching as Strether inquires after Waymarsh, asks if his friend is Mr. Waymarsh of Milrose, Connecticut. Strether gives a rather lengthy response, but “it wasn’t till after he had spoken that he became aware of how much there had been in him of response; when the tone of her own rejoinder, as well as the play of something more in her face—something more, that is, than its apparently usual restless light—seemed to notify him” (19). The language of the passage is rich with sense references. Instead of Maria’s response, James focuses on the tone, or sound, of it. Her expression, and suggestion to a play of light in it, as well, speaks to Strether. These things do not merely speak to him, but “notify” him, suggesting that he is alerted, or that his consciousness is sparked. The recognition unfolds for Strether in time, an early example of James’s awareness of duration. Additionally, he both responds to and receives a response from Maria, but in sensory rather than verbal terms. At this point, Strether is not quite aware of his feelings about meeting Waymarsh; yet he knows he is relieved that Waymarsh is not yet there. The feelings ultimately lead to consciousness about his ambivalence toward Waymarsh and

his judgment, but it is never articulated. As noted earlier, Strether discovers through a silent glance that Waymarsh may have betrayed him to Mrs. Newsome; the nonverbal narrative of their relationship unfolds through a series of interactions with one another, and even Maria Gostrey, as Strether's metasef unfolds. This exchange is paradigmatic of the entire novel; Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship, Strether's coming to consciousness, and the decision he comes to make are all revealed to the reader and to Strether in a nonverbal narrative. Damasio's evocation of space and time lend linearity to the development or expression of consciousness. He sees the self as being "constructed," saying in fact, that the individual reconstructs and remakes the self. The unfolding becomes explicit as he describes that the "metasef only 'learns' about the 'now' an instant later" as the "present continuously becomes past" and we are "hopelessly late for consciousness" (240). The depiction that Damasio creates here echoes what happens to Strether, as his awareness of his unfolding consciousness, which takes him a long time to process, is presented to the reader, who is kept somewhat in suspense regarding the outcome. The unfolding happens for Strether through his moments of responsive arrest, where he pauses and acknowledges glimpses of consciousness, and his awareness after a fact, where he goes beyond the pausing and is aware of the interplay of his mind and distinct knowledge, as has been illustrated in his relationship with Waymarsh. The ability to create a metasef emerges from what Damasio calls the brain-body partnership which is the basis for the mind, and which he defines as the "ability to display images internally and to order those images in a process called thought" (89). Strether experiences those moments of visualization in points of "responsive arrests."

As noted earlier, the term “responsive arrest” is used from the beginning of *The Ambassadors*, when Strether and Maria Gostrey return to their inn to find Waymarsh waiting. James presents this as a significant moment:

the effect of the sight of [Waymarsh] was instantly to determine for Strether another of those responsive arrests that we have had so repeatedly to note. He left it to Miss Gostrey to name, with the fine full bravado, as it almost struck him, of her ‘Mr. Waymarsh!’ what was to have been, what—he more than ever felt as his short stare of suspended welcome took things in—would have been, but for herself, his doom. It was already upon him even at that distance—Mr. Waymarsh was for *his* part joyless.

(27)

Strether is stopped by Waymarsh’s presence and how he reads Waymarsh’s response to them; significantly, he does not articulate anything, leaving it to Maria, whom Waymarsh does not recognize, to name him. In this scene, it is clear that Maria is the only one who possesses knowledge. James creates a distancing effect, as the narrator does intrude by referring to “we,” and by placing Waymarsh at a physical remove from Strether. While Strether does pause at the moment, it is not until later in his emergent consciousness that he is able to negotiate the interaction. William James describes voluntary acts of attention as “momentary arrests, coupled with a peculiar feeling, of portions of the stream [of thought]” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 452). At these arrests, the stream of thought is obstructed, and “things temporarily move the other way.” When Strether sees

Waymarsh, his stream of thought is momentarily diverted, and the arrest is the initial stage in redefining his sense of self.<sup>5</sup>

As Strether later wanders in Paris, he is in the process of defining both the personal and social selves. On his way to find Chad's apartment for the first time, he pauses in the neighborhood, desiring to "put himself in relation, and he would be hanged if he were *not* in relation" (67). He is putting himself in relation to his surroundings, and by doing so, is "there to reconstruct" a connection to Paris, and to feel "the brush of the wing of the stray spirit of youth," and by doing so, recreate a sense of self. Strether's desire to reconstruct the past and his awareness of it reflect what Damasio describes as the reconstruction of the self. While, as noted above, Damasio understands self as an evanescent state, with the owner not knowing unless something goes wrong that he was in the process of remaking, Strether is more conscious of the remaking process. In fact, his desire to feel again "the brush of the wing," he conjures images similar to those later suggested by Damasio:

images are not stored as facsimile pictures of things, or events, or words, or sentences; we all have direct evidence that whenever we recall a given object, or face, or scene, we do not get an exact reproduction but rather an interpretation, a newly reconstructed version of the original. In addition, as our age and experience change, versions of the same thing evolve; this

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<sup>5</sup> Ross Posnock addresses William James's description of attention in relation to the will and the individual mind. He cites James's observation that "the ability to 'voluntarily bring back a wandering attention . . . is the very root of judgment, character, and will' (401). A healthy will enables the self to insulate itself against distraction" (35). However, while James suggests that "insulation" is necessary for the individual mind, Posnock observes that he does allow for interaction of the mind and a narrow view of the "social self" as "one among several selves."

must be reconciled with sensation that we can conjure up approximations of images we previously experienced. (98)

Damasio's evocation of sensation recalls William James's depiction of memory and its reverberations as addressed in *Principles of Psychology*; James describes it as "*the knowledge of an event, or fact, of which meantime we have not been thinking, with the additional consciousness that we have thought or experienced it before*" (I, 648).

Especially significant for the description of Strether's evocation of the past is William James's sense that one cannot think of "a thing as in the past, except by thinking of the past together with the thing, and the relation of the two" (650). Strether's desire to "put himself in relation" echoes the language here; by doing so, not only would he recall an event, but also the sensation associated with it in a remade self built on the relation of the two. It is in this moment of "responsive arrest" that Strether approaches a step in silent consciousness, a physical sense of self as silence adopts additional reverberations when based on the interworking of the mind, brain, and its stimulus. He approaches the point described by William James as consciousness, which does not "*inhabit any place.*" Instead, "it has dynamic relations with the brain, and cognitive relations with everything and anything" (*Principles of Psychology* II, 34).

From here, Strether moves on to Chad's apartment, and as noted in chapters 2 and 3, experiences a moment of consciousness at the approach of a balcony. This particular moment is one of responsive arrest. As he reaches the Boulevard Malesherbes, he pauses and observes the "continuous balcony" of Chad's apartment. Again, this serves as entry into Chad's world, and Strether's consciousness of self. The description of the balcony as "continuous" emphasizes its, and Strether's, connectedness to place and relations in

Paris, and evokes William James's depiction of the continuous stream of thought (*Principles of Psychology* I, 237). Standing there, Strether again is aware that "many things came over him here" and recognizes "the truth that wherever one paused in Paris the imagination reacted before one could stop it." Fixed on the balcony, Strether is aware of the "fine relation of part to part and space to space," both of the balcony to building and, by implication, of himself to his surroundings. Finally, a young man emerges from the apartment, and he and Strether notice one another. Strether is surprised to see that this young man is not Chad; he thinks perhaps the young man is "Chad altered." James prolongs the description of Strether's recognition; through the workings of Strether's consciousness he finally realizes that it is indeed someone else, Bilham. The momentary arrest in which the "relation of part to part" is revealed also uncovers Strether's emerging understanding of Chad, despite his not being present. Perched for consciousness himself, Strether senses that the balcony with its "perched privacy" might not be "a convenience easy to surrender;" moreover, he sees it as "the only domicile . . . on which [Strether] had the shadow of a claim" (69-70). Strether's perception "by a rapid process, was that this knowledge of a perched privacy appeared to him the last of luxuries" evokes Edelman's sense of the mind created through process, as well as of William James's description of perching at the substantive moments of thought. The rapidity of the process also conveys an awareness of duration, which is significant for awareness after an event. Strether is coming to an understanding of himself and his sense of self in relation to both Chad and Waymarsh as he pauses at Chad's balcony. He thinks of Waymarsh in contrast to Chad; Strether sees him as an alternative to the young man on the balcony, and decides that he will "consciously leav[e] Waymarsh out." In doing so,

Strether begins to define his sense of self as he begins to recognize Paris and a changed Chad, and move towards a rejection of the standards of Woollett. As Ross Posnock describes it, the balcony suggests that Strether is on the “margin” as it allows for privacy while still somewhat public. As the “architectural embodiment of Parisian indeterminacy, of a blurred boundary” (Posnock 229), it mirrors Strether’s perching on the boundary of Woollett and his past, while he considers the freedom the balcony, and Paris, suggest.

The moments of arrest become more significant as Strether’s perceptions sharpen. In fact, the arrests even interrupt speech, representing a greater awareness than language provides and significant stages in his reconstruction of self. Much later in the novel, Strether and Maria have a conversation, in which the words are somewhat extraneous to their communication. Maria is planning to leave Paris, but Strether wants her to stay. The knowledge comes to him, in language that echoes the earlier references to Strether’s “sharper sense,” through “a still sharper sense than he would have expected.” While Maria “took it as if the words were all she had wished,” the “sharper sense” carries greater weight than the words, as “it had broken as with a slight arrest into the current of their talk” (292). The phrasing recalls William James’s metaphor of the stream of consciousness, with talk being one means of articulating what they are coming to recognize. The slight arrest illustrates William James’s substantive moment making it possible for Strether to ask Maria a direct question about her earlier absence. This moment defines Strether’s emerging self in relation to Maria and all that is going on around him. It happens in the arrest.

A final moment of arrest occurs in the novel's climactic scene. Antonio Damasio defines the mind as the ability to display images internally and to order those images in a process called thought; Strether's mind clearly emerges in his visit to the countryside and in his recognition of Chad and Madame de Vionnet and the nature of their relationship. The scene is rich with significant moments and methods. While it has been discussed in terms of dramatic and artistic discourse as a symbol system in chapter 2 and vagueness in chapter 3, as a crucial moment in the action and Strether's development the scene is necessarily comprised of several methods of representation. The reader is given a signal even before Strether's own awareness of what is happening in the scene that this moment is decisive; James ends Chapter III of Book Eleven with Strether's, and the reader's, anticipation:

Such a river 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. This perception went so far as to bring him to his feet, but that movement, in turn, made him feel afresh that he was tired, and while he leaned against a post and continued to look out he saw something that gave him a sharper arrest. (307)

Strether has not yet spotted Chad and Madame de Vionnet, but the reader is poised for the critical event. Strether and the reader are taken afloat on the “river” of consciousness. Strether becomes aware of his tiredness, ironically feeling “afresh” that he is tired. The contradiction of terms heightens the moment's physicality as he is brought to his feet with awareness, then leans, perched for consciousness. Ultimately, Chad and Madame de Vionnet come around the river in their boat; at first Strether recognizes merely “a man

who held the paddles” and “a lady” with a “pink parasol.” This information comes at the opening of the next chapter, after Strether’s “arrest” and pause, signaling a substantive moment of consciousness. It is this moment of arrest which will result in Strether’s finally understanding the nature of Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s relationship; it is a silence that advances not only the boat’s progress on the river, but also Strether’s developing consciousness, propelling him to movement. The language is that of William James; the metaphoric sense of the progression of consciousness is clear; even more significant, however, is Strether’s awareness of it, based in the very physical moment of responsive arrest. He can now order images, as Damasio suggests occurs in the creation of mind. Strether takes with him from this scene a series of images that he replays and mulls over repeatedly; from this, his knowledge is silently articulated in his mind. He can, additionally, visualize a course of action for himself. He has become aware of Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s reality as well as his own reaction to it and the implications for the future. The process of visualization is a culmination of the emergence of his mind through a responsive arrest on the stream of thought.

While the interaction of mind and situation, subject and object, occurs in the arrest, Strether does not become fully aware of its ramifications until after he physically removes himself and returns to Paris. The responsive arrest, one silence, yields to another, awareness after a fact, which is a more conscious silence, rich with physical as well as psychological reverberations in its presentation, as Strether comes to confront knowledge that is revealed to both himself and the reader after it has occurred. The mode of silence here labeled “awareness after a fact” is complex in that in addition to silence, it makes both Strether and the reader aware of duration and its relation to consciousness.

Strether expresses awareness of the distance between the moment and his contemplation of a situation early in the novel, telling Maria “I’m always considering something else, something else, I mean, than the thing of the moment” (26). What he is considering must be something he has experienced prior to the moment. The issue of the relationship to knowledge and how it understood, and thereby connected to time and memory, is addressed by virtually all of the thinkers addressed herein. While time may not appear to be significant for knowledge, it provides contrast, as seen even in terms of music. It evokes John Cage’s depiction of the nature of time and its distancing effect: “duration is the only characteristic of sound that is measurable in terms of silence” (14). In the silence of duration, Strether contemplates his consciousness.

William James calls attention to the perception of time, identifying it as “a *duration*, with a bow and a stern, as it were—a rearward- and a forward-looking end. It is only as parts of this *duration-block* that the relation of *succession* of one end to the other is perceived” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 609). This concretization of duration mirrors what Strether comes to perceive as he confronts knowledge from a distance of time and place. William James goes on to write in his chapter on “Memory” that “all the intellectual value for us of state of mind depends on our after-memory of it. Only then is it combined in a system and knowingly made to contribute to a result. Only then does it *count* for us. So that the EFFECTIVE *consciousness we have of our states is the after-consciousness*” (644). Henry James bases his presentation of Strether’s later consciousness on this perspective. It is in the time after he has moved from the event, after it has unfolded in duration and his consciousness, that Strether makes the choice “to be right.”

Duration and consciousness are significant in later theory as well, as Edelman describes higher order consciousness, which takes into account the ability to “model the past and the future.” He identifies categorizations as a necessary step in the creation of meaning, which “takes shape in terms of concepts that depend on categorizations based on value. It grows with the history of remembered body sensations and mental images” (170). Edelman then attaches linguistic and semantic capabilities to the ability to create “new models of the world,” but warns that this system of meaning is “charged with emotion” because of its basis. Strether’s emerging “awareness after a fact” is based in this same continuum. He does not, of course, articulate his consciousness, but in the silent moment achieves higher-level consciousness as he confronts new knowledge in memory.

While Strether’s consciousness does not emerge in a strictly linear way, the silence described here does appear more frequently at later points in the novel, suggesting its significance in the creation of Strether’s sense of an “I” as well as in others’ perceptions of him. One of the earlier representations of Strether’s awareness after a fact is seen in his encounter with Mamie. James tells the reader that Strether “passed forty minutes” with Mamie, immediately directing attention towards duration. Strether does not expect much to develop from this exchange; in fact, Mamie had mistaken Strether for Bilham just as earlier Strether had mistaken Bilham for Chad. The confusion is corrected immediately, but again, the question of knowing is raised. It is not until after he leaves Mamie that Strether realizes the significance of their encounter: “he was doubtless not to know till afterwards, on turning them over in thought, of how many elements his impression was composed; but he none the less felt, as he sat with the charming girl, the

signal growth of a confidence” (249-250). Strether discovers that he has an ally in Mamie; of course, she does not articulate this. James writes that “never a direct word pass[ed] between them all the while on the subject of his own predicament,” but Strether reads her silence. Additionally, “it fully came up for them then, by means of their talking of everything *but* Chad, that Mamie, unlike Sarah unlike Jim, knew perfectly what had become of him.” Communication between Strether and Mamie and an emerging understanding of Mamie’s perceptions of Strether and Chad are accomplished through silence, and realized fully only after the incident has passed. Notice the physicality of Strether’s “turning [the elements] over in thought” as reflection creates awareness. Duration is stressed as the reader recognizes knowledge emerging in time. Multiple realizations take place within this time frame: Strether becomes aware of the nature of his impressions, of Mamie’s understanding of Chad, of Sarah and Jim’s lack of understanding of Chad, and of Mamie’s feelings towards him. All is accomplished silently, and recognized by the consciousness “afterwards.”

Strether has a similar encounter with Jeanne de Vionnet. He finds himself “sitting with the child in a friendly silence” (154). He has no real sense of what she is like when they first sit together; of course, “it came back to him afterwards that she had told him things.” This seems contrary to their sitting in silence, but once again the reader is not privy to what Jeanne told Strether, so it exists in silence. Again, he recognizes it later, after “she had dipped into the waiting medium at last and found neither surge nor chill—nothing but the small splash she could herself make in the pleasant warmth, nothing but the safety of dipping and dipping again.” The imagery, with its physical references to dipping, chill, and warmth, suggests the stream of thought that Strether and Jeanne

encounter together; he comes away, “at the end of ten minutes,” with the impression that she is “thoroughly bred,” but doesn’t have a clear sense of her relationship with Chad. This will not come until much later in their acquaintance. What is significant here is the dive, with its very physical representation, that Strether takes into consciousness, and its sense of duration with recognition occurring from the distance of time.

These early examples of Strether’s self-conscious awareness after an event give way to stronger representations, later in the plot, implying a distance from which Strether can stand and interpret situations and impressions and what is left unsaid. As such, they prove that James has manifested William James’s theories and fictionalized the process. An integral part of the narrative is the reader’s decoding of the silences. Once again, an examination of the climactic scene in which he travels to the countryside is called for. While the responsive arrest described above captures Strether’s pause and dip into the stream of consciousness, the scene does not end there. In fact, the scene reverberates for some time, as befits the significance of the moment. From responsive arrest, Strether moves, over the course of many hours, to awareness after a fact. Awareness cannot be fully accomplished until he returns to Paris and has had the lapse of time necessary for contemplation and interpretation, and he can fully comprehend the significance of what he witnessed. Edelman’s above-cited description of higher-order consciousness requires that one is “conscious of being conscious,” and occurs once systems of memory are “related to a conceptual representation of a true self (or social self) acting on an environment and vice versa. A conceptual model of selfhood must be built, as well as a model of the past” (130). Strether appears, at the later moments of awareness after a fact, to be moving into the state of higher-order consciousness. While he does not use spoken

language to articulate it, he can model events in his mind based on memory; in the memory, meaning emerges for Strether, in relation to the self that has developed through social interaction, an understanding of situations, and awareness of their ramifications. Memory, of course, implies duration, so again, Strether's recognizing from a distance underscores his creation of consciousness. From here, he can determine a course of action for himself.

James's descriptions of Strether from the time he encounters Chad and Madame de Vionnet on the river virtually through the end of the novel reflect his awareness after a fact. Beginning with their discussion of returning home together and Madame de Vionnet's "vagueness" on the subject, Strether is said "afterwards to remember that Chad had promptly enough intervened to forestall this appearance, laughing at his companion's flightiness" (310). Interestingly, the reference to duration and contemplation is placed immediately within the paragraph describing the event. There is a distancing effect created, as the reader is moved back and forth in time. A sense of multiplying impression is created as, in addition to remembering Chad's "sole intervention," Strether is said "to remember further still, in subsequent meditation, many things that, as it were, fitted together," as he literally re-members, or reconstructs, the experience. The parallel phrasing of "to remember" in the above two passages, with the latter followed by "further" has the effect of furthering the action, or moving the reader physically along in time and awareness as Strether becomes conscious of being conscious.

The passage above blends into that which follows, as James takes the reader home with Strether and his contemplation. A scene examined in chapter 2 for its use of syntax is again significant in this context, as the narrator makes the reader very aware of

Strether's passing of time and its contribution to his consciousness. Consider the language related to time here:

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. He then knew more or less how he had been affected—he but half knew at the time. (311)

The narrator manipulates awareness of past and present, as he refers to having already spoken of Strether's recollection; then, the adverb "immediately" breaks into the sentence, as he directs the reader towards the significant revelation in what is called a "belated" vision. A direct reference to time is made at the end of the passage, indicating Strether's full knowledge emerging later.

Not only is Strether aware of the passing of time and of the process of thought, he becomes aware of his sense of self by knowing "how he had been affected." Earlier, he would not have been cognizant of how the "relations" he has entered into help to shape his consciousness. The movement of the sentence, both in time and structurally, has the effect of moving the reader along with Strether as he confronts consciousness. As discussed in chapter 1, this passage is important in reflecting Strether's sense of "I" despite what William James calls "gaps in consciousness" (*The Principles of Psychology* I, 238-9). The self that he calls "myself, I, or me" remains one as the gaps provide a distance from which to view the self. Damasio's description of the creation of the "metaself" reflects the same movement in time. Strether seems to embody what Damasio later describes as "subjectivity," which "emerges during the latter step when the brain is

producing not just images of an object, not just images of organism responses to the object, but a third kind of image, that of an organism in the act of perceiving and responding to an object.” He calls this view “moment-by-moment, a nonverbal narrative document” (243). This is the view that Strether has at the end of this all-important scene; he can see what has led up to his development at various stages, and his reactions to his perceptions and interactions. The narrative finally makes sense to Strether as he watches it unfold through his subjective self. Once it unfolds, Strether can predict outcomes, which include his participation in the events, and make appropriate decisions.

This is a significant step for Strether as he is then able to achieve Martha Nussbaum’s sense of “perceptive equilibrium,” which she describes as a state “in which concrete perceptions ‘hang beautifully together,’ both with one another and with the agent’s general principles.” Reaching this state, Strether is then able to respond to his consciousness in relation to that which informs it, and rest at “an equilibrium that is always ready to reconstitute itself in response to the new” (183). The “new” is that which will follow Strether’s understanding. From this point on, Strether’s thought process becomes even more concrete and observable, both for him and the reader. It is revealed when “he might have been thinking that if he didn’t go before he could think he wouldn’t perhaps go at all” (314). Again, the reader is forced to step back with Strether and contemplate his decision at this point not to leave Paris immediately, but to respond to Madame de Vionnet’s request to see him that evening. From the distance he is aware of what has happened, the possible next steps and their ramifications for him, and how he has come to understand it. The intrusion of the subordinate clause concretizes his thought reference and implies hesitation; aware of his consciousness after the fact, he is

also aware of how his thoughts and actions reverberate in his ultimate decision “to be right,” his perceptive equilibrium. Hesitation is underscored by the use of “might have been” and “perhaps,” which lend an air of tentativeness to his thinking. He confronts and questions the issue of the “state of the wrongdoer,” but throughout the day does not act. Instead, he spends the day “idling, lounging, smoking, sitting in the shade, drinking lemonade and consuming ices” (316), and contemplating what Madame de Vionnet might say to him. As Damasio would say, Strether is responding to the object. He is predicting outcomes, and considering his role. From this point on, however, Strether is able to read more clearly. He walks through Paris and hears the “vague voice of Paris” which now carries “the smell of revolution, the smell of the public temper—or perhaps simply the smell of blood.” He attributes these vibrations to “the effect of the thunder in the air,” but is also able to read the vibrations and the changes that are indicated for him.

Finally, in his walk, Strether “knew in advance 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” (318). The phrasing suggests the movement in time; ironically, he considers beforehand what he will review later. The repetition of “old” and advancement to “oldest” lends an air of ancient knowledge; it moves onward, and therefore backward, with only the slight pause of the comma; Strether is taken along seemingly beyond his control, so that when he finally does meet with and confront the situation with Madame de Vionnet, he has a recursive knowledge. Their discussion is, of course, not initially recounted through dialogue for the reader, but through Strether’s perception of Madame de Vionnet’s explanations.

The first chapter of Book Twelfth ends in the middle of their meeting; Strether recognizes Chad and Madame de Vionnet's "eminent lie," and as discussed in chapter 3, lets it "lie" as he decodes the vibration of her silence. As their interview progresses, Strether is increasingly aware of their exchange, its existence in time, and how it would be reported later to Chad. For the first time Strether grows impatient with Madame de Vionnet, and when she asks when he will leave, "he took some time to reply" (322). All consciousness is suspended in time as he has his "sharpest perception yet" which is "like a chill in the air to him." He finally expresses it to Madame de Vionnet: "You're afraid for your life" (322). The physicality of the moment is apparent, as Strether moves from his perched position and grasps consciousness. Now able to read Madame de Vionnet, Strether is the ambassador with a message, interpreted fully for himself over time and through physical arrests; he can articulate through his silence what it means "to be right" to himself. From the tangible representation of the mind, it is a short distance to silences that reflect Darwinian influences as we move from the mind to the body in chapter 5.

## Chapter Five: Naturalized Silence

In his analysis of the shift in language use in the nineteenth century, *The Wisdom of Words*, Philip Gura successfully attempts to “resurrect the topics of language and symbol” and “show how our writers addressed the question of ambiguity inherent in the gesture of human speech and so began to move in their writings as well as in their philosophy toward a concept of symbolic discourse” (4). Gura’s study is not limited to writers of imaginative literature; instead, he traces the changes in thinking and practice in philosophical, religious, and imaginative writing. He follows a movement away from language seen as incapable of expressing a “shimmering, ever-shifting truth” (7) to more Utilitarian view of language, based on Lockean premises, its truth lying in its utility. From there, he describes the Transcendentalist reaction against the Utilitarian restriction of “man’s awareness of his true spiritual nature” (35), which results in a view of language that seeks to “explore the promptings of intuition and to attempt a recovery of some more primitive accuracy to speech” (50). Horace Bushnell believed in language “built on physical images” and having a double range of uses (52). He viewed the first words uttered as descriptions of the “sensations of the physical objects around men—and arbitrarily designated.” As such, words have very concrete origins, but ultimately became “‘hints or images’ to help one *toward* the comprehension of some fact or thought.” Language evolved, according to Bushnell, mending its errors “‘by multiplying its forms of representation’” (62-63). It is this multiplication of forms that has significance for Henry James, as his work also multiplies the forms of language, reflecting late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century philosophical shifts, in the same way earlier views of language disclose contemporary theoretical concerns.

At the end of *The Ambassadors*, Strether has come to recognize the truth about many things: Chad's relationship with Madame de Vionnet; his own relationship with Mrs. Newsome; Maria Gostrey's feelings towards him; and even his own sense of moral behavior. These truths are ultimately communicated to Strether and expressed in the text in silence that resonates with changes in the method of representation. The concreteness that Emerson and Thoreau seek is supplanted in imaginative writing by symbolism, as described in Gura's discussion of Hawthorne and Melville; while James does, of course, use symbolism, he multiplies language's forms so that just as he manipulates other types of silence in order to reach more perfect expression, he depicts Strether as returning to more physical forms of expression. He does this by first using broad gesture that replaces language and signals communication, then moving toward the more pointed meeting of eyes, a very specific gesture that uncovers the characters' awareness of their communication, finally culminating in moments of recognition, a complex silence comprised of different expressions.

Leon Edel reports that Henry James both read and met Charles Darwin in 1869. Edel says, "the new science, however, and the debates about determinism, was to take on particular meaning for him only later in its literary manifestations, in the *naturalisme* of Zola" (166). Edel acknowledges naturalistic influences in *The Ambassadors*, however, when Strether implores Bilham to "Live!" (132). Edel sees the novel's "'deterministic' post-Darwinian philosophy" as evident in Strether's recognition that "we are all moulds, 'either fluted and embossed, with ornamental excrescences, or else smooth and dreadfully plain, into which a helpless jelly, one's consciousness, is poured'" (*Henry James: A Life* 536). While James was not steeped in the scientific method, it appears that he did

assimilate elements of Darwin's philosophy into his fiction. Before considering James's move to silence as reflecting his awareness of the Darwinian information, specifically man's animal and physical nature, an overview of the ways in which Darwin addresses language in his writing is called for. Darwin considers language from different perspectives in different works, from analyzing language as analogous to classification in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), to forming principles for the development of language in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), and finally to considering it as a reflection of psychological development and social interaction in *The Descent of Man* (1871). Language, which Gillian Beer calls "anthropomorphic by its nature and anthropocentric in its assumptions" and which thereby "might subvert the truth-telling powers of language" (*Darwin's Plots* 50), viewed in light of its origins reveals its physical and gestural nature. These alternatives to articulated language bring one closer to pure, unmediated expression.

In *Darwinism and the Linguistic Image*, Stephen Alter describes the linguistic analogue of evolutionary change, in which "languages undergo steady transformation over the course of time; gradualism suggested that this process took place incrementally." The gradual change "always maintained a degree of continuity with the past and preserved, as Darwin put it, 'traces of anterior states'" (18). If that is the case, then we can read Strether's use of physical gesture and meeting of eyes as a movement to expression reminiscent of what Darwin describes in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. In contrast to Darwin's examination of simple gesture, James's use of physical communication is much more complex. Their shared method of expression, however, removes some of the barriers to knowledge. One of which, language, is said by

Beer to control “our apprehension of knowledge, and is itself determined by current historical conditions and by the order implicit in syntax, grammar and other rhetorical properties” (51). Ironically, by removing language, with its imposed structure, one may move closer to meaning.

In *Open Fields*, Beer examines Darwin’s views on language theory, indicating that he “uses language as metaphor, as model, and as illustration, and as an example of evolutionary process” (98). Beer believes that by using the analogy of classification in *Origin*, Darwin uses linguistic theory as an “‘illustration’ of evolutionary processes.” By explaining that

the various degrees of difference in the languages from the same stock, would have to be expressed by groups subordinate to groups; but the proper or even only possible arrangement would still be genealogical; and this would be strictly natural, as it would connect together all languages, extinct and modern, by the closest affinities, and would give the filiation and origin of each tongue (423)

Darwin follows the pattern of the evolution of languages, which branch out from a common source, to explain evolution. Through a study of language theory, Darwin is able to recognize what Beer calls the “discovery of fundamental *laws*” (103). Those laws include the “continuity between humankind and other species” that Darwin read about in Henry, Lord Brougham’s 1839 work *Dissertations on Subjects of Science Connected with Natural Theology*. Initially, Darwin appeared to resist Brougham’s depiction of animals’ use of language. Beer reports that Darwin wrote “don’t understand” in the margin next to Brougham’s description of animals’ connecting action with the sign of language, which is

the abstraction that is the origin of all language. Brougham calls the “sign” that is connected with the act “purely arbitrary”; Beer believes that Darwin’s problem with the theory involved the “move from the idea of *abstraction* to that of *language*” and its arbitrary nature, which might have conflicted with his emphasis on “continuity and connection” (105). She sees his later acceptance of the theory emerging from his recognition that “resemblance may in fact indicate separation,” and that “the filial relationship between languages was expressed through differences, not only through *resemblances*” (108). He saw that “language study therefore provided not only metaphors and illustrations but also a hopeful model for future research. It seemed to promise the transformation of chance into ‘as yet unknown laws’” (*Open Fields* 109).

The connection between physical and linguistic evolution is made explicit when Darwin writes in *The Descent of Man* that “the survival or preservation of certain favoured words in the struggle for existence is natural selection” and parallels the “differentiation and specialization of organs.” Darwin indicates that language may be viewed in the same way specialized organs are, with each having its function. If, as Darwin says, “the most symmetrical and complex ought not to be ranked above irregular, abbreviated, and bastardized languages, which have borrowed expressive words and useful forms of construction from various conquering, conquered, or immigrant races” (113-114), then it would appear that different forms of language, if expressive and useful, are acceptable alternate modes of expression. Darwin considers the development of language from its most basic expression of emotion in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* to its role in the moral and social development of man in *The Descent of Man*. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin outlines his

“General Principles of Expression”: the principle of serviceable associated habits; the principle of antithesis; and the principle of direct action of the excited nervous system on the body. Within these categories, he addresses both man and other animals, noting that intercommunication between members of a community is crucial to social animals. He observes that it is “generally effected by means of the voice, but it is certain that gestures and expressions are to a certain extent mutually intelligible. Man not only uses inarticulate cries, gestures, and expressions, but has invented articulate language; if, indeed, the word *invented* can be applied to a process, completed by innumerable steps, half-consciously made” (60). By describing language in this way, Darwin explicitly presents language as merely one point on a continuum of expression that includes gesture. Goethe also addresses gesture in his *Scientific Studies*, in which he envisions a common descent for species, but separates man from other animals, citing human’s “expression of the mind” as a point of difference. While he sees “the language of gesture” as “restrained in well-bred people,” he does credit it “as much as the language of words to elevate man above the animal” (22-23). Here, too, one sees the value placed on gesture.

Darwin fully describes a number of gestures in *The Expression of Emotion*, explaining that “every true or inherited movement of expression seems to have had some natural and independent origin” (355), and then has come to be voluntary, aiding in communication, and often accompanying language. Gesture described in relation to the Principles of Expression depends, of course, upon the physical nature of humans. The principle of serviceable associated habits reads, “whenever the same state of mind is induced . . . there is a tendency through the force of habit and association for the same

movements to be performed” (28). This includes, for example, “the involuntary closing of the eyelids when the surface of the eye is touched,” and starting at danger, both real and imagined (38). Further, according to the first principle, “when any sensation, desire, dislike, &c., has led during a long series of generations to some voluntary movement, then a tendency to the performance of a similar movement will almost certainly be excited, whenever the same, or any analogous or associated sensation &c., although very weak, is experienced” (48). These physical associations express emotion and pure response, without intervention, and result in the principle of antithesis, which results in an opposite response to an opposite state of mind. For example, Darwin explains,

every movement which we have voluntarily performed throughout our lives has required the action of certain muscles; and when we have performed a directly opposite movement, an opposite set of muscles has been habitually brought into play, as in turning to the right or to the left, in pushing away or pulling an object towards us, and in lifting or lowering a weight. (64)

The third principle, that of direct action of the excited nervous system on the body, accounts for expressive effects resulting from “nerve-force [which] is generated in excess” (29), such as “the trembling of the muscles,” which is “of no service, often of much disservice” (67). These principles account for expression based on simple nerve response. As pure response, it does not involve learning, or the influence of social or moral concerns.

In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin describes verbal language as an art rather than a true instinct, in that it has to be learned. Owing “its origin to the imitation and

modification of various natural sounds, the voices of other animals, and man's own instinctive cries, aided by signs and gestures" (109), language is comprised of varied means of expression, arrived at incrementally. In parallel, Strether's use and understanding of gesture has the complexity of articulated language in that it is influenced by and influences external response, as well as internal development. In his chapter "Comparison of the Mental Powers of Man and the Lower Animals," Darwin attributes man's capacity for progressive improvement to his "power of speaking and handing down his acquired knowledge" (101). Vocal language emerges from the "principle of the inherited effects of use," with its continued use closely linked to the development of the brain. Darwin indicates that complex thought is dependent upon the "aid of words, . . . spoken or silent" (110). The "silent" words allow for the logical progression of ideas. As though in illustration of this point, many of the complex thoughts expressed by Strether are unarticulated, both for the reader and himself, but nonetheless reflective of growing awareness. For example, when Mamie Pocock arrives in Paris, Strether comes to see her in a new light. He recognizes that she "*was* charming" and "*was* in *his* interest" through a series of impressions that logically unfold for Strether without articulation. The awareness is called the "mark of a relation" that Strether recognizes as he becomes "aware of the little drama" (250). The phrasing implies a lack of verbalization, yet Strether comes to understand Mamie's perceptions and plans. In fact, he "made it out . . . though with never a word passing between them all the while on the subject of his own predicament" as in their conversation, they speak of "everything *but* Chad." Further, Mamie proposes to keep Chad's change a secret. Her observations are not stated; Strether's position is not stated; Strether logically arrives at an

understanding of Mamie's position without either of them articulating it. Their exchange signals Strether's development and ability to have and read complex thought without verbal language, but through an equally valid representation.

Labeling "Imagination" (sic) "one of the highest prerogatives of man," Darwin credits it with contributing to the development of the moral being. Through imagination, one "unites former images and ideas . . . and thus creates brilliant and novel results" (95). A moral being is one who "is capable of comparing his past and future actions or motives, and of approving or disapproving of them" (135).<sup>6</sup> The moral being recognizes the relationship between past events and results, and visualizes the effects of his own actions, weighing them in relation to social good. Social instincts, says Darwin, "still give the impulse to some of [man's] best actions" and emerge from the "wishes, approbation, and blame of his fellow-men, as expressed by their language and gestures" (133). This situation is illustrated by Strether, who ultimately emerges from his experience aware of his moral and social responsibility, reading it in the language of gesture.

In his work *Literary Darwinism*, Joseph Carroll reads texts through their ability to provide for the reader a "sense of psychological order." It is through "stories and verse and dramatic enactments" that "we realize our deeper nature" and "situate ourselves

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<sup>6</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge defines the imagination in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) in contrast with fancy. Coleridge divides the imagination into primary and secondary, with primary imagination described as "the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." He considers secondary imagination "an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify" (167). In that both definitions of imagination result in the creation of an idealized self, they suggest Strether's redefinition of self as a result of his ability to perceive past action, and envision a future self, in Strether's case, as moral man. Darwin's definition is consistent with Coleridge's as in each case, actions and possibilities may be examined, and synthesis arrived at in creation of self.

consciously within our environments and organize the feelings and thoughts through which we regulate our behavior” (116). Carroll describes the reader’s experience, which mirrors Strether’s experience. Strether’s decision to return to the United States is a result of his desire “to be right.” He establishes his place in relation to his social world, Woollett, and Mrs. Newsome, and realizes what he must do to behave morally and for the common good. It is evident to the reader that Strether would prefer to stay with Maria rather than to face the unknown, anticipating Mrs. Newsome’s wrath. Instead, he sees his mission through, so that a sense of social order is maintained.

In his portrayal of Strether’s changing social sense and his understanding of gesture to convey it, James frames the novel within a Darwinian context. According to Stephen Alter in *Darwinism and the Linguistic Image*, “the *Descent* passage<sup>7</sup> suggested that naturalistic mechanisms sufficed for producing both linguistic and biological development” (104). Alter suggests that by establishing parallels between the two types of development, Darwin “supported his antidesign view of nature: the innumerable trifling variations in the long history of language, so many of them eliminated rather than selected, were hard to reconcile with divine purpose” (103). Variation among languages invites further change: silence that incorporates diverse means of expression, in this case gesture, which allows for communication when existing forms fail. With this in mind, it is time to turn to the use of physical representation for silent language.

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<sup>7</sup> Alter discusses Darwin’s passage in *Descent*, in which Darwin summarizes the beginnings of language: “I cannot doubt that language owes its origin to the imitation and modification of various natural sounds, the voices of other animals, and man’s own instinctive cries, aided by signs and gestures.” According to Alter, this passage establishes a series of ten analogies between language and biological development. He cites: the community of descent and similar formation resulting in homologies; the variational symmetry paralleling sound correspondences; the existence of sound rudiments as counterparts to vestigial organs; the classification of languages artificially or naturally; the competition for dominance among languages; the extinction of languages as with species; the blending of languages; and finally, the survival of a semantic variation based on its “novelty and fashion.” These analogies pave the way for a consideration of the development of gestural language as a variation of articulated language.

The category “gesture,” while broad, introduces the reader to the sweeping, yet meaningful language of movement. Michael Corballis writes of gesture as being “as ‘natural’ to the human condition as is spoken language,” and provides a “visual, iconic component that can provide extra information or circumvent prolonged explanation.” Verbal language and gesture, according to Corballis, emerge from the same neural systems, which suggests an inextricable relationship. He asserts, “gestures are not haphazardly associated with speech; they can convey information in a systematic way.” Corballis cites, in fact, a study which indicates that communication through gesture is innate and rather uniform, as those congenitally blind persons observed routinely gestured as they spoke, and used gestures similar to sighted people (2). Through evolution, there is a shift to vocalized language, but as Darwin describes, the physical memory of gesture remains.

George Levine, citing *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* in his discussion of Darwin and Dickens, observes

just as, for Darwin, organisms are connected by physical inheritance, so moral and emotional states are expressed by physiological activity directed at physical defense and relief. All those aspects of human identity and experience that are traditionally regarded as uniquely human, connected with spiritual states unavailable to lower organisms, are in fact physical conditions shared by other organisms. (*Darwin and the Novelists* 146)

An emotional state is revealed through gesture when, soon after meeting Chad and revealing his task to him, Strether gives Chad as much information as he can. Of course,

the reader is not privy to the actual conversation that takes place; rather, James describes Chad's reaction through gesture:

He walked up and down in front of this production, sociably took Strether's arm at the points at which he stopped, surveyed it repeatedly from the right and from the left, inclined a critical head to either quarter, and, while he puffed a still more critical cigarette, animadverted to his companion on this passage and that. (104)

While James does tell the reader that Chad "animadverted," the content of his verbal criticism is not revealed. His gesture, however, finds Strether "thrown back on a felt need to remodel somehow his plan." Clearly, the language of gesture is meaningful; in this encounter it reflects Chad and Strether's interplay, Strether's reaction, and his reconsideration of his action. The gestures become a subtle dance of exchanged meaning; the reader watches a dramatization of their exchange in which the information is referred to as a "production" which is "surveyed." In fact, James's choice of the vivid word "animadverted" underscores this sense. The reader as onlooker does not know the nature of Chad's critique, but witnesses Strether's attention being directed. The derivation of "animadvert," according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, is from the Latin "to turn toward," which suggests the word's tangible and visual nature. A pantomime is enacted between the two. The gestures described, including the inclination of Chad's head and his taking Strether's arm, emphasize the physical nature of their communication and Chad's manipulation of Strether. Chad appears to be directing the show; Strether considers "remodeling" his plan, which is, again, a very tangible way of referring to the exchange of information, and suggests a certain manipulation on Chad's part, both

physical, through his grasping Strether's arm, and psychological, as Strether reconsiders his plan. Chad's gesture and unreported conversation convinces Strether that Chad is free: "his changed state, his lovely home, his beautiful things, his easy talk, his very appetite for Strether, insatiable and, when all was said, flattering—what were such marked matters all but the notes of his freedom?" (104). Strether may be said to be actively engaging his imagination, as Darwin suggests, examining past and present actions and determining future plans; however, he is doing so based upon a misreading.

In contrast with his later epiphany when he sights Chad and Madame de Vionnet, Strether is not yet privy to the workings of the language of gesture, so that he cannot accurately read the real meaning behind Chad's gesture. Nor can the reader, who is dependent upon Strether's point of view for understanding the circumstances and Chad's ability to manipulate Strether's perceptions. Strether's interpretative ability has clearly developed later, when he sights Chad and Madame de Vionnet and can infuse her gestures to Chad with meaning. From a glance, Strether

became aware, with this, of what was taking place—that her immediate impulse had been to control it, and that she was quickly and intensely debating with Chad the risk of betrayal. He saw they would show nothing if they could feel sure he hadn't made them out; so that he had before him for a few seconds his own hesitation. 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. They were thus, on either side, *trying* the other side, and all for some reason that broke the stillness like some unprovoked harsh note. (308)

The diction suggests immediacy, and even violence. It is a turning point for Strether, a moment which turns on a sharpness and harshness as he is jolted to awareness. The “unprovoked harsh note” is in marked contrast with the earlier “notes of [Chad’s] freedom” which Strether accepts without analysis.

Each experience that Strether has with gesture heightens his ability to read and use it as an adequate replacement for language. The novel represents Strether’s development in accelerated form. It is useful here to consider Gerald M. Edelman’s description of Darwin’s sense of the “evolutionary origin of the human mind,” and how “the morphology underlying behavior arose during evolutionary history, and how behavior itself alters natural selection” (45). Behavior connects, but is not limited to, gesture in this context. The connection among gesture, behavior, and interpretation is made even more explicit when Strether “reads” Chad’s behavior as the narrator reports the contents of Strether’s missive to Mrs. Newsome after having met Madame de Vionnet. While not reported verbatim, the letter’s contents and omissions are revealed. Strether gauges his behavior as “still all right” by reflecting “on the unimpaired frequency of their correspondence.” His communication with Mrs. Newsome reflects the morality of his actions, and “he now often brought himself balm by the question, with the rich consciousness of yesterday’s letter, ‘Well, what can I do more than that—what can I do more than tell her everything?’ To persuade himself that he did tell her, had told her, everything, he used to try to think of particular things he hadn’t told her.” Strether justifies his omitting telling “Mrs. Newsome that he promised to ‘save’ Madame de Vionnet” by telling himself “so far as he was concerned with that reminiscence, he hadn’t at any rate promised to haunt her house.” Doing and telling appear interchangeable as

Strether is learning to read his own actions, Mrs. Newsome's reactions, and Chad's responses. In fact, "what Chad had understood could only in truth, be inferred from Chad's behaviour, which had been in this connexion as easy as in every other" (153). Strether's cannot yet wholly read Chad's behaviour, a type of gesture, perhaps because Chad is able to manipulate gesture and adjust his reactions to and expectations of Strether.

Chad's use of gesture may be seen in contrast with Maria Gostrey's, who both provides Strether with insight and uses the power of language and gesture to further her own purpose of drawing Strether in. From early on, they communicate almost intuitively, as when Maria "arrived, at the end of a week, [and] she made him a sign" (79), upon which he immediately visits her. The reader does not know what the sign is, but the connotation suggests something extra-lingual. Throughout the novel she is more aware than Strether of the true nature of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship; in fact, she absents herself from the scene at times, presumably so that she does not reveal too much and thereby influence Strether's actions. Maria's awareness is illustrated in an exchange between the two upon her return from London in the third chapter of Book Seventh. Strether fills her in on the developments since her departure. This is a significant vignette, in which a number of literal and figurative "turns" take place and reflect Strether and Maria's communication. When, at the beginning of the chapter, she learns that Strether has received a cable from Mrs. Newsome requesting his return, she "just escaped changing colour. Reflexion arrived but in time and established a provisional serenity. It was perhaps exactly this that enabled her to say with duplicity: 'And you're going--?'" (190). The exchange reflects a blend of gestural language and

conscious manipulation of expression. Maria manages to stop herself from “changing colour,” controlling her gestural language; instead, she communicates duplicitously with articulated language. She reflects and makes a comment that furthers her desired goal. Presumably, if she does not change color, Strether is unaware of her ingenuous response, and so can read only her words at this point. It is her absence and silence that ultimately allow Strether to develop and begin to be able to read beyond language. As Maria tells Strether, “My absence has helped you—as I’ve only to look at you to see. It was my calculation, and I’m justified. You’re not where you were. . . . You’ve got your momentum and can toddle alone” (190). Still at the “toddling” stage, Strether has indeed progressed in his ability to read situations, but he is not yet capable of reading beyond carefully constructed responses, as he will be later in the novel.

Reunited, Maria and Strether communicate in a number of ways, indicated in very concrete terms. Strether informs Maria that he told Chad that he wants both himself and Chad to stay, and Maria “turned it over.” The “turn” suggests both her reading of Chad’s remark, saying “he wants then himself to stay,” and her contemplation of Strether’s exchange with Chad, which signals his growing ability to manage interaction. When Strether and Maria discuss Mamie, whom they see as Mrs. Newsome’s and the Pockocks’ “great card” in trying to bring Chad home, Strether reveals that the Pockocks will be coming; Maria is “quite in the current now and floating by his side” as he responds with “contemplative silence” (193). The implication is that they are sharing a moment of consciousness, or awareness. They agree that they are “sorry” for Mamie, but Strether concedes, “it can’t be helped” (193). When Maria asks for clarification, Strether “explained after another turn what he meant.” The “turn” may refer, of course, to his

moving about the room, but in the context of their analyses, it suggests a “turn” in consciousness, treating his understanding of the situation as Maria does Strether’s development, a specimen to be held up and examined. The concrete nature of their communication is underscored when “they had come so far as this without sounding another name—to which however their present momentary silence was full of a conscious reference” (193). The name, of course, is Madame de Vionnet’s, whose presence pervades their silence. Both Maria and Strether feel its significance, and finally, “a single gesture from her could pass for him as a vivid answer,” but because Strether is still not fully adept at reading gesture, what would be a “vivid answer,” Maria then asks him if Chad will introduce Sara Pocock to Madame de Vionnet. Strether responds, “I shall be greatly surprised if he doesn’t.” Maria “seemed to gaze at the possibility” (194), assessing both the response and the event in concrete terms. Strether, too, is beginning to assess the situation, reading the significance of the parts played by each member of the Newsome family, and his role among them. He is not ready to return to the United States at this moment in the novel, nor does he want Chad to return; he wants the opportunity to read and understand Chad’s development more fully. Conscious of his social milieu, Strether examines his behavior and the “rightness” of it, considering his promises to Mrs. Newsome and the impact his treatment of Chad may have on them. His letters to Mrs. Newsome “make him come nearer than anything else to the consciousness of doing something” (194), but he begins to question his own honesty and motives in writing them, seeing himself as “some master of the great new science of beating the sense out of words” (194). Strether becomes aware of the artifice of his letters, and is somewhat uncomfortable with it; in fact “it had become quite his habit not to like to read himself

over” (194). The writing is equated here with the self, and Strether is aware of how he and his communication have changed. This scene, approximately midway through the novel, shows Strether evaluating his role in maintaining social order and development, all the while on his way to recognizing the use of alternate expression.

Maria’s restraint and control of gesture indicates her ability to control communication and, to some degree, manipulate Strether, but he too begins to understand and read more fully as the emphasis in communication shifts from the broad and indistinct gesture to more pointed interaction, in which characters experience real communication through eye contact. The shift begins in subtle ways, as for example, Strether moves about as Maria’s “eyes followed him” in the scene just discussed; just as she “gazed at the possibility,” Strether too begins to take “another turn,” eschewing broad gesture until he is later able to read the glance between Chad and Madame de Vionnet “under this odd impression as of violence averted—the violence of their having ‘cut’ him, out there in the eye of nature” (309). The use of the eye, eye contact, and the metaphoric “eye of nature” implies pointed reading. Strether’s development is incumbent upon his going beyond impression to what William James terms “knowledge about” (*Principles of Psychology* I, 259). Eye contact, which becomes Strether’s means of going beyond impression, takes on even greater significance in the context of Darwin’s emphasis on the eye. He addresses the eyes’ connection to a number of emotions and conditions, including the more complex states of reflection and meditation, contending that

vision is the most important of all the senses and during primeval times the closest attention must have been incessantly directed towards distant objects for the sake of obtaining prey and avoiding danger; there is indeed

much analogy, as far as the state of the mind is concerned, between intently scrutinizing a distant object, and following out an obscure train of thought . . . (*The Expression of the Emotions* 224)

James adds to the myriad functions of vision as it becomes, for Strether, an opportunity for understanding.

For the eye, “with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration,” to have evolved through natural selection seems, according to Darwin, “absurd in the highest possible degree” (*Origin* 186). He concludes, however, that it did develop through “numerous gradations” (186). Gillian Beer discusses Darwin’s sense of what she calls “*incongruence* between mind and world” based upon “insufficient or imperfect adaptations.” She concludes that Hermann Helmholtz’s canceling the “Wordsworthian ‘pre-existing harmony’ between mind and material world” was important for Darwin. While harmony may ultimately exist, it is “created through process, by means of according sequences, provisional always in that they are held within time, though capable of incessant renewal” (*Darwin’s Plots* 75). Harmony between mind and the world is created through an on-going negotiation. The movement towards harmony is paralleled by Strether’s negotiation with his own consciousness and social world through eye contact.

Strether’s experiences throughout the novel with virtually every character result in significant realizations. His encounters through the glance will not be examined in strictly chronological order, but rather through interaction with other characters as each one influences him differently. In his first encounter with Chad after the play, Strether

and he come face to face, and while the reader is not privy to Strether's words, his reaction to Chad's look is made clear: "It was the kind of consciousness for which he had to thank the look that, while the strain lasted, the young man's eyes gave him. They reflected—and the deuce of the thing was that they reflected really with a sort of shyness of kindness—his momentarily disordered state" (94). Strether fears, from this look, that Chad will feel sorry for him, and quickly follows with an explanation, and when asked by Chad if he looks improved, Strether responds that he does not know. In Strether's recollection, he feels dissatisfied with his answer. While this might not seem to be an ideal means of communication, one must remember that Strether's early contact with Chad is inconclusive; Chad does mislead Strether. The conditionality of the language, setting off commentary with dashes that qualify with prepositional phrases, contributes to James's depiction of Strether's sense of disorder as the "reflection" is muddled. This very early encounter, however, establishes communication through eye contact as Strether learns to read and adjust his focus, in both literal and figurative ways.

Soon after this, Chad introduces Strether to Jeanne de Vionnet at Gloriani's party, and Strether misreads the truth of their relationship. The emphasis on vision is striking; again, the reader feels suspended in time with Strether, as he watches Chad and Mademoiselle de Vionnet approach. Strether and Bilham have just had their crucial conversation, ending with Strether's imploring Bilham to "Live!" and Strether is about to reveal whom he would most be like. The response is delayed as Strether's attention is caught, and the presentation is clearly visual, as Chad and Jeanne come into focus. The language intensifies, as "what was presently clear" becomes "clearer still" and then "was clearest of all." This phrase is repeated, as it is "clearest of all" not just that Jeanne

accompanies Chad, but with “the click of a spring—he saw the truth” (133). The truth that Strether reads is that Chad’s attachment is to Jeanne, which is, of course, incorrect. This happens upon his having “met Chad’s look.” Strether is using vision to recognize objects and relationships, as well as to come to conclusions about truths. He is not yet at the point of interpreting truth since his consciousness is still somewhat vague, despite his thinking he knows the truth about Chad. Strether’s vision still needs sharpening and focus.

An extended section in Chapter III of Book Sixth demonstrates the emerging use of a look in relation to understanding. The section begins with Strether engaged in conversation with Madame de Vionnet, and the narrator’s recalling Strether’s earlier exchange with Chad: “Twice during dinner he had met Chad’s eyes in a longish look; but these communications had in truth only stirred up again old ambiguities—so little was it clear from them whether they were an appeal or an admonition.” He goes on to comment, “perhaps he should see now” (161). The narrative intrusion calls attention to Chad and Strether’s exchange, Strether’s inability to interpret the “longish look,” and its place in what follows. The conversation with Madame de Vionnet reveals that she has been misleading Strether about Jeanne and Chad, recognizable to Strether and the reader when finally, “though his eyes had been wandering he looked at her longer now. ‘I see what you mean’” (163). Strether’s situation becomes even more complicated when he recognizes that he “hadn’t detached, he had more closely connected himself” as “his eyes, as he considered with some intensity this circumstance, met another pair which had just come within their range and which struck him as reflecting his sense of what he had done” (164). The eyes are Bilham’s; notice the development from the ambiguity of his

glance with Chad, to his knowledge through his exchanged glance with Bilham. While his reading is still not wholly accurate since he believes in Bilham's version of Chad and Mme. de Vionnet's "virtuous attachment," he is moving towards fuller knowledge. Perhaps he's somewhat limited because Bilham does not fully return his gaze when, after describing the nature of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's friendship as "the finest thing I ever saw in my life," Strether "dropped on him a momentary look which filled a short interval and of which he took no notice. He only gazed before him with intent participation" (166). While not getting the full picture, Strether does recognize Mme. de Vionnet's influence on Chad, his development of "manners and morals" and into what Strether terms a "social animal" (167). The appellation has Darwinian overtones, as Darwin describes social instinct as playing a major part in man's moral development. Discussing Chad's changed character with Bilham, Strether confirms Bilham's observation that it is as "a social animal that you also want him" (168). Strether believes that through their friendship, Chad and Madame de Vionnet are "straight, they feel; and they keep each other up" (168). Strether, too, is considering his best move for Chad's development and future place in society, and while he is reading it incorrectly, he sees development in terms of being "straight," or "right," much in the way he will view his own behavior at the novel's completion. This chapter is quite complex in its portrayal of Strether's emerging glance and understanding; he is interacting with characters who are misleading him, and he cannot quite read that yet. James presents this physically through the missed or ambiguous glances, or the suspension of a character's gaze. For communication through meeting eyes, full exchange is needed.

Such a development occurs in Strether's relationship with Chad after Strether's epiphany about Chad and Madame de Vionnet during his trip to the countryside. In conversation with him afterwards, Strether acknowledges their relationship, and his belief that Chad should not leave Madame de Vionnet. There is a self-consciousness about the words, of course, "once he had heard himself say it he felt that his message had never before been spoken," implying the transience of the spoken word. However, Strether then "met his eyes with a sense of multiplying thoughts" (335), and at that point reaches consciousness about his own changing perceptions and feelings towards Chad and Madame de Vionnet's situation. Then Strether speaks, but not what he is thinking. His recognition of Chad's change and justification of his insistence that Chad stay with Madame de Vionnet is enacted through his exchanged glance with Chad. It is from this moment that Strether and Chad can communicate forthrightly, about Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship, about whether Strether feels Chad should stay or return to the United States, about Chad's changed personality, and ultimately about Strether's change as evidenced by his urging Chad to act against his mother's wishes. At this point, Strether is in control of the exchange as "he turned his eyes away, and they lost themselves, through the open window, in the dusky outer air." When he turns back to Chad, "the light of his plural pronoun was sufficiently reflected in his companion's face as he again met it; and he completed his demonstration" (336). Strether makes Chad aware that he has decided that Chad has an obligation not to return to the United States. Following the exchanged glances, Strether verbalizes his position. The evolution of Strether's articulated language and awareness of what it means to be "right" is closely intertwined with the evolution of his gestural language.

Strether's changing relationships with others are also chronicled through his gestural encounters. His exchanges with Waymarsh, for example, are crucial in registering his changes: when he first meets Waymarsh in Chester, Strether is bound by his sense of obligation to the ways of Milrose. As he progresses, however, Strether becomes more uncomfortable with Waymarsh and feels a schism; recall that even at the beginning of the novel, Strether is somewhat relieved that Waymarsh is unable to meet him immediately. Strether meets with Waymarsh at a crucial moment in plot and character development; interestingly, Waymarsh's presence does not further the plot at all, so that the scene between them seems superfluous. It does, however, provide momentary reflection for Strether, accomplished through their meeting eyes. Strether has received, in Chapter II of Book Seventh, a telegram delivering Mrs. Newsome's ultimatum: return with or without Chad. He picks up the telegram just as he is about to meet Waymarsh for dinner, but does not reveal its contents to him. Instead, Waymarsh, unnoticed, watches Strether read the telegram until Strether looks up. Strether then "saw Waymarsh watching him from within. It was on this that their eyes met—met for a moment during which neither moved" (182). Strether decides to say nothing about the telegram, but it is clear that something significant occurs between them. While "our friend had moreover the consciousness that even less than usual was on this occasion said between them," more seems to happen between them. The moment during which their eyes meet is reflective; the repetition of "met" before and after the dash has a mirroring effect. After contemplation, Strether makes the conscious decision to exclude Waymarsh from the developments in his situation. Finally, Strether "closed the door to confidence"

by evading Waymarsh's direct question. In doing so, Strether is, in effect, choosing sides, deciding that Waymarsh is allied with Mrs. Newsome, and that he no longer is.

Interestingly, Strether's development may be gauged, to a large degree, through his interaction with Waymarsh. Later, when Waymarsh is more involved with the Pococks, Strether detects dishonesty in Waymarsh's response to him. Waymarsh tells Strether that he and the Pococks will be leaving Paris for Switzerland. Strether asks about the contents of Mrs. Newsome's cable to Sarah, to which Waymarsh responds, "I know nothing about Mrs. Newsome's cables." It becomes clear to Strether that Waymarsh is withholding information from him, but only as

their eyes met on it with some intensity—during the few seconds of which something happened quite out of proportion to the time. It happened that Strether, looking thus at his friend, didn't take his answer for truth—and that something more again occurred in consequence of *that*. (272)

From this point on, Strether is able to read both Waymarsh and his situation with Mrs. Newsome accurately, hearing the "false note" (272) in Waymarsh's speech and through that, "the conscience of Milrose in the very voice of Milrose" (273). Following this recognition, Strether directly confronts Waymarsh's challenge, telling him, "I know what I'm about" (274). It is clear that Strether is beginning to have a sense of his emerging self.

As Strether approaches the moment of his greater change, the trip to the countryside during which recognizes the truth about the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet, he becomes very conscious of Waymarsh's, and by extension, Milrose's and Woollett's judgment of him. Moments before Strether sees

Chad and Madame de Vionnet together, he visualizes the remainder of his day, which he sees as culminating in a “fine and felicitous” dinner before his return to the city on the 9:20 train. He envisions a conversation with the carriage driver who would bring him to the train, and in doing so, would “tell him what the French people were thinking, and remind him, as indeed the whole episode would incidentally do, of Maupassant” (302). Strether initially sees the real in terms of art; he views the landscape as a Lambinet painting, and associates his imagined interactions with Maupassant’s fiction. He hopes to find authenticity, even picturing washing down his dinner “with authentic wine” (302). Through his encounter with Chad and Madame de Vionnet, however, Strether will be plunged into the real. But as he approaches the climactic moment, Strether is finally beginning to recognize his authentic self, as he “heard his lips, for the first time in French air, as this vision assumed consistency, emit sounds of expressive intention without fear of his company” (303). It is not revealed what these sounds are; are they actual words? Are they in French, about which he might be fearful of his accent, or are they in English, in which case he would be fearful of their content? Regardless of which, the narrator articulates that Strether

had been afraid of Chad and of Maria and of Madame de Vionnet; he had been most of all afraid of Waymarsh, in whose presence, so far as they had mixed together in the light of the town, he had never without somehow paying for it aired either his vocabulary or his accent. He usually paid for it by meeting immediately afterwards Waymarsh’s eye. (302-3)

Notice the complex sentence structure in which the adverbial prepositional phrase “without somehow paying for it” precedes “aired,” the verb it modifies. Strether is, in

effect, concretely turning the phrases around and examining them, as he analyzes his relationship with Waymarsh. Significantly, Waymarsh's judgment is conveyed to Strether as they meet eyes. Strether is aware of this and the narrator explicitly states it as Strether is about to experience a shaping revelation about Chad and Madame de Vionnet, and ultimately, himself. After his encounter with the pair, and recognition of their relationship, Strether makes the conscious decision to return to Woollett having failed in his assigned mission. He comes to recognize his "authentic" self, one distinct from Mrs. Newsome and Woollett, whose judgment is reflected by Waymarsh and the voice of Milrose. While his interactions with Waymarsh may seem superfluous to the text, they are, in fact, crucial, as it is through them that Strether's changing social impulse is emerging. True to the Darwinian model of self-actualization, Strether recognizes his deeper nature and regulates his behavior through those glances, ultimately realizing that he no longer has a place in Waymarsh's social world.

While Waymarsh serves as a moral judge for Strether, it is Maria Gostrey who emerges as his touchstone. As noted above, from the time of their meeting the two engage in meaningful exchanges. Their glances are particularly rich. When they first try to make sense of Chad's "attachment," Strether and Maria "exchanged a look—a look that was perhaps the longest yet. It seemed in fact, the next thing, to require to explain itself; which it did as it could" (117). The exchange is structurally represented by the mirrored phrase "a look" which extends the duration of the reading, and thereby, the look. At this point in their communication, further discussion is required, but still does not get them to truth. As the novel progresses, of course, a great deal of knowledge passes between them, so much so that Maria must absent herself from

Strether's presence so that she is not too great an influence on him. As she tells Strether upon her return from London, and as noted earlier, "my absence has helped you—as I've only to look at you to see. It was my calculation, and I'm justified. You're not where you were. . . . You can go of yourself" (190). By leaving Strether alone, Maria has compelled him to read his environment carefully.

As Maria and Strether approach the end of the novel, and their time together, Strether achieves a greater sense of autonomy. While waiting to hear back from Chad to address Strether's reaction to his revelation about Chad and Madame de Vionnet, Strether spends time with Maria. He shows her some amusements; he is no longer the tourist, feeling, in fact, "an odd sense of leading her about Paris" (325). The knowledge of place reflects Strether's growing knowledge of himself, and they spend the day without discussing "the matter they had talked of to satiety." While the topic remains unaddressed, "she gave herself up to him with an understanding of which mere mute gentleness might have seemed the sufficient expression" and "she met [his sense of the situation] with a new directness of response, measuring it from hour to hour with her grave hush of acceptance" (326). She leaves questions unasked, and they accept one another's knowledge, conveyed through silent recognition, which deepens through their on-going encounters and exchanges, including those of glances.

By the end of the novel the two appear equally matched in insight. When he meets Maria for the last time in her dining room, Strether and Maria sit across the table from one another. He sees even the dining room differently, as it becomes for him "sacred to pleasant knowledge, to intimate charm, to antique order," perhaps infused with his newly gained knowledge and sense of moral self. Again, the glance is significant, as

to Strether, “to sit there was . . . to see life reflected for the time in ideally kept pewter; which was somehow becoming, improving to life, so that one’s eyes were held and comforted” (340). The reflection provides for Strether an emerging recognition, a type of silence in which the other types of silence culminate. It begins with the comforting knowledge Strether gains upon literal and figurative reflection. Maria and Strether come face to face, a phrase repeated throughout the novel, as if facing their reflections in a mirror, signaling the understanding he has arrived at upon contemplation, or figurative reflection. As Strether begins to explain to Maria that he must leave, “they fronted each other, across the table, as if things unuttered were in the air” (341). The exchange is difficult for them both; while they reach and express the recognition of truth and consciousness, Strether averts his glance, focusing “his eyes on a small ripe round melon” (341). It is only after Maria cuts and serves Strether the melon that “he met her question.” The sequence implies that the meeting is in their exchanged look, and Strether is finally willing and able to acknowledge it and his sense of moral and social obligation.

Ruth Yeazell captures Strether’s position when she describes him as having “long been in the uncomfortable position of sensing more than he can allow himself to know. . . for the very rhythms of James’s late style enact this relentless unfolding of awareness; in the language itself we sense the peculiar force with which knowledge—half-dreaded, half-desired—thrusts itself upon the conscious mind” (25). While he has been dodging full knowledge throughout, Strether must finally confront it, again literally and figuratively, as he fronts Maria across the table and meets her eye. It is the culmination of smaller moments of recognition approached earlier. Early in his encounters with Madame de Vionnet, Strether sees her as a woman who can make a “relation of mere

recognition” (150) with Madame de Vionnet. He has some insight into her dealings with others. Later, as he sits with Mamie, Strether feels the “signal growth of a confidence” and recognizes that she is on his side (249). Later still, he participates in an exchange with Miss Barrace in which she tells him that Madame de Vionnet is helping him, and they see “the quantity in each other’s face.” In each of these moments, though, the recognition is not complete as “links were missing and connexions unnamed” (266). In all his relationships, connections are not explicitly made, but Strether can fill in the connections himself with an accurate reading of gesture. He attains the half-dreaded, half-desired knowledge, truths about others and his own moral sense, at the end of the novel.

In the novel’s final pages, we see Strether, after being served the melon by Maria and meeting her question, able to “see” several things, about Chad, Mrs. Newsome, and himself. Their conversation returns to his never having disclosed the “article produced at Woollett” (342). While he is willing to reveal this information and recollects so much of their earliest encounter, Maria no longer wants to know, as she is “done with the products of Woollett” (342). She brings up the topic only as a reminder that they had wondered where Strether would “come out,” and they now see. While Maria tries to get a definitive response from Strether about his projections concerning Chad’s possible actions, Strether does not respond satisfactorily, “pleading with her in various suggestive and unspoken ways for patience and understanding” (342). Strether has reached his defining moment, and can no longer be influenced by Maria. When he acknowledges that he is returning to a changed relationship with Mrs. Newsome, Maria believes it’s because Strether sees Mrs. Newsome differently. His response signals his recognition: “She’s the same. She’s

more than ever the same. But I do what I didn't before—I *see* her” (342-3).

Interestingly, his recognition is conveyed in physical terms—he “sees” rather than “knows.” Only through the physical is knowledge clear to Strether.

It is through these moments of awareness that James perches Strether at the threshold of consciousness and modern literature. On the final page of the novel, Strether has, as Maria Gostrey observes, “wonderful impressions,” and has become aware that everything rests “on selection” which itself is “ruled” by “beauty and knowledge.” The selection involves the choice that Strether makes concerning his future. Of course, its resting on “selection” recalls Darwin’s language, just as Strether becomes the moral being Darwin describes in *The Descent of Man*. As discussed earlier, Darwin describes man as a social being guided in his interaction with others through his instinct combined with “improved intellectual faculties.” James assimilates Darwinian information, with the language of the novel conveying Strether’s figurative reflection in physical terms; through gesture and eye contact, he is finally able to capture past impressions and images, and combined with an ability to visualize, makes a decision which he views as morally “right.” In describing the difference between man and lower animals, Darwin calls the “moral sense or conscience” the most important factor, “summed up in that short but imperious word *ought*, so full of high significance” (Descent 120). Strether’s accelerated evolution is real; his fully developed conscience and consciousness lead him to make a decision that may not be the one he prefers, but as seen in his discussion with Maria, there is no other decision he would consider making. Strether “knows” that he must return, but does not know to what he will return. He is at a decisive and transitional moment in his evolution as a consciously moral being; the evolution is psychological and

social. The physical languages of gesture and the meeting of eyes recall pre-linguistic state, what today is known as mentalese, but far surpass it with the introduction of recognition, or awareness of the workings of consciousness.

Strether and Maria's final exchange is rich with physical language and terminology that recall William James's chapter on "Instinct." Strether deems his decision "to be right" his "only logic" (344). Maria's responds, "with your wonderful impressions you'll have got a great deal" (345). While she does not like his going, she accepts it and credits his "horrible sharp eye" for being right. Being right is a factor in William James's description of instinct, about which he says "every impulse and every step of every instinct shines with its own sufficient light, and seems at the moment the only eternally right and proper thing to do" (*Principles of Psychology* II, 387). Instinct is not always the same for humans as for other animals; it is modified, for example, by logic. James explains, "owing to man's memory, power of reflection, and power of inference" instincts are no longer termed "blind," but are "felt by him . . . in connection with a *foresight* of those results" (390). He continues later in the chapter, "there is no material antagonism between instinct and reason" as reason does not inhibit impulses, but may "make an *inference which will excite the imagination so as to set loose* the impulse the other way" (393). For both William James and Darwin, instinct and reason are not mutually exclusive; together they result in socially beneficial behavior. Strether achieves the ability to "see" what is right, both through the glances he exchanges as a means of communication, and as a metaphor for the recognition that signals the silent exchanges.

The shift in language from Utilitarian to Transcendentalist to symbolic described by Philip Gura is mirrored by James's creation of a form of representation that

incorporates Darwin's understanding of what Gerald Edelman later calls "the evolutionary origin of the human mind" (44). James's movement to gesture and glances encompassing an evolving consciousness signals a movement ahead, into the modern world. Strether does not know what his return to the United States will hold for him, but he knows he must go. Similarly, in writing about George Eliot's fiction George Levine observes,

in realist narrative change and development become both subject and moral necessity, and they tend to be as well a condition of plausibility; character can only be understood fully if its history is known because character, as George Eliot wrote, is not 'cut in marble,' and it is intricately embedded in 'plot.' Moreover, closure is perceived as artificial and inadequate because it implies an end to history and is incapable of resolving the problems raised by the narrative. (17)

Not only is Strether's return ambiguous, signaling a movement to modern ambiguity and lack of resolution, but James has left the reader with a language that no longer relies on the old forms; by adapting silence, and incorporating physicality, he has made expression more complex. In response to Strether at the end of the novel, Maria "sighed it at last all comically, all tragically, away." In doing so, she dismisses long-standing forms of expression, bringing Strether to the threshold of modernity with his closing words in the novel being "then there we are" (345). Where we are, indeed, is perched on the edge of the modern age in which consciousness is arrived at through an evolutionary process that comprises the mind and the means of understanding it: language that, borrowing Gura's

phrase, multiplies its forms of representation, and by doing so, accounts for man's physical nature.

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