The Ambassadors Study Guide

The Ambassadors by Henry James

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Henry James, kept out of the Civil War due to a back injury incurred while fighting a stable fire, began writing professionally with the publication of his first short story in 1865. Throughout his career, James, aware of the significance of the Civil War, used his writing to help America arrive at a new sense of self. He did this by reassessing America's relationship with its origins in Europe. James utilized the increasingly efficient transatlantic transportation to capture the true spirit of contemporary Americans in contact with their European peers. In doing so, he showed how the two sides actively engaged each other in an Atlantic community. The best novel of his last period, *The Ambassadors,* neatly resolves this discussion. In this work, Americans enjoy Paris but then return to America where the grit of life is being manufactured.

The Ambassadors remains one of the few novels whose record of origin appears nearly perfect. The novel began from a "germ" that James captured in his notebook on October 31, 1895. There he records how William Dean Howells, standing in the garden of James McNeill Whistler's Parisian home, sermonized to the young Jonathan Sturges that he must live while he was young. Then, in September of 1900, in an article for *Harpers* called "Project of a Novel by Henry James," James laid out the blueprint of the novel. The piece shows how James constructed from Howells' speech, reworked as the speech that Lewis Lambert Strether gives to John Little Bilham, the basis of his novel. The actual writing took seven months and James supervised the novel's publication process. Published serially in 1903 by the *North American Review* (where Howells was a literary consultant), the novel's reception was guided by James' appraisal of the novel as "the best, 'all round,' of my productions."

Author Biography

Henry James married Mary Robertson Walsh and, on April 15, 1843, the novelist Henry James was born in New York. Months later, the family visited Europe for the first time. The trip was brief, and the family returned to spend the next ten years in New York. In 1855, the family set off again. This time they numbered four boys and one girl. They remained abroad for a few years, and the children went to a succession of schools in Switzerland, France, England, and Germany.

After their return, the family settled in Newport, Rhode Island. Beginning in 1864, under the influence of W. D. Howells, James devoted his life to literature and began publishing criticism and short stories in 1865. His reputation began to grow in 1870, with his stories about the "American Girl," which he modeled on his cousin Minnie Temple who died that same year at the age of twenty four. By 1875, he had decided to live abroad.

He planned to live in Paris, but, by 1876, James had settled in London, where he published his first novel, *Roderick Hudson*. James achieved fame and monetary success from *Daisy Miller* in 1878, and *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1881. In 1883, almost two years after his mother's death, the first collected edition of his works appeared in fourteen volumes.

James had success in travel writing, essays, and as a journalist, but his attempt to break into playwriting in the 1890s was humiliating. The audience booed James off the stage after a production of *Guy Domville* in January of 1895. He gave up drama and returned to fiction. During this year, he recorded the "germ" in his notebook that would become *The Ambassadors.*

James continued writing novels and traveling. He made an extensive tour of the United States in 1904 and 1905. He returned to London and found some success with plays until his health began to decline in 1909. He received two honorary degrees from Harvard in 1911 and Oxford in 1912. When the United States did not enter World War I, James registered his protest by becoming a British citizen in 1915. He died on February 28, 1916, in London but not before being awarded the Order of Merit by King George V. His ashes were eventually buried in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and a memorial plaque was placed in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Plot Summary

England

The Ambassadors begins in England. To maintain his social and employment status, Lewis Lambert Strether arrives in Liverpool under orders from his fiancée, Mrs. Newsome. While waiting for his friend, Mr. Waymarsh, who might be of assistance, Strether meets the ever-resourceful Maria Gostrey, who promises undying support. Waymarsh, once he arrives, seems reluctant about helping Strether's project. While on an outing in the Rows in Chester, Waymarsh reveals his "sacred rage" by dashing madly into a jeweler's shop. As he does so, Gostrey and Strether realize they are, in comparison to Waymarsh, unsuccessful in life.

The party journeys to London, where Strether has a fabulous night on the town with Maria. While attending a play, Maria recapitulates Strether's mission as Mrs. Newsome sees it,

> Mr. Chad [Newsome] . . . a young man on whose
> head high hopes are placed at Woollett; a young man
> a wicked woman has got hold of and whom his family
> over there have sent you [Strether] out to rescue.

Waymarsh and Strether head for Paris; Maria follows separately.

Arrival in Paris

Strether, who has told Chad he would drop in sometime, seeks out Chad's apartment on the Malesherbes Boulevard. Strether gains his first impression of Chad through an inspection of this apartment and the housesitter, Mr. John Little Bilham. Far from discovering sordid details and evidence of discredit, Chad's abode impresses Strether. The next morning, Strether brings Waymarsh to breakfast with Bilham and another of Chad's friends, Miss Barrace. Afterwards, Waymarsh urges Strether to stop meddling with Chad's affairs and be done with the whole thing.

Maria arrives in Paris and Strether introduces her to Bilham while they tour the Louvre. She pronounces Bilham "one of us" while speculating about Chad. His wonderful apartment and his absence, for the time being, in Cannes indicate good things, for one does not go to Cannes with a common mistress. Something special is going on. Strether takes a box at the theatre for the group but, with minutes remaining before the show's start, Bilham has not yet arrived. Just before the curtain goes up, Chad himself enters and surprises the party.

Negotiations

During the show, Strether dwells on Chad's obvious improvement. After the performance, Strether and Chad adjourn to a café where Mrs. Newsome's arguments in favor of Chad's return to America to take up advertising□the family's business □are laid out. Chad does not refuse to return but hints that he will be detained. Strether, who has been writing detailed letters to Mrs. Newsome about his progress, now writes telling of his success at finding Chad and delivering the message. Somewhat relieved by having fulfilled his duty, Strether begins to enjoy Paris by becoming a "haunter" of Chad's apartment.

Waymarsh increasingly disapproves of Strether's behavior and has Miss Barrace run interference □to help Strether focus on helping Chad free himself from whatever binds him. Chad asks that he not be forced to give an answer until after Strether has met the mother and daughter pair that keeps him in Europe. Maria and Strether discuss this situation, and Maria supposes that Chad's affair is not virtuous and, further, that Chad must want to marry the daughter.

Gloriani's Party

The celebrated artist, Gloriani, hosts a party where Chad presents Madame de Vionnet to Strether, Mrs. Newsome's supposed enemy. Strether has hardly spoken with her when they are interrupted, and Strether finds himself on a bench in the garden alone. Bilham joins Strether, who breaks out into the speech that provided the basis for the novel. Strether urges Bilham to take advantage of his youth and live. Strether says this out of regret that he did not do the same; he feels he has wasted his life. The advice endears Strether to Bilham.

Chad reappears to introduce Jeanne de Vionnet, an absolutely stunning young woman. Strether believes that Chad must be pursuing her, and he hardly blames him. But, Jeanne could never possibly live in Woollett and that, Strether believes, is the crux of the issue. Chad takes Jeanne to her mother and Strether quietly departs. He now assumes that Madame de Vionnet will want to plead for Chad to remain in Europe on Jeanne's account. He discusses everything with Maria, who was at the party. Maria is uncomfortable with recent developments. She had promised to support Strether through his errand but did not imagine she would be implicated. She was a classmate of Madame de Vionnet, whose history she tells Strether. Fearing that she might be compromised and approached by Madame de Vionnet, Maria leaves for a while to visit a sick friend.

Chad Surrenders

The morning after the party, Chad "surrenders" to Strether on the condition that Strether puts himself at Madame de Vionnet's disposal for a time. Chad begins to make clear that Madame de Vionnet should be acknowledged as the reason for his transformation.

A woman so capable must be made known to Strether and Mrs. Newsome as a wonderful person□not a temptress of a sordid nature. Strether agrees and begins a relationship with Madame de Vionnet. Against his will, he too is enamored with her. For her part, Madame de Vionnet wishes only for Strether to keep Mrs. Newsome patient. She also assures Strether that Chad is more Jeanne's guardian than her lover.

New Ambassadors

Strether, through hints from Miss Barrace and Bilham, realizes that Madame de Vionnet and Chad are having an affair. This changes everything for Strether, who warns Chad not to give up so wonderful a lady. A bit confused, Chad has to agree with Strether's command due to his prior vow of surrender. With the secret out, Strether gets to know Madame de Vionnet better and likes her even more. To help her, Strether writes favorably of her to Mrs. Newsome. He also prevents Chad from visiting America and pleading with Mrs. Newsome directly. When a telegram arrives demanding their return, Strether decides to stall and Chad plays along. Their negative response prompts Mrs. Newsome to send out her daughter.

Sarah and Jim Pocock arrive with his sister, Mamie, to bring Chad to his senses. Waymarsh immediately joins their group, and it is clear that he has been a double agent. Sarah sticks to the business at hand and refuses to see anything but that. Jim opts out of the mess and resolves to enjoy Paris. Mamie sees that Chad has changed for the better and that he is now too refined to be interested in her, a simple woman. Chad does his best to behave as tour guide. Bilham becomes interested in Mamie. Sarah meets Madame de Vionnet but sees nothing impressive about her.

Returning to America

Sarah issues a three-week ultimatum during which time the Pococks travel to other parts of Europe with Waymarsh and Bilham. Strether decides to spend his last days enjoying his vacation and randomly selects a train to take him into the countryside. While happily enjoying the scenery, he bumps into Madame de Vionnet and Chad, who give every indication that theirs is a normal love affair. Strether, still believing in platonic ideals, is saddened by this and surprised that Chad does not offer an explanation. Instead, Chad travels to London for a week to research advertising, which "presented itself thus as the great new force." After seeing Chad, Strether begins preparations for home. He says goodbye to Madame de Vionnet, who knows she has lost, and declines Maria's offer to stay with her. Strether reveals how much has changed in the past five months by telling Maria he cannot possibly marry Mrs. Newsome; he has become a different person who now "sees things" whereas she remains an invalid who sees what she wants to see.

Characters

Miss Barrace

Miss Barrace is a liberated woman who finds amusement in flirting with Waymarsh and who peers at the world through "her long-handled glass." Miss Barrace has the power of "not being" and responds to seriousness with a "crescendo" of "Oh, oh, oh!"

John Little Bilham

Bilham has failed in his original purpose of becoming an artist by studying in Paris. Instead, he has adopted Parisian habits and struggles to stay there, but he has no purpose - he needs saving. Fortunately, Strether appears, and John finds a more appropriate role model than Chad. The relationship between Bilham and Strether builds to the point where Bilham accepts Strether's mission to help Bilham be saved by Mamie. Consequently, Bilham will cease wasting his life and become Mamie's suitor.

Jeanne de Vionnet

Jeanne is "an exquisite case of education," who honors her mother with her beauty and grace. Her mother has raised her to have some American qualities, like "freedom." This perfect representation of French femininity has entrusted herself to the protection of Chad (who eventually finds her a proper husband). Jeanne confuses Strether whenever she gets near to him.

Madame de Vionnet

The presumably horrible woman who keeps Chad from Mrs. Newsome turns out to be the muchadored Madame de Vionnet. In Gloriani's garden, Madame de Vionnet appears "various and multifold." By her genius, she takes all of Strether's "categories by surprise." A few days later, Strether describes her chamber as a series of passageways that he must journey down so as to lay forth the demands of Mrs. Newsome. To his surprise, far from being a monster, Madame de Vionnet shares a fondness for churches with Strether, and they meet at Notre Dame, where they begin a friendship.

Strether comes to admire Madame de Vionnet as a wise woman in possession of artistic and social ideals. He comes to understand that her education of Chad was done out of a great affection but not because of true love. However, Strether eventually learns that though she transformed Chad, she is human. She did it without marriage but not without physical rewards.

Madame de Vionnet knows the part she plays in the imagination of Woollett, and she registers a protest with Mrs. Pocock. As Madame de Vionnet notes, Strether also has

profited at the hands of a woman. However, Madame de Vionnet estimates Miss Gostrey as a "really wonderful woman." Madame de Vionnet realizes that she lost because she failed "to seem to [Strether] - well, sublime!"

Gloriani

Chad arranges for Strether to meet Madame de Vionnet and her daughter at a party held at Gloriani's house. This character also appears in James' first novel, *Roderick Hudson*. For Strether, a brush with Gloriani is the nearest thing to a brush with fame itself. Strether doesn't quite make it with the fashionable crowd, "the deep human expertness in Gloriani's charming smile - oh the terrible life behind it! - was flashed upon him as a test of his stuff." Strether fails the test.

Maria Gostrey

To the American readers of Puritan descent in James' time, Europe embodied sinful luxuries. To the more enlightened, Europe linked America with its Old World heritage. Maria Gostrey, an American expatriate, has it upon herself to serve as the expatriates' guide through their time in Europe. Gostrey stalls those precious few who come to experience European life until they no longer need her. She hurries those Puritans, who arrive to condemn Europe, through their tour and quickly sends them home again.

Gostrey figures out that Strether's quest has little to do with a prodigal son giving himself up. She asks him "*will* you give yourself up?" Receiving an affirmative answer, Gostrey becomes Strether's guide. Throughout the story, she is Strether's confidant and helps him sort out his thoughts on people and the general situation. Her devotion to Strether has two effects. Upon discovery that Strether's adversary is an old school mate, Gostrey becomes unavailable so as not to be put in an uncompromising situation. Consequently, she spends most of the novel in seclusion. Secondly, she rarely provides information. She merely helps Strether understand the information he has gathered.

Foreshadowing a tragic end, Strether says that Gostrey reminds him of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. That unfortunate woman was idealized after being beheaded by the jealous Queen Elizabeth. He thinks of this after dwelling on the velvet ribbon around her neck rather than what was revealed to him by her "cut down" dress. By the end of the novel, Gostrey has become the ideal woman for Strether for she combines "beauty and knowledge" in ways that he has come to appreciate. Gostrey, for her part, had already selected Strether to be one of her well-kept things, and she offers him the reward of being kept after his service to the Newsomes is done. He declines and "there we are!"

Chadwick Newsome

Chad, the prodigal son, has been having a fling in Europe, where Paris has polished him into an admirable gentleman: "Chad was brown and thick and strong, and of old Chad had been rough." He has spent too much time on this fling, however, and seeks to

extricate himself from his affairs to return home. Strether, his mother's suitor, has been sent to expedite this process.

Mrs. Newsome has reserved a prestigious managerial position for Chad, which includes learning the new art of advertisement to grow the family business. James never identifies the article that the Newsome's manufacture, but it is a domestic necessity that has made the family extremely wealthy. The subject of the business provides the one opportunity in the novel for commentary on contemporary society. Chad's future as an advertising guru for the business is accompanied by the idea that advertising is a new science and nearly an art.

Chad is "formed to please," and he shows himself to be an able salesman throughout the novel. He arranges Strether's impressions of Chad himself and the Vionnets. His show, from his first appearance at the theatre to his last nightly stroll with Strether, has been for Strether's benefit. Strether has purchased the entire show although it means giving up his betrothed.

Mrs. Newsome

A wealthy American, Mrs. Newsome only appears in the novel through her letters, referenced by her fiancé Strether.

Jim Pocock

Jim "arrived in a very mild and reasonable frame of mind" because he has no intention of involving himself in his wife's ambassadorial duties. For Strether, he serves as a revelation of Woollett society - which excludes Jim. "He seemed to say that there was a whole side of life on which the perfectly usual was for leading Woollett businessmen to be out of the question." Strether sees in Jim his fate should he marry Mrs. Newsome - exclusion from "the Good Life." Jim could have been a man who always enjoyed the fullness of life, but marriage and career squashed him into being a "small and fat . . . failure of type." Released from the rat race of business life, Jim wants to binge on Europe as if it were an amusement park. And, binging is not Strether's idea of joy.

Mamie Pocock

Jim's sister, Mamie, is "one of the real and the right." An accomplished young lady who appreciates the arts and recognizes the value of a business-minded man, Woollett hopes that Chad will return home and marry her. Accordingly, "she came over with ideas. Those she had got at home." She wants to save Chad by bringing him around to accepting Mrs. Newsome's argument. She is a good catch, but Chad, as Mamie can see for herself, has drastically changed for the better and does not need her. Bilham, however, suits Mamie, and he accompanies her to Switzerland with the Pococks at the end of the novel.

Sarah Pocock

When Strether fails to obey a summons from Mrs. Newsome, Chad's sister, Sarah, and her family are sent to Paris to retrieve Chad; upon Sarah's arrival, Mrs. Newsome's correspondence with Strether ceases. Sarah acts as Mrs. Newsome's surrogate and executioner. Chad and Strether try to determine "what mother thinks" by means of Sarah. As the new ambassador, Sarah stalks Strether's imagination to the point of giving him "fantastic waking dreams."

Sarah has modeled herself after the worst aspects of Mrs. Newsome. Strether describes her as "gracious" and always "affable" but also fat, unattractive, and "unpleasant." Whereas, Mrs. Newsome was never unpleasant but "reserved" and audibly "silent." Mrs. Newsome had also maintained "the girdle of a maid." Mentally, Sarah is no match for her mother. Sarah, like her mother, hates Chad in Paris and, far from seeing a change in the young man, feels that whatever can be done in Paris should be done in Woollett. Sarah's tenacity in achieving her mother's objective allows Strether to forgive her for being blind. They part on good terms, but "her mother's moral pressure" and ideals sustain her. This is a sustenance Strether can no longer tolerate.

Sally

See Sarah Pocock

Lewis Lambert Strether

A man in his mid-fifties from Woollett - a provincial New England town - Strether holds the esteem of his fellow Americans due to his intellectual abilities and his editorship of a Review, "the cover's green - a most lovely shade." His work ought to make Strether proud, but he only sounds tired when he admits the journal belongs to Mrs. Newsome, who provides all the money as "her tribute to the ideal." Strether's attachment to Mrs. Newsome has grown deeper, culminating in their engagement. He subsequently accepts a mission from Mrs. Newsome of bringing her son home "in triumph as a sort of wedding-present." Strether's increasing awareness of himself forms the focus of the novel. In the preface, James calls Strether his hero, but from a psychological viewpoint, he becomes a case study of the imaginative person - too much immersed in literature - whose dull life and mind are forever changed during a trip abroad.

The burdens of life before his trip haunt Strether. Memories of his wife's death make him feel guilty; in his grief, he was incapable of caring for his sickly child - who died alone. In addition, the weight of living up to Mrs. Newsome's demands has left him "dog-tired." She, in fact, is ever present with him in Europe through her letters and the command that Strether not indulge in distraction. Fortunately, Strether meets Maria Gostrey, who helps him without demanding anything in return, unlike Waymarsh, who is more like Mrs. Newsome. Strether naturally prefers the healthy exchange with Gostrey. His journey to self-realization has only begun.

Paris does wonders for Strether. While he was focused on doing his job when he arrived in Europe, he now seeks reasons for delaying a return to Woollett as long as possible. He has, as an old man, learned new tricks and learned how to live. It is this lesson that provided the "germ" for James's novel. Strether regrets the wasted toil of his days and feels he has only begun to live. He shares this realization - a repetition of the carpe diem theme - with Bilham, who he views as the son he has lost:

It's not too late for you, on any side, and you don't
strike me as in danger of missing the train . . . It doesn't
so much matter what you do in particular, so long
as you live your life . . . It's too late. And it's as if
the train had fairly waited at the station for me without
my having had the gumption to know it was there.
Now I hear the faint receding whistle miles and miles
down the line . . . Do what you like so long as you
don't make my mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!

His eyes are open. He can now sees things as they really are; what is valuable in life and what is not. His speech foreshadows the final lesson in his education as a man who celebrates life; he does take a train and makes a grand discovery. His newfound identity makes it impossible to marry Mrs. Newsome because she does not see clearly.

Mr. Waymarsh

Waymarsh is an American lawyer from Milrose, Connecticut. He provides a stark contrast to Strether. Mr. Waymarsh matches Strether in age but has been more successful in life. He stands as a stereotypical American man of money who exhibits a "joyless" disposition - he grumbles about the accommodations, refuses to go to plays, and doesn't appreciate European civilization, from Chester's Rows to Parisian streets. If Strether had not counted Waymarsh as a friend, he would have fit into Gostrey's category of persons needing to leave Europe as soon as possible. Waymarsh is incapable of self-realization: "he'll resist even Miss Gostrey."

Waymarsh comes from an older American mold than Strether which, apparently, did not tolerate challenge or question. Milrose "was most in the real tradition" of New England Puritanism. Strether knows what this means and adequately explains Waymarsh's background to Gostrey. Waymarsh has the "sacred rage" of the old-time righteous Americans who despised the luxurious ways of the Europeans, and who glowered in disgust from across the oceans. The maintenance of the "sacred rage" endears him to Miss Barrace as an antique from childhood, "your friend's a type, the grand old American . . . The Hebrew Prophet, Ezekiel, Jeremiah" who used to visit her father. Miss Barrace loves Waymarsh because he doesn't understand, "so grand is it not to understand." This type of American has been outdated, but, for the moment, he acts like a check on Strether who wishes to be a new American - the open-minded, cultured American. Waymarsh does not appear to Strether as the wonderful curmudgeon Mrs. Barrace sees because he sides with the Pococks against Strether.

Themes

Disillusionment

Strether runs a gauntlet of disillusioning circumstances on his journey to wakefulness and clear sight. Strether realizes that "to be right" he must see things as they are. Right things are seen and understood clearly. "The wrong . . . *was* the obscure." In Woollett, this means seeing things according to Mrs. Newsome's definitions. Strether's actual experiences force him to disavow Mrs. Newsome's theories while maintaining the definitions of right and wrong. That means sacrificing all preconceived notions derived from books, paintings, nostalgia, or the theories of his betrothed. It also means solitude. Strether gains the brand of traitor when he tries to share his knowledge. The disillusionment with the narrow-mindedness of Woollett was bound to happen. In the end, events also destroy Strether's belief in perfection.

This last ideal will vanish during an attempt to enjoy views of France made famous by the Impressionists. From a train station, Strether walks through a series of studio-perfect landscapes. His nature viewing reaches a crescendo when he takes a seat by a river. "A boat advancing around the bend" that contains a man rowing a woman with a "pink parasol" caps the experience. What a perfect sight! In a moment, recognition ruins the experience. Although he had felt assured that he could count on Madame de Vionnet and Chad to maintain their perfection as platonic lovers with good judgment, they are the ones he sees on the river "in a boat of their own," having a regular, romantic affair. That "their country could happen to be exactly his" adds to Strether's feelings of disillusionment.

France

The fear of "going native," or of watching someone else do this, reached nearly neurotic proportions in the heady days of the New Imperialism. With racist undercurrents supported by new theories of eugenics (the study of improving hereditary qualities); Europeans regarded nonwhite ethnicity as horrible, and any white person who adopted nonwhite ways was condemned in polite circles. Indeed, the duty of the European was to "civilize" the non-white - usually through a conversion to Christianity and white household habits. A corollary to this was the old tension between the English and French. These two nations had been warring over colonial possessions for a long time. Part of their sparring included the English, for example, loathing of French manners and customs. In fact, the English viewed a man who adopted French ways as effeminate.

The Americans inherited this loathing for French ways, and as they fabricated an American identity, they included French mannerisms in their "don't" book. In *The Ambassadors*, however, Americans eventually succumbed to French ways and feel better for doing so. Waymarsh and the Pococks keep themselves from becoming French, but Chad, Bilham, and Strether have been converted. Bilham suggests the

process was more thorough than conversion. "They've simply - the cannibals! - eaten me; converted me if you like, but converted me into food. I'm but the bleached bones of a Christian." In this speech, Bilham alludes to the history of colonialism as well as the lingering disagreement between the Protestants and Catholics. Arts, manners, and food are involved with "going French" but so is the appreciation of the Catholic air embodied in the gargoyles and cathedrals of Paris, which Strether speaks of as "the great romancer and the great romance."

Materialism

The manufacturing of millions of things that people consume as part of their daily lives describes the state of the world in which this novel is set. But that "vulgar" world, though alluded to under the guise of the mysterious item at the root of the Newsome's wealth, remains outside the novel. In an "age of mechanical reproduction," to use Walter Benjamin's phrase, the original and rare item is given greater value. That is, a society that spends a great deal of its time buying and selling "vulgar" things idealizes those original, often antique, pieces and their possessors. This theme announces itself from the beginning when Waymarsh goes into a jeweler's shop to vent his "sacred rage." As a representative of the Puritan tradition, luxurious items and their wanton consumption are sinful. Strether does not agree, but he doesn't really know what to think about consumption. Things in Paris show Strether "a different scale of relations."

Expensive and rare things are pointed out in the novel and provide Strether with a means of evaluating people. He begins with Maria whose "velvet band somehow added, in her appearance, to the value of every other item." Maria, Chad, and Miss Barrace collect things - expensive things like artwork and antiques. Chad's "charming place . . . full of beautiful and valuable things" backs up the idea that Chad has become a gentleman of taste. Miss Barrace's informed and intense inspection of objects make them seem "to need to be." Chad and Miss Barrace widen Strether's idea about things, but Maria's Parisian apartment, on the other hand, is an "empire of things" and "as brown as a pirate's cave." Though he worries about breaking something in Maria's "little museum," he realizes that she, the human, is the most important object to appreciate. Madame de Vionnet disrupts Strether's newfound appreciation of people by their precious things. Madame de Vionnet does not collect things; rather, her wealth was "founded more on old accumulations" that simply baffle Strether's mind as he tries to calculate her age. Strether realizes he has entered "the air of supreme respectability - that was a strange blank wall for his adventure to have brought him to break his nose against."

Strether respects the accumulation of things, and he has learned that the exercise of taste and value can create truly wonderful collections. No effort of collecting, as American billionaires from Gould to Rockefeller were doing at the time, could possibly compete with true collections brought together by a family over centuries. Not for the first time, Madame de Vionnet shows she represents, not an "old and abject and hideous" creature but someone with the "right stuff."

Diversity

Using a mechanical metaphor, Strether puts forth a theory about humans made possible by his trip abroad. If he had stayed at home where things were homogeneous, the observation would have been impossible. However, sitting in the audience at the theatre and glancing at the other audience members, Strether notices the wide variety possible in humanity but holds that there are only two molds - male and female. Beyond that, "a series of strong stamps had been applied" to create finite diversity. Miss Barrace helps Strether continue believing in this theory when she identifies Waymarsh as a type. This theory cracks during Strether's experience in Paris where many opinions - compared to Woollett's "Three or four" - make him realize that people, however similar they may appear, possess unique minds. From this he graduates to being a critic, in the best sense of the term. "Everything's comparative," he tells Madame de Vionnet. By this he means that people and places, past and present, can be compared and lessons can be drawn from that comparison without having recourse to a system or theory of moral judgment (like Woollett's "Theory of the Horrible"). Strether's mastery of this idea disables his knee-jerk ability to judge, which he had at the beginning of the novel. Comparison wins him admiration. Seeing the benefit he has derived from this lesson, he attempts to encourage Chad and Bilham in the same direction.

Style

The Psychological Novel

The impression that external stimuli and events make on a character or the thoughts and feelings motivating characters are the subjects of this type of fiction. In the novel's earliest days, the psychology of a character was declarative. Thus, the nervous mind of *Robinson Crusoe* was stated, as was the fear of death in *Tristram Shandy*. However, an increased interest in criminal minds brought greater psychological sophistication to the novel. Detective stories in America and Russia delved into psychological motivation and reflected current scientific theory. As the nineteenth century wore on, George Eliot and Gustave Flaubert produced psychological novels about normal people. In the twentieth century, following James, the psychological novel would reach new heights with James Joyce, William Faulkner, and Virginia Woolf.

James contributed the technique of sustained focus on one mind to this genre. James used a device called *erlebte Rede or le style indirect libre*, a technique that plays with indirect speech. A standard narration, which uses indirect speech to focus on the thoughts of a character, would judge a character's thought: "he thought [blank]." In erlebte Rede, however, the narrator leads us to the judgement but without the overtness just shown. In this novel, the narrator generalizes the sentiments of what Strether thinks by cutting through the literary and metaphorical manners Strether himself would use. The reader, however, has to reach the conclusions by him or herself. For example, the narrator does not clue the reader into the obvious irony of the phrase "in the same boat" at the end of the novel. Some things are better left unsaid, and the result is a focus on the workings of an individual mind as it deals with its environment.

Realism

James and his friend Howells introduced to American fiction the nineteenth-century conceit that art could truly represent life. In this novel, James' style shows that realist techniques do not always lead to straightforward understandings. James focused on the psychological experiences of Strether and recorded them in a natural manner. There is no theoretical jargon or explanation of Strether's mind□just a play-by-play description of Strether's mind processing his experiences according to his linguistic base.

Another area where James shows his realism is in conversation. Highly educated and witty characters perform the dialogues. Thus, facts and figures obvious to the characters are never spelled out. Thoughts by one character are completed by another as each tries to beat the other to a speculation. The ability to follow the exchanges as well as the allusions contained in the descriptions of Strether's mind are rewarded by amusement:

Considering how many pieces had to fit themselves, it all fell, in Strether's brain, into a close, rapid order. He was on the spot what had happened and what probably would yet; and it was all funny enough.

Ficelle

Ficelle comes from the stage and refers to the tricks and devices now called "special effects." James uses this term as a label for characters whose function assists in firming up the structure of the novel. These characters work much in the same way a letter or other evidence in a detective novel would work; they are an opportunity to fill the reader in on elements otherwise unknown, without using an omniscient narrator or employing interior monologue. Thus, Mrs. Newsome is not a ficelle because she never appears. A ficelle must be present because verbal communication with Strether activates him or her. Miss Gostrey is the purest ficelle in the novel although Waymarsh and Bilham act as ficelles from time to time. When Strether invokes the ficelle, the reader gains information while Strether clarifies his thoughts. The ficelle exists, Strether tells Maria, "to see me through . . . the experience."

Point of View

The perfection of the novel depends on the success of using a third-person narrator spliced with one character's point of view: Strether's. James rejects the obvious choice of first person narrative (his reasons are detailed in the novel's preface) to gain the freedom and reliability of third-person narration while creating a concentrated focus on a person's psychology. He also keeps his novel in prose without quoting letters and only alluding to other literary works. James uses many devices to succeed.

First, James alters the device of "central intelligence" so that it becomes the unifying consciousness of the entire work. Prior to this novel, an "intelligence" was simply a viewpoint or a character. In the character of Strether, James develops a viewpoint through which the entire novel is channeled. Information in the novel reveals itself solely through this intelligence. This is admitted within the novel several times. Second, the third-person narration uses "scenes" and "pictures" to aid Strether's viewpoint. A scene involves characters meeting and speaking while pictures relate Strether's thoughts without the drawbacks of soliloquies. For example, Strether's first meeting alone with Madame de Vionnet begins with a scene with Chad, then flows into a picture, and then into a scene with the lady herself. The picture relays Strether's impressions of the inventory of Madame de Vionnet's apartment in the third person. Their conversation scene is interspersed with comments like, "it gave her another pause; which, however, she happily enough shook off." By these devices, the third-person narrative is grafted into the singular viewpoint of the main character to create a tight unity that becomes Strether's "experience."

As Strether changes, so does the information relayed by the narrator. The day after the rural outing, a picture of Strether is presented to convey the chaos of his feelings. Amidst a series of questions, the narrator suggests Strether asks himself, Strether is described as having "a deliberate hand on his blue missive, crumpling it up rather tenderly than harshly." The details of the note from Madame de Vionnet are relayed without quoting it.

Historical Context

Transatlantic Travel

The days of the speedy Clipper ship were numbered once Robert Fulton launched a successful steamboat in 1807. Steamboats soon revolutionized inland transport and, combined with the construction of canals, led to an era of decreasing shipping prices. Ocean-going vessels began to be fitted with engines in 1819, but they did not pose a significant threat to sail power until the Cunard Line began regular service to Europe in the 1840s. By the 1870s, boiler and propeller improvements led to the triple-expansion steam engine, which did not require huge amounts of fuel. Further improvements in the 1890s, with the adoption of the turbine, brought the travel time between the United States and Europe down to a week. Increasing the speed of transatlantic shipment of goods and people fostered an increase in world commerce.

Industrialization

Industrialization reached a stage of inertia in the late nineteenth century. Whereas heavy industry, like coal mining or iron production (which due to the Bessemer process had all but lost out to steel), had long been brought under the control of large conglomerates like U.S. Steel, other areas of life had also been industrialized. Transportation was no longer by foot or horse but by railroad or, if you were rich enough, a horseless carriage. Flour was made in great milling centers like Minneapolis, while meat was processed in Chicago; both were shipped by rail to department and chain stores. But industrial efficiency and expansion had its problems, especially in the downturn of the world economy between 1873 and 1896. Thus, advertising was the key. Catalogs, roadside billboards, and even parades were used to capture the attention of the newly created mass market.

France

France had imperial ambitions, and its manufactures were expanding as well. A mass society was being created, and Paris was the cultural capital of the world. Under the government of the Third Republic, nationwide compulsory schooling put in place in 1885 created a generation of French citizens who studied the same subjects in the same educational setting. In addition, this generation had similar ideas of patriotism due to compulsory military service. Also, as in other industrialized countries, the railroad and the steam-powered rotary printing press enabled an integrated nation state. Into this mixture, two critical events helped polish mass politics and the beginnings of a truly secular society.

First, General Georges Boulanger attempted to overthrow the Third Republic through a sophisticated political campaign that took advantage of the aforementioned developments in French society. By 1886, his name recognition was high and right-

wingers, monarchists, and big business supported him. His platform remained unclear, but he had frightened the entrenched power structure by 1889. The Third Republic was never in real danger of collapse, and he fled the country amidst charges of scandal. He left behind a political machine that looks primitive by the standards of late twentieth century America but was larger than any other mass political effort of the time.

This overtly reactionary machine was ready when the Dreyfus affair broke in 1894. Anti-Semitism remained more virulent in France than anywhere else in Europe until Hitler's rise to power in Germany. Captain Alfred Dreyfus was framed as a spy and sent to Devil's Island in South America after being convicted on a charge of treason. The trial exposed France's anti-Semitism and showcased the ability of the press and grassroots organizations to influence national politics. Dreyfus was eventually cleared of the charge and returned to the army, where he reached the rank of lieutenant colonel.

The New Imperialism

A number of political and technological developments conspired to bring about New Imperialism. Faster ships made the world smaller, better firepower gave the Europeans the advantage (except at Adowa), Quinine made the malarial sting impotent, and a belief in the white man's right to civilize and subdue the earth came together in the second half of the nineteenth century. From 1875 to the eve of WWI, European nations competed with each other in a scramble for Africa. Wealthy Europeans and adventure-seeking men used the world as a playground as they hunted trophies, stole treasure, and gathered scientific data. Their tales, data, and money helped to bolster the idea that Europeans were superior to everyone else.

The Boer War

Britain had the greatest empire, but by the end of the nineteenth century, it had a nervous hold on its possessions. Britain paid special attention to areas of profitability like India (the only colony that ever turned a profit) and areas with abundant natural resources. Afrikaners (descendants of Dutch settlers) were laying claim to the world's largest supply of gold in South Africa, which Britain viewed as its rightful property. This contest grew problematic when Germany, avowedly friendly to the Afrikaners, annexed Namibia in 1884. British capitalists like Cecil Rhodes invested in mines in South Africa and conspired to overthrow the Afrikaners and establish British rule. They failed in their 1895 attempt.

Tensions increased until the Afrikaners declared war on Britain in 1899. Britain sent 350,000 troops to fight 65,000 Afrikaners in a long, drawn out guerrilla war. By 1902, after years of high casualties and international criticism, the British accepted the surrender of the Afrikaners, and South Africa was created. The conditions of this peace, however, set the stage for an eventual independent apartheid state run by the Afrikaners.

Critical Overview

In a "Memorandum," H. M. Alden advised his superiors at Harper and Brothers against accepting *The Ambassadors*. He noted, "the scenario is interesting, but it does not promise a popular novel." Alden was correct; the novel has never been a widely read book. But David Lodge was not exaggerating when he summed up the place of James' novel in the English canon. In his *20th Century Literary Criticism*, Lodge wrote, "more than any other single writer, James may be said to have presided over the transformation of the Victorian novel into the modern novel, and at the same time to have laid the foundations of modern criticism of the novel." Gore Vidal agreed, saying that in James's third period of work, "the magician" broke his "Golden Bowl" and reached the height of his powers.

The incredible awe in which James was held before his death checked original critical reception of the novel. Many of the first reviewers were writers themselves, like Joseph Conrad or Virginia Woolf. Most critics followed the novel's preface and praised the book, while those who wrote negatively betrayed a lack of understanding. A singular exception was H. G. Wells, who engaged in a series of misunderstandings with James. In "Of Art, of Literature, of Henry James," Wells explained that he simply disagrees with James' presumptions about the novel. James, said Wells, "wants a novel to be simply and completely *done*. He wants it to have a unity, he demands homogeneity . . . Why *should* a book have that?" Ezra Pound, shortly thereafter, replied, "I am tired of hearing pettiness talked about Henry James's style." For style was indeed the issue of the negative reviews□the book was found to be difficult. Pound, instead, felt James was a champion of individual liberty.

The critical mood of the 1920s, like the culture at large, wanted nothing to do with prewar culture. In America, H. L. Mencken took a shot at James in an essay within his *A Mencken Chrestomathy*. He felt James needed to smell reality; "James would have been vastly improved as a novelist by a few whiffs from the Chicago stockyards." Americans were not alone in their negative assessment. E. M. Forster took special notice of *The Ambassadors* in his *Aspects of the Novel*. Forster found that the novel was "pattern triumphant" and "beautifully done, but not worth doing."

Renewed appreciation for James came in the 1930s but was very defensive. Mostly, this criticism followed James' own preface and interpretations laid down by early apologists, like Joseph Warren Beach and Percy Lubbock. In The *Craft of Fiction*, Lubbock revealed the degree to which he was a follower of James by explaining James' working theory of the novel. Lubbock set criticism's focus on the idea that "the point of view is primarily Strether's," which would be the mainstay of approaches to *The Ambassadors* for almost fifty years. In that span of time, a few critics dared to investigate social forces underpinning the novel. Granville Hicks, who noted that few people were interested in James but those that were formed a "kind of James cult," explored James' theme of civilizations clashing in "The Great Tradition." Hicks noted James' divided loyalties as the reason for his "peculiar fitness for the portrayal of the

international scene," a skill that he developed between *Roderick Hudson* and *The Ambassadors.*

The scholarly engagement with James didn't really take fire until the centennial of his birth in 1943 and at first differed little Lubbock. In an essay from 1943, R. P. Blackmur's appreciation of James was less defensive. Blackmur detailed the reasons for James' greatness in presenting the idea that "the man fully an artist is the man, short of the saint, most wholly deprived." Another enthusiast, F. O. Matthiessen, returned to Lubbock's theme but goes further. In his *Henry James: The Major Phase*, Matthiessen says James' "principle contribution to the art of the novel," which writers have since taken for granted, is the creation of a center of consciousness as the unifying element in the structure of a novel.

During the 1960s, scholars (like Christof Wegelin, Stephen Spender, and Graham Greene) began to approach James beyond Lubbock's thesis or the clashing of civilizations theme. Scholars began to delve into the complexity of James' symbols and trace elements of ancient myth, reflections of Nietzschean philosophy, and psychological revelation. By far the most expert analysis of this period came from Ian Watt. He concluded his essay, "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors*," saying, "the notorious idiosyncrasies of Jamesian prose are directly related to the imperatives which led him to develop a narrative texture as richly complicated and as highly organized as that of poetry." This, in short, explained the high regard for James.

Beginning in the late 1970s, James became a darling of the literary academy as *The Ambassadors* became ripe ground for cutting edge literary theory. Reader response approaches to the novel filled the journals but did not add anything beyond early Lubbock- style analysis. This gave way, however, to an avalanche of postmodernist approaches to James for the rest of the century. During this most recent period, James' novel has been celebrated as profeminist and as a case study in hermeneutics (the methodology of interpretation). The novel has been deconstructed and looked at as a spiritual autobiography of James. The gems in this wave of Jamesian criticism are actually old school approaches. Adeline Tintner investigated the novel's sources in her essays written from 1986 to 1993. Daniel M. Fogel worked in a similar style but followed a different direction in *Covert Relations*. There he showed how James influences specific works of modernism by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Hubbell has a M.Litt. from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and is currently studying for a Ph.D. in history at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. In the following essay, he investigates "the Theory of the Horrible" as psychological adventure in James' story.

The Ambassadors conjures a story of a man, or men, on a mission who must carry out an errand for a notable personage. Given the time of its publication, the title further suggests an imperial adventure with an American going out to a foreign land to exchange ideas and sympathies. These are not incorrect assumptions, especially in context of what people were hearing and reading about in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Lectures about primitive peoples or exhibits of dinosaurs were delivered as captivating eyewitness accounts. *The Adventurers of Tom Sawyer*, H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, and Rudyard Kipling's colonial tales were just a few of the popular adventure tales. These elements of popular culture were intensely peopling the globe with monsters and strange behaviors from living dinosaurs to cannibals. The newly evolved mass media helped ensure everyone heard these tales and, therefore, when serial murderers were on the loose, like Jack the Ripper in London, hysteria was easily generated. The dangers of such adventures came home in the 1890s to scare people in their bedrooms. Ghost stories never disappeared, but terror tales set at the seats of empire became normal. Sherlock Holmes entered the literary scene and was followed by *Dracula* in 1897.

Adventure and danger, of course, lie at the base of the novel, starting with Daniel Defoe's tales of shipwrecks and pirates. The pattern for the early and more recent tales was transparent: a young man defies the warnings (or he is sent out into the world explicitly to lose his innocence) about the monsters and dangers beyond the village and goes out to see the world. His anxieties often make him ill, but he never actually battles dragons or monsters, only people. In the end, he has gained in wisdom and comes home to tell people about what he has seen. His journey has been spiritually and mentally rewarding. Though the change of scenery was an essential trigger, his adventure was psychological; he overcomes his crippling anxieties. People at home can't believe how normal it all sounds so the storyteller sprinkles his accounts with monsters. *The Ambassadors* fits this pattern.

John Patterson recognized this in 1960. Skipping the title's allusions, Patterson points out that the very language of "low brow" fiction - adventure tales - composes the heart of James' refined language. In *The Language of "Adventure" in Henry James*, Patterson investigates the novel for its rife allusions to adventure. But he also notes how adventure pervades James' writing in general from his letters to such works as *The Beast in the Jungle*. Patterson sites numerous examples, but one will suffice here; Gloriani's party becomes a jungle in Strether's mind and the host appears as "the glossy male tiger, magnificently marked." Taking Patterson further, James' reliance on adventure language makes sense given the psychology under study - Strether's literary mind weaves his experiences into the linguistics of his reading. Thus, Strether's

masculine crisis, which begins with Mrs. Newsome's proposal to him, will be resolved when he grapples, like a young man leaving the village, with the sublime or, as it is labeled in the novel, "the Theory of the Horrible."

A cursory definition of the sublime immediately illuminates its place in the novel, especially when matched with the psychological theory that James agreed with - that of his brother, William James. Reality and literature clash over the sublime for whenever that term is defined a literary example is used - as well as examples from everyday life. In short, the sublime is that moment when a mind finds itself in a place where things are obscured and death could be possible. However, and this is essential to understanding the sublime, death never results for the hero. In the eighteenth century, people like Edmund Burke wrote theories of the sublime where they gave everyday examples. For example, on a stormy night the candle is blown out and a noise is heard. The instinct of self-preservation kicks in as paralysis. When the nature of the danger becomes evident, fight or flight occurs. An evil person tries to maintain paralysis as long as possible to enact a kill or domination of the hero's will. Of course, when the light comes back on the noise source is discovered and nerves settle, eventually. The sensations of the body felt during the episode are described in order to transport the reader to a belief in the novel - escapism. For Burke, the greatest example of the sublime comes from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, when Satan journeys to Eden. Along the way he has to face his daughter, Sin, which is frightening in itself. But Satan experiences sublime terror when he senses something more frightening in the obscurity of the shadows. Death reveals himself as Satan's son by Sin. In this episode, Satan faced uncertainty and fear and gained the knowledge of incest's horror. James, who was well versed in this theory, recreates Satan's encounter with Sin in the moment of Chad's appearance. The assumptions about his activity that had the town of Woollett paralyzed vanish in Strether's first look at Chad.

James' novel, as many critics have noted for the last hundred years, concerns the consciousness of, to use James' wording from the preface to the novel, an "imaginative person." The adventure, therefore, is within the mind of Lewis Lambert Strether. Maria Gostrey makes this evident by noticing that *Louis Lambert* is the title of a novel by Honore de Balzac. That novel concerns the fate of a mystic writing a treatise on spirituality when he falls in love. Much like a character in the twentieth century movie, *The Fisher King*, he falls into a catatonic stupor. When he awakes, he has arrived at a new plain of wisdom and awareness. The parallels with Strether are as follows: he has been sent out from Woollett - whose idea of the world is that it is full of monsters - on a mission. Though he would rather flee, he fights his way through to find not monsters but people. Maria, in fact, summarizes Strether's mission in the melodramatic light of the play she has seen with Strether. That play contains "a bad woman in a yellow frock who made a pleasant weak good-looking young man in perpetual evening dress do the most dreadful things." The ideas that Woollett and Strether have about the world come from similar literature. Strether, therefore, fears he will be made to do dreadful things. Strether's exciting journey becomes the catatonic stupor of his namesake, and, at the end, he is awake. So the novel, in its large movements, mirrors the adventure tale to the point where, Patterson notes, the psychic confrontations take on the metaphors of blood to heighten their importance in accordance with psychological principles.

According to the psychological theory of William James, as laid out in his *The Principles of Psychology*, three sources of anxiety, or fear, prompt the self-preservation instinct in normal people (those not faced with vampires, cannibals, or barbarians). They are "those of *bodily self-seeking, those of social self-seeking*, and those of *spiritual self-seeking*." The first impulse category describes "the material Self in the widest possible sense of the word," or the vulgar worries dogging all Americans in the novel: monetary well-being, job security, and physical comfort. If Strether fails, Maria discovers, he loses "everything." The second can be summarized as the dandy's terror: to be shunned and ridiculed by society. Strether matures beyond this after failing to impress Gloriani. The last impulse comes out of the religious tradition. At its crudest, it is a fear of hell or all things sinful; Waymarsh exemplifies this. At its most enlightened, it is the "impulse towards psychic progress." Strether wants to learn, and he devises a way of staying in Paris just a little longer to continue to learn. Eventually, as Freudians would note about neuroses such as the fear of the unknown paralyzing Woollett, Strether's anxieties disappear upon contact with the source of the anxiety.

As soon as Strether has distanced himself from Woollett, questions begin to mount. It is immediately apparent that the world outside Woollett is wonderful. Once in Britain, he discloses his mission to Maria who, as a good judge of character, finds Strether's blind adherence to the theory of the horrible strange, "are you quite sure she's very bad for him?" "Of course we are," Strether replies; Madame de Vionnet must be an evil person if she has been able to keep Chad in Paris. However, Strether finally meets Madame de Vionnet, "the embodied influence, the definite adversary, who had by a stroke of her own failed him and on a fond theory of whose palpable presence he had, under Mrs. Newsome's inspiration, altogether proceeded." Strether finds her "wonderful." Instead of the "horror" he "must have imagined," he finds in the presence of Madame de Vionnet that "horrors were so little . . . in this robust and reasoning image." Reality for the traveler and scientist proves to be greater than the goblins from childhood tales. Strether can no longer follow his orders, "you've got morally and intellectually to get rid of her." Strether cannot believe in the idea that the world outside Woollett is horrible because his senses tell him otherwise. Thus, he must recreate his idea of the world, which involves recreating his own psychology. The result is that Strether is less anxious about bumps in the night. Mrs. Newsome, who depends on the theory for her hold on Strether, no longer has power over him. By understanding "the Theory of the Horrible," Strether's transformation becomes obvious.

Waymarsh and Sarah attempt to check Strether's investigations. Waymarsh safeguards the boundaries of Strether's thought and, for this reason, Strether is "in terror of him." If Strether steps out of line, Waymarsh can denigrate him to Mrs. Newsome. Waymarsh, as a threat to Strether's social self-seeking, increasingly finds himself outweighed by Maria and Madame de Vionnet. That is why Sarah is sent out; "she keeps up the theory of the horrible." Sarah petrifies Strether but he faces her and nothing happens. Strether accumulates "notes of freedom" with every successful contact with his fears. He continues to write home about his success at freeing himself from fear. Newsome's "disappointment" in him begins in the letters because Strether has failed to repeat the theory of the horrible and sprinkle his observations with monsters. Those letters home

as well as the conversations with Maria are Strether's efforts to understand Newsome's system.

Creating the mind of the normal person as grounds for adventurous investigation was no easy task. James accomplished this in *The Ambassadors* by using the language of "Adventure" as well as "the Theory of the Horrible. The theme of culture clash and the fear of difference were James' favorite themes throughout his career, and when he investigated the underlying psychology of that fear in one particular person, James created a ground breaking case study. Strether has discovered that the goblins with which Woollett had peopled the earth are not real. He wrote his conclusions to Mrs. Newsome, but she would not believe him. Strether comes to understand that people simply have to learn for themselves although, the novelist believes, they can do so vicariously. If the novelist successfully infects the reader with Strether's experience, then James has not wasted his effort to open the eyes of those back home. Short of that, in terms of fiction's evolution, in literature written after *The Ambassadors*, the mind becomes as exciting as an adventure tale.

Source: Jeremy W. Hubbell, Critical Essay on *The Ambassadors, in Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Krook examines how James' use of ambiguity in The Ambassadors leaves the reader with two separate interpretations of the text from which to choose.

There is scarcely a page in Henry James's *The Ambassadors* (1903) that is not ambiguous in the common loose sense of the word, in which 'ambiguous' means simply obscure, puzzling, mystifying, baffling, and the like. This passage or this sentence could mean this, or that, or something else, we say to ourselves as we gaze at it, often blankly, trying to make out what it could reasonably mean. Here is a typical example. It is the last passage in a long colloquy between Strether and Maria Gostrey late in the story, ending the chapter (Book XI, Chapter 2) which is immediately followed by Strether's fateful day in the French countryside (Book XI, Chapter 3). Maria says:

'Mr. Newsome and Madame de Vionnet may, as we
were saying, leave town. How long do you think you
can bear it without them?'Strether's reply to this was first another question. 'Do
you mean in order to get away from me?'Her answer had an abruptness. 'Don't find me
rude
if I say I should think they'd want to!'He looked at her hard again□seemed even for an
instant
to have an intensity of thought under which his
colour changed. But he smiled 'You mean after what
they've done to me?''After what *she* has.'At this, however, with a laugh, he was all right
again.
'Ah but she hasn't done it yet!'

It is James's elliptical, allusive late style that makes the difficulties, of course. The key questions to be answered are: Why should Chad and Madame de Vionnet want to get away from Strether? What is the thought in Strether's mind that makes him change colour? Why, having evidently pushed aside this thought whatever it was, does he smile when he says 'You mean after what they have done to me?' And what have they done to him?□what does he think they have done to him? And what does Maria mean when she corrects him, saying, No, after what *she* (Madame de Vionnet) has done to him? What *has* 'she' done to him? And why is Strether relieved ('at this . . . he was all right') to think that it's what she has done to him, whatever it is, that makes them want to get away from him? Finally, what does Strether mean when he says 'with a laugh' that she hasn't done it yet□whatever it is she is supposed to have done?

The list of questions is longer than the passage that raises them; but this is not surprising□it takes less space to produce an obscurity than to explain why it is obscure. I give my gloss for what it is worth. Maria is telling Strether that Chad and Madame de Vionnet want to get away from him because they are beginning to find his constant surveillance nerve-racking. The thought that passes through Strether's mind, making him change colour, is that they are finding his surveillance nerve-racking because their

'virtuous attachment' is not virtuous, and they are getting tired of having to conceal this from him. Having pushed this disagreeable thought aside, he takes refuge in an alternative explanation of Maria's cryptic remark: they want to get away from him because it oppresses them to think how they are 'exploiting' him in the interests of maintaining their relationship, and in particular what he has lost as a consequence of their 'exploitation' (Mrs Newsome, and all the benefits for him of marrying her). This is what they have 'done' to him; but it is Marie de Vionnet in particular, Maria reminds him, who had 'done' it, because her need of Chad is greater than his of her (a point already sufficiently established). In that case, Strether's last remark ('Ah but she hasn't done it yet!'), the most cryptic of all, may mean that she hasn't yet caused him to lose all, because he is still within the six-week's period of grace allowed him by Sarah Pocock, and may yet decide to join them (with Chad, of course) at Liverpool for the voyage back to America□in which case 'all losses are restored' and it is paradise regained for Strether.

An alternative reading is to give Maria's words a simpler, less portentous meaning. When she says 'Don't find me rude if I say I should think they'd want to [get away from you]', what she means, and what Strether understands her to mean, is that he is simply becoming a bore to them with his perpetual hanging around them, and they just want to be on their own for a bit. This is the thought that makes Strether change colour: he finds it most disagreeable to suppose that the brilliant pair, and especially of course Marie de Vionnet, are beginning to be bored by him. So he pushes the thought aside, and suggests instead (as on the first reading) that they want to get away from him because of their bad conscience about what they have been the cause of his losing, this being what they have 'done' to him, and she, Madame de Vionnet, in particular. The meaning of Strether's last statement, 'Ah but she hasn't done it yet!', would then be the same as on the previous reading.

These are both possible readings of the passage. But one cannot be *sure* that either is correct□ that there may not be another, quite different reading that 'covers' the elusive data at least as well or perhaps better; and it is significant that neither of the readings I have proposed appears to be decisively confirmed by anything□any act or speech□ elsewhere in the book. Perhaps this passage, among others, ought to be treated as a Jamesian 'crux', analogous to a crux in Shakespeare, which will require time and the cumulative labours of many James scholars to discover its best reading.

I cite another passage which, as is stands, is equally obscure, baffling, and 'ambiguous'. It is the dialogue in Book IX, Chapter 1 between Strether and Madame de Vionnet in the scene in which she tells him about the marriage that has been 'arranged' for Jeanne. It too comes at the end of the scene, and starts when Madame de Vionnet pronounces the words 'And□willingly, at least□ he [Chad] would never hurt *me*'. At this, there flashes upon Strether 'a light, a lead' that, together with the expression of her face, tells him 'her whole story' as never before. The light grows, becoming ever more luminous as the passage proceeds to its close, its revelation apparently reinforced by 'the refined disguised suppressed passion of her face'. What *is* this light, this lead?□ you ask yourself. What *is* the momentous revelation Strether has had by it? There is no clue, no hint, in the passage itself, and you gaze at it baffled, wondering whether the answer

might be this, or that, or something else, without much confidence in any of your hypotheses.

But in this instance salvation is just round the corner. In the very next chapter, Strether briefly gives Maria Gostrey the gloss we need. Chad had helped to arrange Jeanne's marriage as a proof to Madame de Vionnet of his unwavering 'attachment' to her following her cold treatment by Sarah Pocock: 'The act is his answer to Mrs Newsome's demonstration', he tells Maria; 'she [Madame de Vionnet] asked for a sign, and he thought of that one'. What Strether had seen in Marie de Vionnet's face was presumably the intense happiness and relief it was to her to have had this 'sign' from Chad, and this had been for him the 'light', the 'lead', for understanding the depth of her feeling for Chad and the 'suppressed passion' behind and beneath it.

This is how Strether interprets Madame de Vionnet's presumed happiness and relief, along with the 'the refined disguised suppressed passion of her face'. But the reader, who knows□as Strether doesn't yet□'the deep deep truth' about her relationship with Chad, may legitimately see more in and behind Chad's demonstration. He may, more cynically, see the marrying off of Jeanne as a means also of getting out of the way an unmarried daughter whose presence in the house would be an impediment to the mutual pair's complete freedom to pursue their relationship. And he may even see Jeanne's departure as, in her mother's eyes, the removal of a possible rival, even though Chad had plainly shown that it was the mother not the daughter he wanted. Nevertheless, if in her last scene with Strether Marie de Vionnet can call herself 'old and abject and hideous', even if only in the self-despising mood of that moment, she might well be happy and relieved□in the depths of her subconscious, of course□to have a beautiful young daughter safely removed by marriage from the possible role of temptress to a lover who happened to be closer in age to the daughter than to the mother.

The ambiguity I have so far talked about is mainly a function of James's late style, which deliberately resorts to the cryptic, the elusive, the mystifying for its own special ends. There is however another kind of ambiguity to be considered, where 'ambiguous' has a more precise meaning than just obscure, puzzling, baffling, and so forth. It is to be found in only a limited number of James's works, the paradigms being *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *The Sacred Fount* (1901). The remaining works are *The Lesson of the Master* (1892), *The Figure in the Carpet* (1896), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). But there are patches or 'pockets' of this kind of ambiguity in (for example) *The Aspern Papers* (1888), *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) and *The Wings of the Dove* (1902); and, as we shall see, in *The Ambassadors*.

If the paradigm works, everything can be read in two and *only* two ways. The text□meaning, every key episode, dialogue, and even utterance□ admits of two alternative and contradictory readings, each self-complete and wholly consistent with all the data. In *The Turn of the Screw*, one of the two possible readings is that of the first-person narrator, the governness. On this reading, the children are being hideously corrupted by the apparitions of the two depraved servants, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, and the governess is the Jamesian saviour figure trying to redeem them from the evil to

which they have succumbed. The alternative and contradictory reading is that the governess is psychically disturbed (from 'sex-repression', or whatever) and has imagined it all; in which case the apparitions are hallucinations of her deranged brain, the children are totally innocent of the depravity she attributes to them, and the governess herself is hideously guilty□of pursuing and harassing the children with her pathological suspicions, leading the girl to a nervous breakdown and the boy to his death. These and only these are the two possible readings of the story; and there is nothing to tilt the balance decisively in favour of one or the other, thus leaving the ambiguity total and unresolved.

In *The Sacred Fount* the ambiguity is of the same kind, though the outcome is not tragic as it is in *The Turn of the Screw*. Either the first-person narrator's observations and explanations are valid, in which case the strange changes he sees in the principals are real and his 'vampire' hypothesis to explain the changes is confirmed. Or the narrator is wholly and pathologically deluded, in which case the supposed changes are imaginary, and the narrator is an unsavoury *voyeur* who deserves his final exposure by the energetic Mrs Brissenden.

The Ambassadors as a whole is by no means ambiguous in this special sense. But it has one great 'pocket' of this kind of ambiguity; and it turns on Chad's transformation. The matter of Chad's transformation is obviously of key importance in Strether's 'process of vision' and his transvaluation of values vis-a-vis Woollett. It is the foundation of his case for betraying his original mission, for pleading with Mrs Newsome to let Chad stay back with the wonderful woman who has wrought the transformation, for pleading with Chad never to abandon the wonderful woman, and for himself suffering the loss of Mrs Newsome and the security, the affection, the esteem he would have had by marrying her. If Chad was *not* transformed, or even less radically transformed than Strether supposed, all Strether had built on it collapsed□'cracked' and 'crumbled', in his own words.

So it is disconcerting to find the question suddenly arising in Strether's mind: Is Chad's transformation real; or is it a figment of his imagination (which we know to be highly developed)? Is he seeing something that is objectively there to be seen, or is he just 'seeing things'? The momentous and potentially shattering question springs up for him on the day of the Pocock's arrival (Book VIII, Chapter 2), on his drive from the station with Jim Pocock; and his intense reflections on it proceed by three stages.

First, having observed that neither Sarah Pocock nor Jim has remarked on the change in Chad that he himself had found so overwhelming from his first encounter with Chad in the theatre box, he firmly dismisses their 'sightlessness' as a function of their philistine lack of imagination or their bad faith or both:

> It all suddenly bounced back to their being either stupid
> or wilful. It was more probably on the whole the
> former; so that would be the drawback of [Sarah's]
> bridling brightness . . . Their observation would fail;
> it would be beyond them; they simply wouldn't understand.

> Of what use would it be then that they had come?—if they weren't to be intelligent up to that point.

Immediately, however, in the same breath, the great doubt about his own 'observation' leaps up in his mind, and grows and grows like a spreading fire from the moment he asks himself whether he himself might not be 'utterly deluded and extravagant':

> Was he, on this question of Chad's improvement, fantastic and away from the truth? Did he live in a false world, a world that had grown simply to suit him, and was his present slight irritation—in the face now of Jim's silence in particular—but the alarm of the vain thing menaced by the touch of the real? Was this contribution of the real possibly the mission of the Pococks—had they come to make the work of observation, as he had practised observation, crack and crumble, and to reduce Chad to the plain terms in which honest minds could deal with him? Had they come in short to be sane, where Strether was destined to feel that he himself had only been silly?

Strether's copiousness in drawing out the implications of his moment of self-doubt stands in sharp contrast to the spareness of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* when, shortly before Miles dies, the terrifying thought crosses her mind that the child may after all be innocent: 'If he was innocent, what then on earth was I?' she cries to herself. And the narrator in *The Sacred Fount*, when he sees his wonderful 'palace of thought' crack and crumble (Strether's terms exactly fit his case) in his showdown with Mrs Brissenden, is likewise more succinct: 'What if she *should* be right?' he murmurs inwardly. But the point is the same; it is the moment of radical self-doubt and self-misgiving, which is a crucial element in the pattern of the Jamesian ambiguity of the kind I am describing.

The third stage of Strether's process of coping with the frightening thought that he may have been deluded about Chad's transformation is also integral to the pattern. It is the justification, or rejustification, of his own perception by mentally reviewing the witnesses who have confirmed its validity:

> He glanced at such a contingency ['that he himself had only been silly'], but it failed to hold him long when once he had reflected that he would have been silly, in this case, with Maria Gostrey and little Bilham, with Madame de Vionnet and little Jeanne, with Lambert Strether, in fine, and above all with Chad Newsome himself. Wouldn't it be found to have made more for reality to be silly with these persons than sane with Sarah and Jim?

So Strether concludes that he is, must be, 'all right' after all if his vision is supported by such a cloud of distinguished witnesses. But the reader experienced in the subtleties of the Jamesian method of ensuring that the ambiguity shall remain totally unresolved will recognise that Strether's supposed witnesses are either not witnesses at all, or are not 'reliable' because not disinterested witnesses. Maria Gostrey is the first to be struck off Strether's list. Maria never knew Chad before his supposed transformation□so how could she know whether he had or hadn't been transformed? The answer is, she doesn't know; she has only taken Strether's word for it that there *has* been a transformation, and that it is as marvellous as he says. Madame de Vionnet and Chad, being the most interested 'parties' in the case, are *ipso facto* ruled out as objective witnesses. Little Bilham, as a close friend of Chad and wholly committed to his 'cause', is likewise ruled out; and it is surely significant that when he appears to be explicitly confirming the change in Chad, he immediately throws in the qualification: 'But I'm not sure that I didn't like him about as well in his other state'. And later again:

'He wasn't so bad before [the transformation] as I
seem to have made out that you think□'(says Little
Bilham).'Oh I don't think anything now!' Strether impatiently
broke in . . . 'I mean that originally, for her [Madame
de Vionnet] to have cared for him□''There must have been stuff in him? Oh yes, there was stuff indeed, and much more of it than ever
showed, I dare say, at home.'

These may be intended as hints to the reader that the change in Chad is not as great or remarkable as Strether sees it to be, and that little Bilham's honesty obliges him delicately to correct Strether's 'exaggerated' view. Or it may even mean that there is no change at all, and Bilham's seeming confirmation of it is just another 'technical lie' in support of Chad, of a piece with his lie about the 'virtuous attachment'.

As to 'little Jeanne': there is no mention anywhere of her having perceived a change in Chad; and Strether can be drawing on her as a witness only because he assumes that, being Madame de Vionnet's daughter, she must necessarily 'see' what *maman* sees; or, alternatively, because he assumes that, if she is secretly in love with Chad, she could only be in love with him if he *had* been transformed. Finally, there is Mamie Pocock: whom Strether does not include in his list of witnesses because at this point he has not yet had his private meeting with her. The case of Mamie is particularly interesting. Strether tells Madame de Vionnet even before he has had his talk with Mamie that 'she sees him [Chad] as different'. Then, at their meeting in Sarah's hotel salon, he feels he has received all the confirmation he wants of Mamie's 'seeing' what Sarah and Jim have failed to see; and afterwards, in his talk with little Bilham, inspires his young friend to develop his great theory, about Mamie's being unable to be in love with Chad because she came out to 'save' him, but seeing him already 'saved' had nothing to do in that direction. However, when we re-read Strether's long talk with Mamie in search of evidence for his conviction that she 'sees', we discover that Mamie has actually said nothing□not a word□about it. Strether has merely inferred from her behaviour that she must have seen the change in Chad; and is so certain about his inference that he treats it as a fact. But it is *not* a fact; and the disposition of a mind like Strether's to mistake

inferences and assumptions for facts *and* convince others of the factuality of the non-facts is exactly one of the psychological phenomena that Henry James cunningly exploits as a device for creating and sustaining his ambiguity.

What we discover, then, is that there is no reliable independent confirmation of Strether's perception of the change in Chad, which is the starting point of his drama of consciousness, and, consequently, that a huge question-mark hangs over the validity of Strether's vision. This does not mean of course that Strether's perception has been proved to be false. On the contrary, his vision of a Chad transformed remains intact as one of the two possible true interpretations of the data. The transformation may be exactly as Strether sees it□as radical and portentous; Waymarsh and the Pococks who don't see it may be exactly as 'sightless' as Strether says they are; the cloud of witnesses he invokes (Chad, Madame de Vionnet, little Bilham) may all be speaking the objective truth in confirming his vision; and about those who don't speak (Jeanne and Mamie) his inference that they see the change in Chad may be totally correct. In short, just as in *The Turn of the Screw* the governess' account of what happened at Bly may be completely valid, so may Strether's of what happened to Chad.

This precisely is the design of the Jamesian ambiguity: to leave the reader faced with two and only two interpretations of the data, which are mutually exclusive (meaning, that if one is true, the other is necessarily false□Chad cannot both be and not be transformed); yet each of which is wholly consistent with all the available evidence□in this instance, the evidence of the witnesses, which may be read both ways, as confirming one interpretation (Strether's) and disconfirming the other (the Pocock's), or confirming the Pocock's and disconfirming Strether's. Nor is there a single piece of evidence that decisively tilts the balance in favour of one interpretation or the other; that there shall be none is another basic rule of the Jamesian ambiguity. Consequently, there are no grounds *on the basis of the evidence*□in other words, no 'rational' grounds□for choosing one interpretation as more valid than the other.

If you do choose□as Strether does, as the governess in The *Turn of the Screw* does□you can choose only on the basis of something other than the evidence. You can choose, in a word, only by an act of faith□'blind' faith□in the validity and integrity of your own vision. And this is the deep truth about human experience and human knowledge that the Jamesian ambiguity is designed to dramatise. When in life a crucial act of choice has to be made between two and only two possible lines of action, figured in the two and only two possible interpretations of the Jamesian fiction, and the facts or data constituting the evidence are intractably ambiguous in supporting with equal force and decisiveness both of the two and only two alternatives, the crucial choice can only be made by an act of faith□which in effect by-passes, ignores, and transcends the evidence, leaving you with your lone unsupported vision of things as the sole basis of your choice. . . .

Source: Dorothea Krook, "*The Ambassadors*: Two Types of Ambiguity," in *Neophilologus*, Vol. LXXIV, No. 1, January 1990, pp. 194-97.

Topics for Further Study

Paying particular attention to the women in the two novels, compare Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to *The Ambassadors.*

What psychological theory did the profession of advertising adopt by 1903? How does this relate to the novel?

Argue for an interpretation of the novel that inverts the normal, positive assessment of Strether. That is, he has been duped by Chad, whose theatrics make him a natural advertising guru, into purchasing a theory of life that ends his engagement to Mrs. Newsome.

History has changed dramatically in the last generation. National stories have been deemphasized in favor of themes, such as the Atlantic Community. Reading such scholars as Paul Gilroy, Ned Landsman, and Alfred Crosby, define this term and apply it to the work of James.

The novel is rife with allusions to paintings. The title itself repeats the title of a painting by Hans Holbein. Research a few such direct references, and relate them to the novel, or research the works of the Impressionists, and compare them to James' "pictures" of the cityscape of Paris or the French countryside.

Compare and Contrast

1903: Radio is being developed for transmission of news and music.

Today: The internet is being developed for the transmission of all media formats, including real time audio and visual interpersonal communications.

1903: The record for transatlantic crossing is set by the German ship *Deutschland* at just under six days. Nellie Bly circumnavigates the globe (from New York to New York) in seventy-two days.

Today: A Concorde jet flies from Paris to New York in three-and-a-half hours. Richard Rutan and Jeanna Yeager circled the world without refueling between December 14 and 23, 1986. A 747 flew over both planetary poles a few years before in fifty-four hours.

1903: Mass advertising and monopolies are new challenges.

Today: Advertising is ubiquitous and monopolies are illegal due to a belief in commercial competition and consumer benefits.

1903: The French abandoned construction of a Panama Canal because they could not keep down mortality rates among the workers. Unknown to them, the pretty flower pots outside their cottages were ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Discovery of the role of the mosquito in disease transmission and new medicines, combined with the United States-supported secession of Panama from Columbia, allowed American firms to arrive and finish the job.

Today: The Panama Canal is now owned and operated by Panama. The canal requires a great deal of repair after a century of use, but it is now too small for many of the supertankers and aircraft carriers that compose the U.S. shipping fleets.

1903: The ability to reduce mortality advances the prosperity of developing nations who have begun to erase childhood diseases like cholera, typhoid fever, small box, and rickets. Still the infant mortality rate is high.

Today: Mortality rates from disease continue to drop in the developed world to about 10 per 1,000. The situation will only improve as the completion of the human genome project makes new drugs possible. Meanwhile, AIDS has ravaged the African continent and the United Nations projects 27 million dead. Economic digression has begun, and some areas may be set back fifty to one hundred years in their development.

What Do I Read Next?

One of James' most popular novels was the story of Isabel Archer, *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Isabel, James' model of the "American Girl," travels to Europe where she declines marriage proposals from two honest men. Instead, she falls for Gilbert Osmond and, in doing so, she might just suffer enough to see the ghost of Gardencourt.

Another of James' novels that explores the theme of naïve Americans colliding with sophisticated Europeans is *The Wings of a Dove* (1902). At the beginning of the novel, Kate Croy, a Londoner, and her fiancée, Merton Densher, are ready to marry though they differ in their approaches to the institution. Kate's fear of becoming her mother leads her to convince Merton to marry a terminally ill and very wealthy American, Milly Theale, so they will be rich. Theale discovers the plot and dies leaving her riches to Densher. Revenge comes sweetly, however, as guilt prevents the smart Europeans from achieving happiness.

Leon Edel's five-volume biography, *Henry James: A Life*, is an incredible monument to the giant of letters. Late twentieth-century readers who didn't have the patience to read James' novels chose to read Edel's biography once it was abridged in 1985 into one volume.

The clash-of-civilizations theme was explored through a story about a white family fleeing from revolutionaries in South Africa. The family finds sanctuary in the primitive village of one of their servants where they steadily succumb to the villager's way of life. Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) reflects the increasing tensions for whites and blacks living under Apartheid.

Saul Bellow used very different techniques from James when he approached the problems of worldly success and the theme of *carpe diem*, seizing the day. His novel *Seize the Day* (1956) tells the sad tale of a man who loses his job, wife, and hope by looking at one day in the life of Tommy Wilhelm.

Karl Baedeker's *Paris*, the giant of late nineteenth century guidebooks, precisely locates the places, cafés, and homes featured in *The Ambassadors*. The 15th edition of 1900 indicates some developments in Paris that Strether ignored but the Pococks probably did not, like the subway and an international Exposition.

Further Study

Benjamin, Walter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken Books, 1968, pp. 217-51.

Benjamin investigates the cultural ramifications of the ability to reproduce rare works of art thousands of times. Such multiplication gains a work of art more viewers but also questions the value of the original. Benjamin wonders about the meaning of this development.

Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Oxford University Press, 1990.

Burke crystallizes seventy-five years of writing on the sublime with this treatise. He sums up the current ideas on why stimuli, especially literary and rhetorical, affect humans.

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz, *The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*, Basic Books, 1983.

Cowan was awarded the Dexter Prize from the Society of the History of Technology for this groundbreaking look at the impact of technology on domesticity. She argues that while the masculine gender's responsibilities were industrialized, the female's household duties were expanded, until by the 1930s the idea of enslaved housewife was thought to be natural. Along the way she discovers the reasons why certain innovations that would have freed up the housewife were rejected by society.

Hays, Samuel P., *The Response to Industrialism 1885-1914*, edited by Daniel J. Boorstin, Chicago History of American Civilization series, University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Hayes examines the positive and negative responses of people to industrialism in America. The focus of the book is the experience of the male worker and the effects of industrialization on skilled labor. He summarizes the robber barons amassment of wealth as well as the formation of the labor movement.

Sussman, Henry, *Psyche and Text: The Sublime and the Grandiose in Literature, Psychopathology, and Culture,* State University of New York Press, 1993.

Sussman believes that literature is a place where a society works through its ideas about self, others, and relationships. In *Psyche and Text*, Sussman investigates literary characters who reflect societal tensions and explores their significance by relating psychology to literature.

Bibliography

Alden, H. M., "Memorandum on 'Project of a Novel by Henry James,'" in *The Notebooks of Henry James*, edited by F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 372.

Blackmur, R. P., "In the Country of the Blue," in *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction: 1920-1951*, edited by John W. Aldridge, Ronald Press Company, 1952, pp. 202-18.

Fogel, Daniel M., *Covert Relations: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Henry James*, University Press of Virginia, 1990.

Forster, E. M., *Aspects of the Novel*, Harvest Books, 1954, pp. 153, 164.

Hicks, Granville, *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War*, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1935, pp. 112, 121.

James, William, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I, Harvard University Press, 1981, pp. 293-95.

Lodge, David, *20th Century Literary Criticism*, Longman, 1981.

Lubbock, Percy, *The Craft of Fiction*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955, pp. 156-71.

Matthiessen, F. O., *Henry James: The Major Phase*, Oxford University Press, 1944, p. 22.

Mencken, H. L., "Henry James," in *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1953, pp. 500-01.

Patterson, John, "The Language of 'Adventure' in Henry James," in *American Literature*, Vol. XXXII, November 1960, pp. 291-301.

Pound, Ezra, "Henry James," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, edited by T. S. Eliot, New Directions, 1954, pp. 295-338.

Vidal, Gore, "Return to *The Golden Bowl*," in *New York Review of Books*, Vol. XXX, Nos. 21-22, January 19, 1984, pp. 8-12.

Watt, Ian, "The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors*: An Explication," in *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. X, July 1960, p. 274.

Wells, H. G., "Of Art, of Literature, of Henry James," *in Henry James and H. G. Wells: A Record of Their Friendship, and Their Quarrel*, edited by Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray, University of Illinois Press, 1958, pp. 234-60.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Novels for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535