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**TRAINS OF THOUGHT: THE RAILROAD AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN
SELECTED WORKS BY HAWTHORNE, JAMES, AND CATHER**

by

Lynn Marie Messina

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

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Joan Lechner
Chair of the Examining Committee

B Kelly
Executive Officer

Brooks Lynds

Joan Lechner

B Kelly
Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract**TRAINS OF THOUGHT: THE RAILROAD AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN
SELECTED WORKS BY HAWTHORNE, JAMES, AND CATHER****by****Lynn Marie Messina****Adviser: Professor Joan Richardson**

This dissertation considers the role of the railroad in the developments of modern conceptions of identity and of literary modernism in America. It examines the connection between the experience of train travel and the portrayal of consciousness in three American novels, exploring the manner in which train travel has encouraged new ways of perceiving the human relation to time and space. This study examines three main perceptual shifts experienced during train travel that became integral to modern thought. The first deals with the way the passenger views landmarks passing at three different rates simultaneously; the second is seen in the rider's subjective perception of time's passage while traveling aboard a train; and the third deals with the cinematic aspect of train travel, prompted by the subjective assimilation and arrangement in consciousness of spatial details registered by the passenger looking out the window. I first examine Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* to consider the difficulties experienced when modern individuals try to integrate the perceptions of past, present, and future that are accentuated by the speed of a moving train. I then consider how Henry James uses the figure of the train

wreck in *The Ambassadors* to depict the traumatizing effects of the rapid pace and the inordinate quantity of sensations assaulting the modern sensibility, as he demonstrates the uneasy transition from the Lockean train of thought to the notion of the stream of consciousness put forth by his brother William at the turn of the century. Finally, I examine how Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* portrays the subjective consciousness as it dramatizes the relation between train travel, cinematic vision, and the fluid associations which occur in memory. The dissertation is interdisciplinary, drawing on works concerning the history of science and philosophy, literature and film studies, psychology and art history to argue its thesis and to explore the manner in which the experience of train travel has prompted new ways of apprehending and portraying reality and selfhood in the modern world.

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For Mom and Dad

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Chapter 1 : Perceptions of a World in Motion

This study tracks the importance of the railroad in American thought and, particularly, in American literature during the period from 1850 to the dawn of World War I, continuing the work of James Ward, John R. Stilgoe, and Leo Marx.

It is impossible to overstate the train's significance, whether as a symbol, tool of commerce, or means of travel. Before the mass production of the automobile in the early twentieth century, the fastest, most efficient, and most popular means of transportation in America was the railroad. In 1890, 492 million people traveled by rail for a total of 11.8 billion passenger-miles (Martin, *Railroads* 122); these figures suggest the extent to which the railroad had become an integral part of the average American's daily life. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch explains in *The Railway Journey*, "in a little over a generation [the railroad] had introduced a new system of behavior: not only of travel and communication but of thought, of feeling, of expectation" (xiii).

From Leo Marx's classic *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) to Albro Martin's *Railroads Triumphant* (1992), the manner in which the railroad has transformed the nation has been approached from numerous angles. Most historians deal with the train itself—its physicality and symbolic presence in relation to the landscape (Marx)—or with the American railroad industry—its technological and financial history (Martin). Marx especially discusses the locomotive as somehow alien to the American people, even while it becomes part of American ideology, as both "a perfect symbol . . . [of] the superiority of the present to the

past" (192) and a kind of deity simultaneously worshipped and feared for its "technological conquest of matter" (197). I shall follow a more personal, psychological approach more akin to Schivelbusch's study, as though examining the traveler's experience looking out a passenger car window. This will permit an exploration of the railroad's place in the "major reconfiguration of the observer" (Crary 66), the ways in which the observer engaged reality and formed an identity in relation to the train and technology during the nineteenth century. With increasing frequency, people experienced the sensible world through the train, the four walls of their car comprising another layer of skin, as it were, through which their bodies might encounter and their minds might perceive their environment. The train became an extension of its human passengers the way, later in this century, automobiles have become extensions of their drivers. This unique engagement in and with the material world in turn affected the portrayal of consciousness and identity in the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In *The Human Motor*, Anson Rabinbach discusses how, by the turn of the century, people had started to consider the human body in terms of machinery thereby illustrating the extent to which they had begun to identify with the technology they utilized in their everyday lives. This trend can be seen in the art of painters like Fernand Léger, who, in the early decades of the present century, "embraced the machine age" (Cole and Gealt 288). In paintings like *Mechanical Elements* (1918-23), Léger "transform[ed] the figure into a machine and

conflat[ed] machines with humanity” (Cole and Gealt 288). Marcel Duchamp was another whose “interest in ‘reducing’ the human figure led him to transform it into mechanomorphic parts” (Moszynska 20), as he did in Cubist paintings like *The Bride* (1912). Writers of American fiction took an especially keen interest in how the experience of traveling by railroad helped to transform human beings’ perception of themselves and the world around them. The locomotive made possible in actuality the kind of smooth, seemingly effortless movement that takes place in the human mind. In addition, the train’s motion and the changing vista from the window of the moving car, with that view’s unique perspectives on external, physical reality and point of view, provided several insights into how human beings related to time and space. By looking at three American novels—Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*, Henry James’s *The Ambassadors*, and Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*—I shall examine how the new temporal and spatial conceptions generated by train travel helped to shape narrative structure and the portrayal of character in these works. I shall then consider how these conceptions reflect the shifting structure of thought and feeling that is characteristic of modern life.

The concept of modernity involves a complex set of associations that can include anything from a development of more liberal attitudes to an increasing sense of confusion and chaos as a result of the Great War. The label “modern” is usually given to works of art and literature produced between the World Wars, while those whose writings pre-date this period—such as those chosen for this

study – are usually known as “precursors of modernism” (Abrams 108). Indeed, one consideration of the present study is to demonstrate how writers of the period from 1850-1918, like their successors,

subvert the basic conventions of earlier prose fiction by breaking up the narrative continuity, departing from the standard ways of representing characters, and violating the traditional syntax and coherence of narrative language by the use of . . . innovative modes of narration. (Abrams 109)

Hawthorne, James, and Cather anticipate modernist writers like Joyce, Conrad and Hemingway in the way they construct their narratives and portray the various perspectives of their protagonists. *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *My Ántonia* (1918), considered in succession, reveal a development of thought and expression towards an increasingly introspective mode that reflects the idiosyncratic motion of human consciousness and what Joseph Alkana calls “the priority of individual experience” that was of great significance to modernist thought (19). These stylistic considerations are not the only determinants of a “modern” work, however, for the portrayal of contemporary life also makes a composition modern, especially the depiction of what individuals in that particular era consider the marks of civilization. As Tom Lutz has explained in choosing the year 1903 on which to focus his study of neurasthenia in his work *American Nervousness, 1903*, that year in which James first published *The Ambassadors* marks something of a turning point, if not the “actual threshold of modernity, [and] in many ways it is in the center of a series of changes from what we can generally and reductively call Victorian culture to

that which we term modern" (18). Since a culture's modernity can be gauged largely by its acceptance and use of its technology, I have chosen to focus on one of the most significant technological innovations of the nineteenth century to explore how the American psyche adjusted to the changes it wrought in everyday life and the creative ways in which those changes were artistically rendered by three of the country's greatest writers.

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, published at the start of America's industrial revolution, the disturbingly irregular pace of modern life is reflected both in the tempo of Hawthorne's narrative and in his characters' confusion. Continuing this exploration of the by now well-established tempo of commercial society, *The Ambassadors* presents the figure of the train wreck to depict the traumatizing effects of the rapid pace and the inordinate quantity of sensations assaulting the modern sensibility, as James demonstrates the uneasy transition from the Lockean train of thought to the notion of the stream of consciousness put forth by his brother William at the turn of the century. The undulations of that stream are vividly depicted in *My Ántonia*, published at the beginning of America's involvement in World War I. Cather's novel is an appropriate work with which to close my study, for its episodic form borders even more closely on stream-of-consciousness, while its syntax and vocabulary are elegant in their simplicity and directness, anticipating the writing styles of Hemingway and other post-war novelists. Though the railroad is not a major object of focus in any of the above works, its motion suggests the abstract workings of the

consciousness of one or more of the characters and presents new possibilities for constructing narrative.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the train was intricately connected with the new ways of apprehending reality concurrent with the general speeding up of modern life. As an important element of modernity, the city participated with the railroad in generating unique sensations that caused people to abandon or adjust their preconceptions. Consider, for instance, the following description of the early twentieth-century American metropolis: "The city was certainly one of the places where the tempo of modern life was noticeably faster, and with this speed went a blurring of the outlines and a need to capture the panorama through rapidly shifting perspectives" (Molesworth 936). The kinds of mental adjustments required by the pace of urban life were directly related to the increasing importance and success of the railroad across the nation. In short, the often dizzying speed with which transactions took place in the city facilitated its growth, creating a demand for high-speed transportation by which men and women could reach their urban destinations and conduct their business. At the same time, those cities—like New York, Chicago, and Boston—where the greatest number of railroad lines terminated became, in Stilgoe's words, a "gateway" to culture and prosperity (21-45). As he rode the Pennsylvania Railroad from Jersey City to Philadelphia in 1905, Henry James reflected that the train "ought really to be on its way to much grander and more charming places than any that happen to mark its course"; he wished that "it would in the end carry one to some such

ideal city . . . , to some terminus too noble to be marked in *our* poor schedules" (*American Scene* 197-198), a destination like that to which James had sent Strether *via* the railroad in book 11 of *The Ambassadors*. The ease and speed with which people could routinely travel by train into and out of the metropolis thus created the expectation and demand for entertainment as stimulating as the ride which brought them there, as well as for rapid business transactions, both of which contributed to the city's growth and its somewhat frenetic nature. As Schivelbusch notes, with the railroad, speed had become "a new principle of public life" (xiii).

Once the novelty had worn off and people had adjusted to the special conditions of the railway journey, insightful individuals like Hawthorne, James, and Cather recognized certain conscious and unconscious changes in attitudes, perceptions, and behavior which were experienced while riding a train but which extended into everyday life. Such perceptual shifts had begun to be noted quite early in the nineteenth century. "What new thoughts are suggested by seeing a face of country quite familiar, in the rapid movement of the rail-road car!" wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1836 (*Nature; Essays* 34). "Rapid" in Emerson's time meant anywhere from 4 to 40 miles per hour (Ward 109). By contrast, in May of 1893, the Empire State Express achieved a record-setting pace of 112.5 miles per hour (Douglas 312). It should therefore not be surprising that even more novel perspectives were gained from rail travel by the turn of the century. Travel by train, in other words, provided an objective correlative, as it

were, for the perceptual and conceptual reconfiguration afforded by the changing actuality of the modern period.

Indeed, the introduction of speed into long-distance travel had an enormous impact on visual perception, dazzling passengers with the swift changes of scenery, requiring them to refocus constantly as they reestablished their positions in relation to the landscape. The stylistic and narrative analogues of these visual experiences are imaginatively exploited, albeit narrowly, by the novelists whose works are the subject of this study. Long before these authors wrote, Emerson had detected some of the "imaginative possibilities" in the shifting view observed during train travel (Kasson 115). As John F. Kasson explains in *Civilizing the Machine*,

While impressed with the train's speed, what particularly intrigued Emerson . . . was the effect of the railroad on the individual's powers of vision. Vision was for Emerson the primary agent and symbol of imaginative inspiration. The radical dislocation of perspective of the railroad passenger fascinated him and left him straining for images to describe his experience. He compared the effect of rushing but apparently effortless movement alternately to swimming underwater "like a trout" and shooting through the air "like a squib." The railroad suddenly transformed the familiar countryside for its passengers into a different medium, bathed in a red glare by the engine. (115)

The railroad thus ushered in a new age of optically oriented experience, one that demanded an appropriate vocabulary.

According to R. L. Gregory, the eyes do indeed play an essential role in the experience of train travel, contributing significantly to the perception of motion:

If the observer is walking, or running, there is generally not much of a problem, for he has a lot of information from his limbs, informing him of his movement in relation to the ground. But when he is carried along in a car or an aircraft the situation is very different. When he has his feet off the ground, his only source of information is through the eyes; except during acceleration or deceleration when the balance organs of the middle ear give some, though often misleading, information. (113)

This separation of the sense of sight from touch, a phenomenon first given serious attention in the nineteenth century, is discussed at great length by Jonathan Crary in *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. As he explains, "the sense of touch had been an integral part of classical theories of vision in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (19). Tactile sensation used to work in tandem with the sense of sight to help a person determine his or her relation to objects in space. The sudden "dissociation of touch from sight," followed by the eventual privileging of sight over touch, was "a historical condition for the rebuilding of an observer fitted for the tasks of 'spectacular' consumption" (Crary 19). Those "spectacles" consumed by the public included such nineteenth-century optical innovations as the stereoscope and the motion picture, both of which are historically intertwined with the growth of the railroad, as shall be discussed later in chapters here. The end result is that "the empirical isolation of vision . . . enabled the new objects of vision (whether commodities, photographs, or the act of perception itself) to assume a mystified and abstract identity," forming an unbridgeable gulf between the perceiver and the objects perceived (Crary 19).

Much of the new vocabulary needed to give expression to these modern

visual experiences was supplied by Henry James. In his 1898 novella *The Turn of the Screw*, the act of knowing is either equated with or somehow dependent upon what is seen, while in his Preface to the New York Edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, he depicts the novelist as voyeur, gleaning the material for his work from hidden observation. This latter essay is especially interesting for the way it demonstrates the extent to which the eyes had become privileged as instruments of artistic production by the turn of the century. Each novelist, James says, living in "the house of fiction," must look out of its windows with an "individual vision" (*Prefaces* 1075). He continues,

at each of [the windows] stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. He and his neighbors are watching the same show, but one seeing more where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees white, one seeing big where the other sees small, one seeing course where the other sees fine. . . . The spreading field, . . . the pierced aperture, . . . are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher—without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. (1075)

What the artist sees, the distance and angle from which he sees it, and the manner in which he interprets what he sees therefore determine his sensibility and, according to James, "his 'moral' reference" (1075). Vision, he implies, shapes the very character of the observer. How, then, does this principle pertain to the visual experience of train travel for the passenger? To answer that question we must first understand what and how the passenger sees while looking out the window of a moving train.

The manner in which a passenger in a train perceives the landscape depends to a great extent on where he or she decides to focus his or her gaze while traveling. Stilgoe, for instance, delineates the effects of different rates of speed on the passenger's apprehension of details in the landscape:

As a train gathers speed, passengers viewing the landscape at right angles discover that the spatial details nearest the window are the first to blur. At five miles an hour, an intent observer can discern flowers and other elements of the scene immediately adjacent to the rails, but at ten miles an hour he must look at objects fifteen feet from the side of the car. At thirty miles an hour, everything within the thirty- or forty-foot mark appears blurred, unless the observer is willing to swivel his head as the train passes. Increases in speed force the observer to look ever further from the car, and particularly east of the Mississippi River, such long views are rare. . . . At ninety miles an hour, the railroad passenger intrigued by the passing scene must fix his attention only on very distant objects; doing otherwise creates eyestrain and headache. (250)

It is during those highest rates of speed that certain peculiar effects may be noticed by the passenger gazing at the horizon. One of the most interesting phenomena involves the three simultaneous and distinct perceptions of time and space experienced when looking out the window. This sensation is caused by a visual Doppler effect, in which there is an "apparent variation" in the speed with which objects outside a moving vehicle seem to pass the car, depending on their distance "relative to an observer" ("Doppler"). First we notice the blurring of those details closest to the side of the train, those which appear to move rapidly to the right as we look out the window on the right-hand side of a train. While we may not be able to focus on those details without great discomfort, as Stilgoe notes, it is usually this view by which we judge the speed at which we are traveling; the more blurred objects appear to us, the faster we determine

ourselves to be moving through space. If we wish, we may attempt to focus on those details as they pass, employing rapid "pursuit movements" in which our heads "make an endless series of drifts to the right and jerks [called saccadic movements] to the left" (Gibson 126). Such object fixation may not be sustained for very long, however, before we begin to experience the kind of physical discomfort which Stilgoe describes above.

The blurring of objects nearest the train frustrated but intrigued Henry James during a train ride along the Hudson River, at which time he "was able to put, from the car-window, as many questions to the scene as it could have answered in the time even had its face been clearer to read" (*American Scene* 106). On one level, speed increased the number of impressions registered in the minds of the passengers, stimulating them with the "new thoughts" of which Emerson spoke. It also, however, embodied the manner in which "vision in the nineteenth century was inseparable from transience—that is, from new temporalities, speeds, experiences of flux and obsolescence, a new density and sedimentation of the structure of visual memory" (Crary 21). These important philosophical considerations will be addressed in connection with the works that are my subject.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the train's speed for early travelers was the graphic way in which it illustrated time's passage. In addition, the manner in which the train rushed through the countryside was for some in the mid-nineteenth century a troubling manifestation of the speed with which

change was occurring in the modern world. That change proved as difficult to apprehend and keep pace with as the details whizzing past the train window. Hawthorne represents this unsettling effect when he describes the impression made by a train's motion upon its passengers in *The House of the Seven Gables*. "Everything was unfixed from its age-long rest," he says, "and moving at whirlwind speed in a direction opposite to their own" (256). Before the passenger could fully grasp his or her position in the panorama of American life, that position had shifted and he or she had been physically and mentally displaced in relation to that position. This feeling of displacement is described by Mark Seltzer in *Bodies and Machines*, where he describes how the railroad "puts stilled bodies in motion" and imparts "the thrill and panic of agency at once extended and suspended" (18). Such an experience reflects a loss of control that could cause severe trauma to the modern psyche, trauma that is routinely repressed so that one can continue to function in society, as James demonstrates in his portrayal of Strether's moral and psychological crisis in *The Ambassadors*.

Unable to fix their attention on this close-up view for very long, the railroad passengers eventually rest their eyes on a location farther from the car. This more distant point on the landscape will cause the least amount of eye strain and require a minimum of saccadic movements. In his comprehensive study *The Perception of the Visual World*, James J. Gibson explains the dual impression on the moving observer when he or she chooses to focus on or "fixates" a distant site, specifically "a spot not on the horizon but on the ground

halfway down":

This is the scene frequently observed from a train window. . . . At [the point of fixation] the velocity of projected flow is zero, since the pursuit movement of the eye compensates for its change in direction and keeps its image stationary at the center of the retina with a considerable degree of precision. The flow is also zero on a line to the right and left of [the fixation point]; all points above this line [before the horizon] flow to the left and all points below it [closer to the train] flow to the right. (126)

Thus, depending on how far the halfway point is from the passenger, that part of the landscape may appear to be barely moving, while details beyond it may present the illusion of forward movement. Gibson provides an example of the former perception, where "mountains on the horizon and the clouds are at such great distances that the velocity of deformation [the rate at which the scenery changes or passes from view] approaches zero" (122). On the other hand, an illustration of the latter phenomenon describes how, "[a]t sixty miles per hour, the moon may seem to move at five-ten miles per hour. We see it as moving more slowly than us, but keeping up, never falling behind" (114).

These perceptual shifts invariably evoke a variety of emotional and psychological responses. A traveler today in a modern-day Amtrak train following Henry James's route down the Hudson River can still experience what James called "the American railway-journey at its best" (*American Scene* 106). The view through the frame of the train's window can still comprise a "picture" that is "a constant combination of felicities" (106), a framed landscape created by the hand of God or Mother Nature. A good deal of James's enjoyment of this trip derived from his being so pleasantly surprised to come upon the "great romantic

stream," the Hudson River (106), after traveling for miles past the usual sights viewed along what Stilgoe calls the "metropolitan corridor." These sights include such man-made "obtrusions of track and stations" that came between the passenger and his view of the landscape (James, *American Scene* 106). According to James, it was the unique impression of nature seen while one was moving at such high speeds that made this trip so memorable. It was as if so many more impressions of beauty could be gained while speeding past natural elements than if one were to view them in a single, stationary painting. This advantage existed in spite of the fact that, or as he conjectures, "*because* the felicities were all vagueness, and the 'beauties,' even the most celebrated, all blurs" (107; italics in original). The best American railway journey, James suggests, would allow one to see more of the country's natural beauty through the unique perspective of speed.

If the scene doesn't change, if one particular "beauty," no matter how picturesque, remains too long and too constantly in view, frustration arises in the observer. The passenger wonders how a detail could remain static within the window frame despite the train's movement past it. Certain landscape features—like distant hills or mountains—suddenly confound expectation by appearing to remain fixed in space. Then the passenger, rather than feeling as though she is making progress in her journey through time and space, instead experiences the baffling, albeit illusory, sensation of running in place.

The perception that the most distant objects on the horizon are moving

forward ahead of the train can likewise cause confusion or distress. The train may provide the technology to proceed rapidly towards a destination, yet the passenger seems unable to catch up with this perpetually visible point somewhere ahead. Like an opportunity that can never be seized, the faster the train moves, the quicker the scenery flies before, gradually slipping away as time and the train advance.

The various ways in which the landscape may be perceived by a passenger in a car or train has prompted scientists to observe that the perception of motion is, to a great extent, subjective and, "depending on the peculiarities and past experience of the individual, may vary from one observer to another" (Gibson 13). As Henry James notes in his Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, each pair of eyes peering out the windows from the "house of fiction" is a "unique instrument" that takes in and apprehends the scene observed in a way that is "distinct" from every other pair. In *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary reiterates this point: "Vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product *and* the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification" (5). Crary then goes on to discuss how this subjectivity was connected to modernist thought as it developed during the nineteenth century:

[C]oncepts of subjective vision, of the productivity of the observer, pervaded not only areas of art and literature but were present in philosophical, scientific, and technological discourse. Rather than stressing the separation between art and science in the nineteenth century, it is important to see how they were both part of a single interlocking field of knowledge and practice. The same knowledge

that allowed the increasing rationalization and control of the human subject in terms of new institutional and economic requirements was also a condition for new experiments in visual representation. . . . Very generally, what happens to the observer in the nineteenth century is a process of modernization; he or she is made adequate to a constellation of new events, forces, and institutions that together are loosely and perhaps tautologically definable as "modernity." (9)

Crary also acknowledges that "the perceptual and temporal dislocations of railroad travel" provided some of the visual stimuli that led philosophers to reconsider the observer's relationship to what he or she sees and how those sights are consciously assimilated (11).

The process of assimilation, unique in each individual's consciousness, occurs when the mind associates incoming stimuli with conceptions already present in memory. The resulting string of associations was metaphorized by John Locke in 1689 as the *train of thought* in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and two hundred years later as the *stream of thought* by William James in *The Principles of Psychology*. The motion of consciousness was further explored by Henri Bergson in works like *Time and Free Will* (1890), *Matter and Memory* (1896), and *Creative Evolution* (1907). This process consists of two essential parts: perceiving and thinking, both of which are affected by the subjectivity of the observer (Ouellet 67). When "the medium perceived is in motion," as it is during train travel or in the cinema, "consciousness is no longer restricted to a fixed instance" (Ouellet 71). Spacio-temporal boundaries dissolve, while measurements of space and time become subject to interpretation, as mutable as the shifting banks and undulating tides of a stream or river.

How did William James's theory of associations differ from Locke's, and what prompted James to use the word "stream" instead of "train" in his description of consciousness? In a series of three articles on the "stream of consciousness," Thomas Natsoulas attempts to address this issue, only to conclude that "James's stream was more analogous to a train, with tightly adjacent successive components, than to a stream of water" ("Stream of Consciousness: II" 367). Natsoulas persuasively uses James's own words in *The Principles* against him and bases his thesis on evidence in that work. By the time James was to publish *A Pluralistic Universe* in 1909, he had revised his theory of consciousness to reflect how "the proceeding from moment to moment of one's consciousness consists of a succession of discrete temporal units of consciousness," not one continuous stream (Natsoulas, "Stream of Consciousness: I" 4). In a chapter in *A Pluralistic Universe* devoted to Henri Bergson's conception of consciousness, James describes what he calls "the strung-along type" of continuity in reality, a "coherence" among parts in which those parts are "next neighbors" to each other, resulting in a "coalescence of next with next in concrete experience" (778). These ideas are nascent in James's discussion of the "specious present" in *The Principles* (573), where we begin to discern a connection between the train, subjectivity, and the modern conception of time and space.

William James's interpretation of the "specious present" is consistent with the subjective perception of time which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. "Specious" is used here in the sense of something "apparent, as opposed

to real" (*OED*), as with an experience that is perceived but not necessarily accurately so. In one of his most famous metaphors, James describes the specious present as

a saddle back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a *duration*, with . . . 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* 574; italics in original).

In other words, because of time's continuous, uninterrupted flow, what we perceive and call the "present" cannot be isolated as a specific point in time. It is instead an interval that varies in length from person to person and is defined differently by each individual. Furthermore, as James would affirm later in *A Pluralistic Universe*, the word "present" is something of a misnomer:

Past and future . . . conceptually separated by the cut to which we give the name of present, and defined as being the opposite sides of that cut, are to some extent, however brief, co-present with each other throughout experience. The literally present moment is a purely verbal supposition, not a position; the only present ever realized concretely being the "passing moment" in which the dying rearward of time and its dawning future forever mix their lights. Say "now" and it *was* even while you say it. (746)

In *Time and Free Will*, published the same year as James's *Principles* (1890), Bergson similarly asserts that in what he calls "pure duration" or *la durée*, "past and present form an organic whole" (100). Bergson explains that, during a given period of time, we experience an accumulation of the effects of a feeling, ensuring that a past state of consciousness remains in the psyche. Not every moment of that past condition lingers in the consciousness, but the *nature* of

deeds done during that time—deeds that have contributed to our progress towards an end—remain (Bergson, *Time* 188-198). Focusing on movement as an essential element in the vague form of progress that our consciousness makes, Bergson asserts in *Matter and Memory*, "I grasp the reality of movement when it appears to me, within me, as a change of *state* or *quality*" (196). Bergson, like William James, thus addresses "the autonomy and primacy of interior experience" which characterized perceptual theory in the nineteenth century (Crary 72).

In *The Principles*, James frequently refers to the "parts" of the block of duration we call the "present" as "pulses of consciousness" (181), moments when a person's mental state is altered in some way by incoming stimuli. The question is, can a pulse which breaks into another instant of consciousness become part of or blend into the previous state without creating an entirely new thought? In other words, do successive thoughts differ from each other (as with individual cars in a train) or are they part of one another, flowing imperceptibly into each other (as in a stream)?

As Natsoulas points out, the composition of the "duration-block" to which James refers is a crucial point on which he contradicts himself in *The Principles*. On the one hand, using the example of our experience of hearing a thunder clap, James asserts, "Into the awareness of the thunder itself the awareness of the previous silence creeps and continues; for what we hear . . . is not thunder *pure*, but thunder-breaking-upon-silence" (234). Earlier, however, he had asserted

that states of mind which are "supposed to be compound . . . must exist as single new facts, . . . independent and integral, and not compounded of psychic atoms" (164). The key word here is "integral," for an integral instance cannot consist of "separable parts," which means that it "has no parts that might go on, that is, survive the instance of consciousness when it perishes and is replaced by the next instance of consciousness" (Natsoulas, "Stream of Consciousness: I" 12). It is thus more accurate to conceive James's specious present as consisting of, as he says, a "succession" of thoughts, back to back, or "one end to the other." Conveniently, the vestibule train developed during the 1880s can easily serve as a physical manifestation of this abstract concept. While once a train was "a series of cars coupled together and pulling together," the vestibule, by providing transitional structures between cars, made it "a continuous unit" (Douglas 219), enabling passengers to walk safely and easily from one end of the train to the other (White 304). Though entering and exiting different cars during this end-to-end walk, the passengers' present still consisted of a single experience—riding a train.

As Bergson warns in *Matter and Memory*, thoughts cannot be so neatly separated from each other as cars on a train. The progress our consciousness makes from one thought to another is as indiscernible as the passage of time in *durée*. "Not with impunity," he cautions, "can we congeal into distinct and independent things the fluidity of a continuous undivided process" (*Matter* 123). He goes on to explain, "The duration *wherein we act* is a duration wherein our

states melt into each other" (186; italics in original). Therefore, "we cannot conclude . . . that the corresponding duration is composed of separate parts or that it is limited by instants" (191). The mistake often made, Bergson contends, is in confusing the *movement* between two points with the *path* traveled, for "movement is an undivided fact, or a series of undivided facts, whereas the trajectory is infinitely divisible" (192). Earlier in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson had borrowed the language of the railroad to emphasize this distinction, claiming that "each new fact will force us to complicate our diagram, to insert new stations along the line of the movement; yet all those stations laid side by side will never be able to reconstitute the movement itself" (123). This almost constant movement occurring in consciousness is the essential element common also to the motion of a train as it effortlessly traverses the terrain along its route.

When we consider the experience of the specious present during the nineteenth century, the significance of the train becomes more than metaphorical. Karl Marx spoke of the train's "annihilation of space *by* time" (qtd. in Schivelbusch xiv; emphasis added), not merely its annihilation of space *and* time. In other words, train travel had fostered a new way of perceiving time and space. Because of this new awareness, the distances between places were so much shorter than before that they seemed practically negligible. This alteration was caused by speed. Speed was possible, however, because a smooth and level iron road was laid down for the train, clearing the way of all obstructions; this was quite different from the experience of stage coach travel. Because of speed,

a locale which would have taken days to reach would now take hours, making the measurement of the distances between places paradoxically short and essentially converting space into time (Kirby 66).

The train and, consequently, its passengers may have stopped to pick up and dispatch passengers, but until travelers reached their stops, they stayed on the train. It was the site of one long specious present for the passengers. This present contained phases and slight variations in experience, but it was one, single, unitary environment in which one event occurred – traveling. Although the train made periodic stops along the way, each stop representing a "stage" at which the train and passengers "halted" (Bergson, *Matter* 188) or "perched" (James, *Principles* 236), for those passengers who had not yet reached their destination, the journey continued through that pause in the train's motion. As Bergson emphasizes, "the division [in the continuity of motion in consciousness] is the work of our imagination" (*Matter* 189), and the mental or imaginative completion of the passenger's journey corresponded with his or her physically disembarking the train. One disembarked when one had reached the right place, and then the next phase began – the post-traveling phase. In short, one's future could not begin until one got off the train. Being on the train felt a little like being in limbo. Because adults traveled by train for the sole purpose of reaching somewhere else, until they reached their destination, they were in a state of anticipation, and that comprised their present. This is why throughout *The American Scene*, and especially in the episode examined earlier, Henry James

spends as much time describing his thoughts and impressions during the "process" of traveling by train (312) as he does narrating his experiences at the American cities he visits.

All of the possible experiences one could have on a train merely comprise parts of the unit of time called "the present." A person traveling by train thinks, "Right now, I am riding a train on my way to _____. Although I am actually passing through many places—that is, the numerous towns and neighborhoods through which I am traveling on my way to this place—I am going too fast to experience them. What I am experiencing is the train and its inhabitants. They form a kind of moving city, but *one* city, and that is my habitation *at present*." Such a viewpoint epitomizes Hepzibah's and Clifford's experience in "The Flight of Two Owls" chapter of Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. There, Clifford refers to their presence amid "the usual interior life of the railroad" as their being "in the world, . . . in the throng of our fellow-beings!" (256 and 258). Years later, in *The American Scene*, James would similarly describe the Pennsylvania Railroad train on which he rides as having its own "mode of life" (197). As Schivelbusch explains when he contrasts the European compartment system of passenger cars with the "open spatial arrangements" of American cars, the feeling of community established amongst American train travelers was no small advantage, for the lack of privacy assured the passengers' safety, since they could be "at all times in communication with a great number of other passengers" (85). The appeal of what Eileen Bowser calls "the communal factor"

(15) would lead to the building of movie theaters and palaces at the turn of the century, replacing the solitary experience of watching a film through a kinetoscope. According to Charles Musser, "As part of an audience rather than isolated viewers, [spectators] could more readily share the experience with their friends" (92).

Cities and movie theaters, however, are stationary, unlike a train in motion. Therefore, the very idea that the train is a world unto itself suggests the relativity of human perception, a fact that did not escape Hawthorne. In one of the most interesting descriptions of life aboard the train on which Hepzibah and Clifford ride, he depicts some of the temporal and spatial illusions created by the motion of a speeding vehicle:

A party of girls, and one young man, on opposite sides of the car, found huge amusement in a game of ball. They tossed it to-and-fro, with peals of laughter that might be measured by mile-lengths, for, faster than the nimble ball could fly, the merry players fled unconsciously along, leaving the trail of their mirth afar behind, and ending their game under another sky than had witnessed its commencement. (257)

This remarkably astute passage anticipates Albert Einstein's theory of the relativity of simultaneity and illustrates how the perceptions of time and motion are so often measured subjectively. As Einstein recognized, "People traveling in [a] train will with advantage use the train as a rigid reference-body . . . [and] regard all events in reference to the train" (25). Similarly, to the young people in Hawthorne's novel engrossed in the activity of their own specious present, the ball they toss goes only a few feet. To someone standing outside the train on the embankment, however, the ball moves much faster and farther. In the above

passage, Hawthorne's omniscient narrator represents the latter point of view and suggests to the reader that, in the modern world, there are alternate means of perceiving reality.

The dissociation of sight from touch also contributes to the subjectivity of experience during train travel. Jonathan Crary has explained how, in the nineteenth century, the observer became an "autonomous producer of his or her own visual experience" (69), and more particularly, how "the shifting process of one's own subjectivity experienced in time became synonymous with the act of seeing" (98). When the passengers do not *feel* as if they have traveled as far as they have because of the speed and smoothness of the ride, they must rely on their sense of sight to determine how far they have traveled and how fast.¹ Their judgment, nevertheless, is subjective: they may know objectively how many miles they have traveled, but their conception of the trip remains temporal because they don't *feel* the miles pass beneath them. Wolfgang Schivelbusch elaborates this point, applying Henri Bergson's *durée* to train travel:

What was experienced as being annihilated was the traditional space-time continuum which characterized the old transport technology [i.e., the stage coach]. Organically embedded in nature as it was [because the coach's wheels rode over every rut and every pebble in its path], that technology, in its mimetic relationship to the space traversed, permitted the traveler to perceive that space as a living entity. What Bergson called the *durée* (duration, the time spent getting from one place to another on a road) is not an objective mathematical unit, but a subjective perception of space-time. . . . Compared to the eotechnical space-time relationship [associated with the coach], the one created by the railroad appears abstract and disorienting, because the railroad . . . negated all that characterized eotechnical traffic; the railroad did not appear embedded in the space of the landscape the way coach and

highway are, but seemed to strike its way through it.
(Schivelbusch 36-37)

Indeed, as Crary notes, "new experiences of speed and machine movement disclosed an increasing divergence between appearances and their external causes" (112), and this disjunction between perception and reality could and often did produce anxiety in inexperienced train travelers. Nevertheless, the *trompe l'oeil* effects would prove an endless source of fascination for many, as speed married with vision produced optical illusions that impressed themselves upon the passenger's consciousness. That consciousness then assimilated and interpreted those impressions subjectively based on the observer's past experience. Eventually, a new artistic medium would develop in an attempt to reproduce the visual impressions gathered during train travel. By the end of the nineteenth century, that medium—the moving panorama—would lead to the invention of the motion picture and a new way of conceiving time, narrative, and consciousness.

Bergson's establishment of movement as an essential factor in his theory of consciousness makes his work consistent with a particular mode of nineteenth-century thought, one that was especially characteristic of America during that time. As one scholar has observed, "Nineteenth-century America was a century of movement, physical as well as intellectual, economic as well as social. Things seemed to constantly be changing—boundaries, social status, population, and even houses" (McGinnis 143).² As has already been discussed, the eyes became the chief instrument by which perceptions like those of motion

were gleaned by consciousness, producing in the mind unique impressions of reality. Whether or not those impressions were interpreted truthfully, to the observer, they were facts. As Bergson explains, "When my eyes give me the sensation of a movement, this sensation is a reality, and something is effectually going on, whether it is that an object is changing its place before my eyes or that my eyes are moving before the object" (*Matter* 195). According to Jonathan Crary, this "adaptation of the eye to rationalized forms of movement" is symptomatic of the "modernization of the observer" which occurred during the nineteenth century (113).

Both types of movement described by Bergson above could be observed by train passengers during the nineteenth century, providing a visual feast that artists tried to reproduce to entertain a public hungry for spectacle. As noted above, their initial experiments resulted in the diorama and the moving panorama, both of which "provided audiences with scenic views that became linked early on with the experience of railroad travel, and can be seen as proto-cinematic entertainments" (Kirby 59).

Perfecting by Louis J. M. Daguerre in the early 1820s,

the diorama is based on the incorporation of an *immobile* observer into a mechanical apparatus and a subjection to a predesigned temporal unfolding of optical experience. . . . The multimedia diorama removed . . . autonomy from the observer, often situating the audience on a circular platform that was slowly moved, permitting views of different scenes and shifting light effects. . . . [T]he diorama was a machine of wheels in motion, one in which the observer was a component. (Crary 112-113)

Such a contraption could fabricate the effect of being in a smoothly moving vehicle—like a train—touring the countryside and watching the world pass at a regular speed. The appeal of the diorama lasted into the twentieth century, so much so that railroad companies "often produced their own dioramas—for example the Santa Fe Railroad's electric Diorama of the Grand Canyon, made for the 1915 Pan Pacific Exposition" (Kirby 61). The purpose of these dioramas was clearly promotional, for the railroads hoped that, after experiencing the Grand Canyon and other such sights second-hand, the viewer would want to see these attractions in person—and take the train to travel there.

Another invention which tried to simulate the experience of rail travel was the moving panorama, derived from an earlier stationary format.

First created in a circular format to imitate the view seen by an individual standing in one spot and pivoting around in a complete circle, they [panoramas] evolved into long strips of paintings which were unrolled like colossal upright scrolls in front of an audience, providing the view of a scene as one moves along it in a linear path in space—the type of experience enjoyed in a train. (McGinnis 3)

By the turn of the twentieth century, creators of moving panoramas were indeed trying to replicate the experience of train travel for viewers. In those designed for fairgrounds and amusement parks, "passengers" were seated "in railway cars while painted scenery rolled by the windows" (Kirby 64). These moving panoramas "had an influence upon theatre and literature as well as American concepts of visual reality" (McGinnis 3).

Part of this influence can be seen in the portrayal of linear time found in most literary works of the nineteenth century. Although any novel narrated in

the past tense is essentially a flashback³, those written in the traditional mode depict events chronologically from a specific point in time until the denouement, following a progression of plot from start to finish. For readers, this structure is reassuring, since it most resembles their perception of time as moving inexorably forward, representing a positive rather than a negative motion, addition instead of subtraction. Similarly, for progress-oriented nineteenth-century Americans, a spectacle like that seen in the motion of a train and reproduced in the moving panorama "embodied . . . a visual metaphor of linear progression through space. Progress was to move forward in both time and space, and not look backward" (McGinnis 145). Elaborating this point, Lynne Elizabeth Kirby explains why "the train would seem to be the very embodiment of narrative":

Insofar as the train can be conceived as a chain of units linked in a forward linear march, with events, the transformation of space and time, framed by a beginning/departure and an end/arrival, the a/b/a' structure that Todorov considers the basic narrative sequence is realized in every train journey, even if the event that is transformed is simply that of motion and physical displacement. (158)

It is not only the passenger who is physically displaced during train travel. The scenery, at least from the perspective of the passengers, also appears to be displaced, with a variety of images moving before their eyes as they look out the window, just as if they were watching a moving panorama. What is a panorama, however, but a series of still images represented one after the other on a painted canvas, or projected onto a screen using a magic lantern (Musser 43)? Like the diorama which came before, the panorama consists of the "juxtaposition of disjunct scenes" (Kirby 63), a technique used by the end of the

century in the editing of the motion picture, which "replaced" the moving panorama as "an even more spectacular visual art" (McGinnis 5).

A connection between the railroad and cinema has existed from the beginning of the motion picture's inception in 1895 (Kirby 4). Not only were Eadweard Muybridge's motion studies called *Animal Locomotion* (1887) sponsored by the industrialist Leland Stanford, owner of the Central Pacific Railroad (Musser 48-51), but trains themselves were frequently the subjects of some of the first movies produced. When the Edison Company showed its film of a train pulling into a station, called *Elevated Railway, 23rd Street, New York* (1896), it was "so realistic," reported the *Boston Herald*, "as to give those in front seats a genuine start" (qtd. in Musser 118). One can then only imagine the sheer terror of viewers who watched Biograph's "five films of onrushing trains, including *Empire State Express* [1896]" (Musser 150). Equally prevalent was the practice of attaching cameras to the inside or outside of a moving train (as in Edison's *Niagara Falls Gorge* [1896]) or trolley car (as with Biograph's *Panoramic View from Trolley* [1896]) and photographing the scenery from the perspective of the passenger (Musser 119, 150). The variety of uses film makers found for trains in their works indicates "that the train constitutes a significant cultural intertext influencing the emergence and development of the cinema during the silent period" (Kirby 2).

One of the most conspicuous marriages of the railroad and cinema could be found in the "viewer-as-passenger convention characterizing many travel

programs," particularly Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World (Musser 429), popular from 1904-1911 (Kirby 10). The audience entered "a theater that looked like a railway car from the outside," then "boarded the 'train,' paid their dime to a 'conductor,' and sat in a theater that resembled the interior of a carriage" (Musser 429). There, they watched films photographed from moving trains while the car in which they "traveled" swayed and rattled through an imaginary landscape (Musser 429). Such entertainment "advanc[ed] film's appeal to a mass spectatorship common to both the train and the cinema in wedding the tourism of the passenger to that of the spectator" (Kirby 10). These cinematic tours, like those using moving panoramas, functioned as "surrogates of travel" for would-be sightseers (Kirby 54). So popular was the travel genre of films at the turn of the century that many railroads, including the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, and the Mexican International Railroad, produced films that "featured railroads themselves in their most heroic settings" to boost tourism (Musser 234).

The relationship of the railroad to early cinema goes beyond the incidental use of trains in films, for the scenery passing the window of an express train was itself visually cinematic. This cinematic vision associated with train travel was due to a number of factors, including the framing of the landscape by the car windows and the telegraph poles lining the track. While the window frame limited the passengers' peripheral vision and functioned as would the proscenium of a theater, the plate-glass window provided the same kind of barrier as a movie screen, separating the passengers from the landscape

the way a film viewer is distanced from the actors cavorting before their eyes (Stilgoe 249). Meanwhile, the telegraph poles broke the continuous view of the landscape (Stilgoe 255) the way "the flicker effect" interrupted the otherwise smoothly portrayed actions on the screen for early movie audiences (Musser 345).⁴ Each of these contributed to the "absolutely kinetic perspective" afforded by the fin-de-ciècle express train (Stilgoe 255).

John Stilgoe provides further parallels between "express-train vision" and the cinema:

In the cinema theater the viewer sat alone among others, in twilight sharpened by flashes of bright illumination, and watched images flashed past his eyes. Like [Robert] Frost, who could not stop the train to examine trackside flowers, the cinema viewer could not halt the images. The rapidly, almost jerkily passing cinema images struck many authors as the perfect twin to the Pullman-car image of a landscape seemingly flashing past in a series of frames separated one from another by telegraph poles. In any speeding passenger car, coach or Pullman, but especially at dusk or dawn, the gazing passenger entered a theaterlike, cinemalike, dreamlike state. In Pullman and cinema-house now and then one became instantly alert to a fleeting image, then lost it. (252)

A passage from Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* exemplifies this strange effect. As Hans Castorp's train winds its way through the Alps, "A magnificent succession of vistas opened before the awed eye, of the solemn, phantasmagoric world of towering peaks, into which their route wove and wormed itself: vistas that appeared and disappeared with each new winding of the path" (5). The transience of those images made them illusory, ghostlike, as impossible to grasp as the figures projected in light on a movie screen.

The surprise of seeing unexpected images flitting before the eyes caused

shock in both train passengers and film audiences, the latter of whom were also dazzled by shifts in point of view from frame to frame (Kirby 9). In order to enjoy the experience in which each type of observer was engaged, such "excessive collisions and shocks of modernity" had to be repressed, a tendency that, when practiced continually, resulted in a great deal of stress (Rabinbach 154). Other sensations which "amplified the effects of modernity" for train passengers (Rabinbach 154) included "the shock of temporal reorientation in relation to speed, acceleration, and simultaneity" (Kirby 8), all of which made the train passenger, like the film watcher, a "suggestible subject," vulnerable to a "dreamlike fantasy state" (Kirby 9). Train travel thus prompted the same kind of "illusions of reality" that the motion picture aroused in its audience (Bowser 20). While the "genre film" in particular—including the western, the comedy, the detective film, and the newsreel—"facilitated the lulling of the spectator into the cinematic dreamworld" (Bowser 189), the shadowy images glimpsed briefly from the window of an express train fired the imagination of the impressionable tourist. We shall see in *The Ambassadors* and *My Ántonia* how Lambert Strether and Jim Burden become the railroad's "suggestible subjects." Just as Strether perceives the landscape of a dearly-remembered painting magically materializing before his eyes while traveling by train into the French countryside, so the view from the train on which Burden traverses the mid-West prompts visions from his childhood, ghosts from his past given shape and substance in his manuscript.

Contributing to the dreamlike effect of the passing view seen from a moving train is the after-image, a phenomenon that frequently results in our subjective interpretations of actual events. An after-image is an optical illusion in which an image persists in the spectator's vision although the object is no longer before the spectator's eyes. Bergson defines it as "the projection, outside ourselves, of an actively created image, identical with, or similar to, the object on which it comes to mold itself. If, after having gazed at any object, we turn our eyes abruptly away, we obtain an 'afterimage' of it" (*Matter* 102). As James Gibson explains, train passengers frequently perceive a negative after-image:

It is sometimes observed out of a train window after the train has stopped. . . . The fact to be noted is that an unmistakable motion is perceived but that it does not involve any change of position. . . . Out of a train window the ground seems to move forward but not to shift position relative to the window. . . . [H]ere is an experience of motion without an accompanying experience of displacement in the frontal plane. (133)

When the train is no longer in motion, the imagination supplies the physical displacement to which the eye and brain had become accustomed during the passenger's journey. Because the brain remembers the kind of motion recently perceived, that movement is duplicated in the present consciousness. According to Bergson, "It is true that we are dealing here with images photographed upon the object itself, and with memories following immediately upon the perception of which they are but the echo" (*Matter* 103). It is in this way that memory informs our subjective perceptions of the sensible world, for "any memory-image that is capable of interpreting our actual perception inserts itself so

thoroughly into it that we are no longer able to discern what is perception and what is memory" (*Matter* 103). Cather explores this phenomenon in her depiction of Jim Burden's reminiscences of *Ántonia Shimerda*, a portrayal colored by Jim's memories of his childhood friend.

Forerunners to the cinema, such as the stereoscope and the kinematoscope, were experiments in utilizing this natural "illusion of movement and persistence of vision" in order to create "moving pictures" from a series of still photographs (*Musser* 43). The effect of motion was achieved because, due to the after-image, the still photos projected in rapid succession blurred into one another, creating a perception of seamless movement. These images, enduring from one stage into the next, produced one unitary event, exemplifying Bergson's concept of *la durée*, "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances" (*Creative Evolution* 4). As with the negative after-image experienced on a train, the memory of the prior perception of movement and the attendant expectation for its continuation ensure the palpability of the visions, so that the spectator actually believes that what he or she sees is real. The process occurring is more than physiological, for "we do not see only with the eye, but with the mind as well. We see what we desire to see" (*Spiegel* 66). "Physical motion," Gibson says, "like physical shape and physical depth, does not have to be duplicated in the retinal image in order to yield phenomenal motion" (134). Because we recognize, in the actions projected before us in the cinema, corresponding gestures and actions that we

have seen or performed in the real world, when we watch a motion picture, "we can see motion in a situation where nothing moves" (Gibson 134).

As Bergson explains in *Matter and Memory*, consciousness is in constant motion, and our "psychic life" is a series of images comprising "thought which is unrolling . . . in our view" (14). Although memory enables us to move backward, as it were, in our consciousness, we do so as part of a present experience, since time continues to march forward. Thus our consciousness progresses, combining memories with new and varied impressions. "Life," says Bergson in *Creative Evolution*, "progresses and endures in time. Of course, when once the road has been traveled, we can glance over it, mark its direction, note this in psychological terms and speak as if there had been pursuit of an end" (51). So it is we speak of a journey, by rail or automobile, as well as of fictional narratives like those found in literature and cinema. As we have seen in the moving panoramas of the nineteenth century, progress is a key element in the experience of train travel, as reflected in the linear construction of narratives. Nevertheless, the more perceptive travelers have noted temporal and spatial irregularities in the view from a moving train, variations which challenge the idea of a linear narrative. These aberrations include temporal simultaneity and the unexpected juxtaposition of details on the landscape, each of which early twentieth-century writers and film makers attempted to portray in their works.

I have already discussed two different instances of simultaneity experienced by passengers aboard a moving train. The first was the three

concurrent shifts in perception noted while watching the scenery pass. The second was the perception of life aboard the train as being a world unto itself, separate yet coexistent with the world outside. Another, prompted by the adoption by the railroads of Standard Time in 1883, was "an orientation to synchronicity and simultaneity" that came with the awareness of different time zones (Kirby 8). The recognition that, while it was noon in one part of the country, a thousand miles away, at the same time, it was 11:00 a.m., created "a new kind of time sense in industrializing America" (Stephens 2).

As they strove to portray simultaneous events on screen, early film makers found a "paradigm of temporality" in the railroad (Kirby 73). Through various editing techniques, movies like *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and *The Holdup of the Rocky Mountain Express* (1906) were able to represent, in successive scenes, incidents occurring in two different places at the same time. *The Great Train Robbery*, for instance, used "returns in time" to shift "from one narrative site to an earlier locale in the same narrative continuum"; the "'simultaneist' structure" was preserved when, alternating between concurrent lines of action, the narrative would return at the end of one sequence to an earlier scene and a character introduced at the film's beginning, satisfying the audience's curiosity about that character's welfare (Kirby 73). Such techniques could satisfy the most voyeuristic tendencies in the spectator, who was magically able to witness all of the violence along with the victims while also being privy to the schemes of the robbers. This "nonlinear temporality in the arrangement of scenes" was one of

the "most distinctive features" of cinema before 1907 (Musser 5).

The juxtaposition of diverse images in the observer's line of vision is one of the most striking features of both the cinema and the railroad. Even the briefest train ride will afford the present-day passenger a varied assortment of impressions, as, depending on the locale, the train flies past houses, stations, trees, bodies of water, or other landscape details, some of them predictably present, others appearing without warning. Together, they form a visual feast that often proves irresistible to passengers, who, to pass the time on their journey, find sufficient amusement in gazing out the window. If they could freeze the vista framed by their window by means of photography or painting, their eyes would need to travel from one detail to another within the picture in order to examine it completely, but the direction of the eyes' movement and the length of time at which they would dwell on specific phenomena would be determined by the spectators. While viewing a motion picture, by contrast, "the eye *cannot* discern the succession of the sequence of details in any other order than that established by him who determines the order," i.e. the film maker (Eisenstein 30). Nor can the spectators control the amount of time they take to study the moving pictures. The same is true for railroad passengers; the order and length of time at which they might observe specific landscape features are determined by those who map the train's route.

In his description of an 1842 journey by rail through the United States, Charles Dickens conveys the often dizzying rate at which the scenery changes

and the variety of details glimpsed from the speeding train. This lengthy yet illuminating passage illustrates many of the characteristics of cinematic vision, beginning with the manner in which the passenger may be lulled into a suggestible state of mind, and ending with the psychological/emotional effect on consciousness of the rapid, unexpected juxtaposition of landscape features.

After traveling through a swamp-like forest where "the character of the scenery is always the same" (53) the train and its passengers suddenly

emerge for a few brief minutes on an open country,. . . now catch hasty glimpses of a distant town, with its clean white houses and their cool piazzas . . . : when whir-r-r-r! almost before you have seen them, comes the dark screen: the stunted trees, the stumps, the logs, the stagnant water—all so like the last that you seem to have been transported back again by magic. (53)

Following some brief stops, Dickens's train resumes its colorful journey:

It rushes across the turnpike road, where there is no gate, no policeman, so signal On it whirls headlong, dives through the woods again, emerges in the light, clatters over frail arches, rumbles upon the heavy ground, shoots beneath a wooden bridge which intercepts the light for a second like a wink, suddenly awakens all the slumbering echoes in the main street of a large town, and dashes on haphazard . . . down the middle of the road. There—with mechanics working at their trades, and people leaning from their doors and windows, and boys flying kites and playing marbles, . . . on, on, on—tears the mad dragon of an engine with its train of cars; scattering in all directions a shower of burning sparks from its wood fire; . . . until at last the thirsty monster stops beneath a covered way to drink, the people cluster round, and you have time to breathe again. . . . (53-54)

While he wonders at the "magical" quality of the visions he sees, Dickens is unmistakably frustrated at being at the mercy, not so much of the locomotive, but of its speed. In his faithful recording of the landscape details, one senses a desire to slow down so as to study more closely the passing scene and an anxiety

at missing any of it. The impression is of a reader struggling to grasp all he can of the moving text that has been set before him. James dramatizes this very predicament in *The Ambassadors*, where Strether suffers from an inability to comprehend quickly and completely enough the intricacies of the social landscape that continually shifts while he watches.

With each track that he laid, the railroad builder, like the film maker and the novelist, produced a narrative of sorts that could be read by each passenger who chose to travel his line. As the train passed through towns and forests, over waterways and plains, the more observant spectator could peruse a tale of America that would entertain and educate her about her fellow countrymen and women. In a sense, "the train was a force of integration, of linkage, of coherence: it tried to make the world readable" (Kirby 7). Cinema, in providing its own variety of "readable" images, is a concrete, if incomplete, representation of how one consciousness (the film maker's) records and assembles perceptions of a world in motion (Eisenstein 30-31). As such, it reflects, as much as any work of literature, "the inner life of the seer" (Spiegel 40). In speaking of this artistic subjectivity, film pioneer Sergei Eisenstein applies psychological principles similar to those Bergson elaborates in *Matter and Memory*:

In one way or another, the series of ideas is built up in the perception and consciousness into a whole image, storing up the separate elements. . . . A work of art, understood dynamically, is just this process of arranging images in the feelings and mind of the spectator. (*Film Sense* 17)

Cinema is the most vivid expression of that process, though modern writers like

Henry James and Willa Cather could achieve a similar effect with language, adding a sense of motion to the concrete images they set in vivid juxtaposition.

Given the significant psychological and perceptual changes resulting from the introduction of the railroad into American life, it should not be surprising that some of the nation's greatest writers would try to represent these conscious and unconscious psychical adjustments in their works. Hawthorne, James, and Cather display a particular sensitivity to the psycho-social importance of train travel and have therefore been chosen for this study. The chronological order in which the works will be discussed has been determined by the development of railroad technology over the nearly seventy years spanned by these works. Nevertheless, the reader will undoubtedly find some overlapping of style and structure among the three writers, indicating an inheritance of thought and an inclination to experiment with techniques that would become mainstays of twentieth-century literature. As writers grew more interested in portraying their characters' inner lives, they drew considerably from their own perceptions of an increasingly complex world. Because the railroad has been so integral to the experience of modern life, it is no wonder that it should figure significantly, yet almost subliminally, in how people saw, arranged, and recalled the events that comprised their everyday lives. The motion of the train mirrored the motion of their minds, as reflected in the works under consideration here.

The chapters which follow will discuss the works of Hawthorne, James, and Cather, reflecting the evolution of thought concerning human relations to time and space that are suggested by the train and revealed in their fiction. In

each chapter, I will explore those scientific and philosophical developments connected with railroads and contemporary with each author in order to help explain and further illustrate the author's presentation of consciousness in his or her work. I shall first consider Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*; here the conflict between the historical past, present and future is foregrounded and dictates the novel's structure and pace. A discussion of *The Ambassadors* will follow; James, continuing Hawthorne's exploration of time's effect on human consciousness, emphasizes the internal, subjective order and pace at which his protagonist processes information and the manner in which he represses the most disturbing perceptions in order to maintain his sanity in the modern world. I shall then consider *My Ántonia* and examine how Jim Burden's perceptions of the external world affect his memories of past events, and how the subjective arrangement of those memories dictate plot structure in Cather's novel. Her narrative technique reflects the kind of rapid and often unpredictable juxtaposition of details experienced during train travel, a twentieth-century innovation in storytelling that affects the pace and sequence of scenes used in both literature and early cinema. Each of these analyses will enable me to explore how these artists responded to "the distracting view of nature and human life, of imaginative possibilities, outside the window of a moving train" (McPherson 103).

¹ In *Breaking Frame: Technology and the Visual Arts in the Nineteenth Century*, Julie Wosk notes the safety tips for railway travel written in the 1850s by a British science professor, Dionysius Lardner: "Never attempt to get into or out of a railway carriage when it is moving, no matter how slowly," he warned

passengers; for "it is a peculiarity of railway locomotion, that the speed, when not very rapid, always appears to the unpracticed passenger much less than it is. A railway train moving at a rate of a fast stage-coach seems to go scarcely as fast as a person might walk" because of "the extreme smoothness of the motion" (52).

² Here I refer to the tradition of May Moving Day, a custom begun as a New York City ordinance for those changing residences but which eventually became fashionable (McGinnis 143).

³ The clearest instances of such flashbacks are found in those works which begin in the present tense, like Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, wherein the first line is "I have just returned . . ." (45), or Melville's *Moby-Dick*, which famously begins "Call me Ishmael" (12), before narrating those events which have lead up to the writing of the text.

⁴ This "flicker effect" was due to the construction of the shutter on the film projector. Until its improvement by the Biograph company in 1903, the shutter through which the light was projected would block the light periodically as the film was fed through the projector. Subsequently, "the alternation of image and its absence coincided with the number of frames per second. As the number of frames per second became fewer, the flicker effect became worse" (Musser 345).

**Chapter 2: Temporal Simultaneity and the Integration of Consciousness in
Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables***

"The Flight of Two Owls," the chapter in which Clifford and Hepzibah Pyncheon board a train to flee their home and cousin Jaffrey's corpse, represents the turning point of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, a moment at which a new era begins for his characters. It is also the place where epochs collide and ultimately coalesce in an impassioned prayer for "mercy" uttered by Hepzibah (267). The chapter encapsulates the human relation to time that Hawthorne has been exploring throughout his work, as the train enables the characters to face simultaneously their past, present, and future. From this confrontation, hope is born, giving his work the "pleasantness of running interest" noted by Melville, and clearing the way for the rays of "setting sunshine" Hawthorne determined to "pour . . . over it" (qtd. in Miller 341 and 321). If this narrative is a "more natural and healthy product" of Hawthorne's mind, as he declared it to be upon its completion (qtd. in Miller 322), it is because he permits a healthy integration of the temporal factions that had been at war with each other throughout: the divisions of past, present, and future that are emphasized by the speed of the train. In *The Social Self: Hawthorne, Howells, William James, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology*, Joseph Alkana asserts that, "in his tales and sketches Hawthorne repeatedly dramatizes travel, often using it as a way to enter into discussions of the individual consciousness" (40). The same is true of his use of the train in *The House of the Seven Gables*, for in that work,

Hawthorne takes a commonplace railway journey and turns it into something extraordinary, as the sensation of temporal simultaneity seen in the train's motion corresponds with the movement of his protagonists' consciousness.

Before analyzing the connection between the railroad and Hawthorne's portrayal of temporal simultaneity in *The House of the Seven Gables*, it is necessary to understand how intricately Americans had begun to associate the railroad with time and the notion of progress in the first half of the nineteenth century.

According to James A. Ward,

In the three decades before the Civil War, the American public enthusiastically embraced railroads, an invention that promised to expedite its pell-mell rush into the future. The new nation was in a hurry, in full pursuit of its Manifest Destiny. Never before had a people pushed forward so fast. . . . The rails were the one instrument through which Americans could both hurry and solve the problems their own urgency created. . . . [Railroad promoters] understood that time was of the essence for a people in a hurry, trying to solve the great national dilemmas while on the move. Railways, they argued, controlled time. . . . All benefited; Americans would be richer and, if they used [time] right, more free. (106-107)

The motion of the railroad thus became a manifestation of linear time, the train a unidirectional vehicle that would help Americans to progress into the future God had ordained for them, a future that included Western settlement and economic growth. To many Americans in Hawthorne's day, the railroad's power and forward movement through time and space made it the chief symbol of progress, representing what Christopher Lasch has called "the promise of steady improvement with no foreseeable ending at all" (47).

To individuals like Hawthorne, however, the pace at which America was progressing into the future and the path it was traveling made that progress appear dubious. For Hawthorne, what this modern, secular conception of progress lacked was the Puritan concern for history, which "mattered because it was under divine judgment, not because it led inevitably to the promised land" (Lasch 47). In its preoccupation with the present and future, progressive ideology neglected or ignored the past, including the record of human "shortcomings" and "moral failure" to which people had been victim and the memories of which they carry into the present and future (Lasch 47). In short, for modern men and women, progress involved an "exemption . . . from the judgment of time" (Lasch 55) and the substitution of optimism for hope. This latter distinction between optimism and hope provides an important key to understanding Hawthorne's work.

As Christopher Lasch tells us, optimism—"a blind faith that things will somehow work out for the best"—has always been an essential element in progressive ideology, which submits that whatever is, is best, and things can only get better (81). Optimism, however, fails to sustain individuals through difficulties or setbacks. According to Puritan ideology, to overcome adversity, one needs hope, which "does not demand a belief in progress" (80). Lasch continues,

[Hope] demands a belief in justice, a conviction that the wicked will suffer, that wrongs will be made right, that the underlying order of things is not flouted with impunity. Hope . . . rests on confidence not so much in the future as in the past. It derives from

early memories—no doubt distorted, overlaid with later memories, and thus not wholly reliable as a guide to any factual reconstruction of past events—in which the experience of order and contentment was so intense that subsequent disillusionments cannot dislodge it. Such experience leaves as its residue the unshakable conviction, not that the past was better than the present, but that trust is never completely misplaced, even though it is never completely justified either and therefore destined inevitably to disappointments. (80-81)

The past that progressive ideology forgot is thus essential to the hope that enables human beings to endure.

In his 1843 tale "The Celestial Rail-road," a parody of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Hawthorne first used the train to explore the inability of progressive ideology to see Americans through a troubled present to a secure future. Here, the train is portrayed satirically as the vehicle to salvation for modern men and women, a questionable substitute for the hope found in adherence to Christian faith and virtue. As in *The House of the Seven Gables*, the railroad in this story reflects "the nineteenth century's ambivalence about progress" (Lasch 161), and one can see here the germs of many ideas about how human beings relate to time that Hawthorne would explore later in his 1851 romance. His portrayal of Vanity Fair's religious leaders, with names like the Rev. Mr. This-to-day and the Rev. Mr. That-to-morrow, suggests the instability of the present and the rapidity of change occurring in every aspect of modern life. This transience subsequently casts a shadow on the ultimate effectiveness of the reform movements—the "societies for all manner of virtuous purposes" (828)—spawned by the various religious organizations and resembling those to which Holgrave belonged before

assuming his occupation as daguerreotypist in the seven-gabled mansion.

More important to Hawthorne's tale and our discussion of *The House of the Seven Gables* is the manner in which the too-facile railroad that enables its passengers to travel "easily and commodiously" (821) to the Celestial City fails to prepare them for the final part of the journey, where Mr. Smooth-it-away abandons them to the "steam ferry-boat" that will take them across the river to the Celestial gates (824). The fear and panic displayed by the train's passengers while transferring to the boat are in great contrast to the faith demonstrated by the two "poor pilgrims" who successfully swim across the river and are greeted by "a multitude of Shining Ones" (823). Having foregone the route of ease and comfort, surmounting various trials along the way with God's help, the two pilgrims are able to face their last obstacle with hope founded on the memory of past success.

Clifford and Hepzibah, the two poor pilgrims of *The House of the Seven Gables*, also discover hope when they abandon the easy route of escape and step off the train at the end of "The Flight of Two Owls." At the close of the previous chapter, Clifford compares himself and his sister to Christian and Hopeful, the hero and heroine of Bunyan's work (252), foreshadowing the restoration of Hepzibah's faith and indicating the role she will ultimately play in her brother's life. While they ride the train, Clifford's attitudes reflect those of the narrator of "The Celestial Rail-road," who seeks to avoid the pain of spiritual and emotional trial. Like the narrator of Hawthorne's earlier tale, Clifford observes that the

railroads "give us wings; they annihilate the toil and dust of pilgrimage; they spiritualize travel!" (260). However, instead of bringing them to a celestial city, a future world where their previous lives may be forgotten, the train brings Clifford and Hepzibah to a confrontation with emblems of New England's past. Here, at a "solitary way-station," they encounter "a wooden church, black with age, and in a dismal state of ruin and decay," along with "a farm-house in the old style, as venerably black as the church" (266). Hepzibah's ability to pray for the first time in years when they reach this way-station suggests that a healthy collision of past, present and future has occurred in her consciousness. Previously unable to leave their homes to go to church, Clifford and Hepzibah had lost their ancestors' faith. Now, in the presence of the dilapidated church and barn, decaying yet standing nonetheless, Hepzibah is reminded of God's willingness in the past to help His children to endure adversity. She places her trust in God, while Clifford places his trust in her, declaring, "You must take the lead now, Hepzibah! . . . Do with me as you will!" (266). These two pilgrims have progressed towards hope, which gives them, in the bewildering present of the modern world, the courage to face the future equipped with memories of a happier past and adversities overcome.

This successful integration of past, present and future is the result of a long and arduous process for Hawthorne's protagonists. Until they board the train more than half-way through his work, simultaneity is a "temporal disease" that the characters seem to spend all their energy fighting (Hall 6099A). The painful consciousness of their family's past history conflicts with the optimism of

their present age, making it difficult or impossible for them to look forward to the future, the signs of which are constantly present to them embodied in young Phoebe and Holgrave. The train's speed and motion, by heightening their experience of time's passage, force Clifford and Hepzibah to confront and begin to reconcile the competing epochs in their consciousness, just as Holgrave and Phoebe must later, when they confront Jaffrey's body and profess their love for one another.

Because Hawthorne uses similar language to describe both the perceptual shifts observed during the train ride and the psychological shifts occurring in the characters' consciousness before and after "The Flight of Two Owls," the train also becomes a mimetic representation of their psyches. For instance, Hepzibah's "wretched consciousness of being adrift" before she and Clifford board the train (251) anticipates the manner in which, to the passengers in motion, everything outside their window seems "adrift" and "unfixed from its age-long rest, and moving at a whirlwind speed in a direction opposite to their own" (256). Similarly, Phoebe, in reaction to Holgrave's desire to abolish all remnants of the past, exclaims, "It makes me dizzy to think of such a shifting world!" (184). The train, it would seem, provides a visible manifestation of their psychic states, though to say that one mirrors the others might be going too far. Rather, what Hawthorne performs with his portrayal of the train in his romance is "an exercise in formal manipulation and subjectivity"—mimesis and not mirroring (Greenwald 11). The common thread linking Hawthorne's mimetic representation of the train's motion with his depiction of the characters' thoughts

is the subjectivity found in both portrayals—a subjectivity that has profound effects on how the characters perceive time.

According to Art Berman in *Preface to Modernism*, "The fundamental characteristic of the science of modernity is that motion is the subject under discussion," and when this occurs, "change is given greater prominence than form. The essential concerns are not the things themselves, but the relations between them" (130). Thus one's perceptions of change—whether it be the shifting location of an object in time and space or the evolution of an idea—depends on where one is situated (physically or intellectually) in relation to that moving object or evolving notion. In the eighteenth century, Kant had introduced the idea of "a 'subjectivity' by presuming that the known world is not equivalent to the rudimentary nature of things but an effect of the exercise of innate mental structures" (Berman, *Preface* 185), suggesting that the mind imposes a structure on the material world and interprets what it perceives through the senses. In the passages quoted above, in which Phoebe and Hepzibah subjectively reflect on their disturbing perceptions of a world in motion, their fears are prompted by visual stimuli, seen either by the physical eye or the mind's eye, or both. As I shall demonstrate even more completely in the discussion of Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* in chapter 4, the subjective interpretation of visual stimuli contributes to the definition of the self in the modern world. Pierre Ouellet explains how this subjectivity is the product of the "modern or classical 'I'. . . constructed on the model of the 'eye,' which is

itself conceived as the *source* of vision and of our knowledge of the real" (68).

Furthermore,

the *ego* is construed as a kind of "magic eye" inside our physical eye which transmits and relates everything we see to our experiential self (as thinking and perceiving subjects). The universe is consequently ego-centric, and our thinking, like our perceptual activity, is fundamentally egotistical, as Stendhal would say. The gigantic mirror lugged along the streets, which is the foundation of the realistic aesthetic, is in reality none other than our human eye—all too human, as Nietzsche might say—and in which our own "I" is reflected, or refracted, along with the exterior world in sometimes illusory and hallucinatory ways. (68)

Hawthorne's description of how the "spires of meeting-houses seemed set adrift from their foundations" (256) suggests the optical illusions experienced during train travel. It is, after all, the passenger who is in flux while traveling and not the spatial details that are part of the landscape. Nevertheless, the sensations produced by these visions are very real, as are our subjective interpretations of all the events in our lives. As Hawthorne demonstrates in his romance, particularly in the manner in which Clifford and Hepzibah tremble at the mere sight of their cousin Jaffrey in response to the memories his presence triggers, the force of those impressions determines the manner in which and how long we remember them and can affect the rest of our lives.

Hawthorne divides time and the perceptions recollected by his characters into three categories that correspond to the three simultaneous perspectives experienced during train travel described in the previous chapter. Events in the most distant past—i.e. the Pyncheon and Maule family histories—pass from memory the most slowly and seem to travel with the characters into and, as

Hawthorne's concluding chapter suggests, beyond their present views becoming part of the future. Events in the most recent past represent the main action of the romance and what Bergson calls "real time," time through which the characters live (*Time* 208)¹; it moves slowly enough for them to absorb a multitude of physical sensations and note the effects of those impressions on their consciousness. Finally, there is time passing in the present from one moment to the next, whose events occur too rapidly to grasp their significance and assimilate them into consciousness, as Clifford experiences while viewing the street scene from his window and Hepzibah notes while she looks out the window of the moving train.

The nature of temporal simultaneity makes separate discussions of past, present and future difficult, if not impossible, in connection with Hawthorne's work. This is especially true when discussing the ending, which many have found so unsatisfying². The final scene is so problematic because all it can do is speculate about the characters' future, presenting the reader with enough palpable reminders of their unhappy past to cast doubt over the characters' expectations of familial bliss. Not only are they preparing to relocate (albeit temporarily) to "the elegant country seat of the late Judge Pyncheon" (314), but the Pyncheon family inheritance is discovered to be a "vast extent of territory at the eastward" (316), representing a motion backward through America's history and an unusable past, as opposed to the forward movement of westward expansion. Finally, there is Maule's Well, containing "a succession of

kaleidoscopic pictures, in which a gifted eye *might* have seen fore-shadowed the coming fortunes" of the romance's heroes and heroines, along with the Pyncheon-elm that "whispered *unintelligible* prophesies" (emphasis mine; 319). Hawthorne's language here reflects both the hopefulness and uncertainty with which the characters have ventured forth, the same attitudes he would like readers to bring to their consideration of the characters' progress after the close of his romance.

This uncomfortable blend of hope and uncertainty is possible because, as Hawthorne suggests throughout *The House of the Seven Gables*, one cannot see the future until it has passed, and the railroad reinforces this view. John R. Stilgoe explains how "the great plate glass windows [in passenger cars] provided no forward vision" (170), and it is precisely this lack of foresight that Hawthorne repeatedly attributes to his characters. Hepzibah, the first of the current Pyncheon family with whom we become acquainted, experiences an almost palpable fear of the future that nearly paralyzes her with its uncertainty. The chapter entitled "The Little Shop-Window" is full of various pauses and delays, as Hepzibah avoids entering and re-opening the family's cent shop. Although Hawthorne's description of the sun "ascending nearer and nearer to its verge" indicates the steady passage of time (32), neither Hepzibah nor the story actually move forward until she takes that first step into the shop and the mysterious realm of nineteenth-century capitalism. By contrast, Holgrave and, later, Clifford, approach the future with the spirit of adventure that Hawthorne

suggests is more characteristic of his own age. Holgrave, a "representative of many compeers of his native land," is "delightfully uncertain" of his own future (181), while Clifford determines to ride the train "as far as that will carry us," their final destination being of "no great matter" (259). The concluding chapter, being not quite as optimistic as Holgrave and Clifford, nor as full of dread as Hepzibah, is thus a kind of mean between two extremes, representing Hawthorne's own ambivalence about American attitudes towards time and progress in the modern world (Swann 3).

Early in his romance, Hawthorne presents us with Uncle Venner, a figure who is the epitome of temporal simultaneity, having achieved the kind of healthy integration of past, present, and future for which all of the characters must strive. Appearing to be "patched together . . . of different epochs" (62), Uncle Venner is Father Time himself, an "immemorial personage, who seemed always to have had a white head and wrinkles" (60). Moving with a steady yet "slow and shuffling gait," he is nevertheless "tough and vigorous" in performing his seasonal tasks in both summer and winter (60). The only things thought to be of a more "ancient existence" than Uncle Venner are the seven-gabled house and the Pyncheon-elm, suggesting that he has seen enough to have earned the appellation "venerable" applied to him by the narrator (61). His age-old wisdom enables him to put present events into their proper perspective, like, for instance, Hepzibah's fear and distaste at beginning a new commercial venture at her age, which, he points out, is relatively young compared to his own (62). It is when Hawthorne describes Holgrave's temperament that we see more clearly the

symbolic importance of the "patched philosopher" (317). Hawthorne tells us, "[Holgrave's] error lay, in supposing that this age, more than any past or future one, is destined to see the tattered garments of Antiquity exchanged for a new suit, instead of gradually renewing themselves by patchwork" (180). The past is therefore essential to the fabric of our present lives and, in fact, supplies the materials for the composition of that present. Here, Hawthorne anticipates Henri Bergson, who, in *Time and Free Will*, asserts that "past and present" form an "organic whole" (100) and describes an accumulation of the effects of feeling in duration (188). The past, according to Bergson, remains in our psyches, contributing to our progress towards an end (198), a principle dramatized in *The House of the Seven Gables*, which depicts "the interpenetration of the past and the present" (Male 138). Uncle Venner personifies this phenomenon as the representative of both continuity and change.

From the outset, Hawthorne expresses his desire "to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us" (2). While this is clearly a lament for the way the past has been forgotten and devalued in the future-oriented society of his day, his characters seem to be immobilized by their past, causing us—at least at first—to wonder why he would encourage rescuing the past from oblivion. Indeed, for Clifford and Hepzibah, the past seems to be as burdensome as the "giant's dead body" which, complains Holgrave, the "young giant" of the present must carry around with him (182). Regardless, as Hawthorne knew, the past is inescapable. In the 1950s, Georges Poulet observed

that, "for Hawthorne, . . . it is impossible to linger in the pure present. The latter is only an illusion of pause"; thus, his characters must "transport to the future the weight of the past" (329). Nowhere is this seen more clearly than aboard a train. When fixing their eyes upon the most distant landscape features, passengers will notice that, as soon as the train starts to move, those faraway details will appear to travel with them and sometimes race ahead. Subjectively perceived, they are as much a part of the passengers' present and future views as their past (since those faraway details also linger in their memories).

In "The Flight of Two Owls," Hawthorne transforms the above visual phenomenon into something more intellectual in order to dramatize the motion of Hepzibah's consciousness aboard the train and to demonstrate the importance of the house in Hepzibah's definition of herself:

Fast and far as they had rattled and clattered along the iron track, they might just as well, as regarded Hepzibah's mental images, have been passing up and down Pyncheon-street. With miles and miles of varied scenery between, there was no scene for her, save the seven old gable-peaks This one old house was everywhere! It transported its great, lumbering bulk, with more than railroad speed, and set itself phlegmatically down on whatever spot she glanced at. (258)

In the train of Hepzibah's thought, the physical distance between her and the house she has just fled is as much an illusion as the house's appearance on the landscape. What's past is present for her, here as in the beginning of the story. This is only natural, since Hepzibah has always defined herself in relation to the house. She, like others, may perceive it as old and oppressive, but it has provided her with security, and to her it is home, the only one this single woman

has ever known. When she beholds it, projecting upon it the color of necessity, Hepzibah thus sees something different from what others see. At this point in the story, she sees in the house not only her past and present, but also her future, since she presently has no hope of relocation.

The manner in which the Pyncheon family history weighs upon the characters in Hawthorne's romance has been the subject of numerous studies³ and thus need not be examined in great detail here. We can, nevertheless, point to a few specific visible reminders that, in this romance, "the past is alive in the present" (Winner 147). The most prominent of these is the house itself, the very atmosphere of which "assimilate[s] the new inhabitant to the old, the present to the past" (Arac 98). The site of several Pyncheon family calamities during the two centuries since it was built, it remains, as Hawthorne tells us, "a connection with the long past—a reference to forgotten events and personages, and to manners, feelings, and opinions, almost or wholly obsolete—which . . . would serve to illustrate how much of old material goes to make up the freshest novelty of human life" (6). A common element of Gothic fiction, the ancient dwelling provides "a rich sense of the presence of the past, the historical depth that underlies and helps to determine both the shape and the significance of our present" (Arac 98).

The cent-shop, added to the house a hundred years before the main action of the story begins, is a clear example of how the past is instrumental in shaping the present. Constructed to provide the Pyncheons of old with a means of financial support during a fiscal crisis, it has lain untouched for years until

Hepzibah re-opens it for the same reason as the Pyncheon who originally built it. Anticipating the trauma Hepzibah experiences when she embarks upon this new commercial enterprise, Hawthorne explains, "This same shop-door had been a subject of no slight mortification to the present occupant of the august Pyncheon-house, as well as to some of her predecessors" (28). Although it appears as if history is merely repeating itself, this re-opening of the cent-shop, as Holgrave notes, "ends an epoch, and begins one" (44). Not only will it be "the time when the patrician lady is to be transformed into the plebeian woman" (38), but, more importantly, as will happen when Clifford and Hepzibah board the train later, it will also bring the Pyncheon family into contact with their fellow "passengers"—their neighbors who daily "frequent" the vicinity of the house (46).

Other emblems of the past which continue to follow and influence the Pyncheons of the present are the various works of art that decorate the house, most particularly the map of "the Pyncheon territory at the eastward" and the portrait of "old Colonel Pyncheon" (33). According to Viola Hopkins Winner, a romance writer such as Hawthorne "often singles out the portrait, drawing on the painter's power to express psychological and moral truths through a visible, tangible thing" (146). As she points out, the Colonel's portrait is "fancifully described as living," expressing various moods as it watches in judgment over the house's inhabitants (147). Winner then draws an apt comparison between the portrait and Jaffrey's corpse, the latter sitting motionless in the chair while a fly crawls upon his face and open eyes, "as it might on the ancestral portrait"

(147). Upon Jaffrey's first visit to the cent-shop, Hepzibah had describe Jaffrey as "the old Pyncheon come again!" (59), and our final glimpse of his corpse solidifies his moral connection with the "stern" and iron-willed Puritan in the portrait (33). In using the portrait this way, Hawthorne thereby demonstrates how the romance writer is able "to find meaning in the spatial rather than the temporal dimension, to aim for simultaneity or timeless states" (Winner 157). Just as Hepzibah sees the house wherever and whenever she glances out the window while aboard the train, thereby experiencing continuity amidst the changing landscape, so the larger-than-life image of the old Colonel accompanies the current Pyncheons through time and space, simultaneously present in his portrait and in his descendent Jaffrey.

Holgrave, despite many attempts to escape his own family's history, is as much a receptacle of the past as Jaffrey Pyncheon is. Heredity has branded both of them: Jaffrey has received the colonel's genetic imprint on his physical appearance, and Holgrave has inherited Matthew Maule's unique talent for hypnotism. Holgrave effectively conceals this gift throughout most of the story, but his cognizance that he possesses the same ability as his notorious ancestor, along with his knowledge of how that talent was used to ruin a young girl's life, prompt Holgrave's continuous flight from the past. His constant career changes are symptomatic of this retreat, as they represent his desire to remake himself on a regular basis, to live perpetually in the present philosophically. In Holgrave, Hawthorne gives us the stereotypical modern man, to whom "[t]he present is superior to the past, which no longer requires adulation; the future can be better

still" (Berman, *Preface* 154). Thus Hawthorne tells us, "It seemed to Holgrave . . . that in this age, more than ever before, the moss-grown and rotten Past is to be torn down, . . . and everything to begin anew" (179). Whether this attitude is applied to buildings, to people, or to ideas, the result is the same: history is shortened or eradicated. Holgrave stubbornly insists on viewing the world as a "tender stripling," rather than as the "gray-bearded and wrinkled profligate" that it is (179). Throughout, Hawthorne makes a clear distinction between history as Holgrave sees it and the way it is represented in Uncle Venner, the patchwork philosopher. While the younger man does his best to deny the importance of the past in the fabric of the present, the cumulative effect of history present in the image of the older is a reminder of the impossibility of escaping the past.

Ironically, Holgrave's current profession as a daguerreotypist belies his own desire to bury the past. One of the chief benefits of the daguerreotype lies in its ability to produce a permanent and fairly accurate record of the past—or present, which, as William James has pointed out, becomes the past as soon as it occurs. A case in point is the two daguerreotypes of Judge Pyncheon taken by Holgrave in the course of the narrative. The second, taken after the Judge has died, makes the first one of him in life passé and no longer an accurate depiction of the man. The same will be true of the second one, representing him in death, as the years pass and the Judge's body decays in the ground. The man may die, but thanks to Holgrave's daguerreotypes, the past represented in those images may always be carried into the present—literally and figuratively.

The power of the photographic image of the daguerreotype is such that it will always be present as long as one's eyes are able to see it. That representation of the past becomes a reality. According to Charles Swann, "Holgrave's repudiation of the materiality of the history that surrounds him and his desire to reduce the old house to ashes are connected to his role as daguerreotypist. The image makes the actuality redundant" (12).⁴ Nevertheless, if the seven-gabled house were torn down after a photograph of it were taken, that photo would still represent what has past, not the present. If one believed the house still existed just because the picture of it did, that person would be suffering from delusions similar to Hepzibah's vision of the house of the seven gables while riding the train, and the mistaken belief that distant objects on the horizon actually travel with a train as it moves. All three are optical illusions that demonstrate the subjectivity of human perception and the manner in which our relations to time and space are complicated by technology in the modern world.

Try as we might to obliterate such material reminders of the past, we cannot escape our memories, as Holgrave and Clifford know all too well. As opposed to Clifford (whose ordeal we shall look at shortly), Holgrave is not haunted by anything he has himself experienced in the past. Rather, he is disturbed by stories of his family's past history. It is this history by which he defines himself and against which he acts in his choice of professions and in his private life (Swann 10-11). Because he is "morbidly aware of the hold of actions committed in the past upon those now alive" (Rodnon 44), he sets about to

rectify the past. In a private act of reformation of past history, Holgrave releases Phoebe from the spell he has placed her under while relating the tragic story of Alice Pyncheon. His hand's "slight gesture upward" in bringing Phoebe back to consciousness (212) "is evidence that he has advanced further up the moral ladder than his ancestor" Matthew Maule (Swann 13). Such correction of past ills could only be achieved by recalling that past and applying its lessons to the present, thereby proving the possibility of "evolutionary improvement" (Swann 13).

The more public way that Holgrave has set out to forge an identity separate from that of his family while improving upon the past is through involvement with various reform movements. David S. Reynolds reminds us that contemporary reformers had been a favorite target for Hawthorne in the past (118), and their satirical portrayal continues in *The House of the Seven Gables*, in both the hypocrisy of Jaffrey Pyncheon and the extremism of Holgrave. As the embodiment of the "Subversive reform impulse," Holgrave wages a constant battle against the tyrannous class system that has seen his family socially and economically persecuted by the Pyncheons (Reynolds 126). Holgrave's solution, as seen in his analogy of the Past to a dead "giant," would be to replace such abuses with a completely new philosophy based on nothing that has come before it. This practice would be consistent with the views of men such as Emerson, who, in his essay on "Man the Reformer" (1841), asks,

What is a man born for but to be a Reformer, a Re-maker of what man has made; a renouncer of lies; a restorer of truth and good,

imitating that great Nature which embosoms us all, and which sleeps no moment on an old past, but every hour repairs herself, yielding us every morning a new day, and with every pulsation a new life? (146)

If this mode of thinking appears extremely idealistic, Emerson declares, it must be so in order to counter the "extravagance of the [societal] abuses" that have accumulated over the years (136).

Consistent with the clothing metaphor that Hawthorne uses to depict Time throughout his romance, Hepzibah describes the reformers with whom Holgrave associates as wearing "long beards, and dressed in . . . new-fangled and ill-fitting garments" (84). There is an implicit contradiction in this description. Despite the advanced years indicated by their excessive facial hair, these men try to deny their age—and the past that saw their growth and maturity—by wearing only the latest fashions and adopting customs ill befitting men of their generation. Such incongruity is found in Holgrave's reform speech, "full of wild and disorganizing matter," according to the penny-paper Hepzibah reads (84). Holgrave seeks to overturn the social order that has been in place for centuries until love, the oldest and most basic of all motivators, undermines his intentions. According to Reynolds, "By the end, he has given himself to Phoebe, decrying his former radicalism by declaring: 'The happy man inevitably confines himself within ancient limits.' The former champion of change wants to live with Phoebe in a conservative world of stone houses, fences, wealth, and laws" (127). Perhaps, but Holgrave also expresses his desire to plant trees and surrender to Phoebe his "oscillating tendencies" (307), suggesting his turning

towards a more natural and constructive kind of reform that produces change through steady growth and progress. The planting of a tree symbolizes the manner in which his former destructive impulse has been replaced by a more constructive one, his endorsement of a future built on the past (Swann 13).

The figure most obviously and painfully oppressed by the past in *The House of the Seven Gables* is Clifford. Hawthorne depicts him as being as much a slave to his happy memories as to his unpleasant ones. Robbed of his youth by Jaffrey, who secures his cousin's unjust thirty-year imprisonment, Clifford relives the trauma of that experience each time he sees the Judge. Meanwhile, as Paul McCarthy discusses in his study of perspective in Hawthorne's longer works, Clifford's preoccupation with the life of the street viewed each day from the arched window indicates his desire to return psychologically to the carefree days of his childhood (50). Clifford's physical distance or "remoteness" from "the rush and roar of the human tide . . . as it rolls its slow and long array" past the house (165) corresponds with his distance in time from his beloved past. The butcher, the fish and vegetable salesmen, the baker, and the scissor-grinder, whose "charm lay chiefly in the past[,] . . . for the scissor-grinder's wheel had hissed in his childish ears" (162), embody that faraway time for him. This scene illustrates how, for Clifford, as for many of the characters in Hawthorne's romance, "the journey through the heart becomes as much a temporal movement as a spatial one" (Horne 459). That journey, which begins when he re-enters the house after his prison release, culminates in "The Flight of Two Owls" and

involves, in Christoph Lohmann's words, "an acceptance of the past and a willingness to stride along with the changing present" (98).

In Hawthorne's romance, the rapidity of change in the modern world and the transience of the fleeting moment both characterize the present and are highlighted by the speed of the train in "The Flight of Two Owls." The present finds an apt metaphor in the blurring of spatial details situated immediately beside the moving train; for it is as impossible to focus on each moment of time *when it happens* as it is to fix one's eyes on a single flower growing alongside the railroad tracks while speeding past it. Hawthorne explores the profoundly elusive nature of time in the present even before Clifford and Hepzibah ride the train—from which "they could see the world racing past them" (256)—by showing us the Pyncheons' everyday life through Clifford's eyes.

In the chapter entitled "The Arched Window," Clifford's visual and psychological perspectives on the world are shown to be closely related, and both are illustrative of his time-consciousness. An important feature of the house that causes its "aspect" to resemble "a human countenance" (5), this window is the house's eye on the outside world, arched like a child's might be in surprise and wonder. It is therefore appropriate that Hawthorne should situate Clifford there, as the author emphasizes Clifford's child-like perspective on the contemporary world he has only recently rejoined. Set as it is in such a "venerable mansion" (5)—a description that connects it to the aged philosopher Uncle Venner—the window necessarily "provides both an 'eye on the past'" to

one looking inside the house from the outside "and a perspective for the present" to the older, yet paradoxically childish, resident Clifford as he looks out of it from within the house (McCarthy 50).

Hyper-sensitive to physical stimuli due to his long years of confinement, Clifford's nerves are as delicate as one of the window's panes of glass, and every new sensation is like a small shock to his system. The severity of Clifford's condition is all the more noteworthy when one considers Hawthorne's description of the view Clifford sees from the arched window: "a portion of the great world's movement, as might be supposed to roll through one of the retired streets of a not very populous town" (159). Even this relatively placid scene, however, excites Clifford, and, as occurs with a child, "few facts or activities escape him" (McCarthy 50). Hawthorne gives Clifford a peculiarly infantile lack of object permanence, so he forgets what he sees as soon as it disappears from his view and he becomes distracted by the next sensation. As a result, these impressions "always affected him with just the same surprise as at first" (160). Clifford's inability "to keep up with the swiftness of the passing moment" (161) is consistent with his incapacity for confronting events in his distant past. Hence, while Holgrave seems determined to dwell in the present philosophically, Clifford appears doomed to live in the present perceptually.

Two symptoms of Clifford's longing for the distant past are his powerful reactions to the railroad and a parade that passes down Pyncheon-street. The newer and more powerful the stimulus, like the "terrible energy . . . forced upon him" by the sight of the modern train speeding through town (161), the more

distressed he becomes. A similar "species of terror" grips him when he is tempted to leap into the crowd from his balcony while watching the political parade pass beneath his window (166). Both of these events witnessed by Clifford have in common an excess of noise and motion that seem to overwhelm his delicate senses. According to Wolfgang Schivelbusch, such a fear was also experienced by railroad passengers during the nineteenth century. The sudden, unexpected fright from being "'shot' through space (with the train as projectile)" often caused disorientation and shock in early railway travelers (Schivelbusch 159). Julie Wosk explains that the speed of the railroad threatened a person's "feeling of mastery and control" over the machine (47). This sensation then prompted a helplessness similar to that described by Hawthorne, when he uses the earthquake analogy to suggest the violent rapidity with which landscape features appear and disappear from view while Clifford and Hepzibah ride the train (256). John R. Stilgoe likewise discusses how "irritating" turn-of-the-century travelers like William James, Robert Frost, and Hart Crane found the "ephemeral quality of the view" from the express train window (250). These lamented that the train moves too rapidly to grasp visually the distinct items along the track; instead, all of these details, no matter how unique when viewed separately, blur into one indistinguishable mass when seen at high speed, and may receive only a cursory examination at best if one is actually able to focus on them. Hawthorne presents the political parade passing down Pyncheon-street as affecting Clifford in a similar fashion. While the spectators are close enough to the marchers to "distinguish the tedious common-place of each man's visage,"

the large number of such individuals in motion together down the narrow street appears "as a mighty river of life, massive in its tide, and black with mystery" (165). In this description, the marchers, like the trackside details viewed from a moving train, can be seen yet not very easily discerned. Their forward movement, as profoundly inexorable as that of time itself, does not cease long enough for a spectator to study and record the image of any one individual among them. Clifford's desire to leap into this "surging stream of human sympathies" (165) reflects his wish to join the march of Time, to be more philosophically *in* the present, rather than merely its spectator. The kind of object permanence for which he strives here is one of traditions and ideas in which he and his fellow men and women may immerse themselves and carry safely from one year to the next. Nevertheless, as he will discover later when he and Hepzibah board the train, there is a more practical way of "shocking" himself into the present than taking a "plunge" from his balcony (166).

Also illustrative of present time in "The Arched Window" are the soap bubbles Clifford is seen blowing towards the chapter's close. Hawthorne describes them as "airy spheres" and "[l]ittle impalpable worlds . . . with the big world depicted . . . on the nothing of their surface" (171). When popped by the passersby below the window, "the bubble, with all its pictured earth and sky scene, vanished as if it had never been" (171). This latter passage recalls for us the beginning of the chapter, where Hawthorne tells us how Clifford so easily forgot the novel appearance of the omnibus and other sights as soon as they

disappeared from his view (160). These soap bubbles similarly exist for a brief time before they disappear into physical and imaginative nothingness, forgotten by the spectators below as soon as they turn the corner of the house (171). The bubble's inability to be grasped reflects the impossibility of isolating and comprehending a passing moment of time. As William James would write nearly four decades later, "Where is it, this present? It has melted in our grasp, fled ere we could touch it, gone in the instant of becoming" (*Principles* 573). Edwin Haviland Miller discusses Hawthorne's use of the soap-bubbles in similar terms, asserting, "The bubble . . . confirmed the transience of time, the reality of death" (328), for as sure as each moment dissolves indiscernibly into the next, our bodies will decay until they too dissolve back into the earth. In the present life and death of the bubble, humankind can thus also see its future. In fact, Clifford glimpses his own future when a bubble pops on an unsuspecting Jaffrey's nose. Of this occurrence, Miller explains, "Clifford's soap bubble turns out by accident . . . to be his means of attacking his betrayer and emasculator. . . . Symbolically, then, the child-man, or 'son,' has revenged himself on the Bad Father" (331). This episode becomes a foreshadowing of Jaffrey's final defeat by Clifford, wherein the Judge dies in the old house while waiting to interrogate and further torment his long-suffering cousin. His passing, as sudden as a bubble's bursting, will then secure a happy—or, at least, happier—future for both the Pyncheon and Maule families.

At the start of the chapter entitled "The Flight of Two Owls," Hawthorne

once again uses bubble imagery, this time to suggest the impermanence of the energy and enthusiasm Clifford will display while riding the train. He is described as having "the warmest tide of life . . . bubbling through his veins" (253), implying an intensity that can only last for the present time and which will eventually dissipate (Miller 333). In "The Arched Window," the soap bubbles likewise present "brilliant fantasies" that "made the dull atmosphere imaginative" (171). With that description, Hawthorne emphasizes their illusory properties and suggests that they are mere products or tools of our imaginations, that they, like the present, are subjectively perceived by each of us. William James, in his discussion of the "specious present," and Henri Bergson, when he puts forth his concept of *la durée*, also reflect upon our individual, subjective perceptions of the varying lengths of time that we call the present, and their ideas can be applied to Clifford's consciousness in "The Flight of Two Owls." For the duration of the train ride, he is energized, and this condition persists from one moment to the next. Distracted by his conversation with a fellow passenger, neither the immediate past nor the future have any actuality for him. Only his present condition is real to him. Paradoxically, that present marks a return to his past, as he exclaims, "[M]y youth, my youth!--the more does it come back to me" (262). As we shall see in Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, such rejuvenation is never permanent, yet it cannot help but affect an alteration in one's character. So we see that the moment Clifford steps off the train, Hawthorne tells us, "this bubbling up-gush of ideas . . . had entirely subsided"

(266), indicating that his apparent rejuvenation aboard the train is like a figment of his imagination, an illusion of recovered youth that almost completely vanishes and leaves him "old" (262), as he was before. Nevertheless, afterwards, we are told, "he did not sink into his former intellectual apathy" (314), illustrating the manner in which a past experience has once again been carried into Clifford's present and future.

For the time he is on the train, however, Clifford is content to forget his immediate past and to remain blissfully ignorant of what his future holds, telling the conductor that he and his sister wish to go "As far as that [bank-note] will carry us. . . . It is of no great matter" (259). Here, Clifford echoes Hawthorne's earlier description of Holgrave's future accomplishments—"matters" that he calls "delightfully uncertain" (181). Like the young artist who has no desire to preserve the past for posterity, Clifford is truly living in the present, a present which, like a soap bubble, barely has any substance or "matter" at the moment. The only thing that is real is the speeding train in which they are presently riding. This vehicle becomes a literal train of thought, as Clifford "pours out words and ideas which match the speed of the train" (Miller 333). Clifford's demeanor aboard the train fulfills his own prophecy made after his aborted leap into the marchers, that "had I taken that plunge, and survived it, methinks it would have made me another man!" (166). Instead of attempting a suicidal immersion in the lives of his fellow citizens, he has been "drawn into the great current of human life" by the train (256); and the combined shocks of this

"plunge" (his boarding the train) and Jaffrey's death, according to Hawthorne, "had a permanently invigorating and ultimately beneficial effect on Clifford" (313).

The further they travel from the seven-gabled mansion and the past that it represents, the more Clifford sounds like Holgrave, as he advocates all that is new and decries anything permanent. Like Holgrave, he displays an enthusiasm for mesmerism and rappings, two of the most popular fads of Hawthorne's time, and even borrows Holgrave's metaphor of the past as a "giant's dead body," claiming that anyone who builds for posterity "lays his own dead corpse beneath the underpinning" (263). He declares that "the greatest possible stumbling blocks in the path of human happiness and improvement, are these heaps of bricks, and stones, consolidated with mortar, or hewn timber fastened together with spike-nails, which men painfully contrive for their own torment, and call them house and home!" (261). Like Holgrave, Clifford is reacting against the oppressiveness of his family's past, and suddenly aboard this "emblem of modern transport" (Swann 14), he feverishly embraces the contemporaneity that the train represents.

One of the train's advantages, in fact, is that it can rescue anyone from the kind of suffocating existence that comes from dwelling too long in the same old house. With the advent of rail travel, no one need establish roots, ensuring the possibility of one's continuous existence in the present. Clifford says,

My impression is, that our wonderfully increased, and still increasing, facilities of locomotion are destined to bring us round again to the nomadic state. . . . Transition being so facile, what can

be any man's inducement to tarry in one spot . . . when he may just as easily dwell, in one sense, nowhere—in a better sense, wherever the fit and beautiful shall offer him a home? (259-260)

As the end of the romance—and, indeed, Hawthorne's own life—illustrates, such a philosophy is often easier expressed than adhered to. The conclusion of *The House of the Seven Gables*, which sees the Pyncheons trading one ancestral home for another, certainly contradicts the ideas Clifford voices above and perhaps reflects Hawthorne's own "understandable ambivalence to Salem," a town which he never seemed to leave "except physically" (Miller xiii). As Miller demonstrates, Hawthorne's frequent re-visitations to Salem in his fiction reveal to what extent the town was part of his "inner landscape" (xv), just as much as the seven-gabled house is for Clifford and Hepzibah while they ride the train. As attractive as the nomadic lifestyle may seem to Clifford at this time, as Hawthorne knows, nothing can replace the security and familiarity of a home, nor should one underestimate that home and its importance in shaping one's character and identity.

By 1914, Robert Herrick would prove the prescience of Hawthorne's notions in an essay called "The Background of the American Novel." There, Herrick laments the absence, in the American literature of his own time, of "atmosphere," which he defines as "a spiritual medium that is the product of inherited and shared traditions and instincts" (222-223). This atmosphere can only be gleaned from intimate, extended knowledge of a place, a condition discouraged by the facility of train travel. Because of the extensive railroad

system of his time, Americans move easily and quickly from place to place, and each location takes on the significance of a temporary dwelling place. For Herrick, the result is unfortunate. With disappointment, Herrick reflects, "It is hard to say where Americans have their permanent roots. No people other than the nomads so easily exchange their habitat as Americans. . . . For our novelist our cities are like huge hotels where his characters eat and sleep,—hotels with meaningless names" (226). Those who move from place to place pursuing "new ventures" are like "aliens" everywhere (Herrick 222), as they repeatedly abandon the past in favor of a new yet temporary present. In "The Flight of Two Owls," Clifford wishes to use the train for the same purpose: to trade one dwelling and identity for another, to flee his past and avoid establishing the kinds of roots which have choked him and his ancestors for the last two hundred years. It is only when he and Hepzibah de-train that he recognizes the folly of such an ambition.

Also symptomatic of Clifford's desire to embrace the present is his fascination with electricity and the telegraph, the latter of which was invented specifically because of the railroad. The telegraph enabled engineers to coordinate the movement of trains along the same tracks and "permitted, for the first time ever, the virtually instantaneous synchronization of one place with another distant one" (Stephens 11). Along with the railroad, the telegraph helped "to annihilate distance rather than time" (Swann 15) by permitting a person to be in two places at once. According to Stephen Kern, the telegraph

thereby provided "a major change in the experience of the present" (68). As Clifford says, telegraphy has turned the earth into one "vast head" within which human thoughts can be transmitted instantaneously (264). The speed with which messages are communicated *via* the telegraph makes it seem as if two people were speaking face to face or telepathically, each knowing the other's thoughts as they occur. One no longer has to wait for a recipient to read one's letter at a future time, as with the post; the telegraph ensures that one can communicate with that person now, in the present.

The circumstances described above raise the question of "whether the present is a sequence of single local events or a simultaneity of multiple distant events" (Kern 68). Although Hawthorne does not attempt an in-depth exploration of this topic, Clifford's reference to electricity as "the all-pervading intelligence" (264) suggests a possible view on the subject. According to Clifford, "by means of electricity, the world of matter has become a great nerve," and the "vast head" which we call the earth "is itself a thought, nothing but thought, and no longer the substance which we deemed it" (264). It is because that "means" of communicating by telegraph (electricity) is insubstantial that it is able to exist everywhere simultaneously. As long as this is true, the two different mental processes that produce and receive the thoughts transmitted by telegraph also take place simultaneously. Its ephemeral qualities make electricity as paradoxical as a thought, which has substance and reality when it occurs yet cannot be located in the material universe. William James considers

this same conundrum in *The Principles of Psychology*, where he explains, "If we could say in English 'it thinks,' as we say 'it rains' or 'it blows,' we should be stating the fact most simply and with the minimum of assumption. As we cannot, we must simply say that *thought goes on*" (220). We know that a thought exists when it is expressed just as we know of the presence of electricity by its vibration—but only then. Both are as ephemeral as a moment of time in what we call the present.

While it is as impossible to focus on those objects immediately beside the speeding train as it is to capture a fleeting moment of time, the passenger may observe passing scenery at a more comfortable point midway between the side of the track and the most distant landscape features. There, with a minimum number of saccadic movements, the spectators' eyes may follow the backward motion of the scenery presently in their view while they attend to its details. When that scenery has passed, those passengers sitting on the right side of the train may return their gaze to the left side of the window and follow new landscape features ahead of them backwards until they too have passed. In this way, the spectators may comfortably observe the progress of time and, more specifically, how the future becomes part of our present until it moves inevitably into the past. At this midway point, however, the pace of that movement appears slower than the rate at which trackside details pass and is therefore easier to apprehend. Because spatial details are in the spectator's present view for a greater length of time, the passing of time itself appears much slower as

well, while the present seems to last longer. This condition occurs in a person's consciousness when that person is more alive to his surroundings, more cognizant of the heterogeneity in his environment. At this time, he experiences the *feeling* or *sense* of advancing into the future (what Henri Bergson calls *la durée* or duration), rather than the *pace* at which he is moving (*le temps* or pure time). For the characters in Hawthorne's romance, the importance of this distinction lies in the difference between being time-bound (as in *le temps*) and being able to overcome the restrictions of time (as in *durée*).

The first few chapters of *The House of the Seven Gables* include a number of means by which the readers and characters may measure *le temps*. The first chapter includes a description of a sun dial, affixed to one of the seven gables on the precise day of Colonel Pyncheon's death, as if to mark the "the passage of the first bright hour in a history, that was not destined to be all so bright" (12). Hence, the presence of this dial represents the continuing importance of time-consciousness for the Colonel's descendants. Soon after the dial is erected, the dead Colonel's "sluggishness" in greeting his guests is noted nervously by the narrator (13)—foreshadowing Jaffrey's inexplicable "lingering in the old chair" when he dies of the same ailment a hundred and sixty years later (270)—and his death is accepted for its "happy seasonableness" (17), as if it had occurred on time or in a timely fashion.

This heightened awareness of time's passage is then seen in the two chapters devoted to Hepzibah's re-opening of the cent-shop ("The Little Shop-

Window" and "The First Customer"). The narrator reflects his era's impatience with wasted time, as he expresses uneasiness—or anticipates the reader's uneasiness—with Hepzibah's stalling tactics: After asking rhetorically with exasperation, "Is all this precious time to be lavished on the matutinal repair and beautifying of an elderly person," he begs the reader's "pardon" for "her one other pause" as she glances at a miniature of Clifford (31). At this point, time's passage is still determined by a natural, even old-fashioned method: according to the movement of the sun along the horizon (32). When Hepzibah finally opens her shop, however, ushering the Pyncheon family into the modern era, elements of that modern world mark the advancing moments for Hepzibah. When she is alone in her shop, the anxious rhythm of Hepzibah's "beating heart" is joined by that of the "footsteps of early passengers which now began to be frequent along the street" (46), and together they denote the agonizingly slow passage of time, as will the ticking of Cousin Jaffrey's pocket watch later in the story. Hawthorne's use of the word "passengers" in this section skillfully links one representative of the modern world, the street (Horne 463), with another that he will utilize later, the train. Each eventually becomes a sort of time machine for Clifford and Hepzibah, for their engagement with both will free them from the past and enable them to begin to live more fully in the present.

In Jaffrey Pyncheon's character, Hawthorne depicts the essence of the time-bound consciousness. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the "Governor Pyncheon" chapter, which, as Roy R. Male has acknowledged, "has repelled some modern tastes" because of how Hawthorne seems to "gloat" over

the Judge's death (134). "But," as Male goes on to note, "it climaxes the subtle interaction between space and time that permeates the book" (134). It is an especially revealing chapter about Jaffrey's relation to time in his everyday life and therefore makes a vivid contrast with his cousins' consciousness (mostly Clifford's) in "The Flight of Two Owls" which precedes it. The focal point of the chapter is not so much the Judge's corpse as it is his pocket watch, the incessant ticking of which Hawthorne tells us we should imagine that we hear throughout the chapter. Hawthorne uses the occasion of the Judge's death-induced paralysis to emphasize the manner in which he and men like him are enslaved by the clock and the all important need for "punctuality" (269). As Hawthorne tells us here, Jaffrey has spent most of his time devising new money-making "schemes" (269), and his philosophy seems to reflect that of "time=money=profits for all" encouraged by the railroad (Ward 112). Such a view is, by necessity, highly self-centered, as it considers the well-being of others only indirectly. Since Jaffrey has shown a considerable lack of concern for Clifford and Hepzibah's emotional and financial well-being throughout the story (especially in the chapter entitled "The Scowl and the Smile"), the "Governor Pyncheon" chapter merely confirms the reader's earlier impressions of Jaffrey as cold, calculating and insensitive.

In Bergsonian terms, Jaffrey's "faithful timekeeper" (271) represents his devotion to *le temps*, "the mechanical system in which time is measured spatially. It is a knife-edged point of view that assumes that our experience takes place at discrete instants" (Male 134). According to Bergson, time conceived concretely

or spatially and broken up by a clock or watch becomes homogeneous space when it is really heterogeneous; time becomes a series of singularly conceived events arranged in linear fashion when it really consists of simultaneous, overlapping events (*Time* 219). As Christopher Collins points out in *The Poetics of the Mind's Eye*, our peripheral vision enables us to perceive the simultaneous presence of objects all around us, and "our eyes dart restlessly about our visual field" in saccadic movements in order to "target" specific objects for "focal inspection" (98). He continues, "With the help of short-term memory the visual cortex can generate a complex spatial image all parts of which are understood to be simultaneously present . . . but *not imaged* simultaneously" (98). That is, we may be able to focus on only a part of a visual field at any one time, but we are aware that several parts of that field exist simultaneously and that its composition is heterogeneous.

Someone to whom time is spatially homogeneous is incapable of considering—or simply refuses to consider—events occurring on the periphery of his field of vision while his own attention is focused on a particular objective. In visual terms, he performs a minimum of saccadic movements, thereby ensuring that his attention will not be compromised. He is like the train passenger who focuses on and follows the movement of one object at a time as it passes before his field of vision at the midway point on the landscape. This passenger performs the eye movement psychologists term *pursuit*, an action that, in contrast to saccadic movement, is "smooth, considerably slower, and fixed

upon one moving target at a time . . . while its relatively stable background streams past in the opposite direction a fluid blur" (Collins 107). So Jaffrey, in pursuit of his own objective (worldly success), allows his vision to blur with respect to the suffering of his family (those living on the periphery of this focal point of monetary pursuit). If he did pause to grasp the concerns of those individuals, his attention would be divided, and his progress might be retarded.

Thus we see Jaffrey impatiently urging a reluctant and distraught Hepzibah to fetch Clifford for further questioning about the ancestral deed, saying "Time flies! Bid Clifford come to me!" and then "measuring the interval which was to ensue before the appearance of Clifford" with his pocket watch (239). Pressed for time, Jaffrey refuses either to delay his interview with Clifford or to consider the pain he is causing Clifford and Hepzibah. He has developed tunnel vision and chooses to ignore anything peripheral to his primary goal.

Hawthorne, by contrast, encourages the reader to conceive of events in time as occurring simultaneously. The opening sentence of the "Governor Pyncheon" chapter, for example, begins "Judge Pyncheon, while his two relatives have fled away with such ill-conceived haste, still sits in the old parlor" (268). As with the earlier "Alice Pyncheon" chapter, the narrative's forward movement appears temporarily stalled, while the reader is forced to sit with Judge Pyncheon and experience his inertia. As will be seen in a moment, this stillness allows for the expansion of present time, but for now we shall concern ourselves only with the manner in which it permits Hawthorne to illustrate temporal simultaneity and to deviate from the conventions of the linear narrative. Collins

explains that "there are certain aspects of literature that seem to struggle against the unidirectionality of discursive time and to emulate the recurrent patterns of saccadic vision" (98). Among these literary features, he cites such common devices as foreshadowing and flashback (of which the chapter "Alice Pyncheon" is an example), as well as detailed descriptions of setting and character (99). We see the latter technique in "Governor Pyncheon," where Hawthorne wittily puns, "Time, all at once, appears to have become a matter of no moment with the Judge!" (271). In one very long present, Hawthorne saccadically shifts the reader's focus from descriptions of those events the Judge is missing as he sits motionlessly, to the incremental passing of homogeneous or clock time, to the gradual darkening of the room and increase of shadows, and finally to the hypothesized appearance of the Pyncheon family ghosts while the moon shines through the windows. For a man like Judge Pyncheon to experience time in this way, in all its heterogeneity and simultaneity, he would have to be dead, for only then would time be permitted to wash over or "engulf" him (Male 137) without his attempting to capture it and isolate its parts.

In his Preface, Hawthorne reveals that his goal in writing *The House of the Seven Gables* is to achieve a kind of timelessness, to create a world and characters for whom time was "of no moment," as it is for the deceased Judge Pyncheon. The Romance, he tells us, enables him to overcome the restrictions of time with its ability "to connect a by-gone time with the very Present that is flitting away from us. It [the Romance] is a Legend, *prolonging* itself, from an epoch now gray

in the distance, down into our own broad daylight, and bringing along with it some of its legendary mist" (emphasis mine; 2). In this "prolongation" of which Hawthorne speaks, the past lives into the present, as it does in Bergson's concept of *durée* or "pure duration" (*Time* 100). Bergson describes a condition in which "states of consciousness . . . permeate one another," even if they *appear* to occur in succession (as with the ticking of a watch's second hand), resulting in the past and present (*Time* 98). In duration, we experience the accumulation of the effects of a feeling, with all of these effects living simultaneously in our consciousness. No one sensation is localized or highlighted (as if it were a point in space), so that our consciousness does not focus obsessively on that one sensation or point in time to the exclusion of all others. At these times, "pure duration" is realized, and "our ego lets itself *live*" (Bergson, *Time* 100), a condition that Henry James will explore with Strether's character in *The Ambassadors*. Hawthorne's Uncle Venner, the patchwork philosopher, is the embodiment of this state of mind; rather than clothing himself in only the latest fashion, as Jaffrey Pyncheon does, he wears a conglomeration of past and present styles that he has accumulated over the years. He neither fights the effects of time nor struggles to catch up with the times; he simply *lives* and endures from one age to the next.

Through his own experience of temporal simultaneity while riding the train in "The Flight of Two Owls," Clifford realizes *durée* for the first time, reawakening his desire to live, rather than merely tolerate the passage of time. As in the "Governor Pyncheon" chapter that follows it, in "The Flight of Two

Owls," Hawthorne constantly shifts the reader's focus through Hepzibah's and, primarily, Clifford's points of view. These mental saccades that Hawthorne forces the reader to perform correspond with those visual ones enacted by Clifford and Hepzibah when they initially board the train and take note of "the usual interior life of the railroad" (256), summed up by the author in two pithy sentences: "Sleep; sport; business; graver or lighter study;—and the common and inevitable movement onward! It was life itself!" (257). While Clifford commands the audience of "a gimlet-eyed old gentleman" (259), with whom he discusses everything from the merits of rail travel to mesmerism, and from the uses of electricity to reform of the criminal justice system, the young people aboard the train play ball, the conductor collects tickets, and the train "sped onward like the wind" (256). Clifford's consciousness, "startled into manhood and intellectual vigor" (258), suddenly has no trouble reconciling the existence of the two parallel universes in which he simultaneously lives—the interior of the railroad and the world outside. Whereas earlier, he almost kills himself when he attempts to join the life streaming past him on the street below his arched window, here the train enables him to make such a leap in safety and indulge his "winged nature" (258).

Although, as Hawthorne tells us, Clifford's intellectual vitality aboard the train is as "transitory" as one of his soap bubbles (258), it marks the first time that Clifford seems truly alive since his release from prison. His exclamation to Hepzibah that, until this day, "I had not lived!" (262) suggests that, in this scene,

his consciousness has realized *durée*. The smooth yet "whirlwind" progress of the train across the physical landscape (256) mirrors Clifford's seemingly effortless yet frenetic pace across a mental landscape of ideas. During his time on the train, chiefly spent conversing with the old gentleman, Clifford's senses are alive and responsive to his surroundings, and he allows his consciousness to become filled with numerous sensations simultaneously. The ideas generated by these sensations may seem outrageous to his listeners, and may even be extreme for Clifford—hence Hawthorne's description of his mental condition as "diseased" (258)—but they are elaborated completely and expressed in a logical stream of associations. Clifford's audience and the reader can easily follow the path of each idea before he begins a new yet related one, performing one mental saccade after another without suffering intellectual whiplash. The fluidity of Clifford's associations corresponds with the "bewildering and ceaseless fluidity" of American society during Hawthorne's time, both of which are concomitant with the motion of the train (Male 127). As Clifford's ideas accumulate, they comprise a single, specious present: Clifford's train ride with Hepzibah. Hawthorne never tells us how far brother and sister travel, nor how long their ride lasts, for what is important is *how* they experience the time on the train—the *nature* of that experience, as elaborated by Bergson in his description of *durée*. They disembark the train, not because they have reached a predetermined destination, but because it feels as if this phase of their experience has ended; "We have flown far enough for once," Clifford tells Hepzibah (265-66).

Before "The Flight of Two Owls," Hawthorne uses the terms "juncture" and "threshold" to describe spatially those events that mark significant moments in time for his characters. These are points of temporary stillness distinguished by expansive pauses and delays in the forward motion of the story, wherein characters carefully consider what is about to occur and how their lives will be changed afterwards. Unlike the expansion of present time experienced in *durée*, these magnifications of the present are distinguished by feelings of dread, as the character is unable to make peace with the impending future and desires to hold it at bay. One definition of "juncture" (according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*) is a "crisis" or turning point, "a particular or critical posture of affairs or point of time." Hawthorne appropriately uses the word "juncture" to describe the "inauspicious" moment at which the Patrician Hepzibah is about to enter the world of commerce by re-opening the cent-shop (38); Jaffrey likewise employs it in reference to the occasion of Clifford's return to the seven-gabled house (126); and the same word is used during Holgrave's narration of Alice Pyncheon's tragic story, to indicate the crucial moment at which Matthew Maule announces his permanent possession of Alice's mind during hypnosis (207). The arrival at a "juncture" is also implied when Hepzibah develops "the sense of something unprecedented, at that instant passing, and soon to be accomplished" (241) (which turns out to be Jaffrey's death) and just before Holgrave reveals Jaffrey's passing to Phoebe, when he tells her "We meet at a strange moment!" (301). At each "strange moment" or "juncture," past and future also meet and gape at each

other across an expansive interval of time called the present, a time of "crisis" in Hawthorne's work (42) in which the characters "linger" or "loiter" (34), trying desperately to "defer" the arrival of the future before submitting to its uncertainty (242).

Hawthorne gives the word "juncture" additional significance at the end of "The Flight of Two Owls," thereby linking the chapter linguistically with those preceding it but also clarifying the strategic importance of the train in his romance. The primary definition of "juncture" is simply "a place at which two things join," exactly the same as the meaning of "junction," which is further defined as "the place or station on a railway where lines meet and unite." At the end of "The Flight of Two Owls," the emotional climax of his romance, Hawthorne plays with the association often made between these two words, when he discusses the importance of what occurs at "the solitary way-station" at which Clifford and Hepzibah disembark the train. He tells the reader that, given the desperation of their circumstances, that particular time and place is "no juncture" at which to question the existence of God (267). At this most crucial point at which their past and future meet, Hepzibah "paused a moment to consider what her prayer should be" (267), thereby expanding present time and delaying a potentially unpleasant future. It took the train, however, to bring them to this critical juncture or junction where, in the sight of physical reminders of time's inevitable passage (the decaying church and farm-house), they may begin to resolve the crisis between permanence and change that has thus far kept them from truly living (Lohmann 98).

Hawthorne often locates important junctures in his plot at various "thresholds," mid-way points from which both reader and character may glance simultaneously at where they have been and where they are going. The first occurrence of this word in Hawthorne's romance expresses the writer's own vain attempt to delay Hepzibah's inevitable crisis by "loitering faint-heartedly on the threshold of our story" (34). Clifford then stands in a similar fashion "at the threshold of the parlor" before summoning the courage to enter and recommence his life as a free man (103). In contrast to her cousins stands Phoebe, whose distinction from them is seen most vividly upon her return to the house, when, "Without hesitation, . . . she stepped across the threshold" (299). Only once are Clifford and Hepzibah said not to pause beneath a threshold, and that is when "they found themselves passing beneath the arched entrance of a large structure of gray stone," that is, the entrance to the railway station (255). It is then with "irresistible decision," uncharacteristic of Clifford up to this time, that he "impels" Hepzibah to enter the train, crossing the threshold, as it were, into a new phase of their lives (256). Hawthorne's thresholds are then touchstones by which the reader may judge the characters' ability to adapt to changing times or alterations in their lives. They provide specific sites where those changes may occur and at which the characters' readiness for those transformations may be tested. The manner in which the thresholds are crossed suggests their ability to respond positively at critical junctures in their lives.

With Clifford's observation that he and Hepzibah have "flown far enough" before they disembark the train, Hawthorne suggests the successful

crossing of two thresholds for his protagonists. The first of these is the threshold between the past and present, indicated by their ability to escape "far enough" from their oppressive home and Cousin Jaffrey's corpse sitting in their parlor. The second is an ideological threshold that Clifford crosses, wherein he travels far enough, philosophically and morally, from his former position as "the most inveterate of conservatives" (161) to an advocate of radical notions. As we shall see in *The Ambassadors*, this philosophical journey that Hawthorne portrays most vividly in "The Flight of Two Owls" is the foundation of Henry James's entire novel, as James explores Strether's stream of consciousness to gauge that character's emotional and moral development. Hawthorne's closing chapter "Departure" describes a new movement across yet another threshold for his characters, one which results in their evolution towards hope and their reconciliation of temporal simultaneities.

One of the most hopeful aspects of the ending of Hawthorne's romance is precisely what critics usually find its most unsatisfying quality: its uncertainty. In that uncertainty is a comforting absence of necessity, rescuing the story from "the deepest pessimistic determinism of our naturalistic writers" that has characterized most of the narrative until this point (Rodnon 45). That determinism, suggested in the Preface where Hawthorne describes the "pure and uncontrollable mischief" that is passed down from generation to generation (2) and seemingly confirmed in the inexorable forward motion of the train, is replaced by a more beneficent inheritance: money and property. Even the

inevitability of the train's motion proves escapable, as Hawthorne demonstrates when he permits his protagonists to disembark at the station of their choice, simply because they had had enough. Finally, in "Departure," we hear the "unintelligible prophesies" uttered by the giant elm joining the "succession of kaleidoscopic pictures" in Maule's Well, neither of which reveals anything predetermined about the characters' futures. While the ending is not the most clearly hopeful in all of fiction, it reflects Hawthorne's resolve "to pour some setting sunshine over it."

The lack of necessity in the ending of *The House of the Seven Gables* is the natural culmination of Clifford's and Hepzibah's experience in "The Flight of Two Owls." We have already discussed the hopefulness in Hepzibah's ability to pray again once the train has gone and the inspiration potentially provided by the sight of the decaying church and farm-house. But there may be an additional reason for Hawthorne's situation of these structures at this place and time, for their dilapidation serves as a visible reminder that nothing is permanent, that even the most oppressive of human conditions and institutions (like Puritanism) will lose their vitality and pass away with time. The death of Jaffrey Pyncheon, that flesh and blood reincarnation of their Puritan ancestor, first signals this departure and the lifting of the curse for Clifford and Hepzibah; the ruined buildings they encounter when they de-train merely confirm it.

Clifford's permanent transformation (minor though it is) from timidity and lethargy to a more lively disposition represents another important departure

from the despair of the Pyncheon past. Just as the train willfully pulls away from the ruins of the farm and church, leaving them in its wake, so Clifford seems able to "leave what he once thought his irreparable ruin far behind him" and begin a new life (313). Hawthorne tells us, "He did not sink into his former intellectual apathy" after the train ride (314), a hopeful sign that he continues to possess some of the mental vigor that once enabled him to realize *durée*. He has thus learned that he need not sacrifice or abandon all sense of the past but rather overcome its oppressive influence. This alteration in his consciousness makes it possible for him to live a happier, more fulfilling life because it curtails the deterministic attitude that had dominated his character. As Bergson explains, in time that is lived in *durée* or "real time," successive moments are not "bound up" with each other in a deterministic sense; there is no necessity (*Time* 208). While the past merges with the present, it does not determine the present. The natural processes of change and endurance that occur when the human consciousness attends to the temporal simultaneities in the environment eliminate necessity and create numerous possibilities, if not guarantees (Bergson, *Time* 209).

This somewhat hopeful ending also suggests Hawthorne's characteristic ambivalence about our relationship to time and progress, revealing him to be on the intellectual cusp of the departing (Enlightenment) values and the dawning modernity. This ambivalence is seen most clearly in Hawthorne's portrayal of his characters' relationship with the past. As Clifford and Hepzibah move to Jaffrey's former country home, they will be new inhabitants in an old dwelling

and will bring their own unique perceptions to that mansion, no doubt transforming its atmosphere. How positive that transformation will be is uncertain, but at least, the reader may think with relief, they are out of the house of the seven gables and will no longer be oppressed by the physical reminders of their family's unfortunate history.⁵ Holgrave's new conservatism, on the other hand, represents a puzzling development that is, nonetheless, a positive one, as far as Hawthorne is concerned: his wish that he and Phoebe might live in a more permanent dwelling reveals that he has made peace with the past, that he believes it can co-exist in consciousness with the present and the future without being a burden to them. This view seems to contradict the aims of modernism which Holgrave had previously represented and which determines that men and women should live "always in the present" (Berman, *Preface* 147). It also contradicts Hawthorne's assertion that the past is full of "mischief" from which one must escape, an Enlightenment view that gave birth to Gothic literature, the genre in which his romance is classed. Perhaps *The House of the Seven Gables* is Hawthorne's attempt to make his own peace with both the past that is unavoidably present in heredity and his present era represented by the train. Holgrave's character is presented as an example of how that mischievous blood may be diluted with time and evolution, so that the past may no longer be feared while its properties may be reconciled with those of the present and future.

¹ Roy R. Male also applies this Bergsonian concept to the merging of past with the present and future in Hawthorne's novel (p. 124) but does not develop this connection to the extent that I shall here.

² While Josephina T. Mariano has interpreted the novel's conclusion as hinting at a "happy future" (280), most writers have taken a more negative view, like Roy R. Male, who called the ending "feeble" (137), Christoph Lohmann, who sees a "looming darkness ahead" for the characters, especially Phoebe and Holgrave (100), and Charles Swann, who claims "the reader is deliberately discouraged from imagining futures for the characters" (18).

³ Most notable among these are F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (1941), Roy R. Male's *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision* (1957), and Frederick Crews's *The Sins of the Fathers* (1966). The prevalence of such studies is further evident in the titles of several journal articles, including Christoph Lohmann's "The Burden of the Past in Hawthorne's American Romances" (1966), Stewart Rodnon's "*The House of the Seven Gables* and *Absalom, Absalom!*: Time, Tradition, and Guilt" (1969-70), and Mildred K. Travis's "Past Vs. Present in *The House of the Seven Gables*" (1970).

⁴ Charles Swann discusses how owning daguerreotypes of famous landmarks like Venice's Grand Canal or St. Mark's Place could become a kind of substitute for the experience of travel. He quotes Ruskin in 1845 as writing that "a daguerreotype 'is very nearly the same thing as carrying off the palace itself'; the advantage is that the owner is able to visit and revisit the place at will by glancing at the image of it (12).

⁵ Lewis B. Horne assesses the move in the following way: "Hawthorne was enough of a realist, philosophically, not to admit the ideal into the world of historical time. He finds only its suggestion. . . . It is quite true that the problems of Clifford and Hepzibah will not be resolved by moving to the country. But it is also true that Hawthorne would have done violence to his novel by suggesting they would" (466).

**Chapter Three: The Price of the Ticket: The Train Wreck and the Modern
Sensibility in James's *The Ambassadors***

In the first book of Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, Lambert Strether observes that fellow New Englander Waymarsh displays the apprehensive posture of a railway passenger bracing himself for a train wreck (30), an image which resonates throughout the novel. In the late nineteenth century, the notion of the train wreck functions very much as the ship wreck did for individuals a hundred years earlier, when it inspired the kind of terror depicted in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1816) and Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838). As the primary vehicle of long-distance travel at the turn of the twentieth century, the train supplies the dominant metaphor for private and public catastrophes, those events which can decimate an individual's sense of self and the world. James appropriately uses the figure of the train wreck to dramatize the idea of psychic trauma in his own novel, particularly in relation to Strether's experience while in Europe. Strether, Mrs. Newsome's over-worked and severely fatigued emissary sent to Paris to retrieve her errant son Chad, arrives in Europe vulnerable to the psychic disturbances of modern life, most notably its pace and heterogeneity. The lack of control Strether feels as he tries to grasp the accompanying shifts in perspective is reflected in James's choice of metaphor, with images borrowed from the experience of train travel. An examination of Strether's ordeal reveals the broader significance of this train wreck imagery, for in the course of the novel, the rational, Lockean *train of*

thought is thoroughly dismantled and replaced by the more unstable "stream of thought" proposed by William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (219). When Strether unwittingly opens his mind and heart to the mercurial European society upon his arrival from the staid New England town of Woollett, Massachusetts, his journey is bound to end in social and psychological disaster.

Modern theorists divide traumatic events into two categories, both of which are suggestively portrayed in James's work. In the first category are "life events," including relatively small incidents, such as receiving an unexpected (and unwanted) piece of news or arguing with a spouse (Zautra et. al 124), as well as larger, more violent disruptions to daily life due to the death of a loved one, involvement in an accident or combat, or divorce (Kugelman 25). The second type of trauma is more complex and not as readily detected. According to Robert Kugelman, it involves "a type of derangement of the symbolic context within which people make sense of life. . . . when the meaning of life is threatened or lost, then trauma occurs" (26). As Kugelman explains, "the notion of control" is essential to enduring trauma (31): "Primarily through mastery and a sense of control does one survive ordeals, showing clearly how stress frames the world. It reveals an absurd world in which meaning is made, not found, and in which the will of the individual is simultaneously glorified and treated as illusory" (32-33). In *The Ambassadors*, James explores what happens when the modern individual as exemplified by Strether loses his sense of control over the moral and epistemological realities upon which he has based his existence.

When truth becomes a matter of interpretation determined by shifting perspective, meaning itself is subject to repeated revision and becomes as sturdy as a house of cards exposed to a breeze.

In contrast, the New England principles Strether initially brings with him seem constructed of the heaviest concrete, and as such, in the light of Paris, they prove a weighty burden. But as Alfred North Whitehead reminds us, there was a time when these principles did not seem oppressive, during the eighteenth-century when the philosophies of men like John Locke were valued for their reasonableness and so became the cornerstone of American life. According to Whitehead, Locke's principles, particularly those elaborated in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), helped make the eighteenth century "a triumph of organized common sense" (114). In the *Essay*, Locke describes how ideas are logically associated with each other, and "if they are more than two which are thus united, the whole gang always inseparable shew themselves together" (395). In Locke's conception, ideas follow each other in linear fashion and the whole equals the sum of its parts. Each idea maintains its integrity, even when joined with others in "Trains of Motion . . . , which once set a going continue on in the same steps they have been used to, which by often treading are worn into a smooth path, and the Motion in it becomes easy and as it were Natural" (396). Such an "habitual train" produces "Custom," which originates, Locke says, with "the accidental Connexion of two *Ideas*, which either the strength of the first Impression, or future Indulgence so united, that they always

afterwards kept company together in that Man's Mind, as if they were but one *Idea*" (396). It is little wonder that an enlightened society nourished on Locke's ideas should one day produce an actual steam-driven train, its invention the logical outgrowth and application of the philosophical and psychological ideals he helped usher in (Whitehead 63).

The certainty of distinct ideas following each other in a logical train was a welcome notion after the irrationality and upheaval of seventeenth-century Europe. As Whitehead explains it, eighteenth-century European society underwent a kind of mental purging:

It had got rid of medieval phantasies, and of Cartesian vortices. As a result it gave full rein to its anti-rationalistic tendencies derived from the historical revolt of the Reformation period. . . . It measured the obvious things to be measured, and it generalized the obvious things to be generalized. . . . The eighteenth century opened with the quiet confidence that at last nonsense had been got rid of. (114)

The above passage could be used to describe the primary features of the Woollett mentality, its typically American view appropriate to the age in which the nation was born and to the region that produced some of its greatest statesmen. The no-nonsense attitude described characterizes Mrs. Newsome, Sarah Pocock, and Waymarsh, who always keep their destination in sight and maintain the utmost faith in the wisdom and practicality of their chosen path. With common sense to guide them, moral, ethical, and psychological derailment does not seem possible and would occur only if they deliberately strayed from the course of logic, jumped the track, as it were, to follow another path. The

formation of moral consciousness is guided by a particular kind of logic, for Locke and for those like the citizens of Woollett who became heirs to his philosophy, that "indicated in the Christian revelation and required by the law of nature, a law which men are just as capable of understanding, both extensively and precisely, as they are the truths of mathematics" (Dunn 66).

According to Locke's empiricist philosophy,

Both knowledge and rational belief are . . . compulsive. Faced with the clearly perceived relation between ideas, the direct evidence of their senses, or the plainly apparent balance of probabilities, men cannot but know, sense, or judge as these dictate. Demonstrative ethics would consist of a sequence of relations between ideas which, if considered with care and in good faith, a man or woman could not but see as they are and hence could not deny. (Dunn 67)

This is the conviction with which Strether arrives in Europe, but as the novel's action unfolds, he discovers, much to his consternation, that he is not as strongly possessed of them as he and his fellow New Englanders assume him to be.

As James informs us, it takes barely thirty-six hours for the Woollett mentality to lose its grip on Strether, for its "limit" to be "transcended" (23). Again, Whitehead's analysis of the Enlightenment principles to which Strether's townspeople subscribe is useful in helping us to understand why he would find those ideals lacking:

It was the age of reason, healthy, manly, upstanding reason; but, of one-eyed reason, deficient in its vision of depth The common sense of the eighteenth century, its demands of human nature, acted on the world like a bath of moral cleansing But if men cannot live on bread alone, still less can they do so on disinfectants. (59)

It is precisely the previously mentioned "vision of depth" which Strether has and

brings to his experiences in Europe. In fact, the words "deep," "deeply," "deepen," or "depth" appear in *The Ambassadors* no less than 113 times, usually in order to portray Strether's comprehension of events. We learn of his "deep consciousness" of the degree of Miss Gostrey's "civilization" in comparison to their compatriots (21), while his enjoyment of his visit to Chester is described as being "Too deep almost for words" (24). He is even conscious of depth in others, for while observing Chad at Gloriani's garden, he notes of the young man, "It was deep, what he understood" (103), and afterwards perceives that he "probed, at moments, abruptly, even deeper than his friend's layer of information" (104). In addition to these is the image of "touching bottom" used by James to indicate Strether's impression of having sunk to newer, deeper levels of futility (256) or decadence (318). The fact that he fears that the Pococks might drive past him on the Boulevard and "catch this view of him" (318) demonstrates the moral and philosophical distance Strether has traveled from the Woollett consciousness. That attitude, described by Whitehead above, stresses above all control and order, the very control that such famous New Englanders as Henry Adams felt slipping away at the turn of the twentieth century. For Adams, the image of a world spinning out of control is figured in the dynamo, while for James it is found in the train wreck. Whitehead's description of the impact of age's the "new mentality" on men like Adams and the Jameses suggests the source of their confusion: "It has altered the metaphysical presuppositions and the imaginative contents of our minds; so that now the old stimuli provoke a new response. . . ."

[J]ust that slightest change of tone . . . yet makes all the difference" (2). An environment of moral and intellectual uncertainty thus prevails throughout Western society. In fact, by the end of the nineteenth century, scientific theory exploded many of the common-sense notions giving order and meaning to the world; the train of thought had crashed.

Railroad historians tell us that train travel physically epitomized the feeling of helplessness of nineteenth-century passengers to whom the very notion of modernity involved the ability to control their environment. As Julie Wosk explains in *Breaking Frame: Technology and the Visual Arts in the Nineteenth Century*, "It was this feeling of mastery or control that seemed threatened by the railroad" (47). When aboard a moving train, the more sensitive passenger was often troubled by the sensation of "experiencing one's body . . . set in motion apart from one's own intentions" (Seltzer 17). The various psychological traumas associated with the loss of control during railway travel at the end of the nineteenth century were prompted primarily by the train's speed, which sometimes resulted in excessively violent accidents. In his preface to the New York Edition of *The Ambassadors*, James's imagery puts one in mind of such collisions, as he describes how Strether is "thrown forward . . . with violence" upon new perspectives during his sojourn in Paris (8). The reader is asked to imagine Strether on a journey of discovery akin to a railway journey, when his vehicle which has been traveling smoothly along its iron rails suddenly stops short. Such an incident is psychologically disturbing, even if only temporarily

so, and when it occurs as a result of a train crash, more severe trauma can result. In *The Ambassadors*, of course, Strether is afflicted by the shock of recognition when the truth is thrust before him—or, to be more consistent with James's image, when he is helplessly cast forward upon the kind of knowledge he had vainly hoped to avoid. James thereby combines the trauma of life events with that of cognition in order to complete his portrait of the modern sensibility.

Throughout his elaboration of the stress caused by railway accidents, Wolfgang Schivelbusch effectively applies the Freudian notion of "traumatic neurosis" as elaborated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). While it is not my intention to do a Freudian analysis of James's protagonist, I shall nonetheless make limited use of Freud's psychoanalytic theories in order to examine James's employment of trainwreck imagery in *The Ambassadors*. To ride a train at all, Schivelbusch explains, nineteenth-century passengers underwent "a process of repression of fear" (160) through which they conditioned themselves into believing they were perfectly safe during their journey. When the unthinkable became reality, train passengers experienced "traumatic neurosis" (Schivelbusch 136). Eventually, an increase in railway travel in nineteenth-century England prompted scientists in that country to begin researching the "phenomenon of accident shock, i.e., a traumatization of the victim without discernible physical injury" (Schivelbusch 137).

By the close of the nineteenth century, incidents of psychological trauma were increasingly brought on by the evolution of modern civilization itself, a

relatively new circumstance that manifested itself in the "theory of organic mechanism" at the end of the nineteenth century (Whitehead 107). According to Whitehead, "The general principle [of the theory of organic mechanism] is that in a new environment there is an evolution of the old entities into new forms" (107).

This notion opposes the concept of the Lockean train of thought. The ideas which Locke conceived as maintaining their integrity even while in combination with each other are now understood as changing and evolving as a result of their mutual association. Whitehead elaborates this concept further as he explains the inter-relatedness of ideas now perceived in flux, rather than succeeding each other in a Lockean train:

Cognition discloses an event as being an activity, organising [sic] a real togetherness of alien things. . . . what is known is already a prehension of aspects of the one real universe. These aspects are aspects of other events as mutually modifying, each the others. In the pattern of aspects they stand in their pattern of mutual relatedness. . . . Wherever such objects have ingression into the general flux, they interpret events each to the other. . . . Thus no individual subject can have independent reality, since it is a prehension of limited aspects of subjects other than itself. (151)

Henri Bergson describes this same process in *Creative Evolution* (1907), in which he first compares our mental state to a snowball that swells as it rolls upon the snow, and then asserts, "The truth is that we change without ceasing, and that the state itself is nothing but change" (2). He continues, "The real whole might well be, we conceive, an indivisible continuity. The systems we cut out within it would, properly speaking, not then be *parts* at all; they would be *partial views* of the whole" (31). History plays an integral role in this philosophy, for it is carried

into the present *via* our memory and combines with our perceptions of current events to alter our consciousness of that present.

In the final decade of the nineteenth century, Bergson's contemporary William James derived his own notion of the *stream of thought* which eventually replaced the Lockean train of thought by the turn of the twentieth century. According to James's conception elaborated in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), the ideas which provide the "partial views" of our thoughts are alterable the way a stream's or river's width and composition are modified as water flows against its banks and objects fall into it. What many of James's contemporaries found disturbing about this concept is the manner in which it seemed to apply to morality. According to this position, old ideas (like the Woollett consciousness) cannot remain static; they must alter and evolve when they encounter new ideas (like those in Paris). The old ideas cannot be linked with the new in a logical train. Instead, for a person to adapt to a changing environment, the ideas must be reconciled with each other in consciousness, at which time the integrity of the original idea is unavoidably sacrificed. Whitehead observes that "a favorable environment is essential to the maintenance of a physical object" (109), and Paris is certainly not an environment conducive to the maintenance of the Woollett consciousness. As James informs us in the Preface, "people's moral scheme *does* break down in Paris" (7). Our present society has come to associate the expression "break down" with insanity, but Strether does *not* go insane as a result of his Parisian adventure; that is the source of his heroism. Despite the

catastrophic shattering of his moral frame of reference while in Paris, he learns to evolve and adapt to the modern ideas he encounters in more than just a superficial manner (in contrast to Waymarsh, who comically dons a straw Panama and wears a rose in his lapel after a day at the Marche aux Fleurs with Sarah Pocock).

In *American Nervousness, 1903*, Tom Lutz addresses the moral and intellectual crises prompted by the transformations taking place in modern civilization before providing a list of the numerous technological advances that drastically altered American life between 1890 and 1910. "Turn-of-the-century writers," Lutz tell us, "claimed that theirs was a time of rapid, widespread, and significant change in almost all areas of social life, and historians later in the twentieth century have concurred" (9). Doctors termed the resulting nervous condition *neurasthenia*, and its victims included Henry James, Sr., along with his two most famous sons Henry and William. In his exploration of the disease at this period in American history, Lutz explains that, "if patients were sensitive and refined enough to begin with, neurasthenia could be brought on . . . by simple exposure to the hectic pace and excessive stimuli of modern life"; thus neurasthenia became "a sign of modern life" (4). Because a great deal of Strether's trauma is caused by the factors named by Lutz above, we shall examine each as it is portrayed in James's novel and discuss its connection with the railroad imagery woven into the novel.

According to E. Anthony Rotondo, "George Beard and other doctors who

studied neurasthenia . . . saw it as a symptom of progress" in "more complex societies" which "moved at a faster pace" (191). In chapter 2, I discuss the connection between the railroad and progress in the nineteenth century, including the growing obsession with punctuality and being "on time" which train travel promoted (Ward 106). In the "Governor Pyncheon" chapter of *The House of the Seven Gables*, for instance, Hawthorne's focus on the deceased Jaffrey Pyncheon's pocket watch illustrates the importance to modern men of the world of "keeping up" and the damaging effects it can have on one's health. As R. W. Stallman has asserted, the clock is also a key item in *The Ambassadors*, for it is doubtless one of the two "unnamed articles" mentioned in the novel, the first being the one manufactured by the Newsome family business, while the other is the watch that Waymarsh most probably purchases during his jaunt through Chester with Strether and Maria Gostrey (42). Time is thereby depicted as an important commodity to modern Americans, one that can be bought, sold, and saved by the most conscientious.

In a novel in which "nothing is without inter-relationship" (Stallman 42), there are a number of threads we can now weave together as we explore James's portrayal of the train's connection with the modern experience of trauma. The first of these is Strether's metaphor of "missing the train" (131), by which he implies that he has not been punctual and has lost time somewhere in his past. As James painfully dramatizes, missed time frequently results in a missed opportunity. Several years after the death of his young son, Strether's "spirit"

can still "wince with the thought of an opportunity lost" (61), but this is in retrospect. As James first sketches Strether's character in an 1895 notebook entry, his chief coping or defense mechanisms seem to be those of repression and denial. To use Freud's terminology, Strether has "pushed the pathogenic experiences in question out of consciousness" (*Five Lectures* 24). James says, "I don't see him as having battled with his passions—I don't see him as harassed by his temperament or as having, in the past, suspected, very much, what he was losing, what he was not doing" (*Notebooks* 141). "He has been a great worker," James continues, an "intellectual" and "a mere man of business" (141), by which he describes one who has dealt with trauma and adversity primarily by *not* dealing with them and instead "divert[ing] the passion of grief into productive work and consumption" (Kugelmann 42). Like the person Freud describes as suffering from traumatic neurosis after a railway disaster, Strether seems "more concerned with *not* thinking" about his own catastrophe (*Beyond* 7). He has learned to suppress his grieving, emotional self and allows his rational, controlled self to dominate his personality. Repression can result in "hysterical dissociation (the splitting of consciousness)," although "efforts by the ego to ward off painful memories are quite regularly to be observed without their producing the result of a mental split" (Freud, *Five Lectures* 22 and 26). While Strether displays no overt symptoms of a split or schizophrenic personality, he is, nevertheless, possessed of his famous "double consciousness," as James tells us at the end of the novel's second paragraph (18). We are thus to read Strether's

character from the beginning as, at least, engaging in a form of psychological repression. Our task as readers is to determine the nature of the trauma or traumas from which Strether's consciousness has been protecting him, an endeavor that shall occupy the rest of this chapter.

Because Strether has repressed his past traumas, James tells us that when he allows himself to *feel* once again, rather than merely *think*, his "consciousness" is overcome by the memories of his past, which "roll over him now with force" (142), much the way Charles Dickens describes being overpowered by recollections of a train wreck. One of the most famous individuals to experience the "commotion" or "shock" of a railway accident during the nineteenth century, Dickens, although physically uninjured and able to assist fellow victims out of the train wreck, was later overwhelmed by a sudden and inexplicable nervousness when recalling the incident in a letter (Schivelbusch 137-38). Those defense mechanisms which had helped him to cope with and recover from his trauma suddenly give way to the intense fear he had repressed during the accident. Strether's defenses similarly begin to crumble when he arrives in Europe, as is indicated by his early excursion to Chester. The city is surrounded by a "tortuous wall" that clearly shows signs of instability and deterioration: this "girdle" has "long since snapped," and as he and Maria Gostrey walk its circumference they encounter "a dismantled gate or a bridged gap, with rises and drops, steps up and steps down, queer twists, queer contacts" (24). It is no coincidence that James here uses the language of pain ("tortuous," "girdle") and

psychic abnormality ("snapped," "dismantled," "gap"), for this wall is a cipher for Strether's emotional and psychological state. The wall's unevenness, characterized by James in *English Hours* as "full of that delightful element of the crooked, the accidental, the unforeseen" (51), foretells the kinds of experiences that will weaken the figurative wall he has erected around himself—understood in the novel as the Woollett consciousness, the very one so sturdily defending Mrs. Newsome, Waymarsh, and Sarah Pocock but which he, by contrast, finds terribly constraining.

Symptomatic of the weakened and vulnerable state in which Strether arrives in Europe, he is not only fatigued but also suffers from the notion that, as far as his emotional life is concerned, "he was done for and finished" (61), that he is, in fact, emotionally dead and probably has been for longer than he has realized. He tells Bilham, "[I]t's as if the train had fairly waited at the station for me without my having had the gumption to know it was there" (132). The train is life itself, with all of its attendant opportunities, but Strether was too preoccupied even to notice its hulking mass and hear its whistle, his spirit numb or dead. By the time that spirit is roused by Maria Gostrey and Europe, the train (the life of his youth and its accompanying energy) has long gone. As James says, "It is too late, too late *now* for HIM to live—but what stirs him with a dumb passion of desire . . . is the sense that he may have a little super-sensual hour in the vicarious freedom of another [Chad]" (*Notebooks* 142).

Several months before the above 1895 notebook entry, James reveals his

preoccupation with building a story around "the idea of *Too late*," which he connects with the trauma of emotional death (112), and as we read *The Ambassadors*, it becomes obvious that Strether is confronting just such a situation. When Miss Gostrey observes of Strether, "Your failure's general" (25), she refers to his failed attempt to catch the metaphorical train to which Strether later refers, to attend his once youthful spirit and "Live!" (132). Now, Strether must attempt to resurrect what James calls "the Dead Self," to recover the "lost treasure" before it is too late for him to experience fulfillment in life (*Notebooks* 113). In fact, one has the impression throughout the novel that Strether's main objective in delaying the completion of his task for Mrs. Newsome is to stave off death. Adeline Tintner has discussed the specter of impending death in the novel and its connection to the painting by Hans Holbein the Younger called *The Ambassadors*, which she believes to be a source for James's work. Completed in 1533 and exhibited in the National Portrait Gallery in London since 1890, the subjects of the painting were determined in 1900 to be "the French Ambassadors to the English court of Henry the Eighth: Jean de Dinteville, Lord of Polisy, and Georges de Selve, Bishop of Lavour, two young men under thirty, who along with their talismanic objects represented on the canvas all that was the best in French civilization of the early sixteenth century" (Tintner, "A Source" 135). Ironically, many of those "talismanic objects," designated by Dinteville when the painting was commissioned, are "reminders of death," most notably the distorted image of the skull which appears in the bottom foreground of the

picture (141). Tintner rightly connects these *memento mori* with the theme of *carpe diem* and the preoccupation with lost time which also pervade James's *The Ambassadors*. She declares, "As death is hidden in the picture, so it is in James's novel" (141).

For James, however, who viewed Holbein's portrait at the close of the nineteenth century, the association of death with the accouterments of "civilization" had a particular resonance. Tom Lutz has abundantly illustrated that in the early 1880s, neurasthenia was considered "an indication of the high degree of civilization America had achieved" (35), suggesting that, for many *fin-de-siècle* Americans, physical and mental debilitation went hand-in-hand with modernity. Goethe's Faust, the successful man of the world whose declaration, "Alas, there are two souls that live in me" (32) announces him as the first modern figure to be afflicted with a "double consciousness," suffers from a similar form of enervation that leads him to the brink of suicide, a condition Goethe directly attributes to modern life. Marshall Berman's description of Faust's study and state of mind at the start of the play suggests that, 300 years after Holbein painted his masterpiece, the tools of modernity have become a source of discontent. Berman writes, "We find him [Faust] surrounded by rare and beautiful books and manuscripts, paintings and diagrams and scientific instruments—all the paraphernalia of a successful life of the mind. And yet everything he has achieved rings hollow, everything around him looks like a pile of junk. He talks endlessly to himself and says he *hasn't lived at all*" (41; my

emphasis). Strether, while hardly a paradigm of Faustian achievement and ambition, comes to the same conclusion after years of "a good many earnest and anxious experiments—professional, practical, intellectual, moral, personal" which have made him, if not to himself, then in the eyes of Woollett, "a highly esteemed figure and influence" (James, *Notebooks* 543). It is his disillusionment that prompts his retreat into the more youthful frame of mind that culminates in his railroad excursion to the countryside.

Unfortunately, Strether's urgent attempt to recover the spirit of his youth only results in further trauma and psychological debilitation when he recognizes "what he has missed and that it is too late for reparation" (Sears 124). Several critics have noted Strether's obviously futile desire to trade places with Chad, epitomized in the line "If Strether was to feel young, . . . it would be because Chad was to feel old" (93).¹ There can only be one reason to indulge in such folly. Strether is trying to buy time, so to speak, as if it were a commodity, thereby demonstrating his attempt to adopt the consumerist mentality that, according to Lutz, is counter to the old, neurasthenic, "New England economy of saving" to which Strether subscribed before this trip to Europe (260). Mrs. Newsome, whose New England consciousness represents "one of the moral poles of the book" (Lutz 254), is so obsessed with time and the clock as she waits impatiently for Strether to complete his mission of returning her son Chad to Woollett that she eventually sends her daughter Sarah Pocock to accelerate the process. By that time, Strether has long since indulged in the kind of

recuperative activities characteristic of the modern neurasthenic.

As James says in his "Project of Novel" for *The Ambassadors*, Strether's "professional career had been a long, hard strain" already (*Notebooks* 542), making him a perfect candidate for neurasthenia, though perhaps not as much so as Waymarsh, who had "barely escaped . . . a general nervous collapse" (*Ambassadors* 30). Still, James's decision to name Strether after Balzac's Louis Lambert, a character who, after a series of traumas, lapses into "a cataleptic fit" (Rosenbaum 23n), suggests that we are to read his protagonist as one with at least the potential to succumb to a form of nervous prostration. According to Lutz, neurasthenia was often caused by "changing notions of work" which produced overworked and over-extended individuals (25). Indeed, before he arrives in Europe, James tells us that Strether feels "dog-tired" (31), suffers from "fatigue" (60), and is "distinctly fagged-out" (61). Nevertheless, his repeated glances at his watch as he and Miss Gostrey wait for Waymarsh before their walk through Chester demonstrate that the neuroses and habits of Woollett die hard. Herein lies the great irony of Strether's life that makes him a tragic figure, for as R. W. Stallman points out, "Strether is addicted to watching the clock lest he miss the train, and that's why he misses it" (44). His anxiety about losing time prevents his general enjoyment of life because it encourages the kind of tunnel vision that makes Hawthorne's Jaffrey Pyncheon so tyrannical.

In this early part of the novel, time is measured specifically by James in regard to Strether's appointments, the duration of his activities and the length of

time between those activities. At first, Strether can only comprehend what William James calls "bare time[,] . . . the least stimulating experience we can have" (*Principles* 589-90). When one lives in a homogeneous universe, where the hours of the day mark a series of deadlines one must meet, "the other thing"—namely, that which one *should* be doing at a particular time instead of enjoying oneself—becomes a source of "terror," as Strether observes (26). Within one's job or family responsibilities lurk the seeds of trauma instead of the path to fulfillment. James reflects upon this circumstance by presenting Strether's observation that, despite "the beauty of Mrs. Newsome's desire that he should be worried with nothing that was not of the essence of his task," he is sure that "if he had seen Mrs. Newsome coming he would instinctively have jumped up to walk away a little" (60). Mrs. Newsome officially relieves Strether of the responsibility of enjoying himself and encourages the perpetuation of the New England work ethic with which she—and, she assumes, Strether—is most comfortable. It is little wonder that he should wish to run in the opposite direction and avoid completing this piece of business for Mrs. Newsome. As Rotondo explains, "Neurasthenic breakdowns represented a sharp rejection of work, complete with physical separation, the loosening of business relationships, and the abandonment of the usual pace and style of work activity" (193). While experiencing his own nervous collapse, Strether attempts to slow "the flight of time" (198)—the pace at which he completes his task, including the pace at which he learns the truth about Chad's involvement with Marie De Vionnet.

What James demonstrates so vividly in *The Ambassadors* is how differently time's passage is measured in Europe, and Paris in particular, in comparison with America. Whereas in the competitive world of American business, the duration of events in time is very closely calculated, in Europe, time seems to be measured in the accomplishment of the task itself, in the distance one must travel to get from A to B. Since the main action in the novel is understanding, the key events around which the plot is centered and wherein Strether learns something become locations in space. Those times when he *thinks* he has discovered another piece of the puzzle concerning Chad's life in Europe, or believes he has actually solved the mystery, are thus frequently signaled by variations on the novel's final line, "Then there we are!" (347). Where Strether "is" from a cognitive standpoint becomes more important to him than how long it takes to get there, an attitude that puts him in direct conflict with Mrs. Newsome and, later, Sarah. Strether's progress towards his destination cannot be measured by the clock. His task cannot be completed any sooner than it is, despite Mrs. Newsome's wishes, for no matter how long it takes, his consciousness must reach "the right spot," as James refers to the location at which Strether decides to de-train later in the novel (304). James's expression in that scene echoes Strether's words to Bilham in Gloriani's garden that "the right time is now yours" (132). It is that subjective perception of time and space suggested by the notion of "rightness" that concerns James in the novel, with his exploration culminating in book 11, as we shall see shortly.

Throughout the novel, Strether is traveling, as James tells us when he boards a train at the beginning of chapter 3 of book 11, "from a station—as well as *to* a station" (302)—i.e., from one level of comprehension to another—and on this journey, Strether sets the pace. Symptomatic and emblematic of his neurasthenic response, Strether chooses to incorporate numerous delays and pauses along his route, partly to maximize his enjoyment of the trip but mostly to avoid facing the truths about Chad and himself that await him at the end of his excursion.

Fairly early in Strether's adventure, Maria Gostrey issues a directive only slightly less urgent than Strether's later advice to Bilham to "Live!": "Take time," she says; "it's the only way not to make some mistake that you'll regret" (108). Since he first arrived in Europe, it seems as if that is all Strether has been doing, as he has been making the most of his newly-recovered "personal freedom" by enjoying a leisurely pace that he hasn't known in years (17). We are told of how, during one of his first mornings in Paris, he "indulged more than once . . . in a sudden pause before the book-stalls of the opposite quay. In the garden of the Tuileries he had lingered, on two or three spots, to look; it was as if the wonderful Paris spring had stayed him as he roamed" (58). It is precisely because he *hasn't* taken time in this manner in the past—to enjoy life and to recover from its traumas—that he does have several personal regrets, many of which return to him as he spends a quiet afternoon in the Luxembourg Gardens shortly after his arrival in Paris. There, while indulging in "the delights of

procrastination" (Yeazell 21), he reads the letters from Mrs. Newsome that awaited his arrival and does little else but absorb the surroundings and contemplate the path that brought him to this stage in his life. James describes him as "lost in thought," holding the letters "as if to prolong the presence of what they gave him" (59). Here, for the first time and of his own volition, Strether is deliberately halting the progress of his mission, but as James demonstrates throughout the novel, it is only during such pauses in his physical activity that he can make psychological and emotional progress. His stasis is deceptive, for as Richard Hathaway puts it, "By doing nothing he is moving, beginning to perceive something beyond Woollett's worldly moralism" (89). His time spent in deep reflection at the Luxembourg Gardens brings to the surface his repressed feelings of guilt and regret for the harsh way he judged his son's mental competence and sent him away after his wife's death, an act which results in his estrangement from his son in the years before the boy dies. At that time, Strether's failure to allow himself time to recover from the first trauma somewhat precipitates the second. Thus, by the time Maria utters the fateful passage quoted above, James has already demonstrated its applicability to Strether's life.

Although, as Adeline Tintner has shown, James probably did not read Henri Bergson's works and thus did not have a first-hand knowledge of his philosophy, nor is there evidence that he discussed Bergson's ideas with his brother William ("Great Condition" 111), we can still apply Bergson's concept of

durée to Strether's experience of time's passage in *The Ambassadors*. To review briefly the ideas addressed in chapter 2, when one experiences *durée*, referred to in Bergson's *Time and Free Will* as "pure duration" (100), one is most conscious of the *sense* or *feeling* of progress through time and space without cognizance of the actual *quantity* of time that has passed. Sensations "blend" into each other as the mind makes rapid, fluid associations (172), until the effects of feeling accumulate so that past and present form a single, "organic whole" (100). Within this notion is a fascinating paradox of homogeneity combined with heterogeneity, as the totality of an event is comprised of a number of impressions without which one would never be able to experience duration. In order for sensations to impress themselves upon our consciousness, however, we must attend to them, an exercise that requires the devotion of time. When we "take time," our minds can indulge in the necessary "flights" and "perchings" that William James tells us occur imperceptibly in consciousness (*Principles* 236), allowing us to make the associations and assimilate the ideas which constitute our very selves.

Just as the actual train Strether rides in book 11 takes him from one station to another with various stops in between, so throughout the novel, Strether's ambassadorial mission is said to include pauses at a number of "junctures" and "thresholds," in addition to several literal and figurative "stations." At each of these locations in the space of his consciousness, Strether learns something he did not know before or experiences something that is a first for him. In either sense, his intellect is surprised or shocked into expansion, as something

impresses itself upon his consciousness and causes his mind to take flight. One such moment is the first time he meets Miss Barrace, sees her smoking and tries to comprehend what she means "at each juncture" of their conversation (78). Soon afterwards, we find Strether paused with trepidation on the "threshold" of Miss Gostrey's apartment, fascinated by its furnishings and struck with the fact that, "wide as his glimpse had lately become of the empire of 'things,' what was before him still enlarged it" (79-80). This passage illustrates the manner in which mental activity is facilitated by physical stasis and stimulated by a sensuous environment, as Strether's visit to Notre Dame further dramatizes. The cathedral is for him a place of physical rest, a figurative station within which are appropriately located the Stations of the Cross. By contemplating the Stations, one follows the path to Jesus's death, from which He is supposed to have arisen to a new form of life. The places at which Strether pauses on the way to his figurative train wreck function similarly to the Stations of the Cross, for at the end of his own arduous journey awaits the death of his Woollett self, and what emerges will be a new consciousness. Fostering his transformation are the items and images that adorn the church and stimulate his senses. The cathedral presents a decadent contrast to the Protestant churches of iconoclastic New England, distinguished by the relative paucity of such ornamentation that appeals so powerfully to the emotions. It is only by bringing buried emotions to the surface that Strether can begin to reconcile them with his present consciousness, and for this reason, Notre Dame is an essential stop on his journey. As the pilgrim who enters Notre Dame to observe the Way of Christ is

stirred by the graphic representations of Jesus's suffering and comforted in his own distress, Strether is said to have enjoyed the church's "beneficent action on his nerves" (172) as he "trode the long dim nave, sat in the splendid choir, paused before the clustered chapels of the east end" (173). In this scene, James skillfully parallels the pilgrim's course to spiritual salvation with Strether's path to mental and emotional health.

His thirst for new sensations leads him, after several weeks of hesitation, to call upon Marie de Vionnet for the first time, where he travels "across a river" before passing "under the great arch of [her] doorway" (202). Upon his crossing this threshold, however, he is stirred by the novelty of the experience and frightened by the possible consequences of his own actions, revealing to himself and to the reader that he has not yet traveled as far as he thinks he has. As James tells us, "Suddenly, . . . on this particular day, he felt a particular fear under which everything collapsed. He knew abruptly that he was afraid of himself" (203). The "self" that he fears is his Woollett consciousness, which intrudes upon him at this moment in the image of Sarah Pocock that "flashes" before his eyes (203). In this brief space of time, Strether learns that he is still tormented by his double consciousness.

Most pertinent to this discussion of *The Ambassadors* is Bergson's observation that pure duration is realized "when our ego lets itself *live*" (*Time* 100; italics in original), a notion with linguistic and semantic parallels to the novel's most famous passage. That passage appears midway through James's

work, after Strether has luxuriated for some time in Mrs. Newsome's absence, long enough for him to understand fully the damaging effect of the Woollett consciousness upon his own. His preoccupation with bare time and his failure to attend to the sensations to which he is naturally sensitive have kept him from living the life he would have wanted, a life that was truly *his*. According to Bergson, to realize *durée* we must "retire into ourselves" (*Time* 233), as Strether does when he sits alone in the Luxembourg Gardens. In that scene, his thoughts are centered on himself and his *feelings* about Mrs. Newsome and his mission, and this meditation allows him to recall his previously buried feelings about his wife and child. To build on the progress he feels he has already made in his recovery of his true self (his ego), Strether attempts to slow the pace of events as they unfold before him. We see him, for instance, "lingering for five minutes" across the street from Chad's apartment to glean as many impressions as he can before addressing the young man for the first time (68); spending a "luxurious" afternoon strolling through Paris with little Bilham "in no great pulse of haste" (76); and presenting Chad with "his plea for delay" before deciding when they should return to America (206). During the latter scene, James's further description of Strether's musings dramatizes Bergson's theory:

he knew as their cab rolled along, knew as he hadn't even yet known, that nothing else than what Chad had done and had been would have led to his present showing. They had made him, these things, what he was, and the business hadn't been easy; it had taken time and trouble, it had cost, above all, a price. (206)

This passage is most remarkable for its portrayal of time and the manner in

which several temporal demarcations merge in a single instance of Strether's consciousness. The past, present, and even the future are blended and become part of the same moment, for as James tells us, "he hadn't even yet known" the extent to which Chad's actions, which have already affected his psyche, would continue to affect it—at that instant and in the future. The passage skillfully portrays the flux of time, "an impartial world transcending the 'here-now' which marks the ego-object, and transcending the 'now' which is the spatial world of simultaneous realization. It is a world also including the actuality of the past, and the limited potentiality of the future" (Whitehead 151). James places us in the midst of *durée* with Strether, on our way to a station or juncture somewhere down the line.

As is typical of a modern man, what vexes Strether as much as *what* he learns and the pace at which he learns it is *how much* he must absorb at once. He is clearly unsettled by what Lutz calls the "chaos of 'multiverse,' the newly discovered pluralism of the universe" (24). In his preface, James tells us that Strether

had come to Paris in some state of mind which was literally undergoing, as a result of new and unexpected assaults and infusions, a change almost from hour to hour. . . . At the still wilder extremes represented perhaps, for all he could say to the contrary, by a variability so violent, he would at first, naturally, but have gazed in surprise and alarm; whereby the *situation* clearly would spring from the play of wildness and the development of extremes. (6)

He continues that Strether "had in fact, from a good way behind, to catch up with [the social complications he encounters], breathless and a little flurried, as

best he could" (7). This "belated man of the world" (7) ultimately does comprehend what is going on around him and assimilates the new sensations to which he is exposed, but the variety of sensations often seems overwhelming. Here, Strether is in the paradoxical position of the train traveler, seemingly static and passive in his seat yet in almost constant motion. Michel de Certeau reflects with wonder upon this peculiar situation, which he calls "A traveling incarceration. Immobile inside the train, seeing immobile things slip by. What is happening? Nothing is moving inside or outside the train" (111). He later calls it "A strange moment in which a society fabricates spectators and transgressors of space" (113). In *The Ambassadors*, until Strether actually boards a train in book 11, the space that is traversed is the landscape of consciousness, where Strether moves closer to the truth, sometimes immersed in the "sublimar element" where he would gently "float" (131) and other times engaged in more dramatic "fresh backward, fresh forward, fresh lateral flights" (42), all the while "watching, after his habit" (257). Throughout his time in Europe, his visual senses are "assaulted," as James puts it, so variously and with a kind of "violence" which, in the end, exhausts his spirit.

Schivelbusch discusses this psychic effect as marking one of the primary differences between traveling by the old, "traditional" conveyance of the horse and carriage and the modern express train:

what is decisive is the quantitative increase of impressions that the perceptual apparatus has to receive and to process. Contemporary texts that compare the new travel experience with the traditional one demonstrate how that stimulus increase produced by increased

velocity is experienced as stressful. The speed causes objects to escape from one's gaze, but one nevertheless keeps on trying to grasp them. (57)

In numerous passages throughout *The Ambassadors*, James vividly portrays Strether's perplexity at the "rush of experience" he encounters (198) and emphasizes the psychological strain Strether undergoes in Paris, the city Marie de Vionnet calls "this tiresome place where everything's always changing" (220).

At one point we learn that "his impressions, though multiplied, still baffled him" (230), while later, a "sudden flood" of impressions inundates him (251). In a passage that is linguistically consistent with common descriptions of the landscape when observed from a speeding train, Strether has a "quick blurred view of daily cables, questions, answers, signals" (274), a depiction that is particularly effective for several reasons. First is the manner in which the two adjectives "quick" and "blurred" appear in succession without the conventional punctuation of a comma between them. David Lodge has suggested that this "running together of groups of nouns or adjectives" which appears throughout *The Ambassadors* represents simultaneity in Strether's environment and is a technique used by later modernist authors like Joyce and Stein (193).

Hawthorne depicts this simultaneity of multiple impressions as overwhelming to more sensitive and isolated individuals like Hepzibah and Clifford Pyncheon in *The House of the Seven Gables*, and if Strether seems less troubled by it, that is only because he is more accustomed to repressing his anxiety over what James metaphorically calls the "assault of images" (120) experienced in the "accelerating

world" (Stowell 208). The allusions to "daily cables, questions, answers, signals" also point to the dizzying speed with which modern affairs are conducted via that tool of technological simultaneity necessitated by the railroad—the telegraph. Just as Hawthorne, when reflecting upon the effects of telegraphy, compares the world to a giant head wherein thoughts are communicated instantaneously via electrical currents, so James frequently depicts the "rapid progress" with which Strether must assimilate impressions if he is to stay current with events among his peers in Europe (70).

Repeatedly in *The Ambassadors*, James presents Strether's universe as one undergoing constant upheaval, where the unexpected has become a daily occurrence, thereby contributing to his renewed sense of trauma. Because, unlike Waymarsh, Strether willingly abandons most of his preconceived notions about everyone he encounters in Paris once he actually makes their acquaintance, he is vulnerable to their machinations. His general fatigue also puts him in a highly suggestible state of mind that permits him to perceive what they want him to. Freud's "speculation" about a condition such as Strether's is that it can be avoided by cultivating a sufficient "protective shield" against the stimuli that bombard one's consciousness (*Beyond 18 and 20*), the kind of shield Waymarsh's anxiety provides him upon his arrival in Europe. In Freud's words, "*Protection against stimuli is an almost more important function . . . than reception of stimuli*" (21), and by examining Strether's character, we begin to understand why. After departing America possessed of Mrs. Newsome's certainty about

Chad's rightful place and the precise nature of his own task, upon first encountering the newly-transformed Chad, Strether finds that he had "the sense of really not having known what in the least to expect" (*Notebooks* 554). Too often, for all of his effort at comprehension, Strether is forced to confront his utter confusion and admit, as he does to Miss Gostrey, "I don't know anything" (*Ambassadors* 72). His observation "that he was free to believe in anything that from hour to hour kept him going" (264) indicates that he is learning to expect the unexpected and is prepared to switch trains, so to speak, at the most convenient "juncture" along the way (69). Existing for so long in such an unstable mental universe prevents Strether from developing a sturdy or substantial frame of reference through which to view the actions of others. It is thus only a matter of time before, in Freud's words, a "breach" is found through which a trauma can penetrate (23), as it will towards the novel's end.

E. M. Forster has said of Strether's intellectual process, "he takes us along with him, we move" (73), but with so much motion and speed, as we have seen with the typical railway journey, details tend to become blurred and the view can take on a disturbingly insubstantial or "ephemeral" quality (Stilgoe 250). Similarly, the blurring of truth produced by all of the "shifting perspectives" before Strether's visual field (Stowell 209), while it contributes to the impressionistic quality that so many have noted in the novel², also contributes to Strether's own moral indeterminacy. Marie de Vionnet, whose motives he should have seen clearly had he maintained his—and Mrs. Newsome's—initially

resolute position, appears to Strether "so odd a mixture of lucidity and mystery" (232). She becomes one more of the "vague and multitudinous" sensations he encounters in Paris (89). The word "vague" appears countless times throughout the novel to describe Strether's perceptions of his environment,³ as if he or those impressions are moving too rapidly for him to grasp them and discriminate accurately one from the other. By the end, Strether will characterize the whole experience as dreamlike and unreal; as he tells Maria, "I moved among miracles. It was all phantasmagoric" (353).

Strether's reaction to this cognitive onslaught is to observe passively the actions of those around him, to surrender to "the immediate and the sensible" in his environment (18), a response that, according to William James, is essential to the formation of one's consciousness. In the chapter devoted to Bergson in *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), William James declares,

if you want to *know* reality, . . . turn your face toward sensation, that flesh bound thing which rationalism has always loaded with abuse.—This, you see, is exactly the opposite remedy from that of looking forward into the absolute, which our idealistic contemporaries prescribe. It violates our mental habits, being a kind of passive and receptive listening quite contrary to that effort to react noisily and verbally on everything, which is our usual intellectual pose. (746)

This passage illustrates what Sanford Schwartz describes in *The Matrix of Modernism* as the "opposition . . . between the instrumental conventions that shape ordinary life and the original flux of concrete sensations" which characterizes our perceptions in the modern world (5). Trying to reconcile or balance these oppositional forces naturally causes a tension and confusion

characterized so well by James in *The Ambassadors* as "the life of high pressure" (89). The pressure Strether feels at this point is that of knowing how to act in light of the unexpected observations he has made regarding Chad's transformation since they last saw each other in America. He must incorporate these newer impressions of Chad with his older ones, but how, and then what is he to do with them? The scene in which Strether first speaks to Chad of his mission to bring the young man back to America is filled with language reflecting the manner in which this situation has distressed Strether. After he blurts out his intentions to Chad, he feels as if he "has run a mile through the dust," and the words "strain" and "fear" which appear several times afterwards convey how, at this moment, "everything was unpleasant" (94).

In order to deconstruct and make sense of the complex conceptual forms of modern life, philosophers—along with writers like Henry James—have tried to uncover "a realm beneath the forms that organize daily existence" (Schwartz 5). To do so, as William James expresses in the passage above, one has to sit still and observe those forms—i.e., to think, or indulge in what Lutz calls "brain work" (4). At the turn of the century, when a far more energetic definition of manhood is gaining in popularity, the behavior of the thinking men, considered "inactive" and "effeminate" (Lutz 22), suggests the paralysis of spirit associated with neurasthenia. According to the popular view, "the neurasthenic man was retreating into the feminine realm" (Rotondo 191), and this retiring attitude is evident in Strether. In his portrayal of Strether's relationship with Maria

Gostrey, for instance, James clearly reverses traditional gender roles, as Strether is "as pleasantly passive as might be" (21) and allows Maria to "lead [him] on" (34), rather than vice versa. Later, during the afternoon in Gloriani's garden, James tells us that "our poor friend, conscious and passive, really seemed to feel himself quite handed over and delivered; absolutely, as he would have said, made a present of, given away" (127), as if he had become one of the commodities valued and possessed in the modern, consumerist society. James, who so brilliantly dramatizes the perils of the marriage market in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove*, knows as well as anyone the manner in which women are viewed as commodities during his own day, and here he is placing Strether in this same position of social weakness.

The conventionally-perceived feminine attitude of helplessness that so often associates women with children in the minds of nineteenth-century men is also depicted in Strether's character, for like a child, he seems to possess an enormous ability to absorb and assimilate new sensations into his consciousness. After only thirty-six hours in Maria's company, Strether notices, "A place was too small for him . . . that had seemed large enough before" (28). Later, he observes to Waymarsh that "one does fill out some with all one takes in, and I've taken in, I dare say, more than I've natural room for" (31). To borrow one of William James's favorite metaphors, the stream of Strether's consciousness has become more like a swollen river, preparing to overflow its banks. While he is enjoying the sense of Europe to which Maria is introducing him, he has not

abandoned the Woollett mentality that is in direct conflict with it. As he admits, there is not enough "natural room" in his consciousness to maintain both perspectives of his "double consciousness." For the moment, Strether has attempted to maintain, separately and alongside each other, both the Woollett and Paris mentalities, but he learns the impossibility of this endeavor, as we shall see later, in the climactic episode that appropriately takes place at a river. It is then that James reveals the degree to which the tension has increased in Strether between the competing rationales of the eighteenth-century train and late-nineteenth-century stream of thought.

One episode wherein this tension is most clearly visible takes place during an afternoon in which Strether finds himself directly confronted with the relativity of truth and morality in Europe. His attention has been arrested for a lengthy span by the diversity of opinions (some in direct opposition with each other) voiced by the "polyglot" collection of individuals gathered in Bilham's apartment (109). What strikes him most, oddly enough, is the lack of "violence" present in the discussion, the absence of "tact" among the dissenters (109). Still burdened with the Woollett consciousness, Strether expects that people would struggle to defend their opinions on moral grounds, even to the point of violence. But in Paris, people are willing to view simultaneously many different sides of an issue, all of which are equally acceptable; in this heterogeneous universe, it is understood that one opinion is just as good as another, so the need for tact is obviated. This moral relaxation disconcerts Strether. Here he is experiencing what Robert Kugelmann calls the "loss of the familiar," a disturbing

mental condition that, "because it exposes us to life without meaning, renders us vulnerable to trauma" (40). It is the truly modern way of thinking and does not correspond with the Woollett consciousness. Meaning is found in tradition and continuity, as Locke asserts in his *Essay*, but the individuals gathered in Bilham's apartment freely break from tradition—at least, in Strether's mind, from the Woollett tradition. What he sees and hears are people exercising their freedom of choice, manifesting a situation that he would later consider a "comfort—that he was free to believe in anything that from hour to hour kept him going" (264). He is free, in other words, to choose, as he notices with "apprehension" when he first disembarks in Europe and finds himself possessed of "a consciousness of personal freedom as he hadn't known for years" (17). It is precisely that freedom of choice that troubles so many in the modern world because it exiles them from past traditions and attitudes. As Kugelmann explains, "The exile is, to borrow Sartre's phrase, condemned to be free. Stress originates in the ambivalence between the isolation and loneliness of the loss of tradition and the heady liberation that views myth as a set of barriers to be replaced by 'a dazzling array of choices'" (40). The modern man is permitted to "take things as they come," as Miss Gostrey advises Strether to do (140), but he finds this difficult to accomplish. Because it is like nothing he has ever encountered, this amicable discussion at Bilham's causes Strether further stress, and stress, Kugelmann explains, is "grief in which losses are not mourned but adapted to" (41). James tells us, "if his nerves were on the stretch it was because he missed violence" and

was even "wondering how to provoke it" (109), passages that suggest the intensity of the emotions Strether experiences throughout the scene. Nevertheless, he adapts to the situation by repressing his emotions and merely reclines and smokes as he persists in his general inactivity and feminine passiveness.

According to Ruth Bernard Yeazell, Strether's use of metaphors like "missing the train" also indicates the presence of repressed psychological trauma. Yeazell asserts that Strether's proclivity for "speaking in metaphors, like thinking in metaphors, is a way at once of confronting and of avoiding unpleasant facts. . . . For in James's late fiction, the metaphoric imagination works with its most feverish intensity when faced with knowledge that is both deeply desired and profoundly terrifying" (53-54). Although cognitive theorists have demonstrated that this tendency to think metaphorically is unavoidable in human beings (Hollister 1), Yeazell's analysis of James's deliberate use of metaphor as a means of evasion is applicable to Strether's character. There are two pieces of knowledge that Strether is particularly frightened to face, the first of which, of course, deals with the true nature of Chad's relationship with Mme. de Vionnet. The second is far less explicit yet perhaps of greater significance in the novel, and that is the fact that his youth is behind him and at age fifty-five, all he has to look forward to is his death. What Strether longs for now is to re-experience the sensations of his youth and, in doing so, to stave off death for a little while longer. The problem, of course, as William James reminds us when

he paraphrases Heraclitus in *The Principles of Psychology*, is that "we can never descend twice into the same stream" (227). The heterogeneity of our environment ensures that nothing is ever the same in our lives; only different (*Principles* 226). James acknowledges this as Strether's problem, that "he finds himself sinking . . . up to his middle in the Difference—difference from what he expected, difference in Chad, difference in everything" (*Notebooks* 561-62). Much to his utter consternation, Strether is confronted repeatedly with the loss of the familiar and the "phenomenon of change" (*Ambassadors* 90), prompting his flight from the complex reality of modern Parisian life to the simplicity of a pastoral setting.

With words like "Romance" and "land of fancy" to characterize Strether's intended destination (303), James portrays his train ride to the country as appropriately dreamlike and illusory. To borrow an expression from Michel de Certeau's description of railway travel, Strether's eighty-minute journey "combines dreams with technology" (113). As he travels, Strether absorbs various impressions that pass his window and imaginatively converts them into what he conceives as accurate representations of the original images depicted in the Lambinet painting he admired but failed to purchase in his younger days. The motion of the train as it smoothly glides along the iron rails and the "*trompe-l'oeil* movements" that make the scenery appear to shift as the passenger travels (de Certeau 112) facilitate the unconscious processing of perceptions and lull him into a state of mind that is more receptive to such delusions. Like previous

scenes of repose—such as those in the Tuileries, the Luxembourg Gardens, and Gloriani's garden—James's portrayal also "lulls us, rather than suggesting the disaster ahead" (Hathaway 90). Christopher Morley describes his 1928 railway journey as having a similarly hallucinatory effect on him: "Looking out into that stream of space I could have lapsed into a dream. I came closer than ever before to the actual texture of Time whereof our minds are made" (120). Morley's notion of spatial "streaming" has particular resonance in the scene which follows, as well as in James's novel as a whole, and it must be addressed before continuing further.

As Wolfgang Schivelbusch has shown, the smoothness of the train's movement along the track diminishes the passengers' ability to feel the terrain they traverse and partially contributes to the dreamlike experience mentioned above. In *The Ambassadors*, James uses the words "float" and "vague" to portray a similarly magical human experience—that of thinking, a process William James encapsulates in the metaphor "stream of thought." Richard Hathaway discusses at length that sense of the vague and its relation to ghost-like images that float throughout the novel before the eyes of James's protagonist and his readers, images that serve both to enchant and disturb us. "Floating," he tells us, "suggests uncertainty and the possibility of intellectual and moral disaster, but also ease, security, savoir-faire, and mastery" (85). Examples of the various characteristics Hathaway mentions abound in *The Ambassadors*. At the novel's beginning, in James's depiction of Waymarsh as a train traveler bracing himself

for an inevitable collision, it is suggested that Waymarsh should instead try to "float" through life and thus avoid the trauma of a nervous collapse (30). The notion of floating here has the positive connotation of taking life as it comes, of allowing the waves of sensation to wash over one, rather than one's bracing oneself against them. The stream or river upon which one would mentally float would be somehow gentler and more desirable than the express-train experience, as well as more natural. The characters' thought processes are often described in these fluid terms, as when Maria, while following Strether's line of reasoning, is said to be "quite in the current now and floating by his side" (195). Nevertheless, in the modern world, that otherwise benevolent stream can become threatening. At one point, James speaks of Waymarsh as caught in an "eddy" that "swallowed him down, and there were days when Strether seemed to bump against him as a sinking swimmer might brush a submarine object"; meanwhile, Chad provides the "fathomless" medium in which the two New Englanders are "immers[ed]" (108). Floating upon the flux of sensations may induce relaxation and dreaminess, but like any natural force, it may become overwhelming and entail hidden perils, as Strether acknowledges when he speaks of needing to "bridge the dark stream" between himself and Waymarsh (193).

Even the seemingly harmless process of perceiving visual impressions is laden with a peculiar kind of violence, for, according to John Carlos Rowe, "in order to impress . . . something must be repressed, pressed back, put out of play in a shadowy background" (234). In his psychological portrait of Strether, James

dramatizes the strong-arm tactics with which the unconscious forcibly represses those ideas that the conscious mind is not yet able to confront. What Strether represses in order to complete his own journey is his recognition that he is unable to relocate his past and the truth about Chad's and Marie's affair, both of which he has buried deep in his unconscious. When Chad and Marie float before him in their boat on the river, this new *impression* directly coincides with what he has *repressed*, thereby deepening his sense of shock. The river in this scene becomes a literal stream of thought for Strether, a physical manifestation of the phenomenological process he experiences while riding the train. Because the river and its passengers have a material presence, however, unlike his stream of consciousness, and because the meaning of his vision is thrust before him with such force, his recognition of it causes him far more pain than the mere idea of their affair. Conversely, the visible similarities of the natural landscape to the Lambinet comfort Strether with their resemblance to a soothing object he associates with his past. Only by fooling himself into thinking he could actually recover those past sensations could he embark upon his journey, which must necessarily end in disappointment.

The construction of the train itself enables Strether to adapt the visual phenomena he sees outside his window to conform with his memories. As James relates, Strether immediately associates "the little oblong window" of the passenger car with a "picture-frame" in which one would see a landscape painting, like the Lambinet (303). Here, he "instinctively manifests his habitual

tendency . . . to frame or 'pattern' the outside world into some recognizable, significant structure" (San Juan 302). James asserts throughout the novel the manner in which Strether's impressions are routinely framed in this manner, as they are during his afternoon in Gloriani's garden where he first meets Marie de Vionnet. We are told that, as he converses with her, "He might have been perched at his door-step or at his window and she standing in the road" (147). Although she "wasn't to shift her posture by an inch" while speaking to him (147), suggesting a vague imposition of restraint on her activities, she is the one perceived by Strether as free and mobile, while he is confined by a specific frame of reference. As Tom Lutz notes, this is because, despite his immersion in French culture and morality, "his double consciousness persists. Although he has, through imitating the Parisians and expatriates, adopted a new way of life and a new set of social relations, he has not been able to slough off the old Strether, the old values" (259). When Sarah Pocock arrives, this notion of the old, New England consciousness as rigidly constrained is reinforced by the fact that Strether first sees her "at the window of the train" as it pulls into the station (210). He soon notices, among other things, that she reminds him, not only of her mother, but also of Waymarsh. We thus see how these New Englanders not only observe through a limited framework of perception but are in turn framed by Strether, pigeon-holed into representing what he perceives them to represent. Unlike Sarah, Mrs. Newsome, and Waymarsh, however, Strether is impressionable, lending instability to the frame in which he observes all that he assimilates while in Europe. As Richard Hathaway asserts, James's narrative

places the reader at a similar disadvantage, for as we attempt to comprehend the novel's events, "What we see shifts, depending on which way we frame it, and that is much of what *The Ambassadors* is about" (91). The "sudden, abrupt shifts in meaning" that bedevil Strether throughout the novel (Lee 91) also vex the reader who is likewise trying to grasp the truth about these Parisian sophisticates.

Strether's framing tendency which he employs when he searches for the Lambinet in the natural landscape was enacted by many during the early days of rail travel. Julie Wosk discusses how, in a painting by the English artist Abraham Solomon called *The Return* (1855), "the view of the landscape seen obliquely through the train window becomes in itself a framed painting—a picture on the wall in this domesticated, homey interior" (66). In the "Place-Names: The Place" section of *Within a Budding Grove* (1919), Marcel Proust goes one step further and portrays the train passenger as nothing less than an artist, a painter of panoramas "running from one window to the other," striving "to reassemble, to collect on a single canvas the intermittent, antipodean fragments of my fine, scarlet, ever-changing morning, and to obtain a comprehensive view and a continuous picture of life" (704-705). The landscape is thus contained in or confined by the limits of both the window frame and the passenger's vision and then possessed by the passenger, like an admired painting that one decides to purchase for display in one's own home or gallery. James depicts Strether involved in a similar transaction while seeking the Lambinet in the French

landscape. Although James never tells us the exact number of years it has been since Strether first saw the painting in the Boston gallery, it is possible that his aborted purchase of it coincides with the death of either his wife or son. If this is the case, Strether might then associate this lost painting which he had "quite absurdly never forgotten" (303) with the loss of his loved one, so that by figuratively recovering the one he might recover some of the happiness he experienced before losing the other. His obsession with the painting could also be due more simply to his vast disappointment at having missed the opportunity to acquire an *objet d'art* which he found enormously appealing or the recognition of his own financial impotence at the price being so far "beyond a dream of possibility" (303). Whatever the reason, he intends to rectify the situation by taking the train, from which he may "chance of seeing something somewhere that would remind him of . . . [the] small Lambinet" (303), thereby enabling him to procure this dearly-remembered painting and the years that have fled for the price of a railroad ticket.

The visual consumerism in which train passengers routinely indulged during James's time was symptomatic of the growing subjectivity that was characteristic of modern thought. An 1877 essay called "A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate" by Florence Leslie, the wife of publisher Frank Leslie, demonstrates how the train traveler makes a mental purchase of each "wonderfully new picture" viewed through the train window to place in "memory's gallery" (36). The composition of that "picture," however—what each

individual passenger sees through the window – will depend on that passenger's point of view, by which should be understood not merely the unique angle at which he or she views the landscape from his or her seat but also the previous experiences the passenger brings to that viewing. That single vista is being surveyed simultaneously by many different observers, but each perceives the scene differently. These factors make the dual acts of containing and possessing very personal ones, as James depicts in Strether's unique co-opting of the landscape he sees through the train window in book 11.⁴ This subjective experience of public space and time is one aspect of modernity that the railroad helped to usher in, but Strether's extremely "arbitrary and unbridled subjectivity" could also be symptomatic of his neurasthenia, according to Anson Rabinbach (154). Rabinbach explains, "The neurasthenic's weakened state and unstable emotions are at the mercy of chimerical thoughts and images, representations that are themselves refractions of a will incapable of resisting the stimuli of the modern world" (154). Strether, who has all along shown himself to be highly suggestible to the sensations in his environment, continues to appropriate those sensations and exercise his imagination on them so that they suit his framed conception.

Strether thus views the countryside as a representation of the Lambinet, which is itself a representation of the artist's conception of the original landscape. By extension, the landscape he sees from his train window also represents what the Lambinet does in his consciousness, namely youthfulness and contentment. For a while, Strether almost achieves the repetition he desires

by emotionally and, apparently, physiologically turning back the clock to what he remembers as a happier time. He de-trains at what he considers "the right spot," where he may literally step into the frame and experience first-hand the timelessness of a work of art and the warmth of continuity between past and present, rather than the coldness of punctuality and the clock. He wishes to strike a particular "note" within himself (304), the one connected with his memory of the emotions the painting elicited and which reverberated in him during his youth. James suggests to the reader Strether's rewards for realizing this sense of timelessness: for the moment, his protagonist finds "peace"; he is "luxuriously quiet, soothed and amused by the consciousness of what he had found at the end of his descent" (305), as if he has sunk into a stupor (like the dreaming Alice who falls down the rabbit hole into Wonderland) or been hypnotized out of consciousness. He also spends the afternoon energetically rambling the countryside, at the end of which time James tells us, "He had walked many miles and didn't know he was tired" (307), signifying his physical rejuvenation. Even the appearance of Chad and Mme. de Vionnet initially adds to his contentment, for before he recognizes them as the inhabitants of the row boat he sees floating on the river, he calls the sight "exactly the right thing" which "had been wanted in the picture" (309). Here, Strether continues his delusional construction of reality but soon will be distressed when he awakens to the truth about the couple that he has successfully, until now, repressed.

The ultimate blow for Strether is ironically struck by the very things which had recently so contented him, namely the countryside and the river. His

gradual recognition of Chad and Mme. de Vionnet as the unexpected passengers of the row boat shows Strether how delusive his feelings of tranquillity had been. Their presence together in the boat speaks louder than any verbalized truth about the reality of their affair, and the moment vividly demonstrates what Richard Hathaway so eloquently calls the "extraordinary evocativeness of what is withheld and thus communicated" (88). Their betrayal and duplicity now "throw him forward" upon knowledge about them which he did not wish to face and which he had specifically hoped to avoid when he took the train to the country in the first place. Both James's analysis of this scene in his "Project of Novel" and his narration of the episode itself in *The Ambassadors* are replete with the language of violence and trauma. In the novel, he refers to the "unprovoked harsh note" which their presence brings Strether (310), as well as "the violence of their having 'cut' him, out there in the eye of nature" (311). In the "Project," he describes how Strether's recognition of their affair "considerably startles and pulls him up. . . . It staggers him a little, and he has to brace himself afresh; . . . he rather wishes the incident hadn't occurred" (571). He valued and remembered the Lambinet and his two friends as charming, beautiful and graceful, but now he must face that the Lambinet was just a painting and his friends had been anything but forthright with him, impressions he possessed from the beginning but had successfully pushed out of his frame of knowing.

Two frames have been broken in this scene: the remembered "oblong gilt frame" that doubled as the train window in which the cherished landscape had

been contained; and the frame that contained his misconceptions of Chad and Marie. On this subject, Nicola Bradbury makes some fine points: "The precise context of a perception is all-important In *The Ambassadors*, Strether's misunderstandings arise from his attempt to 'place' the Parisian situation in a New England framework of moral judgment, and to interpret the behavior of those in Paris according to the patterns of New England custom and prejudice" (40). Julie Wosk discusses this very situation as part of modern life. She explains, "the experience of breaking frame occurs when the basic frameworks of understanding used to make sense out of events no longer apply" (3). She then goes on to quote the American sociologist Erving Goffman, who describes what happens when a subject

discovers that "no particular frame is immediately applicable, or the frame that he thought was applicable no longer seems to be." In this unexpected situation, "the unmanageable might occur, an occurrence which cannot be effectively ignored and to which the frame cannot be applied, with resulting bewilderment and chagrin on the part of the participants." (3)

The person who has successfully adapted to modern life will experience no such distress, as James suggests when he outlines his conception of Maria Gostrey. Not only is she supposed to be "unshockable and highly incorruptible," but "She knows all the trains," all of which make her "inordinately modern" (*Notebooks* 546). Strether, by contrast, feels the pain of modernity, compounded now by his having to re-experience simultaneously the two most agonizing events of his life when he loses the individuals who had become romantic surrogates for his deceased wife and son: Mme. de Vionnet and Chad. As the reality of their affair

impresses itself upon him, he experiences "a sharp fantastic crisis" that had "popped up as if in a dream" (310), suggesting the horror of suddenly facing an image of one's original perceptions in a nightmare. In Hathaway's words, "What is solid has become a ghost, yet palpable for all that" (91).

James reinforces the idea of Strether's affliction when Strether can do no more than sit motionless and think all night upon his return to Paris, suddenly paralyzed by "the obsession of the other thing" that was always the "terror" he was afraid to confront (26). Upon returning to his hotel, Strether is nothing less than shell-shocked, for he remains motionless, "even at an hour or two past midnight, . . . for a long time, without a light and without undressing, . . . on his bedroom sofa and stared straight before him" (313). Once again, Strether's spontaneous inertia enables him to sort through and make sense of the day's disturbing impressions unconscious of time's passage or the lateness of the hour, but here he has been stunned into this attitude. In his immobility, he resembles Hawthorne's Jaffrey Pyncheon at the hour of his death, and James similarly impresses upon the reader the manner in which this recent shock has led Strether to his own moment of truth: his realization that "there had been simply a *lie* to the charming affair" (313). The italicization of "lie" indicates the real source of this latest perturbation, the ultimate act of social violence whose chief casualty is trust.

With his depiction of Strether's physical condition after his confrontation with the truth, James suggests what the price of knowledge is for the more

sensitive souls among us. Strether suddenly feels "ancient and weary" (336), so much so that during his final excursion around the city with Maria before he parts from her and Paris to return to Woollett, Strether appears more like her "kindly uncle" than the prospective mate she has considered him throughout the novel (327). This recent shock to his psyche also prompts his realization that he has reached the final station on his journey, that his old, conflicted self, the one afflicted with a double consciousness, is dead. As James tells us of his time with Maria, "the scene was filled for him with so deep a death-bed hush, so melancholy a charm" (328). Such morbid ruminations suggest a kind of psychological and physical collapse—perhaps due to a form of neurasthenia that had recently afflicted James himself. Tom Lutz reminds us how James "clearly identified with Strether," for when presenting Jocelyn Persse with a copy of *The Ambassadors*, James asked that he "try to like the poor hero, in whom you will find a vague resemblance (though not facial!) to yours always Henry James" (258). James most likely converted his own neurasthenic experience and repressed traumas into the psychological disturbances that would afflict Strether and contribute to the formation of his character. The healthy consciousness, James implies, develops through the survival of those psychical commotions that either make or break us.

Strether, as James demonstrates at the novel's end, is a survivor who recognizes that he must begin his life anew with a newly-formed consciousness that will function relative to the two diverse perspectives from which he has

recently viewed the world. Alfred North Whitehead's comments on the theory of relativity that Einstein introduced barely two years after the publication of *The Ambassadors* are applicable here, for he says, "if we can conceive a body at one stage of its life history as in motion relatively to itself at another stage, then the body at these two stages is utilising [sic] diverse meanings of space, and correlatively diverse meanings of time" (120). Strether's consciousness at the two locations in space (Woollett and Paris) and at the two corresponding stages of his life conceives two different meanings of the world which are so diverse as to be incompatible. He must reject one meaning in order to live according to the other, or he must combine elements of the two and thereby create a new frame of reference through which to view the world. By the time he leaves Paris, his association with that world and its epistemological framework makes it impossible for him to re-adopt the former Woollett mentality, but after what he has experienced in Europe, he cannot completely accept the Parisian mentality either. He determines that he is "Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself" (346). He is like a man without a country, proceeding to a new, third stage or station that will contain its own meaning, comprised partly of the "wonderful impressions" gleaned from Europe (346) and partly of the New England values instilled in him by Woollett.

Strether's departure from Paris and its inhabitants marks the ultimate resolution of his crisis. In his discussion of the process by which we recover from trauma and grief, Robert Kugelmann's ideas are instructive:

If grief asserts the necessity for the persistence of the past in the present, then we will also have to reconsider the topic of the exile, which claims that we are uprooted from the past. Only when grief is resolved can the past be let go. Unresolved grief surrounds us with ghosts and phantoms who have not been laid to rest. The difficulty may not be that we have lost traditions, but that we have not let them go through the work of grief. Perhaps to deal with our historical consciousness and the disruptions of traditions and myths, we have, paradoxically to bury rather than flee them into the neon lights or defensively claim their continuity. We need to bury the dead in order that we can, with their help, find continuity with the present. (45-46)

Certainly, throughout the novel, James has depicted Strether as an individual haunted by his past, so much so that he must seek it in the natural world, rather than in the supernatural realm of ghosts and spirits. He takes the train to the countryside specifically because he is grieving for the past—for the losses of his wife and son which he has successfully repressed for so many years, along with the youthful joy that accompanied his life with them. Standing on the terrace watching Chad and Marie float upon the river, he experiences two more losses that parallel his original ones, for Chad has occupied the place of his son since he first became engaged to Mrs. Newsome, while Marie has become a romantic interest during his months in Paris. Maria, whose name is merely a variation on Marie, represents the more attainable satisfaction of his desire for Marie because she is single, unlike Marie. Nevertheless, whether he were to remain in Paris and marry Maria or bring her back to Woollett with him, he would still be clinging to the ghosts of the past, for she would become a physical representation of his time in Europe. In Europe, he has embraced the modern way of life for the first time, by embracing the individuals who have comprised

that life, but his misconceptions about everyone and everything he has witnessed there make that life insubstantial and "phantasmagoric," to borrow Strether's word. They are ghosts, existing in his memory, like his wife and son. To live with Maria would mean living with those ghosts. That is why it is so important for him "Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself." Strether has finally learned to let go of the past and is on his way to recovering from the emotional and psychological traumas of his life.

Along with the insubstantiality of his personal relations, Strether discovers the illusoriness of reality in the modern world, brought into relief by the train that transports him to the countryside in book 11. The smooth blurring of images and the sensation of floating across a framed landscape highlight the unreality of Strether's experience, the impossibility of grasping the plurality of truths that insist upon his recognition even as they continue to change. All he can do is *perceive* reality, forever uncertain of his grasp upon it. Within that loss of certainty lies the crisis of modern life. Prior to his afternoon in the country, missing the train represents Strether's failure to live, his inability to pursue the variety of options continually opening themselves up to modern individuals. It is only after catching the train and indulging in the fantasy of fulfillment that he can renounce that longing and return to the reality of life in America. James's vision of modernity in *The Ambassadors* is not the most hopeful one, but his novel is a stunningly vivid portrayal of the modern sensibility and its survival techniques in the face of constant upheaval.

¹ Tom Lutz suggests that, with Strether's desire to imitate Chad, James is here satirizing the kind of "emulation" that was "at the center of the construction of class and class consciousness" at the turn of the century (258), while H. Peter Stowell sees it as revealing Strether's wish to live vicariously through Chad and the others, "hoping only to catch onto the caboose of their train of time" (212). But Adelaide Tintner has the sharpest criticism for Strether's behavior, claiming that "he becomes young and culpable, as Chad becomes old and responsible" ("A Source" 136).

² Ian Watt acknowledges this characteristic of James's prose in his explication of the first paragraph of *The Ambassadors* (260); later, Viola Hopkins Winner describes the novel's narrative structure as "partially impressionistic" (155); Brian Lee uses the term "impressionism" when discussing the impact of sensations on Strether during the afternoon in Gloriani's garden (88-89); H. Peter Stowell devotes an entire study to the "literary impressionism" of James and Chekhov, including the "pictorially scenic structure" of *The Ambassadors* (208); and John Carlos Rowe examines James's use of "mimetic impressionism" in portraying Strether's imaginative structuring of his environment (233).

³ I owe this observation to Joan Richardson, who alerted our class to this stylistic peculiarity during a course in the Fall of 1990 at the CUNY Graduate Center.

⁴ As Helga Nowotny points out, "What positively exploded through the discovery of simultaneity was the temporal objectivization and legitimation of the individual consciousness, of the subjectively experienced existence. . . . There were as many subjective times as there were thinking, feeling, knowing, communicating individuals" (28).

**Chapter 4: Reel Time: Cinematic Vision and the Subjective Consciousness in
Cather's *My Ántonia***

In the Introduction to Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*, a train is shown transporting the novel's narrator Jim Burden through the land of his childhood (the mid-West) while he travels mentally and emotionally into his past. This figurative transport back in time is stimulated by the sights Jim regards from the train's observation car, a section of the train ideal for viewing what railroad historian John H. White, Jr., calls the "panorama of the passing countryside" (303). While Jim and the anonymous narrator of this introduction sit in the observation car, the train is said to have "flashed" with great rapidity past scenes of wheat, towns, pastures, and groves, all of which "reminded" them of their former lives on the prairie, and of their old friend Ántonia Shimerda in particular. Frequent train trips such as this, necessitated by his position as a lawyer for "one of the great Western railways," have been inspiring Jim's reminiscences for some time, until, with his words, he seems able to reproduce Ántonia's very image before the mind of the reader, permitting the narrator to "see her again" while traveling that day by train. Jim's spoken and written words bring the past into the narrator's present just as the train does, indicating the parallel Cather will draw between the motion of Jim's memory, the text, and the train, a correlation I will address in this chapter. By emphasizing the subjectivity of perception, the train in this scene may be considered a literalization of Burden's consciousness, that is, a vehicle that inspires his

reminiscences of *Ántonia*, the subject and substance of the novel. The present discussion considers Cather's narrative (though, of course, not a screenplay written for the cinema) in the context of a storytelling culture that includes the motion picture at the time she composes her novel. The train participates in this culture and therefore becomes a useful element in Cather's own depiction of Jim Burden's consciousness. As Cather's fictional memoir unfolds, the matter and motion of Jim Burden's memory—his train of thought—are given a cinematographic narrative form, a meaningful structure for the reader to understand the images and events he recalls.

In her analysis of Willa Cather as a modernist writer, Phyllis Rose points to the absence in Cather's novels of stream-of-consciousness writing and interior monologue as evidence of Cather's "refusal to explore [her characters'] subjectivity" and her manner of "abandoning the attempt to represent interior consciousness" (132), assertions which ignore the importance of narrative structure and perspective in portraying the subjective consciousness. In a work like *My Ántonia*, the arrangement of scenes and level and type of detail provided give profound insights into Jim's character and consciousness. Rather than illustrating Cather's "resolutely external treatment" of events in her fiction (Rose 132), *My Ántonia* depicts the internal rhythms of Jim Burden's consciousness and is thus an exercise in subjective perception. In this sense, the novel dramatizes an important principle of Henri Bergson, who "cast his spell over prewar America" (Quirk 53) and who both Tom Quirk and Loretta Wasserman have

shown was, in Wasserman's words, "an important influence on Cather's thinking" ("Music" 227). Bergson emphasizes the importance of intuition in our location of "the real . . . as it lives in us and is perceived as change" in the "flux" of our consciousness; because our consciousness is "organic and fluid," its motion is "unforeseeable and therefore free" (Quirk 47-48)—free, that is, to shift between memories of the past and perceptions of the present, as well as to anticipate the future based on those former and current impressions. As Quirk explains, "It is in this way that experience of the world acquires its subjective character" (49). In her analysis of Daniel Defoe's *The Fortunate Mistress*, Cather applies this very condition to the conception and writing of a work of fiction:

The "scene" in fiction is not a mere matter of construction, any more than it is in life. When we have a vivid experience in social intercourse, pleasant or unpleasant, it records itself in our memory in the form of a scene; and when it flashes back to us, all sorts of apparently unimportant details are flashed back with it. When a writer has a strong or revelatory experience with his characters, he unconsciously creates a scene; gets a depth of picture, and writes, as it were, in three dimensions instead of two. The absence of these warm and satisfying moments in any work of fiction is final proof of the author's poverty of emotion and lack of imagination. (*Willa Cather On Writing* 79-80)

Those details, the excess baggage that accompanies our memories of significant events, give the fiction writer—and, for that matter, the dramatist, for Cather's language and references to "scene" clearly describe the conditions facing the playwright and screenwriter—the ability to create compelling characters. The idea of these details "flashing" back to us indicates their unpredictability which mirrors the uncontrollable nature of ideas as they occur to us in consciousness.

As Jim tells the narrator of the Introduction, "I didn't take time to arrange it; I simply wrote down pretty much all that her name recalls to me," thereby demonstrating the manner in which, by the time she wrote *My Ántonia*, Cather had internalized many of Bergson's concepts, which "constituted the informing atmosphere of her drama of memory" (Quirk 166). In *Feeling and Form*, Susanne Langer calls memory, "the great organizer of consciousness" and says it "is the real maker of history—not recorded history but the *sense of history* itself, the recognition of *the past* as a completely established (though not completely known) fabric of events" (263; italics in original). Jim's memoir is thus not a faithful recapitulation of his experiences but comprised of "selected impressions . . . recalled as separate incidents," for as Langer explains, "when memory is very vivid it has no continuity. The deeply impressed incident seems to rise out of the past all alone" (263-64). This condition makes Jim's narrative appear disordered and haphazard, but the seemingly random order in which he recalls events "itself is an intellectual system" (263). Cather's novel is full of unexpected details and diversions, which Phyllis Rose suggests likens it to a composition of improvisational jazz, a particularly modern musical style (138). However, because of its unconventional "temporal organization and plot" (Rose 135), it can also be discussed in terms of another modern art form, one that provides the technological means to represent the unexpected turns of consciousness deemed essential to Cather: the cinema.

Shifting from the level of narrative to more formal considerations, the

narrator's comment that Jim made her "see" *Ántonia* again—an expression that identifies sight and remembrance—points to a significant moment in the development of early modernism in both fiction and human perception. As Jonathan Crary explains in *Techniques of the Observer*, during the nineteenth century, the eye became the primary means by which the mind acquired sense experience (19). This condition arose with the inventions of various optical devices—like the moving panorama, diorama, stereoscope, and motion picture—which brought dazzling spectacles to mass audiences (Crary 19). This growing emphasis on the visual was promoted to a large degree by the unique perceptions gained while traveling by train. In *Bodies and Machines*, Mark Seltzer connects the physiological with the cognitive effects of train travel by explaining how "the panoramas in perspective, seen through the glass frame of the window, reduce motion to the shift of the gaze, and the shift of the gaze reduces landscape to 'scenery' and to the cinematographic illusionism of the *trompe l'oeil*" (18). The conditions of train travel—specifically the rapidly shifting points of view and framing of the landscape, provided passengers with new ways of seeing the world outside their windows. It would not be long before many would note the correspondence between the act of *perceiving* and the equally subjective act of *conceiving* that we have already discussed in regard to Henry James, the writer whom Cather sought to emulate before finding her own authorial voice. Her abandonment of James's indirect prose style represents one way in which she "exchanged a late nineteenth-century vision of the world for

another" (Quirk 113). In a Jamesian turn of her own, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant notes how Cather valued any work of art that "represented a new way of *seeing*" (121), her italicization no doubt suggesting the cognitive, as well as the ocular meaning of "to see." Cather sought to achieve a similar effect in her own work by creating what Loretta Wasserman has called "a panorama, a montage, of a world being ever created, of selves forging new selves from the material of their layered and intertwined pasts" ("Music" 232). Wasserman describes the symbolic relationship between our consciousness and the sensible world, how our minds bring to the outside world as much as they take from it, afterwards producing unique conceptions of truth and reality. It is that singular interpretation, more than anything else, that Cather portrays in Jim Burden's memoir, beginning with the train ride in the Introduction.

Cather's writing of *My Ántonia* (published in 1918) coincides with the emergence of the American film industry and the peak of railroad construction in America (Kirby 5). During this time, the train was in a reciprocal relation to the newly-invented motion picture, the visual impressions and perceptions provided by one reinforcing those provided by the other: "the cinema finds an apt metaphor in the train . . . as embodying the prototypical framed, moving image, mass spectatorship, the construction of a journey as an optical experience, the radical juxtaposition of different places, the 'annihilation of space and time'" (Kirby 1-2). The railroad played a crucial role in the development of the motion picture, both as an industry and an art form. Many railroad companies

produced films in the United States, particularly "journey narrative films" shot from inside a moving train looking out the window (Kirby 11).¹ Until 1904, the travel genre of films remained the most popular in America (Kirby 57). In the single-reel narratives of this era filmed inside moving trains, the *trompe l'oeil* effect of which Seltzer speaks is clearly visible, only doubly so. In a film like *What Happened in the Tunnel* (Edison, 1903), for instance, the viewers' gaze is drawn to the window on the right, outside of which can be seen a landscape of trees passing. Those trees closest to the car are completely blurred, while those farther away move slower and are much easier to discern, as described in chapter 2. The effect of observing this view on film is akin to watching a motion picture within a motion picture, since the landscape moves at a rate different from that of the actors inside the car. The same view in the film *Mystery of the Missing Jewel Casket* (AM & B, 1905) proves far more interesting than the antics of the actors on screen. At one point, as the train pulls into a station alongside a brick building on which the sun shines in certain spots but not in others, the effect observed through the window is like the exaggerated flickering of a movie in a darkened theater. These are two of the more dramatic illustrations of the cinematic vision about which railroad historians speak.

Even before she wrote *My Ántonia*, Cather too had made imaginative use of trains in her work. Consider, for example, the following description of the evening sky as viewed through the telegraph poles from the observation car of a moving train in "The Affair at Grover Station" (1900):

The telegraph poles scored the sky like a musical staff as they flashed by, and the stars, seen between the wires, looked like the notes of some erratic symphony. The stillness of the night and the loneliness and barrenness of the plains were conducive to an uncanny train of thought. (339)

Here we see Cather using the train, much as she will in *My Ántonia*, as an *entrée* into her narrator's psyche. In her hands, the train becomes a tool for representing the movement of consciousness. Rather than *telling* the reader what the narrator is like, she *reveals* his nature and state of mind by describing the way he perceives the world around him from the perspective of a moving train. According to Alan Spiegel, such narration is typical of early modern fiction and exemplifies what he calls "concretized form, . . . a way of transcribing the narrative, not as a story that is told, but as an action that is portrayed and presented, that seems to reveal itself to the reader apart from the overt mediations of the author" (6). The action portrayed in the passage above is one character's subjective interpretation of reality, as the motion of the train affords him a unique perspective on the sky and stars, which in turn affects his consciousness.

Even more pertinent to the present discussion of *My Ántonia* is the way Cather uses the train in a poem entitled "Going Home (Burlington Route)" (1903), described by Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant as illustrative of her joy at returning to Nebraska from Pittsburgh and her "connection with Lincoln and the past" (34). The first and third verses of this three-stanza poem begin with the lines "How smoothly the trains run beyond the Missouri; / Even in my sleep I

know when I have crossed the river" (216). Here, the motion of the train penetrates her unconscious, while the wheels, which "turn as if they were glad to go" (line 3), parallel her emotional state upon returning to her homeland. The open windows through which the "air of morning" blows into the car (lines 11-12) provide the passengers access to the world outside. They function simultaneously as the train's—and passengers'—eyes, ears, and nose, organs that are vital conductors of sensations that trigger memories. As the poem continues, Cather explores the psychological elements of this journey even further. The wheels "run like running water" (line 18), by which she compares the train's motion to that of a stream or river (a reference which acquires enormous significance in light of the transition which has taken place in modern thought from the Lockean train of thought to the William Jamesian stream of consciousness, as discussed in chapter 3). Cather, having already associated the train with her own psyche earlier in the poem, now begins to solidify that connection and completes it with the lines "They run remembering, / They run rejoicing, / As if they, too, were going home" (lines 23-25). Cather identifies with this train and humanizes it, imagining its ability to recognize, as she does, the terrain it traverses. The motion of the train is clearly connected here with memory, a process she dramatizes so vividly in the Introduction to *My Ántonia* and which helps to establish the cinematic aspects of her novel.

Cather's views on the cinema were decidedly mixed, as evinced in the following excerpt from a letter she wrote to the *Omaha World-Herald* in 1929:

I am not lamenting the advent of the "screen drama" (there is a great deal to be said in its favor), but I do regret that it has put an end to the old-fashioned road companies. . . . The "movie" and the play are two very different things; one is a play, and the other is a picture of a play. A movie, well done, may be very good indeed, may even appeal to what is called the artistic sense; but to the emotions, the deep feelings, never! (Bohlke 186)

It is conceivable that she found turn-of-the-century films lacking due to their silence, for in 1925 she said, "I must have the American speech around me, touching the springs of memory" (Bohlke 88). Here Cather refers to an emotionalism and a humanism that she perceives as absent from silent movies, for it is usually the actors' inflection and tone of voice that move us to recognition and empathy. Without them, it can be difficult or impossible to gauge character and personality accurately. The few and sporadic titles that appear throughout the average silent film like *The Girl and Her Trust* (Biograph, 1912) might communicate part of the dialogue, but never all of it. Even then, only through close-ups of exaggerated facial expressions and bodily movements can the feelings and emotions with which the words are said be articulated. So much guess work is involved on the part of the movie audience. By contrast, Cather's own wonderfully visual narratives include dialogues that vividly portray mood, tone of voice, and dialect, all of which enable her to construct recognizable and memorable characters and events.

One wishes, however, that Cather had elaborated on what precisely about the film genre she found "in its favor," or how exactly movies appeal to "the artistic sense." The only films she professed to have enjoyed were "three or four

in which Charlie Chaplin is the whole thing" (Bohlke 186). A brief look at *The Immigrant* (Mutual, 1917), which Chaplin wrote, directed, and stars in, will help to explain why Cather would value his films above all others of the period. In addition to featuring Chaplin's broad physical humor for which he was justly renowned, *The Immigrant* is distinctive for the natural, subtle acting of its principle players, Chaplin and Edna Purviance, who effectively communicate a variety of emotions without the benefit of sound. Sometimes titles are used to inform the audience of bits of dialogue, but close-ups enable one to read the actors' lips quite easily at times without the need for them to exaggerate their pronunciation, as when Chaplin gallantly asks Purviance when they first meet, "Would you like to sit down?" For the most part, titles are unnecessary because thoughts are effectively communicated with just a glance or a slight change of facial expression. One of the best examples of this understated acting is in the beautiful and moving scene when the immigrants first see the Statue of Liberty from their ship as it approaches New York Harbor. Once again, a number of thoughts and feelings are conveyed without the use of exaggerated expressions, as the camera lingers on the actors' enraptured faces just long enough for the viewers to gather their own impressions of these characters and sympathize with their plight. Cather, like many moviegoers of her era, obviously recognized the superior quality of such film making.

Cather no doubt also appreciated the movie's ability to tell a story, for one of the gifts she most valued as a child was a magic lantern² given her by a doctor

when she worked in a drug store. As a treat for her friends and siblings, "She hung up a bed sheet and gave frequent shows for the neighborhood with her lamp-lit lantern" (Bohlke 130). Later, in describing her conception of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, she would speak of imaginatively viewing the story "on the white wall of that hotel room in Santa Fe, as if it were all in order and color there, projected by a sort of magic lantern" (Bohlke 109). As she examines Cather's narrative technique in works after *My Ántonia*, Jo Ann Middleton asserts that Cather was not "unaffected by or insensitive to the new possibilities of film-making—that is, picture-making—technique" (79). As Alan Spiegel asserts, "Any artist [in the early years of the twentieth century] could be influenced by film and know all about it simply by being alive and visually alert in the modern world" (xiii).³

One of the most important cinematic features of *My Ántonia* is the element of motion, an expression of energy which Susan Rosowski says drives the novel (82). According to Sergeant, this energy radiated from Cather herself, for due to her country breeding, "Rapid motion was essential to her" (58-59). Later, Sergeant recalls, "She knew when she was in motion, . . . and when she was jostled and churned up from below by meeting, usually through memory, a figure she could not deny. Then she paused, gazed, apprehended her fullest inwardly and communicated in a story what she saw and felt" (118-19). This mental process parallel's Jim Burden's as he recalls the events of his childhood and characterizes the structure of his memoir, which includes often rapid flights

between episodes followed by slower, more deliberate narration of thoughts and actions. This motion is dramatized with the opening description of the train "flashing" past the scenery while Jim and the narrator sit in the observation car. A paradoxical combination of movement and inertia characterizes the kind of spectatorship Cather describes in that scene, a situation resembling the experience of member of an audience sitting in a theater watching a movie. There are two ways of looking at this parallel. On the one hand, Jim may be viewed as a still spectator watching the scenery pass outside his window, a condition similar to the theatergoer's experience of watching the action unfold during a motion picture. Mark Seltzer addresses this very condition when he discusses how "the railway, like the elevator, or (in its recreational form) the Ferris wheel, puts stilled bodies in motion. What these mobile technologies make possible, in different forms, are the thrill and panic of agency at once extended and suspended" (18). On the other hand, Jim is also a spectator in motion, carried by the train and physically moving through time and space the way a film watcher mentally travels through narrative time and space. In discussing this parallel, Kirby notes how the train approximates the cinema "in terms of the unfolding of a chain of essentially still images, and also the rapid shifting of point of view . . . both experiences entail" (2).

Like the conscious attempt to assimilate spatial details observed while riding a train, the art of the cinema is grounded in subjective experience. The film maker perceives a scene through the camera's eye from a particular point of view, with a certain perspective on life that he or she brings to the filming

process, and with the intention of manipulating objects, time and space. While most film makers exercise this subjectivity consciously to achieve certain cinematic effects, human beings in their everyday lives are, like Jim, usually unaware that their minds perform such selective editing and interpretation. For writers of memoirs, however, this condition is unavoidable:

By definition, a memoir is personal, colored by feeling, the product of subjective thinking and recollection. And always, it is tempered and tempted by time. It is one person's view of another, and of herself in relation to that other; and that is its strength and its weakness, its special value and its limitation. (Arnold 5)

As Gabriel Josipovici reminds us, "even before we sit down to describe, at the moment when we start trying to make sense for ourselves of what is before us, we distort and falsify" (132). Because Cather's novel is a first-person account, the possibility similarly exists that Jim's written impressions could be exaggerations or inaccurate depictions of the incidents narrated. Even Sergeant recognizes that Jim considers *Ántonia* in "the confused terms of a youthful projection of love and nature blended" (161). Jim's subjectivity determines the structure and language of the novel, demonstrating how, for him as for a film maker, "vision and arrangement create character" (Murphy 37). As it does in "The Affair at Grover Station," the train serves here as a sign to the reader of Jim's personal viewpoint, the creation of "his" *Ántonia*. Its presence in the Introduction provides evidence of Jim's subjective engagement with the sensible world of the narrative, a perspective that mirrors that of the filmmaker.

Regardless of how Jim perceives his motion in relation to the static scenery he views while riding the train, and whether or not he is aware of the

paradox in his visual experience consisting of movement and stasis, it is significant that his physical movement through space and time prompts a corresponding mental activity: remembering. In her portrayal of Jim's act of recalling *Antonia* and his childhood while on the moving train, Cather suggests that Jim's role in the narrative will chiefly be to remember. Remembering is an activity much like sitting still watching the landscape pass or a movie play on a theater screen, for while the person recollecting is physically static, his mind is in constant motion replaying scenes from the past. Jim remarks on this phenomenon, describing a walk across the prairie with his grandmother. He says, "Perhaps the glide of long railway travel was still with me, for more than anything else I felt motion in the landscape; in the fresh, easy-blowing morning wind, and in the earth itself, as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it herds of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping" (16). In this somewhat delayed experience of an after-image, Jim's imagination causes him to perceive the kind of physical displacement he felt while on the train. Cather thus demonstrates the kinetic properties of consciousness, along with the "sense of motion" depicted in the land (Saposnik-Noire 171), for the landscape that passed him as he beheld it from the moving train has apparently not stopped moving in his imagination.

The connection between memory, imagination and motion was noted at the turn of the twentieth century by, among others, Henri Bergson. In *Matter and Memory* (1896), Bergson describes memory in cinematic terms, discussing images

"pictured in consciousness . . . unrolling . . . in our view," and claims that we "reel off our psychic life into action or wind it up into pure knowledge" (13-14; my emphasis). He later makes an important distinction between static images (like photographs) and those in motion which constitute our memories, asserting that "images can never be anything but things, and thought is a movement" (125). He thereby implies that moving pictures, like those found in cinema, more closely resemble the motion of consciousness at times of recollection.

Elaborating the concept of "*pure perception*," Bergson claims that, if such perception existed, it would consist of "the preservation of the images perceived" (*Matter* 65), as if the mind were simply a camera (a photographic machine) or blank canvas that turned the object filmed or painted into another object—the image represented. In reality, however, these impressions gathered by the mind and preserved in memory become contaminated, so to speak, because our minds always turn impressions into reusable representations, and to access those representations the mind must move from the present into the past and then back again. The result is significant, particularly in the context of Cather's fictional memoir. According to Bergson,

if there be memory, that is, the survival of past images, these images must constantly mingle with our perception of the present and may even take its place. For if they have survived it is with a view to utility; at every moment they complete our present experience, enriching it with experience already acquired, and, as the latter is ever increasing, it must end by covering up and submerging the former. (*Matter* 65-66)

The Cubists were one group of artists who made creative use of Bergson's

philosophy, as exemplified in the painting *Sea=Dancer* by the Italian Futurist Gino Severini. According to Anna Moszynska, Severini was "probably inspired, like others of his time, by a remembered experience (of dancers) fused with current sensation (watching the sea). Such a blending of past and present, of memory and experience recalls the influential writings of the French philosopher Henri Bergson" (26). The Introduction to Cather's novel describes a similar artistic process, for Jim Burden blends his memories of *Ántonia* with an immediate sensation—that of riding a train—and the result is a work that achieves in prose what Cubists like Severini do in painting. Indeed, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant tells us that Cather had a personal interest in Cubism. After completing *O Pioneers!* (1913), her first Nebraska novel, "Willa," Sergeant says, "was intrigued . . . by the Cubist. She determined that I should expound modern art to her" (108). Cather, who read Bergson "carefully" (Woodress 232), was no doubt fascinated by the manner in which the Bergsonian theory of *durée* was reflected in Cubist paintings. In *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, Stephen Kern explains how such thinking was symptomatic of the age:

One distinctive feature of the prewar sense of the present was a thickening of its temporal length beyond a "knife edge" between the past and future into an extended interval that included part of the past and future. Bergson's *durée*, James's specious present, Husserl's halos and fringes of retentions and protentions, and Gertrude Stein's continuous present all implied that intervals of present time involved streamings from the past and into the future. These concepts also implied that our life in days, weeks, and years included what came before and after and expanded its reach across time as we grew older. (294)

It is thus that Jim Burden is moved to write of *Ántonia* and his Nebraska

childhood in the first place: the spatial details on the landscape that flash by his train window remind him of his past life, but then those memories envelop his present experience and infuse it with a special meaning. His numerous business trips across the country *via* the train become opportunities for self-discovery—or, perhaps, *rediscovery*—through his subjective interpreting and recording on paper of his childhood memories. For this reason, Jim Burden's memoir is more an artistic rendering of history than a facsimile of it, a condition that is also characteristic of the art of the cinema.

In his 1916 work *The Photoplay*, Hugo Münsterberg, a student and later a colleague of William James, presents a psychological study of the cinematic arts, noting the relationship between the motion of consciousness during memory and the often imaginative means by which events are impressed on our psyches. His analysis of what makes a work—whether a novel, painting, or motion picture—an "artistic" representation of the real world can be applied to Cather's fictional memoir:

It is artistic just in so far as it does not imitate reality but changes the world, selects from it special features for new purposes, remodels the world and is through this truly creative. To imitate the world is a mechanical process; to transform the world so that it becomes a thing of beauty is the purpose of art. The highest art may be furthest removed from reality. (144)

Jim's insertion of "my" before *Ántonia's* name in his manuscript's title indicates that his memoir will demonstrate the selectivity which Münsterberg says is necessary in a work of art. As if *Ántonia* and the events of her life somehow belonged to him, Jim as the story's narrator claims the right to interpret and

arrange those events as he sees fit in order to tell *his* story—or, at least, the story he wants the world to hear. It is his way of controlling the past and a life (Ántonia's) in which he wishes he had played a more significant role.

Of the moving picture or "photoplay," Münsterberg says the following, describing how the selective process of memory and consciousness are translated onto film:

It [the photoplay] has the mobility of our ideas which are not controlled by the physical necessity of outer events but by the psychological laws for the association of ideas. In our mind past and future become intertwined with the present. The photoplay obeys the laws of the mind rather than those of the outer world.
(97)

The "association of ideas" about which Münsterberg speaks was elaborated in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) by William James, whose ideas also held great significance for Cather (Wasserman, "William James"). One of James's most important perceptions concerning consciousness is that the operation of mind is a "stream of thought." James arrives at this metaphor by attending to the "transitions, . . . [the] intermediating links of perfect naturalness and propriety" which occur during the association of ideas, producing a "magical, imponderable streaming" in our minds (519). It is precisely film's ability to portray this psychic streaming which prompts Münsterberg to claim, "In the photoplay our imagination is projected on the screen" (96). Just as in our imagination, the transitions between thoughts are difficult, if not impossible, to discern, so on a film strip, as Münsterberg notes, the "movement from picture to picture is not visible," enabling us to see one "continuous movement" (57). The

strip of film, composed of smoothly flowing images spliced together, objectifies James's "stream of thought" metaphor. Cather presents the streamlike flux of Jim Burden's consciousness through such "cinematic" devices as framing, montage, flashbacks, flashforwards, and close-ups.

Cather's use of framing in the novel first appears in the Introduction when we learn that Jim has composed his narrative while riding the train. This fact is significant, for the view from the inside of an express train at the turn of the century was itself framed in two specific ways that "fostered a peculiar distancing of passengers from landscape" (Stilgoe 249). One framing device was the window out of which the passenger looked while traveling.⁴ In *The American Scene*, Henry James referred to the train window as "the great moving proscenium of the Pullman," and wrote of watching "some untoward drama"—i.e., the scene beyond his plate-glass window—"as if the chair in the Pullman had been my stall," while the "hot-looking stars" in the night sky doubled as the "footlights" of the theater (312). Like the screen on which a motion picture was projected, the window separated the passenger from the shifting scene outside, creating a somewhat unreal spectacle of a vibrant yet silent world beyond one's reach. In chapter 1, I discussed the "theaterlike, cinemalike, dreamlike state" in which the express train passenger frequently found himself (Stilgoe 252), and such was Jim Burden's view as he observed the landscape that was so dear to him while composing his memoir. According to Cather, this kind of vision produces the most memorable artistic renderings, the kind found in a

masterpiece like Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. In "The Novel D meubl ," she says, "As I remember it, in the twilight melancholy of that book, in its consistent mood, one can scarcely see the actual surroundings of the people; one feels them, rather, in the dusk" (*Willa Cather on Writing* 41). The images Hawthorne presents are indelible not because of their clarity of presentation, but for precisely the opposite reason. Our memories contain similarly murky impressions, and according to Cather, "The shapes and scenes that have 'teased' the mind for years, when they do at last get themselves rightly put down, make a very much higher order of writing, and a much more costly, than the most vivid and vigorous transfer of immediate impressions" (*Willa Cather on Writing* 48). The imposition of time between the writer and her original perceptions thus produces a separation that is necessary to produce great literature.

In their own framing of the moving vista outside the train's window, the telegraph poles provided two means of physically separating the railroad passengers from the scenery observed through their windows. First, these evenly spaced poles disrupted the unitary composition of the landscape, severing the passengers' view at regular intervals. Any two poles in succession could represent the outside borders of a gigantic frame through which the scenery was viewed, while the telegraph wire above and the ground below supplied the top and bottom edges respectively. Observing the landscape through a string of such frames over several miles produced an unusual visual effect that was duplicated in the cinema until the biograph projector ensured

"the absence of flicker and 'jump'" noticeable in films before its use in the 1890s (Musser 152). Stilgoe explains how the poles "flashing past indeed provided a cinemalike vision to the [observation car] passenger sitting on the wicker chairs or leaning against the rail" (255). Just as the railroad passenger watched the swiftly moving landscape broken and separated into frames, the movie audience similarly viewed sequentially ordered and framed stills or photographs rapidly projected onto a screen.

The smooth blending of a movie's frames into one another during projection that is comparable to the blurring of the telegraph poles when the passenger focused on the landscape beyond them is also illustrative of the movement of thinking. As William James explains in the "The Stream of Thought," chapter of *The Principles*, the separations between thoughts in the flux of our consciousness are difficult to discern. In what he calls "the dissolving-view-appearance of the mind" (225), thoughts are continuously connected or, as Bergson would say, "blended" in consciousness (*Time* 172). As we will see, in *My Ántonia*, especially in the montage sequences Cather employs, the transitions between Jim Burden's thoughts appear equally seamless. These seemingly effortless mental shifts mirror the movement of his mind as he composes his memoir and often illustrate "the appearance and disappearance of a reminiscence" (Münsterberg 99), so often portrayed in the cinema with the "fade," "wipe," and "dissolve" (Bordwell and Thompson 200).

The need to look through the telegraph poles and wires in order to see the

passing countryside emphasized the barrier which further separated the train passenger from the scenery. According to railroad historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch, "They [the poles and wires] interposed themselves, both physically and metaphorically, between the traveler and the landscape" (31). The same lack of immediacy which Cather lamented in the motion picture was thus present for the train traveler, resulting in the passengers' alienation from the land over which they traveled and observed from their windows. However, as Münsterberg reminds us in *The Photoplay*, a similar form of estrangement exists between any work of art and its viewer:

[The artist] puts his landscape into a frame so that every possible link with the surrounding world is severed. He places his statue on a pedestal so that it cannot possibly step into the room around it. . . . He tells his story so that nothing can happen after the last chapter. *The work of art shows us the things and events perfectly complete in themselves, freed from all connections which lead beyond their own limits, that is, in perfect isolation.* (149-50; italics in original)

After all, for a work of art to be just that and not a mere imitation of reality, there must be an acknowledged gulf between the representation and its model in the real world. Alan Spiegel addresses this situation in his comparison of visual images in D. H. Lawrence's fiction with those recorded by the movie camera:

There can be no observation of any object, no seeing of it, without an initial separation from it, without an initial settlement of the necessary distance, near or far, between the seer and the seen. Distance is the essential postulate of the camera's stance and that of all artists in any medium who choose to observe the way a thing presents itself to the eye. (45)

In Jim Burden's case, a temporal distance between the events of his childhood and his recording of them enables him to put those experiences in perspective

and present them artistically.

Just as reality interposes itself between reader and novelist, audience and film, time is the element which separates us from the events which supply our most treasured recollections. As Stephen Kern explains, the cinema has the unique ability "to create a direct vision of the past," thereby facilitating memory (39). This phenomenon, called by one writer the "capability for resurrection" (O'Brien 35), bears upon my study of *My Ántonia*, since, according to the Introduction's anonymous narrator, Jim Burden's own memories have helped her to visualize Ántonia once again, framing her own recollections of their childhood friend. Recreating historic events on film and committing memories to paper as Jim Burden does are two of the best means of representing the past. Both methods give artists the freedom to reproduce significant events as accurately—or inaccurately—as they wish while manipulating the presentation of time and space to give their work meaning. Münsterberg's description of this process as it relates to the motion picture can be easily applied to a fictional work like Cather's: "*the photoplay tells us the human story by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely, space, time, and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely, attention, memory, imagination, and emotion*" (173; italics in original). By using cinematic techniques in the writing of *My Ántonia*, Cather dramatizes the inner workings of the narrator's consciousness.

In *My Ántonia*, Cather offers several instances of narrative framing that contribute to what others have called the novel's "episodic form" (Wasserman,

"Music" 231). The first instance appears in her Introduction, in which someone other than Jim Burden (the novel's chief narrator) acquaints the reader with him. As Stilgoe points out, Cather leaves this frame open at the end of her novel, since she fails to return Jim, the narrator, and us to the site of the Introduction—the train. Stilgoe sees this lack of closure as demonstrating Cather's inability to "comprehend the distancing effect" of "express train vision" (252). I would argue, however, that this is Cather's way of emphasizing that Jim is not quite ready to sever his connection with the "precious, the incommunicable past" which *Ántonia* represents for him (372). His parting promise to the Cuzak boys to take them hunting "next summer" (368) illustrates his reluctance to distance himself from *Ántonia*'s family and his intention to continue his association with them in the future. By refusing to return Jim to the train, "past and present tend to merge in a dynamic new image of happiness that makes the future possible" (Martin, "Drama" 311).

Though Cather leaves the outermost frame of her novel open, there are many frames within the narrative that are complete. Some of the stories Jim frames within his memoir include a humorous tale of Otto Fuchs's adventurous life since his arrival in America from Austria, another depicting Lena Lengard's difficult life on the farm before she arrives in Black Hawk, and a touching narrative of the life of the mulatto pianist Blind d'Arnault. By far, the most dramatic of all the frame stories appears in chapter 8 of book 1, when the howling of wolves on a blustery winter evening torments the dying Russian Pavel. This prompts Pavel to relate to Mr. Shimerda the tragic story of the

wedding party that he and his friend Peter had fed to the wolves one similar night so long ago in Russia. Before hearing the story in translation from *Ántonia*, Jim assumes that Pavel "raged and shook his fist" while he spoke because he was "cursing people who had wronged him" (55). In reality, Pavel was bitterly cursing, as one critic has noted, "nature's triumph over the [human] will" (Saposnik-Noire 173), since it forced them to act murderously and unnaturally in order to preserve their own lives. Hearing *Ántonia's* narration of this story afterwards forces readers, along with Jim Burden, to revise their understanding of Pavel's earlier gestures. The demonstrations of his anguish that are part of the tale's outer frame give the story deeper meaning, since we then appreciate how profoundly the events have haunted the two men based on the violence of those gestures. Jim's memory also frames the story when he recalls it afterwards, for he says, "At night, before I went to sleep, I often found myself in a sledge drawn by three horses, dashing through a country that looked something like Nebraska and something like Virginia" (61). Out of Pavel's gruesome tale, Jim's imagination has constructed its own motion picture, set in a familiar locale and with himself as star.

Although it is set in its own frame within the novel, this horrific story is hardly disconnected from the narrative itself. The brutality of that winter evening long ago in a distant land parallels the severity of the weather outside and anticipates the violence of the winter that ensues, one in which Mr. Shimerda will commit suicide shortly after Christmas. This juxtaposition of a story of hope and life (Christmas) beside a tale of death (Mr. Shimerda's)

illustrates "Jim's ability to pattern his memories" (Murphy 68). Although he tells the narrator in the Introduction that he did not arrange the incidents depicted in his memoir, the sequence of events are hardly random thoughts without connection to each other. Jim's consciousness has made the connections necessary to produce a coherent narrative; an automatic, selective editing process has already taken place in his brain, causing his mind to splice together the winter scenes in the manner in which he will recall them in his memoir. Considered together, the celebration of Christmas and the suicide of Mr. Shimerda comprise, in John Murphy's words, "a diptych framed in snow—actually blizzards" (68) before the "frame pictures" of chapters 6 and 7 of book 2 about winter in *Black Hawk* (74). Like the diptychs of Renaissance art, these framed images narrate a tale, in this case of Jim's childhood and the domestic tragedies—both large and small—to which he was exposed. The primary difference between Cather's diptychs and those of the painters and sculptors of earlier times is that Cather's images are kinetic. While reading the pages of Jim's memoir, our consciousness travels with him forming moving representations of the action he describes. When these episodes are juxtaposed with the coming of Spring in the chapters which follow, the cycle of life begins again, and we mentally journey with Jim to a new phase of his life where once again, our conceptions will be framed by his.

Jim's affection for *Ántonia* and the "hired girls," to whom Cather devotes an entire book in the novel, also provides a frame for his recollections. As so often occurs in memory, his portrayal of these characters and the events

surrounding them are susceptible to what Bergson calls "subjective idealism" (*Matter* 26). Consider, for example, Jim's assessment of the Danish laundry girls, who "never looked so pretty at the dances as they did standing by the ironing-board, or over the tubs, washing the fine pieces. . . . [T]hey were kind, simple girls and they were always happy" (221-222). Here, Jim disregards the enormous, perhaps back-breaking effort their labors require, as well as the general discomfort caused them by the "steam or heat" which curls their hair so attractively as they work (222). Furthermore, Jim naively assumes that because their demeanor toward him is friendly whenever he sees them, they must be happy all the time. He thus represents them to the reader as he needs to remember them: in direct relation to himself and as having no other significance than that. Later, we understand more fully what his intention has been in his portrayal of them, for he notes "the relation between girls like those and the poetry of Virgil" (270). Like the figures in Virgil's *Georgics*, the girls in Jim's narrative have been idealized and enclosed in a pastoral frame representing the "*Optima dies*" that are now fled (271). This partial image of the truth, what Terence Martin has called "the afterglow of remembrance" (308), emphasizes not merely the distance between fact and fiction, but also the temporal gap between the events of Jim's past and his narration of them.

In comparing the Danish laundry girls to Virgilian maidens, Jim engages in metaphoric thinking, which, Michael Hollister reminds us, is "always contextual" (1). Such association of two disparate images, according to the

philosopher Max Black, employs "language directly appropriate to the one as a lens for seeing the other . . . in a new way" (qtd. in Hollister 1), a notion consistent with Cather's attitude about art already discussed. She literalizes this concept for Sergeant when she sets the orange and blue Taormina jar "in the middle of a bare, round, antique table" in order to convey her intention that *Ántonia* should "stand out—like this—. . . because she is the story" (Sergeant 149). The brightly painted jar contrasts with the unadorned table, and their unexpected juxtaposition forces Sergeant to see each in a new context. So Jim uses language appropriate to pastoral figures of old as a means of seeing these modern-day laboring girls in a fresh way; they become, by analogy, the living embodiment of Virgil's maidens. Jim wants *Ántonia* to fit within this innocent Virgilian scheme as well, but she does not, choosing instead to work for the lecherous Wick Cutter and later becoming pregnant out of wedlock. As she seems to have done during most of the years they have known each other, she forces him to alter his own thinking about her, to see her anew. For possessing this characteristic, *Ántonia* surpasses the other girls in stature—at least in Jim's memory.

Jim's reluctance to reconcile his memories with reality is most evident in the final two books of the novel when he recalls two reunions with *Ántonia* after lengthy absences from Black Hawk. In book 4, *Ántonia*'s unwed pregnancy seems to spoil the pleasure of Jim's return because, other than that unpleasant situation which he acknowledges "bitterly," "Everything seemed just as it used to

be" (297)—that is, just as he remembers. When he finally does find it in his heart to forgive her for disappointing him, for not living up to his expectations, the time of their meeting (dusk) creates a dreamlike setting where Jim's imagination frames their encounter. In the "solemn magic that comes out of [the] fields at nightfall," Jim longs to "be a little boy again," and seems to receive his wish when he holds *Ántonia's* hands and looks at her face in the encompassing shadows (322). It is this vision of *Ántonia*, rather than the thin, "worked down" face he observed in the daylight (319), that Jim vows to store "at the very bottom of my memory" (322). His artistic transformation of the evening is complete when, while walking down the "familiar road" leading to his grandparents' home, he "almost believes" that his and *Ántonia's* shadows run beside him, as they used to do when he and she ambled that road as children (323).

Jim's consciousness in the above scene resembles the "cinemalike" state experienced by express train passengers, in which insubstantial phantoms like those found in dreams appeared and vanished before their eyes as they gazed out the window. James had depicted a similarly phantasmagoric experience in *The Ambassadors*, in which Strether's train ride is portrayed as placing him in a sort of dreamy yet illusory contentment. Langer also discusses "*the dream mode*" of cinema, claiming it is "'like' dream in the mode of its presentation: it creates a virtual present, an order of direct apparition" (412). Thus, "the 'dreamed reality' on the screen can move forward and backward" (Langer 415), as occurs with the flashforwards and flashbacks in Cather's novel. Langer continues by explaining

the manner in which "the camera is in the place of the dreamer," although that camera, which is not an actor in the dream, "is the mind's eye and nothing more" (413). In addition, while a dream is likely to be incoherent and distinguished solely by its emotional content, a motion picture is "a poetic composition, coherent, organic, governed by a definitely conceived feeling, not dictated by actual emotional pressures" (Langer 413). The same can be said of Jim Burden's narrative and his romantic portrayal of *Ántonia*; while his affection for her inspires and informs his composition, the events depicted in his memoir are deliberately organized, despite their idealistic representation.

As book 5 opens, although twenty years have passed, it appears as if Jim has retained his tendency to favor fantasy over fact, the visually ideal over the real. In one of his most revealing confessions, he explains why he "dreaded" meeting *Ántonia* again: "In the course of twenty crowded years one parts with many illusions. I did not wish to lose the early ones. Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen to one again" (328).⁵ Jim's memories of the past continue to be so tied with the visual that he would almost rather replay the past in his mind, as one replays a favorite movie⁶, than face visible signs of time's passage in the present.

When he does finally see *Ántonia*, the "miracle" to which he attests (331) occurs in his imagination because he is able to look into her eyes and hear her voice. Gradually, as he focuses on these traits that have remained constant over the years, untouched by the passage of time, "the changes grew less apparent . . . , her identity stronger" (331). Once Jim locates the *Ántonia* of his memories in

the woman before him, he simply replaces the real, less pleasant vision with an idealized one, combining his memories of her with the facts of her new situation. *Ántonia* may have been "one to leave images in the mind that did not fade—that grew stronger with time" (352), but she also "had that something which fires the imagination" (353). She was at once what she was and what he imagined her to be. For Jim, she was not just a struggling, aging mother of a large brood of children, but "a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races" (353). The real *Ántonia* has thus been fondly and artistically framed in a mythic ethos as visually subjective as his perspective of the landscape from the moving train at the beginning of the novel. It is this imaginative rendering of *Ántonia* that Jim finds easier to reconcile with his memories of her.

What Jim has been struggling to achieve in his relationship with *Ántonia* is what Michael Hollister calls the "holistic mode of consciousness" (9). This mode represents a reconciliation of two patterns of cognition usually in opposition—the head and the heart—which Hollister discusses in spatial terms—the sides of the brain with which they are now thought to correspond, the left and right respectively. Hollister associates left-brain thinking with verticality and, among other things, puritan values, judgment, absolutism, straightness, logic, and the City; "the left brain," he says, "operates most efficiently by 'purifying' its own structures and functions of interference by other parts of the brain" (3). By contrast, right-brain thinking is associated with horizontality and such concepts as pastoralism, fluidity, relativism, equality, and the Garden, "because the right brain specializes in felt connection, both natural

and social" (3). As a machine of science and progress, the train is sometimes associated with verticality and the City (Hollister 8), but because it runs from the City into the Country or Garden, it links the pastoral with the puritan mode, especially in Cather's novel. When we first meet Jim in the Introduction, we learn how he has been shuttling between the City and the Country *via* the train, much as Cather did after she moved from Nebraska to the East at the turn of the century. In this way, Jim remains in touch with both modes of consciousness, although at first, he experiences a struggle between them. He futilely desires to fit *Ántonia* within a traditional frame of reference, as when he tells her, "I'd have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister—anything that a woman can be to a man," to which *Ántonia* insightfully replies, "How can it be like that, . . . when I've disappointed you so?" (321). She resists classification as a character and a woman, causing her to stand out in Jim's consciousness like Sergeant's Taormina jar on the table.

While Jim's attitude is often vertical, as he sits in judgment of *Ántonia* and her actions throughout their adolescence and early adulthood, he seems most inclined towards the horizontal mode, which "eliminates hierarchy and gives centrality to the heart in the Garden" (Hollister 7). As Hollister writes,

This mode is pastoral in spirit and picaresque or episodic in narrative form, as expressed in the poet reclining on the grass in Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," or Jack Kerouac's beatnik style of being "on the road." Pastoral values such as freedom are dramatized by horizontal movements through space in a fusion with nature. (7)

In at least two aspects, Jim's memoir fits this model: its form is "episodic," for as

Jim admits in the Introduction, the arrangement of his narrative reflects the order in which he recalls the events of his youth; and it is composed while he is traveling on the iron road across the Great Plains. Nevertheless, in the end, his decision to live in the City and travel frequently through the Country, where he makes periodic stops to visit *Ántonia*, thereby keeping one foot in both spatial contexts, indicates his participation in the holistic mode of consciousness which "reconciles opposites in esthetic unities, transcending verticality, horizontality, ideology, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation" (Hollister 9). In this mental condition, "the horizontal axis is unstable in that left and right are preserved but relative to position; the vertical axis is stable but allows for inversion, rotation and synthesis" (Hollister 10). When viewed in this light, Cather's novel is itself a holistic work, for, as John H. Randall has asserted, *My Ántonia* has a "double protagonist, part *Ántonia*, who faces the future, part Jim Burden, who faces the past. Together, Jim and *Ántonia* make a complete, albeit 'Janus-faced' personality" (Martin 305). By the time Jim writes his memoir, both views have become elements of his own personality, thanks in part to the strength of *Ántonia*'s character; as Jim tells her, "you influence my likes and dislikes, all my tastes, hundreds of times when I don't realize it" (321). Jim's point of view has become flexible, as both sensual and temporal experiences are viewed in a different light depending on his position in space and time. In Jim's recollections, memories of earlier years are colored by his knowledge of present circumstances, while his present understanding of self is determined by his

memories of specific events in his past. According to David Stouck, Cather introduces this conflict between remembrance and reality at the novel's very beginning, for "the introductory sketch sets up the creative pastoral tension between the memory of past happiness and the experience of loss and estrangement in the present" (47). As Jim says at the end of the novel, while observing the faint tracks marking the path their wagon took upon their first night in Nebraska, "For *Ántonia* and for me, this had been the road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined for us all that we can ever be" (372). Destiny itself, as Susanne Langer reminds us, is "pure semblance" which corresponds to our "real experience" and contributes to our "sense of past and future as parts of one continuum" (311). In other words, destiny is a subjective construct, a sort of conscious and deliberate illusion we create based on our personal histories. It comforts us and enables us to discern a purpose to our lives so that we might come to terms with the unexpected and/or unpleasant turns our lives have taken. So it is that, for the first time in the novel, Jim seems at peace with the fact that this same road has brought them to two different destinations. His pastoral vision has been tempered by his logical, realistic consciousness which has prompted him to pursue success in the City, yet he can still look to *Ántonia* to find in her the childhood friend he once knew and still values.

In the context of Jim's narrative, the frame stories Cather presents to depict the shifting of Jim's perspective between past and present, the Country and City, are flashbacks that function very much as they do in motion pictures.

A popular device used from the cinema's earliest years, the flashback or "cut-back," as Münsterberg calls it (95), provides a "temporal ellipsis" that halts the pace of the story's forward motion (Bordwell and Thompson 219). One vivid example of this technique is found in the film *When We Were Boys* (Selig, 1907), in which "an elaborate flashback construction" that "cuts back and forth between the old men and scenes of their youth" is used to depict the reminiscences of two old men (Musser 478). In literature, the flashback functions similarly and is considered "a modernist technique of juxtaposing past and present" (Middleton 46). Technically, of course, the entire novel after the Introduction is a flashback, with the events of Jim's childhood told in the past tense from an adult perspective. However, with a flashback such as the Russians' story, Jim Burden interrupts the current time—and forward motion—of his reminiscence to conflate time periods (the past with the distant past or past perfect). This sudden temporal shift illustrates how "Cather intuitively rejected the linear perspective" (Shaw 540). According to Gabriel Josipovici, this rebellion against linearity and the forward motion of time in narrative is a characteristic of modern thought and stems partly from what Freud said was a desire to flee death, "to keep at bay the recognition of time passing" (125). This would appear an accurate description of Jim's intention, in his memoir and in his life, especially in light of his imaginative transformation of Antonia in the scene examined above and in his nostalgic embrace of the line from Virgil "*Optima dies . . . prima fugit.*"

As Münsterberg points out, flashbacks also enable the storyteller to illustrate the free associations and "fleeting turns of attention" which occur in memory (95):

With the full freedom of our fancy, with the whole mobility of our association of ideas, pictures of the past flit through the scenes of the present. Time is left behind. Man becomes boy; today is interwoven with the day before yesterday. The freedom of the mind has triumphed over the unalterable law of the outer world. (181)

The train in Cather's Introduction is a novelistic technique enabling her to dramatize the kind of mental movement of which Münsterberg speaks, for childhood scenes "flash" (or, as Münsterberg says, "flit") through Jim's mind when he sees the present landscape, temporarily blurring the line between past and present. The vividness with which past scenes and events are often replayed in consciousness is reproduced—in both cinema and fiction—in the flashback, making it "an objectification of our memory function" (Münsterberg 95). Just as it happens when we recall recent events still fresh in our minds, or remember traumas from which we have failed to recover despite the passage of time, we can practically *see* and *hear* what occurred as if it happened yesterday—or, in Pavel's case, as if it were happening now. Requiring that the reader function as the camera eye, Cather and other modernist writers, according to Middleton, sought "to involve the reader in just the same way that the viewer is involved in film. . . . Willa Cather is one of the first to understand that literature is also an audience art, and she adapted her technique to this discovery" (81).

Cather's flashback of the horrible events Pavel recalls is animated by

details of sights and sounds, including dialogue, making it a film within a film, a narrative within the narrative of *My Ántonia*. First, we see how the bride's parents "blessed" their daughter before she was carried and secured in the sledge by the groom and how the groom was "absorbed in his bride" (56). Next, we are told how the "jingle of sleigh bells" mixed with the singing of the wedding party (56), but this is soon contrasted with the howling of the wolves intermingled with the "screams of the horses" and "the cries of the men and women" as the party is attacked (57). Such graphic details enable us to appreciate the pathos of the event because we can see and hear the joy turn to horror as if we were witness to it along with Pavel and Peter.

Another frame story that becomes a film within a film is the narrative of Blind d'Arnault, a flashback containing extremely vivid characterizations and depictions of the action. Its chief purpose in the novel seems to be to provide Jim (and, perhaps, Cather) with the opportunity to reminisce about his early years in Virginia, for the "amiable Negro voice" (184) reminds him of his life there, just as the scenery he passes in the train reminds him of his Nebraska childhood when he is an adult. The kind of subjectivity he displays in his perceptions of the landscape while traveling is also in evidence here, particularly in the barely concealed racism contained in his description of "the note of docile subservience" in the mulatto's voice and in the details of his appearance: "He had the Negro head, too; almost no head at all; nothing behind the ears but folds of neck under close-clipped wool. He would have been repulsive if his face had not been so

kindly and happy. It was the happiest face I had seen since I left Virginia" (184). Then there is the highly erotic depiction of d'Arnault's first encounter with a piano and his attempt to play the songs he had heard issuing from it, the "passages" of which he "began to finger out . . . definite as animal desires" (188). This mating ritual between the young boy and this instrument serves as a preview of the mating ritual that will take place in the next chapter when the dancing pavilion comes to Black Hawk. The rhythm of the music d'Arnault plays corresponds to that of the blood pumping through veins of the young people indicated by the "fresh color" of their faces and "that brilliancy" in their eyes called "the light of youth" (192), as well as to the rhythm of the seasons, for Spring and Summer follow quickly upon the Winter in which the Blind d'Arnault story is told.

In addition to the flashback, Cather also employs its cinematic opposite, the flashforward. Flashforwards in movies are described by Hugo Münsterberg as "forward glances" which fulfill the viewer's "expectation" (95). Cather's flashforwards serve the same purpose, ending the reader's suspense about a character's future success or failure, as in the surprising tale of Tiny Soderball's adventurous life after leaving Black Hawk. This particular flashforward is important because it helps to correct a misconception about Tiny held by the people of Black Hawk. That misconception is planted in the reader's mind when Jim says that "it was the fashion to speak indulgently of Lena [Lingard] and severely of Tiny Soderball, who had quietly gone West the year before" (298). Tiny is expected to come to ruin because she is "conducting a sailor's lodging-

house," and "all sailors' boarding-houses were alike" (299). Since Jim is writing his memoir twenty years after this severe judgment of Tiny is said to have been voiced, he can draw on the subsequent events of Tiny's life to prove just how wrong he and the townspeople were about her. Jim's transitional sentence, "How astonished we should have been . . . if we could have known what her future was really to be!" whets the reader's appetite for Tiny's story, as does his declaration that "Tiny Soderball was to lead the most adventurous life and to achieve the most solid worldly success" (299). After these pronouncements, it is a relief to read, "This is what actually happened to Tiny:" (299). The insertion of this story may delay the continuation of the novel's main action—Jim's reunion with *Ántonia*—but it satisfies the reader's curiosity and is therefore essential in the narrative, fulfilling a need created by the author.

Like flashbacks and flashforwards, montage sequences contribute to the irregular pace and structure of Cather's novel. Stephen Kern defines the French word "montage" as "the assembly of a product from component parts," and he asserts that cinema was "the technological link" between various methods, among them the montage, by which artists portrayed the "mechanization, jerkiness, and rush of modern times" (117). As David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson explain in *Film Art*, in the montage sequences used in motion pictures, a lengthy time-period is compressed by presenting several brief scenes, or "short takes," in rhythmic succession (219). During the late teens of the twentieth century, these "short takes" averaged five seconds apiece (Bordwell

and Thompson 188), which somewhat explains the brevity with which each event is portrayed in the montage sequences Cather presents in *My Ántonia*. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* employs this technique to depict a series of events which occur in South Carolina's House of Representatives after the war, when 101 newly-elected African-American Representatives, outnumbering the "helpless white minority" of 23 men, pass bill after bill in the State Legislature, from the mundane requirement that all Representatives must wear their shoes on the House floor to the more incendiary law (from the South's point of view) that an African-American man may marry a white woman.

Towards the end of *My Ántonia*, Cather presents a montage that is in the tradition of both Cubist painting and the cinema, as Jim recalls specific "images" of Ántonia "that did not fade":

In my memory there was a succession of such pictures, fixed there like the old woodcuts of one's first primer: Ántonia kicking her bare legs against the sides of my pony when we came home in triumph with our snake; Ántonia in her black shawl and fur cap, as she stood by her father's grave in the snowstorm; Ántonia coming in with her work-team along the evening sky-line. (352-53)

Jim may associate these images with still ones ("the old woodcuts of one's first primer"), but there is a great deal of motion portrayed, with Ántonia "kicking" and "coming in" and the storm raging, as well as in their brevity and the speed with which they are recalled in succession. Such an effect resembles that of a ride on an express train, for just as the train's speed compresses distance, enabling passengers to travel much farther in a matter of hours than in previous vehicles (like the stage coach), time is similarly compressed in the montage

sequence; events which actually take days, weeks, or months to unfold are portrayed within the space of a minute in the cinema or a few lines or paragraphs in a work of literature.

Most of Cather's montage sequences depict a series of similar actions repeated over a long period of time. One such sequence in *My Ántonia* begins, "In the evening I used to prowl about, hunting for diversion" (217). Cather's use of the word "hunt" in this sentence hints that such diversion was not easily forthcoming, and the narrative which follows proves that assumption to be true. Jim's failed attempts to find entertainment take us, within the space of a few pages, to the streets and saloons of Black Hawk, the drugstore, the cigar factory, the depot, the "flimsy shelters" of the dispossessed, and finally to the dances at the Fireman's Hall (217-220). Cather's words, like a movie camera, enable "the eye to follow the hero . . . continuously from place to place" (Münsterberg 32). That Jim chooses not to dwell too long on any of these (except for the Fireman's Hall dances, which I shall discuss shortly) suggests their monotony to him in contrast with the memorable nights Jim would spend dancing with the Bohemian and Swedish girls—especially Ántonia and Lena Lingard. Montage sequences such as these, containing "rapid change which does not allow the attention to become fatigued" (Münsterberg 82), also keep the novel moving forward and act as transitions between longer episodes of more significant, character-forming events described in greater detail.

Those scenes or episodes which Jim narrates after the montage sequences

contain what film-makers call "long takes" which are more accurate depictions of "real time" (Bordwell and Thompson 187). "Real time" is also the expression used by Henri Bergson to define *durée*. In a "long take," as in *durée*, time is protracted as the camera dwells for a considerable amount of time on the action or details of a scene without breaking away. Like a train progressing along its route, the narrative during "real time" moves steadily forward. Such scenes contain dialogue and "close-ups" which "emphasize facial expression, the details of a gesture, or a significant object" (Bordwell and Thompson 170). Several episodes in *My Ántonia* contain these elements as well, along with detailed descriptions of the setting, the characters involved, and Jim's emotions and thoughts throughout a single scene. This attention to detail slows the narrative considerably and enhances the duration of particular moments.

One episode containing several long takes and close-ups is Cather's depiction of a typical night at the Fireman's Hall dance. We see Jim dressing for the dance and sneaking out his bedroom window, and as he walks to the dance, we follow the movement of his thoughts to those he looks forward to seeing there, including the Danish laundry girls. Jim then pauses, as a train might pause at a station, to dwell on the physical attributes of these girls, providing us with close-ups of "their white arms and throats bare, their cheeks bright as the brightest wild roses, their gold hair moist with the steam or the heat and curling in little damp spirals about their ears" (222). Like a close-up that we see in a movie, each detail here "is greatly enlarged and replaces for an instant the whole

stage," thereby objectifying Jim's "mental act of attention" (Münsterberg 36 and 88).

By the time Jim finishes his description of the Danish laundry girls, we have arrived with him at the dance. There, we are given contrasting views of the dancing styles and characters of Lena and *Ántonia*, with Lena's "sleepy" and "indolent" style of movement described in soft consonants—"When she sighed she exhaled a heavy perfume of sachet powder" (222)—while harder, more assertive tones portray what it is like to dance with *Ántonia*—"She taught me to dance against the hard-and-fast beat of the music" (223). In this scene, which takes place in a single room, Cather vividly conveys both mood and motion, what Eudora Welty calls the "quality of animation" found in all of her novels (66), accomplishing with language what the film maker does with visual images. This scene is followed by one of the most pivotal dialogues in the novel between Jim and *Ántonia*, when a good-night kiss reveals the differences in their feelings for each other (224). The entire dialogue portraying "real time" takes place in a single locale—Wick Cutter's front yard—and the reader's mind need wander only as far as the characters do. Here, as in the dance hall scene discussed above, Jim's and the reader's attentions are focused on a single event made all the more significant by the amount of time in which Jim dwells on its details.

Perhaps the most memorable long take in *My Ántonia* is the famous description of the plow silhouetted against the sun towards the end of book 2. Although after it is read, this striking image becomes frozen in the reader's

memory almost as if it were a photograph, the episode itself reads like a motion picture, not a still one. We are told how the "great black figure" of the plow "suddenly appeared on the face of the sun," and, Jim says,

We sprang to our feet, straining our eyes toward it. . . . The sun was sinking just behind it. . . . There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun.

Even while we whispered about it, our vision disappeared; the ball dropped and dropped until the red tip went beneath the earth. The fields below it were dark, the sky was growing pale, and that forgotten plough had sunk back to its own littleness somewhere on the prairie. (245)

What we see here is a work in—or, *of*—progress. As we read, the sun sinks, the observers' vision wanes, and the plough grows and diminishes before our eyes. Nothing is static, except, perhaps, Jim's stationary camera eye which captures all the action. These images and events linger in the mind of the reader almost as powerfully as they do in Jim's memory many years afterward. They make him the man he is and become lasting components of his consciousness.

A number of cinematic techniques Cather employs in *My Ántonia* resemble the motion of a train, with its alternately irregular and constant rates of speed, its pauses at stations and its sudden departures into new phases of its journey. These aspects of movement parallel those of the mind described by James and Bergson, and Cather dramatizes them in her narrative as she portrays her protagonist's consciousness. In her Introduction, italicized and visually distinct from the rest of the novel in the 1918 edition, Cather places Jim on a train to warn readers of the purely subjective nature of his memoir and to suggest how unique his perspective on the characters and events will be. The train is

thus a novelistic technique by which Cather reminds us that Jim, not *Ántonia*, is the main character in her narrative, and her depiction of his train of thought will reveal more about him than about the friend he wishes to immortalize. Cather portrays Jim's subjective interpretation of remembered experiences through visually concrete images that unravel before our eyes in memorable juxtaposition, creating a uniquely moving portrait of the past.

¹ In fact, "out of some 2,500 films produced between 1896 and 1902, several hundred were travel and scenic films, of which most involved a train or some aspect of the railroad" (Kirby 30).

² Jonathan Crary in *Techniques of the Observer* and Charles Musser in *The Emergence of the Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* explain how the cinema developed at the turn of the century from, among other visual media, the magic lantern (Crary 132; Musser 20-25).

³ According to Ernest Hemingway, Cather more than simply admired certain popular films of her day. If we are to believe him, she borrowed whole scenes from D. W. Griffith for *One of Ours*. Commenting on that novel in a 1923 letter to Edmund Wilson, Hemingway derisively asks, "Wasn't that last scene in the lines wonderful? Do you know where it came from? The battle scene in *Birth of a Nation*. I identified episode after episode. Catherized. Poor woman she had to get her war experience somewhere" (qtd. in Acocella 62).

⁴ One is reminded here of the portrayal of the landscape through the train window in the painting by Abraham Solomon called *The Return*, discussed by Julie Wosk in *Breaking Frame: Technology and the Visual Arts in the Nineteenth Century* (p. 66) and noted in the preceding chapter.

⁵ Here, Jim would seem to illustrate a condition Bergson describes as being a frequent occurrence in consciousness. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson explains, "In most cases . . . memories supplant our actual perceptions, of which we then retain only a few hints, thus using them merely as 'signs' that recall to us former images. The convenience and rapidity of perception are bought at this price" (33).

⁶ Geoffrey O'Brien calls the early years of cinema beginning in 1895 "the era of playback" (35).

Afterword

The world of high speed motion that has characterized the twentieth century has intensified many of the sensations and experiences described in this work. The title of John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), named for the lonesome New Jersey train station at which travelers bound for New York City would board ferries to facilitate the last leg of their journey across the Hudson River, immediately focuses our attention on the rapid shifting of perspectives peculiar to his novel and the environment in which it is set. Like Cather's *My Ántonia*, Dos Passos's novel is highly episodic, though even more so, as if to amplify the temporal simultaneity which had once so troubled individuals during Hawthorne's time but which, by the 1920s, had become an accepted part of American life. The surprising juxtaposition of the extremely diverse images and storylines found in his work had also become more palatable by the time Dos Passos wrote. Works such as his fit neatly and safely into the category of "modernism," with their expression of the psychological chaos almost universally experienced following the Great War. There is much work that could be done comparing the emotional and psychological effects experienced while reading post-War works like *Manhattan Transfer* with the sensation of passing through the metropolitan threshold for which it is named. The confusion, frenetic pace, and odd feeling of exhilaration are present during both experiences, as perspectives shift abruptly and a pastiche of images accumulates in both the reader's and passenger's consciousness. Such effects are seen

throughout literature of the twentieth century, as writers have turned increasingly inward in their exploration of individuals' adaptation to modern life and times.

During the 1980s, when air and automobile travel were clearly the transportational modes of choice, Amtrak sought to revive its diminishing ticket sales with a promotional campaign featuring the slogan "There's something about a train that's magic." While cynics may find this a treacly attempt to elicit a kind of enthusiasm long dead in American travelers, the notion has apparently survived in many late twentieth-century storytellers. One such example is Jim Jarmusch, whose 1996 film *Dead Man* begins, significantly, on a locomotive speeding West. It carries the film's protagonist William Blake, played with an intriguing blend of wonder and resignation by Johnny Depp. As in *My Ántonia*, the opening train ride sets a tone that will linger through the rest of the story. During his sojourn from Ohio to the lawless frontier town where he seeks employment, Blake sits silently observing the life inside and outside the train, and in a peculiarly post-modern visual effect, his view of the passing scenery is shown cropped, as many films are today when they are formatted to fit TV screens before coming to video. As frequently occurs in the single-reel silent films discussed in chapter 4, that shifting view of the landscape becomes a sort of film within a film, one that proves soporific for our hero. After Blake turns away from the window and closes his eyes, the screen fades to black as he drifts off to sleep. Each time he opens his eyes, the sequence is repeated, but the

variety of individuals aboard the train changes along with the type of scenery he views out the window. The continual mutation and sudden foreignness of his surroundings slightly disorient the young traveler; the scenery and passengers seem to transform themselves each time as if by magic. The dreamlike quality of this scene pervades the rest of the movie, and we find ourselves, like Blake, constantly blinking our eyes and gazing in disbelief at the improbable characters and adventures he encounters. Surely, we tell ourselves as the scenes shift before us, we must be seeing things. Of course, we are, for the film maker has been manipulating our perspective just as the speed of the train and the angle at which we observe the landscape manipulate the view from our window. In both cases, we allow ourselves—like Strether in *The Ambassadors* and Blake in Jarmusch's film—to be taken for a ride, our imaginations sent dreaming by the sights we see.

With the popularity of road movies persisting throughout the century—from those of Hope and Crosby in the 1940s to *Thelma and Louise* (1991)—it has become apparent that the American imagination continues to be fired by the concept of the body in motion. Our national infatuation with the automobile, for instance, has been the subject of numerous non-fictional as well as fictional works. The movie *Singles* (1992) vividly dramatizes the current preference for the more modern car over the out-moded train when a young executive played by Campbell Scott loses his job after he designs a super commuter train containing all of the comforts of home. The mantra repeated throughout the film

by those who reject his innovation is "People really like their cars." Given the manner in which the torch has been passed from the train to the automobile since the 1950s, a very interesting study would examine the way writers have portrayed our perceptions of the world in motion from a car window, particularly in contrast to those from a train. Both are land-based conveyances, yet many of the physiological and psychological concepts considered in the present study take on different dimensions when applied to the experience of traveling by car. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* would, no doubt, be a good starting point for such a study.

The locomotive portrayed by Hawthorne, James, and Cather is now the subject of nostalgia, this once-feared demon of technology now regarded as a quaint relic lovingly preserved by historical societies, visited and ridden upon by tourists. Most vacationers fly or drive their cars to the sites of these antique vehicles just to ride the brief stretch of track through a small piece of American countryside specially set aside for the passengers' entertainment. These passengers can only imagine the age which saw the birth of these monstrous creations, a time when such machines inspired poets and others who also dreamed dreams while zooming towards a destination somewhere down the line.

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