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# Non-Reified Space: Henry James's Critique Of Capitalism Through Abstractness And Ambiguity

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NON-REIFIED SPACE: HENRY JAMES'S CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM THROUGH  
ABSTRACTNESS AND AMBIGUITY

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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2015

This dissertation, submitted by Elizabeth Aileen Barnum in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Elizabeth A. Barnum  
April 30, 2015

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To my sons, Paul and Brian, whose support and help for five long years  
made this degree possible.

## ABSTRACT

Despite Henry James's reputation as a novelist of upper class manners, many critics have argued that his work also contains well-grounded criticism of capitalism and consumer culture. An even larger number of writers have analyzed James's idiosyncratic style, characterized by ambiguity and abstractness. Where these two analytic approaches overlap, the area examined in this dissertation, James makes a deeper critique of capitalism's redefinition of human purpose and its reification of the human mind and consciousness. James suggests, through his ambiguous and abstract language, that open-ended language which rejects concrete and conceptual meaning can gesture toward a space in which people can reclaim their full humanity and reject the reification of life – a space that is non-reified. Moreover, this non-reified space, while it can help an individual redefine her subjectivity, is brought to fruition when people share deeply intersubjective connections. By applying to four James novels the Marxist elaboration of commodification and reification by Georg Lukács, the detailed analysis of Jamesian grammar and syntax by Seymour Chatman, and the phenomenological discussions of language and intersubjectivity by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as well as the views of Gertrude Stein on the importance of allowing linguistic space that is not already filled with meaning, this dissertation finds James's gesture toward a space in which people can be fully human, experience each other as fully human, and rediscover language as a powerful force for mutual creation of the next moment and, from there, the world.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Henry James is often thought of as a novelist of manners, focusing his stories on the relationships among well-to-do people and the intricacies of their outer and especially their inner lives. James is also frequently called a master of the English language, manipulating grammar and sentence structure with consummate skill to convey subtle shades of meaning. These two predominant aspects of James's writing do not appear on the surface as likely places to find political messages or economic commentary. Yet I will argue in this dissertation that it is precisely in the complexity and ambiguity of his idiosyncratic language uses, especially when he is depicting intersubjectivity between characters, that James embeds a surprisingly powerful critique of consumer capitalism and the commodification of people, relationships and human qualities that capitalism engenders. Critiques of and commentaries on consumer culture have been found in James's writing by many critics – in his themes, in his plot-lines, in his characters' personalities or relationships. I argue here that the master of the English language uses his sharpest tool to present a more subtle, and for that reason more profound, critique of both capitalism's surface activity and its influence on people, calling into question the quantification of life and values that many critics, especially those with a Marxist perspective, see as capitalism's inevitable effect. For James, this effect was most evident in the restrictions that capitalism imposes on what it means to be a human being. In commenting on this impact, James underlines the power of language to shape our

understanding of the world and ourselves and invites us to re-engage that power in our own lives.

Though James was no Marxist, my reading of his linguistic effort to reveal and oppose capitalism's presentation of a limited human reality accords with the contention of Raymond Williams that language is a primary human activity as important as labor in building the world and social relationships. Williams's definition of language as a primary force through which human beings create reality, rather than a tool for reflecting a reality that is already there, as orthodox Marxism typically defines it, acknowledges a truth that I argue James perceived in a somewhat different way: that language can subvert the imposed limitations of capitalist roles and values, and create a space outside of those limitations where individuals can think, act, and relate to others. As a Marxist, Williams sees language as a material activity, a socially developed force that is essential to the building of material social reality. People make meaning together through language in order to cooperate and communicate about their productive activity. James's concern is less the social creation of material reality through language than ways in which language can be constitutive of individual subjectivity and social intersubjectivity. For Williams, people create their material reality socially through language; for James, people can use language to create and extend their non-material social reality. In doing this, James's characters begin to show how people living in capitalism's reified reality can reclaim language as a primary constitutive force and thus take charge again of making the world together.

My reading of the linguistic opposition to capitalism and consumer culture in James is woven from three threads of theory: the concepts of commodification and

reification as theorized by Karl Marx and elaborated by Georg Lukács; Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theorizing of intersubjectivity in communication; and grammatical and syntactic analysis, primarily Seymour Chatman's extensive examination of abstractness and ambiguity in James's style. The clear presence in much of James's fiction of critiques of commodification and reification, traced through the application of Marxist theory, supports my claim that James also uses language to call attention to the impacts of capitalist values and activities on human beings. Merleau-Ponty's depiction of the role of language, both spoken and unspoken, in communication echoes the mental processes and social interactions of James's characters, affirming the potential for deep intersubjectivity in a context that is free of reification. Analyzing Jamesian style for its ability to achieve certain specific effects, as Chatman's exploration does, clarifies that James's most notable grammatical and syntactic idiosyncrasies have a purpose far beyond aesthetics or mere showing off. Rather, intertwined with his themes of capitalist commentary and intersubjectivity, the abstractness and ambiguity of his style support, elucidate, and push further his economic critique, suggesting a larger vision of what a human being can be than that imposed by capitalist ideology, as well as pointing to the primary power of language in the creation of reality.

Social and economic commentaries, ambiguity and complexity of language, and a deep concern with relationships have all been found in James's fiction by countless literary critics and, indeed, they are hard to miss. Applied separately, the three lenses I am using allow interpretations both obvious and nuanced about James's world and his way of understanding it. Applied together, however, these three seemingly unrelated critical approaches to literature can take interpretation to a deeper level than any of them

individually, and can bring into focus a way of seeing capitalism's impact on human self-understanding that sheds light on the challenges of being fully human not only in James's *fin de siècle* world but also in our extreme consumer capitalist world of the twenty-first century. Read in this way, James's writing has never been more relevant than it is today. To explain this claim and to demonstrate how my proposed analysis brings a new focus to critical work done by others in the three areas I am bringing together, it will be helpful to look at how literary critics have applied these lenses to James's work.

The abstractness and ambiguity of Jamesian style have been analyzed in a wide variety of ways. Much commentary on James's language use has focused on the aesthetics of his style—the mastery of complex grammatical and syntactic structure that is in itself admirable, in addition to the beauty, balance, and nuance of meaning that he achieves through that mastery, especially in his late style. Judith Woolf is representative of this typical commentary on Jamesian style, pointing to the symmetry of language as evidence of his skill (79, 81). Others, however, have called the complexities of James's prose needlessly confusing and even seen them as indicative of a failure of skill with words. For these critics, such as later criticism of James by R. P. Blackmur, the convolutions of grammar and sentence structure demonstrate his disconnection from the speech patterns of ordinary people and thus his distance from their interests and concerns (123). F. R. Leavis, a highly influential critic whose work was widely taught in the mid-twentieth century, even suggests that James became obsessed with “doing” his style, and may have been losing touch with reality as a whole in his later years (170, 168). These divergent analyses of James's style reflect the richness of interpretive possibility that his writing offers as well as the shift over time from viewing an author's style from a

predominantly aesthetic standpoint to understanding its integrative role in his work as an author of fiction, including its relevance to the world in which the author produced the text.

Another body of scholarship exploring style has focused on the narrative work done by James's language, noting the contribution of grammar and syntax to shading in nuances of character, executing time jumps and foreshadowing, and elaborating his themes. R. W. Short argues that James's "violations" of grammar and syntax reflect the confusion of his characters in the absence of familiar guideposts in their situations, requiring the characters as well as the reader to follow the grammatical clues and interpret meaning in the "new epistemology" they must create (76). Ian Watt's article-length close reading of the first paragraph of *The Ambassadors* is a stellar exegesis of Jamesian style that demonstrates the narrative work done by each carefully chosen word. Watt argues convincingly that through his carefully constructed sentences, James forces the reader to pay attention to the mental and emotional state of the main character, Strether (257). Starting from some observations of both Short and Watt, Seymour Chatman explores in great detail the specific grammatical and syntactic methods by which James achieves ambiguity and abstractness in his prose, giving particular focus to the highlighting of characters' mental processes. Chatman's catalog of these techniques contributes significantly to understanding of the narrative purposes of Jamesian style, as do the observations of Short and Watt. None of them, however, go beyond the narrative itself in their analyses, finding internal purposes but making no connection to the world in which James lived and about which he wrote.

Finding in James an author who was aware of and commented on the world, critics with a more Marxist bent have looked less at language uses and more at plots, themes, and characters. These critics point to evidence in James's fiction of either critiques of capitalism or demonstrations of complicity with its ideology, or sometimes both. James's career-long focus on collection and possession, for example, which he explores in *The Spoils of Poynton* as well as the 1881 work *The Portrait of a Lady*, his last novel in 1904, *The Golden Bowl*, and other novels and stories, has been analyzed frequently as evidence that he was both critical of and complicit with capitalist values (Armstrong, Sarris, Savoy). Despite the biting criticism of advertising in *The Ambassadors*, June Hee Chung argues that in fact James liked the more visual approach that advertising in his era had begun to take, and sought to achieve the same effect using words. The dismay about the increasingly commercial ethos of New York, Boston, and other American cities that James expressed in his travel essays published in *The American Scene*, which he wrote upon his return to the United States after 20 years of living as an expatriate, unmistakably demonstrates James's discomfort with capitalism, but also reveals a distinctly upper-class context and tone of that discomfort, argues Jean-Christophe Agnew (77, 79). On the other side of this issue, noted James scholar John Carlos Rowe, using Marxist analysis, has found James to be complicit with capitalism in some ways and at the same time argues that his politics, especially as they are visible in the plot and characters of *The Princess Casamassima*, were actually quite radical. Julian Markels even reads in *Princess* an indication that James secretly longed for a socialist revolution (70).

A few critics have looked at James's style and language use through a Marxist lens. The depiction of characters through economic imagery, the most memorable of which may be the detailed description of Charlotte Stant as a bag of money in *The Golden Bowl*, has been seen by Fredric Jameson and other Marxist critics as evidence of James's complicity with capitalist ideologies. Peggy McCormack looks more subtly at economic language, and finds that James's easy use of these kinds of words and concepts indicates he was comfortable with the commodification of people and the quantification of value. In his frequently-cited article, Agnew argues that the dialogue in James's novels, in which all the characters speak in high Jamesian style, exemplifies the commodification of reified and detachable qualities of language that leisure-class people "produce." McCormack uses this point to argue further that James's novels present social relationships as a marketplace in which language is the currency, and that characters who are able to learn the economic language and thus dominate or at least hold their own in discourse can avoid the worst outcomes, while those who cannot use that currency usually do not fare well. She argues that James both criticizes this situation and acquiesces in it. These critics provide plenty of evidence for the fruitfulness of making Marxist readings of James's narratives and of the economic meaning and context of his words and images. Marxist analysts have not, however, given attention to the grammatical and syntactic relationships of the words and whether they carry, on a level not dependent on meaning, a critique of capitalism.

In a similar way, analyses of language have played a partial role in the work of most critics who have read James through the lens of phenomenology, touching on James's language uses as they relate to how the characters enact phenomenological

principles. Merle Williams, for example, argues in her essay on *What Maisie Knew* that the ambiguities Maisie notices in her limited understanding of her parents' language and behavior stimulate her deep intersubjective efforts to learn about their motivations and determine how she might contribute to the best outcome for everyone in each situation. Paul Armstrong also, without exploring James's ambiguous language as a factor, points out the intersubjective uncertainty with which Maisie has to work as she attempts to make sense of her world. Unlike these two, whose focus mostly remains on individual characters' interactions with the world, George Butte looks at characters' interactions with each other, highlighting the ambiguity and abstractness inherent in Merleau-Ponty's theorizing of communication as reflective of the way James narrates intersubjective connections between his characters. Butte relates what he calls "deep intersubjectivity" in Jamesian relationships to the linguistic focus on mental activities and states as characters seek to connect with each other, a focus James achieves through grammatical and syntactic means. Nevertheless, neither Butte nor any other critic has read intersubjectivity in James's writing in an economic context, as a search for non-reified space for subjective understanding and relationships.

Applying a Marxist analysis on the level of language and in the context of intersubjectivity – what my argument does – reveals something none of these by itself or in existing combinations have showed up to now: a potent critique of the impact of consumer capitalism on people and their relationships, and a suggestion of a way to evade that impact. This critique is not found in the words themselves, nor in the concepts they express, nor in the specific situations or relationships of the narrative. It is missed when style is viewed as simply aesthetic or idiosyncratic, or seen as having only a

narrative function. Neither is this subtle and nuanced critique discernible from the phenomenological construction of intersubjectivity and the ambiguities inherent in such endeavors. It is this gap in James scholarship, a gap as small as the spaces between words and as large as the space between reified reality and human reality – the material process and relationships that make up human life – that I intend to fill with my analysis in this dissertation.

The concept that capitalism imposes a false “reified reality” upon people and their relationships comes from Georg Lukács, whose extension of the Marxian concepts of commodification and reification is central to my reading of James. Marx argues in *Capital* that in a capitalist system, everyday life no longer rests on the material relations between people, but rather on the relations between “fetishized” commodities, which come to embody those social relations. When people relate to each other directly to fulfill their social and economic needs, commodities are simply things that serve a purpose. When this direct relationship is replaced by an indirect connection in which a worker makes commodities that are sold to strangers, the commodity functions to mediate this indirect relationship. Complicating the relationship further, the labor that went into making the commodity also becomes commodified, according to Marx. Human labor, “the expenditure of human brain, nerves, muscles, etc.” (320), he says, ceases to be an inherent part of the worker’s humanness and instead becomes detachable – commodified. This not only diminishes and fragments the person, but creates a system in which all human qualities and skills can be viewed as detachable commodities.

In this kind of system, the commodity takes on a power of its own, metabolizing the whole society and everything in it, including people, argues Lukács in his essay

“Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat.” Commodification begins with manufactured products taking on the role of mediating human relationships, and metabolically extends to encompass aspects of character such as kindness and moral sense, cultivated qualities of appearance such as beauty and poise, and characteristics related to class, including taste, style and even language itself. Eventually, as the capitalist system develops, says Lukács, this effect of the commodity mediating the relationship between worker and owner changes all relationships within the system to commodity relationships, resulting in all human qualities and traits and even people themselves becoming commodified. Commodification, as I am using the term, refers to this effect.

This tendency of capitalism to make commodities out of not just human labor but all human qualities results in the reification of those personal qualities, of social relationships, and ultimately of everything both tangible and intangible, according to Lukács. When human attributes and relationships are reified, he argues, people’s minds and consciousnesses must inevitably become reified also, seeing self and others only within the context of commodification. Equally important, since the system is based on commodity relations rather than actual social relations, the very reality that capitalism presents, the quantifying and commodifying economic context for all self-understanding and relationship, is a reified reality. Commodification, then, is the way people relate to each other when they live unquestioningly in a system that has become metabolically commodified: people treat each other as commodities and their relations are commodity relations. Reification, or “thingification,” inevitably happens in such a system, where there is no other context visible in which to understand one’s own humanness – one’s

subjectivity – or one’s relationships. People reify their own and each other’s qualities and experience relationships as opportunities to get from others what they need. They live in the reified reality of a system that shapes their subjectivity and their relationships in these terms.

Although James lived and wrote a generation earlier than Lukács, I see James as having an understanding of the reality he saw around him in the 1890s that accords markedly with the way Lukács describes “modern capitalism” in the 1920s. Without using Marxist terminology, James reacted against two ways in which he saw what Lukács would call commodification redefining and reifying human life and purpose. First, capitalism was replacing human relationships, which for James are a centrally defining feature of what it means to be a person, with relationships to commodity products and their detachable reified values. Individual and social identity were being replaced by consumer identity, resulting in people seeing the purpose of their lives as acquiring things both tangible and intangible. Second, even more important and insidious, the commodification of human beings was making relationships shallow and instrumental, shrinking the vastness of potential for human interaction into a context of economic exchange. Rather than understanding their interactions with others as potential moments for seeing deeply into another’s unspoken intention and joining at a creative level of consciousness, collaboratively making the next moment of their experience, people were stuck in surface interactions based on reification and selfish motives. For James, such reified relationships could not only never satisfy the human longing for connection nor the potential to be more than consumers; it also could never allow people to experience

the open-ended flow of consciousness and the non-reified reality that human beings create together when their relations are direct.

Because Lukács's concern in theorizing the commodification of everything in capitalism is to place his current moment in a historical context rather than looking in detail at the moment itself, he does not offer any exploration of what commodification looks like in individuals or in social relations between people. His argument, however, can provide insights into the personal dimensions of commodification, particularly for bourgeois people. Although writing a generation before Lukács and in an entirely different genre, James the novelist, with his keen interest in the personal dimensions of social and economic conditions, takes Lukács's ideas to the individual level in his characters and their relationships, exploring the ways people think about themselves and relate with others when they live uncritically within a commodifying and reifying system. Read this way, James's bourgeois characters and situations depict the playing out of reified consciousness and also suggest what might happen outside of reification.

In exploring the individual and relationship impact of commodification and reification on bourgeois people, James sees the impact on them less on the level of material well-being – the reification of labor, the deadening quality of manufacturing work, the disempowerment of dependence on selling oneself for a job – and more in the non-material aspects of life – the commodification of themselves and others, the narrowing of purpose to fulfilling an economic role, the loss of connection on a deep level with other people. Wendy Graham's analysis of the ways James portrays the effects of commodification and reification on people and relationships in *The Spoils of Poynton* supports my argument that James was interested in examining through language the

personal and interpersonal impacts of commodification. Drawing parallels between James's critiques of the reification of consciousness and relationships and the descriptions of commodification that Marx and Lukács describe as inevitable in a capitalist system, she argues that James explores these impacts on bourgeois people through the cultural aspects of human social life, such as how they think about themselves and their relationships and how they treat each other. Graham's argument that James focuses on the cultural impacts of capitalism affirms Raymond Williams's argument that language is as primary as labor in how social life is created, and supports my argument that James presents his critique of consumer capitalism both through depicting the impacts of reification on his characters and also through his uses of language that suggest its power in creating and maintaining and also in subverting these impacts.

The social reality that James wishes to present in contrast to the commodified consumer reality of capitalism does not, it is probably obvious, in every way resemble the non-reified reality that, for Lukács, underlies it. Lukács uses the words "concrete" and "material" to describe the reality that exists when social relations instead of commodity relations are primary, implying that there is an objective "reality" that can be explained and described, but not explaining where it is located or how it is to be understood. The ideas of Williams, however, offer an way of understanding non-reified reality that provides another key element in my reading of James. While James's characters are usually less concerned with material reality in a concrete sense, the materiality of their focus on consciousness is supported by Williams's suggestion that "material" life can best be defined as a process, characterized by change and development (*Marxism and*

*Literature* 19). This process is material because it involves human activity that shapes the world as people work socially to ensure mutual survival and build a human social order together. Williams thus provides a Marxist understanding of the term “material” that removes relations between things from the basis of the world and human experience, and restores relations between human beings to that basis. This way of understanding “material reality” is neither positivist nor objectivist, and it implies a reality characterized by constant movement and change.

Besides establishing that material relations means human social relations, Williams’s argument that language actually is constitutive of material reality also supports my argument that James sees a primary power in language. Williams’s assertion of the primacy of language in the social shaping of the world supports my contention that James also viewed language as having a role in creating reality, and that he objected to capitalism’s use of it to depict and reinforce a reified reality of commodity relations and commodified relationships. James resists this false reality through his own use of language, which I argue attempts both to point to an evanescent, moving reality and to depict the social basis of that reality. In my reading, James sees reification as imposing unacceptable limitations on human beings, and suggests that language which insists on uncertainty – on ambiguity and open-endedness – can subvert efforts of the language of capitalism to limit the meanings of words and ideas as well as of human beings and relationships.

James’s language implicitly calls into question the more typical language uses of the capitalism of his day (and ours) that tend to categorize, explain, and quantify the world in ways that James, as well as other writers of his era such as Gertrude Stein,

deeply opposed. Stein's dislike for nouns, which she dismisses as labels that limit what things could be to the reality described by that label, adds a grammatical perspective on James's own language uses. Stein saw James as someone who was trying to write in ways that resisted this limiting function of words. His ambiguity, so different in its imprecision and uncertainty from the naming and describing functions of journalism, social sciences and other predominant discourses of the late nineteenth century, suggests that the world and human experience – "reality" – moves and shifts in ways that make it impossible for words in themselves to capture and communicate its meaning fully. Instead of purporting to present a picture of reality itself, James's prose brings attention to the way people perceive and understand the world and their place in it, implying that human thought and perception have a primary role in constructing the world, rather than simply perceiving and responding to a world that is already there to be categorized, explained and quantified. By pointing to a reality that is more open and flowing, and highlighting consciousness as the medium of people's understanding of the world, he implicitly exposes capitalism's pretense of describing and delimiting reality by words and concepts with fixed meanings, including labels like "worker" and "consumer" that place limits on human meaning and purpose. In his grammar and syntax James depicts a world of perception and experience that can be understood only through linguistic ambiguity that leaves meaning lexically uncertain and open-ended. Through this ambiguity James makes his critique of the "false reality" of capitalism, a critique that becomes deeper, more subtle, and more complex when it involves the intersubjective connection between characters.

For James, exploring the connection of language to deep intersubjectivity means opening the minds of his characters to the scrutiny of readers, often in minute detail, and even inviting the reader into intersubjective relationship with the characters. His preference for limited point-of-view narration, a narrative centered in the mind of one character but told by a third-person narrator, gives him the flexibility to take the reader deeply into the consciousness of a character while allowing the narrator to intervene occasionally to interpret or shed light on the character's experience. In showing the reader the intimate perceptions, feelings, intuitions, judgments, and other mental processes of his characters by means of this narrative technique, James uses language in an open-ended way, implying and pointing to meanings that remain unarticulated as he attempts to imitate the flash and flow of mental activity and invite readers to look, along with his characters, beyond the limitations of the everyday reified world to a reality that is not contained by the fixedness and clarity of conceptual meanings.

Because the feelings and perceptions – the mental processes – depicted in the mind of a character frequently have to do with another character, these language uses are a primary context for characters' relationships with each other, sometimes remaining on the level of thought and other times occurring in dialogue. These moments in which characters mentally or verbally reach toward each other align closely with Merleau-Ponty's description of communication as happening when a person "takes up the intention" of the other person and reflects it back (*Phenomenology of Perception* 183-84). The reaching toward each other of the two people in this process requires an openness that defies commodification, providing a descriptive context for my argument that human relationships for James find their deepest fulfillment when people can meet each other

beyond the mentality of commodity exchange. George Butte, using Merleau-Ponty, describes those moments in which James's characters take up each other's intentions as depictions of "deep intersubjectivity." Such moments, which James was intensely interested in exploring, according to Butte, involve a level of intimacy deeper than a sharing of thoughts or ideas. Rather, the connection between two consciousnesses in Jamesian deep intersubjectivity involves, as Merleau-Ponty describes, a sharing of intentions that take them deep into each other's consciousness, beyond reified concepts and commodified subjectivities and into a space where they can create their relationship in the moment.

James's interest in deep intersubjectivity reflects his sense that human understanding of individual subjectivity and of the world can only be complete in the context of relationships with others, and for this reason the intricacies of intersubjectivity often constitute the "action" in his novels. This focus on depth in relationships also, in a more subtle way, opposes capitalism's quantification and commodification of relationships and the superficial level of intercourse that such commodification presupposes, and suggests instead that human purpose extends far beyond the capitalist-defined roles of worker and consumer. The abstractness and ambiguity of meaning that characterize Jamesian style are his way of using language to open the minds of characters to each other and to the reader, and also to portray, within that openness, the possibility that they could interact without commodifying each other, without a context of economic exchange, and in ways that open the potential for deeper and more expansive communion with each other rather than closing it down. This potential for human interaction in the realm of the reality that extends beyond the imposed categories of capitalism also opens

the possibility for people to reclaim language as a primary socially creative and subjectively constructive activity, in a way that accords with and expands upon the ideas of Lukács and Williams.

Understanding how James's language uses can open non-reified space for intersubjective connection requires exploring some of the specific types of grammatical and syntactic moves he makes repeatedly in his writing, particularly those whose effects are abstractness and ambiguity. Grammarian Seymour Chatman, who has minutely analyzed James's style, identifies and describes at least sixteen specific grammatical and syntactic techniques through which James creates these effects. Chatman does not extend his analysis in the direction that I am taking it – in fact, he frequently points out the distance and objectification that seem to result from James's abstractness. Grammatical techniques that abstract the feelings, thoughts and other mental processes within a character's mind so that they seem more important than the character in whom they are happening, an almost ubiquitous technique in James, create a distance between the reader and the characters, Chatman says (35, 39, 65).

What I am arguing, using Chatman's detailed work as a basis, is that abstracting characters' mental processes in this way actually has the opposite effect, in three specific ways. First, abstraction draws the reader's attention more intimately within the mind of the character, while at the same time depicting the character's mental processes not as objectified conceptual ideas, but as unique to their consciousness at that moment and enlivened by that uniqueness. Second, even though the thoughts, reflections, considerations, and other mental activities can only occur in the mind of this character at this moment, they are comprehensible to the reader because of the intersubjective

connection that James's narrative technique invites. The intimacy of the reader with the character, achieved through abstractness and opened to the reader through limited point-of-view narration, allows the reader to take up the character's intention in the Merleau-Pontian sense. The reader understands the character's intention both because of the conceptual meanings they share through having a common language and, even more, through specific experiences of those meanings, which the reader shares with the character, that give them a unique and personal nuance. Finally, abstracting mental processes shows the character's mind as a site of constant movement. Feelings, thoughts, intuitions, perceptions, and other mental processes are presented as active, almost autonomous forces that happen within the consciousness of a person, rather than as static parts of the person. This reflects Stein's view that reality must be seen as an ever-moving flow, and James's sense that this flow can be gestured toward through language that resists conceptualized or reified meaning.

In addition, while it may seem counterintuitive that abstractness would assist in making relationships more "real," this occurs because one must abstract oneself from the reified reality of everyday existence within a capitalist culture in order to find the space of non-reification within oneself and with another. Because this space is opened up only by language, abstraction from the concrete world of things allows words and concepts, even thought itself, to open out beyond reified meanings and make possible creative nuances of thought and understanding. Such an open-ended connection creates the potential for the meaning-making that Raymond Williams argues is the material power of language. People can engage with each other in thought and dialogue unrestricted by consumer capitalism's "metabolic" commodification of consciousness, and create the

moment together in ways that could potentially lead to a less commodified relationship beyond the moment and to meaning that extends far beyond the quantified concepts of capitalist language. Thus, paradoxically, abstraction is the way back to a socially created material reality in which language is a direct and primary way people make the world together.

In a similar way, the other predominant grammatical effect of James's writing style, ambiguity, functions to keep meaning in flux rather than fixed. It also invites the reader into more intimate involvement with the characters' efforts to make sense of their experiences, another opportunity to become intimate and intersubjective with the characters. James pushes ambiguity, achieved through grammar and syntax, far enough to ensure that meaning in many cases will never be completely clear, nor fully articulable in conceptual language. Even more than abstractness, the ambiguity in James's style requires readers to do significant work to follow where the intricate style is leading, and to tolerate uncertainty when even those efforts do not lead to clear meaning, but the reward for this effort is great. It is through the multiple possibilities for interpreting or understanding a given situation, and the willingness of the characters and the reader to allow for the continual flow of meaning, that the non-reified space is found in James's novels. Readers may also find that the ability to maintain a truly critical view of their own real-world participation in a capitalist system requires this kind of openness to more than one possible reading of a given situation in life. Avoiding the specifically defined roles of worker and consumer in favor of other possibilities which may be less clearly defined, taking up a non-verbalized intention in another person, and allowing for

unknown possibilities for intersubjective communion in difficult-to-define spaces require a willingness not to demand clarity.

Writing for the small audience of people willing to engage in serious interpretive work while they read may not seem the best strategy for getting one's message across or for making a good living as a novelist. Fortunately for James, he was successful enough in his multi-faceted writing career not to have to cater to readers who wanted easy-to-consume entertainment that would stroke their self-righteous understanding (*Art of Fiction* 382). Rather, he could ask the readers of his novels, in ways both direct and subtle, not only to think deeply about what he wrote, but to look critically at the world around them and reflect on their role in it in regard to individual issues of identity and agency, gender, and relationships, as well as collective political and social issues including the operation of consumer capitalism and its effects on the ways people understand themselves and the world. Like many novelists of the late nineteenth century, James wove comments and criticisms of capitalism into the plots, characters and themes of his novels. But James's style also asks readers to do significant work in exploring the impact of capitalism on their identity, relationships and understanding of social reality, and in particular, to be interested in the role of language in creating that social reality. The idea that language can create – or close down – spaces for human relationships that are free of capitalist reification requires effort both to see the possibility, and, even more, to enact it. In doing so, I argue, we may become able to reclaim the primary power of language in our own time to create the reality we inhabit and share.

## Organization

Capitalism's impact on society and especially on people and their relationships was a concern of James throughout his career, but shows up more distinctly in some of his works than in others. For my analysis, four novels from his middle and late periods, all of which feature economic commentary in their themes, characters, and plots, trace an evolution in his commentaries on capitalism. Although James's idiosyncratic style permeates all of his writing, increasingly so as he refined it later in his career, the prominence of economic commentary in these four novels makes the subtler linguistic critique of capitalism more evident. For this reason, in the chapters that follow I offer extended analysis of the four novels, looking at the ways that James criticizes capitalism through his characters, plots and themes as well as finding the critique that is embedded in his language uses. The novels, which span nearly two decades of James's *oeuvre*, are *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), *The Ambassadors* (1904), and *What Maisie Knew* (1897). Though I devote a chapter to each novel, my main focus is *Maisie*.

Chapter Two begins to trace the anti-capitalist thread that runs, more or less prominently, through most of James's fiction. This strong critique of the increasing encroachment of capitalism as an ideology on society and culture, especially the ways it was narrowing the definition of human purpose and making relationships more superficial, is easy to find in James's work, and many critics have discussed it from a variety of angles. Yet the notion persists, mostly from earlier critical writing on James, that his concerns were not political but social, focusing on the realm of relationships among people of the upper classes. Because of this, and because finding the strong

awareness of and commentary on the negative impacts on people of capitalism and its sibling, consumerism, supports my locating of his more subtle critique within his language uses, I begin in *Princess* to explore his political and economic commentary through the characters, themes and narration. Because this novel centers on a small anarchist group in London and its plot to assassinate a public figure as a way of fomenting an uprising against the capitalist economic system, many critics have offered analysis of how *Princess* reflects James's own attitudes toward capitalism. John Carlos Rowe and others argue that James was far more radical in his political views than most give him credit for; these analyses may shed new light on James as a politically astute author and make my claims more credible. There is also, however, evidence in this novel of James's complicity with the economic system and its influence on culture. This chapter begins to trace the tension between James's proneness to uncritical acceptance of some capitalist influences on culture and his critical rejection of others, a tension which creates the conditions for the critique that he embeds in his grammar and syntax.

To begin unfolding my analysis of how he makes this embedded critique, Chapter Two introduces two of James's favorite grammatical techniques for creating abstractness and ambiguity, as described by Chatman: psychological verbs and the nominalization of mental processes. I contextualize them and demonstrate their use through examining several passages from *Princess*. These passages also show the beginnings of his use of such techniques to portray intersubjectivity between characters in a space that is not reified, and to portray characters' inner lives in ways that invite reader intimacy with them. The relative sparsity of these techniques here, compared with the later novels,

highlights his increasing use and refinement of them as he added more levels of nuance to the work they do.

Building on this beginning, Chapter Three introduces the concepts of commodification and reification as theorized by Lukács in his expansion on Marx. These concepts are applied to passages from *The Spoils of Poynton*, which deals with the consumerist theme of defining identity and finding life's meaning through the ownership of things. Through exploring commodification and reification, defined as inevitable results of a capitalist system by Marx and Lukács, I consider how James may be making a critique of commodification and reification through his portrayal of the "spoils" and the characters, such as Mrs. Gereth, who are most influenced by them. As part of this analysis, I explain Lukács's theory of reification of the mind to begin making the case that James himself, in spite of his overt criticism of consumer capitalism and reification in this novel, was not only complicit with that system, but possessed a mind that was already reified. I then introduce several more grammatical and syntactic techniques of ambiguity, in particular the expletive "there" and "it," and pronouns with indefinite or vague referents, techniques that contribute to the abstractness and ambiguity that allow the opening of space beyond reification for intersubjective relationship.

In Chapter Four, I jump out of chronological order to look at the late-period work *The Ambassadors*, published in 1904. This novel contains both an unmistakable critique of capitalism on several levels, including the quintessential capitalist activity of advertising and the impact on human beings of a culture that is dominated by a business mentality, and numerous extended examples of intersubjectivity in a non-reified space created by abstractness and ambiguity in language. Using Gertrude Stein's ideas about

the relationship between words and reality and Raymond Williams's theory that language is constitutive of the reality of human material life, I argue that James sensed, perhaps not fully consciously, that language offers a way to see, and perhaps to be in, a different reality than that created and expressed by capitalist language. In *The Ambassadors*, he experiments with grammar and syntax as means of pointing to a non-reified space for human identity and relationships. At the same time, however, this novel offers plenty of evidence of James's complicity with capitalism's impacts and activity – for example, as June Hee Chung convincingly argues, offering a biting condemnation of advertising while embracing the use of some of its own techniques, especially the visual.

By Chapter Five, the culmination of my unfolding argument, the important theoretical points have been laid out in preparation for applying all of them to my key James text, the 1897 novel *What Maisie Knew*. As with the others, I elucidate the commentary on capitalism that James makes in this novel, where I find an extended critique of commodification of human beings in a capitalist system. The ways that the four main adult characters treat the protagonist, Maisie, a child of six when the novel begins and 11 or 12 at the end, exemplify the economic context of these relationships, affirming Lukács's argument that commodity culture results in the commodification of human beings and their relationships and demonstrating James's bitter criticism of these operations of capitalism on people. At the same time, however, he portrays Maisie beginning to see her commodification and noticing her own tendency to commodify others. Through the grammatical techniques of abstractness and ambiguity, James brings to life Maisie's mental processes, tracing her growth in this understanding so intimately that the abstractness disappears and non-reified space becomes real – no longer an

intangible, temporary space of interaction but the place from which Maisie meets the world. She chooses non-reification, and in doing so demonstrates the high degree of tolerance for ambiguity that is required to make this choice.

Part of the ambiguity of living in a non-reified way is elucidated through the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, whose philosophy of intersubjectivity both complexifies and concretizes the deep interpersonal relationships that James depicts and the uncertainty that may accompany that depth, as Maisie experiences. Jamesian intersubjectivity offers a profound and fascinating context for human identity and communication that is outside of the narrow limitations on individual identity and relationship with others that capitalist discourse imposes. At the same time, as Merleau-Ponty demonstrates in his description of the “chiasm,” explained by George Butte, deep intersubjectivity also carries the possibility, indeed, the likelihood, of missed connection and failed communication. For James, realistic depictions of deep intersubjectivity must include these intersubjective failures, Butte argues, because the complexity of human beings and their relationships makes this inevitable. I would add that working against a commodifying ideology to make real and direct connection with another person increases the difficulty.

Yet, even though it can bring heartache and even separation, meeting another consciousness in an open-ended, ambiguous, and abstract – yet real – space carved out by non-reified language allows a level of self-awareness and deep connection with another that are simply not possible within the reified constructs of normal discourse. The courage required to live within these deep connections and the uncertainties that accompany them is what Maisie exemplifies. This novel is my key text because in

addition to analyses that trace James's increasingly nuanced effort to find a non-reified space through language, I offer a reading that sees Maisie's experience in the novel as exemplifying how language creates reality, and the girl herself as embodying and demonstrating, in her thoughts, words, and actions, the very process of creating a non-reified space – including the heartbreak of missed communication – in which to know herself and conduct relationships with other people.

In my final chapter, I bring this model of consciousness and use of language to create non-reified space into our moment and explain its relevance for us today, more than a century later. Living in a world that has, most would agree, become completely commodified – far more so than in James's day or even in Lukács's – most residents of the world's more advanced economies have never experienced any other way of understanding themselves or their lives. Seeing our labor and other human capacities such as creativity and thought as detachable, reified qualities we can sell or barter to meet various needs, as Millicent in *The Princess Casamassima* exemplifies, is so familiar to us as to seem natural. That commodification creates an exchange basis in our relationships with others, clearly presented in *The Spoils of Poynton*, also remains beneath our notice, for the most part. We are inundated with advertising and marketing messages that manipulate us into identifying needs and wants we would not otherwise know, just as James critiques in *The Ambassadors*. We are aware of how commercial values permeate even the institution of the family, and that children are surrounded by efforts to commodify them, as *Maisie* portrays, but we do not examine how we participate in that process through the reified ways we unconsciously treat our children. When we read the destructive, even violent, impact of the instrumental use of Maisie by the very adults who

are supposed to protect and nurture her humanity, we may begin to see how commodification shapes our relationships to our own children, and learn from Maisie that we are not stuck with those commodified relationships. This little girl who chooses to live in the ambiguity of nonreification can also show us the power of language to construct reality, and encourage us to take up that power in our own lives.

## **CHAPTER II**

### ***THE PRINCESS CASAMASSIMA***

My argument that James's grammar and syntax contain a commentary on capitalism and the reification that it engenders needs to begin with a look at the evidence for his awareness and concern about capitalism and its impacts on people. James is not the first name that comes to mind when one considers late nineteenth-century authors who comment on the impacts of capitalism. Although his characters tend to be people of upper-class wealth who do not appear to work for a living, leaving many readers to assume his own life was limited to the rarefied world of attending the theatre, going to dinner parties, and paying lengthy visits to country estates with rambling grounds and manicured gardens, this is only one side of Henry James. This view is reinforced by his command of the language and his style, which is usually analyzed as highly aesthetic and upper-class-sounding. However, there is another side to James, a side of acute and sympathetic concern about social issues of his day, including the impact of capitalism on both society and individual people. As a self-described observer of the world around him, James could not help but notice the impacts of capitalism as an economic system as it grew more powerful during his lifetime, coming to dominate not just the economy but culture as well.

As an artist with distinct interest in exploring human consciousness, relationships and psychological depth, James observed capitalist ideology sweeping people into categories of worker and consumer, oversimplified and limited roles that were redefining

human purpose and shaping human interactions in economic terms. As an author with evident sensitivity to the subtleties of his world and intensely interested in exploring the impact of the world on people, James had the artistic and temperamental equipment to make stories out of his observations and offer subversive commentary on the capitalism he saw. This is what we see in his most political work, *The Princess Casamassima*, published in 1886, a novel in which James's interest in politics, social justice, and the impact of capitalism on human beings is amply evident.

The novel traces the involvement of a young bookbinder, Hyacinth, in an anarchist plot to assassinate a public figure of the aristocracy as a way to foment a revolution. Hyacinth, raised by a poor seamstress because his mother was in prison, finds out as he grows up that his father was an aristocrat, and his mother a French woman of the lower class who killed his father. Ambivalent about but also intensely interested in his class identity, Hyacinth keeps it secret as he lives within the limited options for someone of his upbringing and resources, making his living as a skilled worker. Becoming involved with an anarchist cell that meets after work at a tavern called the Sun and Moon, Hyacinth soon finds himself volunteering for the role of assassin and becoming, through this decision, acquainted with the Princess Casamassima, an aristocrat who has involved herself in the anarchist rebellion. Hyacinth falls in love with the Princess, but continues also to spend time with his childhood sweetheart, Millicent, now a shop-girl and fashion model at a London department store. As the novel progresses, he struggles increasingly with his secret identities as an aristocrat and as a would-be anarchist assassin, finally realizing that he does not believe in the anarchist plans to bring down society, but feeling morally obligated to his commitment to pull the trigger. Unable to reconcile either doing

or not doing the deed, and feeling he has been abandoned by both the women he loves, he turns the gun on himself.

The character of Hyacinth came to James's mind, he tells us in the introduction, as a representation of working-class people in London whom he observed during his long rambles around the city. On these walks, he tells us, he could not help but notice the misery and bleakness of life for the city's underclass (7-8). These observations, happening in the political and social context of a series of prominent anarchist assassinations and attempted assassinations in Europe in the 1880s, seem to have been the impetus for James to depart from his usual focus on upper class people's lives and concerns and devote this novel primarily to an exploration of the impact of capitalism's impositions, both existential and personal, on working-class people. Though critics over the years have read James's portrayal of a working-class revolutionary cell as uninformed, even naïve, possibly due to assumptions about his upper-class perspective, a growing number have argued that his depiction was not only accurate, but evidence of the close attention he paid to events in the world around him (Trilling, Devine). Julian Markels and John Carlos Rowe present evidence of their view that James not only had a sophisticated grasp of the social conflict he explores in *Princess*, but also felt some sympathy for the socialist cause. Markels goes so far as to argue that James had an explicitly Marxist understanding of the events and the larger economic and social situation of 1880s Europe (67). Whether or not this is true, it is reasonable to say that James saw the negative impact that capitalism was having, and chose to explore it in this novel from the working-class standpoint. Hyacinth, an image of the young working-class

men James had observed on his walks, is the character through whose consciousness James carries out this exploration.

Like most James protagonists, Hyacinth possesses a highly sensitive consciousness, making him a person “on whom nothing is lost” (*Art of Fiction* 390). This sensitivity, together with his dual class identity, put him at the intersection of the influence of capitalism’s categories on human identity and agency on all class levels, and the dim awareness of the sense that language may offer a way to evade or at least gain perspective on some of this influence. Examining some of the key ways in which James’s language highlights the psychological sensitivity of Hyacinth and also begins to point to the existence of non-reified space for human identity and interaction will help to elucidate the connection between these two intersecting movements.

According to Seymour Chatman, James’s style is characterized primarily by “abstractness” (2). Chatman argues that the quality of abstractness in James’s prose is a result of his preoccupation with “intangibles” such as mental states within characters and social relations between them, and his tendency to focus more syntactic and grammatical attention on these intangible qualities and movements than on the characters in whom they are occurring. This focus on qualities of the individual mind and of relationship lends itself particularly to the detailed exploration of the psyches of characters, an exploration which fascinated James and of which Hyacinth is an example, and also to depictions of intersubjectivity. Although the language uses on which I am focusing my analysis are less prominent in *Princess* than in James’s later work, abstractness is clearly present in contexts involving many of the characters, and is particularly noticeable when the narration is focused on Hyacinth.

Of many of the techniques Chatman identifies as key in producing the Jamesian feeling of abstractness, in 1886 James has already begun using two of his most potent: psychological verbs depicting mental or emotional activity, such as “consider,” “wonder,” “feel,” and “realize,” and nominalization of mental processes, noun forms of these verbs, such as “understanding,” “decision,” or “perception,” placed in the position of the subject or other main noun in a sentence. Both techniques create abstraction by focusing the reader’s attention on the interior life of a character, so that the character’s mental processes not only become more important than the person in whom they are happening, but they even seem to have active agency of their own within the psyche of the character. These techniques are both evident in a passage depicting Hyacinth’s return from a lengthy visit to the Princess’s fine country house to find Miss Pynsent, his guardian, gravely ill. He encounters Mr. Vetch, a neighbor who has been a long-time friend to Miss Pynsent and helped Hyacinth get his job as a bookbinder. In this encounter, Hyacinth begins to understand how he has misconstrued Mr. Vetch’s social class. The narrator describes Hyacinth’s sudden understanding of the old man’s position using nominalizations and some psychological verbs, italicized below for emphasis.

If the first *impression* made upon him by Pinnie’s old neighbor as to whose place in the list of the sacrificial (his being a gentleman or one of the sovereign people) he formerly was so *perplexed*; if the *sentiment excited* by Mr. Vetch in a mind familiar now for nearly a month with forms of indubitable gentility was not favorable to the idea of fraternization, this secret *impatience* in Hyacinth’s breast was

soon corrected by one of the sudden *reactions* or quick *conversions* of which the young man was so often the victim. (321)

In this sentence (which resembles James's later "difficult" style much more than most passages in *Princess*) the words "impression" and "sentiment" are the subjects of two different beginning clauses of the sentence. These nominalizations of mental processes abstract Hyacinth's feelings and bring the reader's focus to what is happening in his mind rather than to him as a subject. This abstraction is reinforced by referring to Hyacinth's mind as "a mind" instead of "his mind" (this use of an article instead of a personal pronoun is another technique of Jamesian abstractness noted by Chatman). The word "impatience," the subject of the sentence, nominalizes the feeling Hyacinth experiences, keeping the focus of the entire long sentence on the internal processes within Hyacinth's mind. The two nouns toward the end, "reactions" and "conversions," which are prepositional objects, also nominalize experiences that happen within Hyacinth.

The grammar in this passage illustrates another subtle effect of these techniques of abstractness: they give the intangible qualities of Hyacinth's mind an agency within him, doing action which Hyacinth himself experiences passively. "Impression" in the first sentence, for example, was "made upon him," a rather typical grammatical expression in English that here highlights Hyacinth as being on the receiving end of action. Moreover, James emphasizes the separation between Hyacinth himself and the internal processes of "reaction" and "conversion" by describing him as their "victim," and the passive voice verb in the main sentence intensifies the effect of Hyacinth himself being at the mercy of the mental experiences that happen within him. The whole passage describes a series of mental processes that occur in a flash, far more quickly than the time

it takes to verbalize them, leaving the reader with a picture of Hyacinth standing stock still while these events occur in his mind. The comment that Hyacinth was “often the victim” of such inner changes of understanding shows Hyacinth as a highly sensitive psyche “on whom nothing is lost.”

The strong sense of Hyacinth’s mental processes having agency of their own and affecting him in ways not within his control has narrative purpose in portraying Hyacinth as not being fully aware, fully conscious, of his own mind. He is bewildered, an essential quality for a character to be “natural,” or “typical,” as James explains in the Preface to the novel: “It seems probable that if we were never bewildered there would never be a story to tell about us... Therefore it is that the wary reader for the most part warns the novelist against making his characters too interpretative of the model of fate, or in other words, too divinely, too priggishly clever” (11). At the same time, while the abstractness in this passage shows Hyacinth’s bewilderment, it also creates the overall impression that Hyacinth is experiencing a rapid series of new realizations, a shift in his consciousness.

As this passage shows, James portrays consciousness by showing mental processes such as “thought,” “impression,” “sentiment,” or “reaction” as having relations with the people in whom they occur. According to Chatman, these relations may be more interesting to James, and hence to readers, than the relations between characters (22). The seeming separation of mental activity from the person in whom it is happening highlights a particularly Jamesian understanding of subjectivity, and makes possible a detailed exploration of it. For James, the specific activities that go on within a person’s mind – thoughts, perceptions, impressions – taken together, make up subjectivity. Looking at each mental process and how it affects the person—what kind of relations it has with him

or her—allows a more detailed picture of an individual character’s subjectivity to come into view. In the above passage, Hyacinth’s confusion and sense of bewilderment are almost palpably conveyed in the utter passivity with which he is acted upon by “impression,” “sentiment,” and “impatience.” Even the “reactions” and “conversions” by which he begins to take an active role in his own understanding are, syntactically, independent actors that are affecting him.

However, the subtle shift in his relationship to the “reactions” and “conversions,” as compared to “impression,” “sentiment,” and “impatience,” constitutes James’s way of showing that Hyacinth begins to wake up and become more aware of his own mental activity. The convoluted and syntax-violating structure of the sentence, with two different “if” clauses at the start, as if the narrator had so much information to convey so quickly that he had to start over in the middle rather than write two sentences, emphasizes both Hyacinth’s bewilderment and the rapidity with which he is coming to awareness. Thus the abstractness of James’s focus on mental processes both highlights Hyacinth’s lack of awareness of his own mental activity and depicts his subjectivity as somewhat confused, while it also shows Hyacinth beginning to wake up and become more aware.

Even as this grammatical abstractness takes the reader deep into the mind of Hyacinth by implying that his relationships to his mental processes are of more interest than his relations with other characters, as Chatman states, this kind of abstractness also, paradoxically, allows a movement in the opposite direction. As the complexity of characters’ individual mental processes is more clearly understood, the reader develops greater interest in the relations between characters. Because the mental activity experienced by James’s characters frequently involves intersubjectivity, relations

between the characters can be much more finely depicted through a focus on each character's mental processes and the relations of those processes within both characters and, in the most deeply intersubjective moments, the relations between those two characters' processes. How this works will become clearer in subsequent chapters.

In addition, the focus on specific aspects of psychological activity is one of the key ways in which James executes his favored narrative style, "limited point of view," in which the narrator takes the reader inside the perception of one of the characters without shifting into first person. The focus on mental activity subtly points the reader to the importance of what happens inside the character's mind from within the character's understanding while allowing occasional interpretive commentary by the narrator to give the reader an even deeper experience of the character, sometimes explaining what the character himself does not understand about his own interior processes. James's use of abstractness together with the subtly shifting narrative point of view invites the reader into intersubjective relationship with the characters, intimately experiencing with the characters their shifting mental processes and understanding them, perhaps even more deeply than do the characters themselves.

For James, then, the "intangibles" of mental activity are not insubstantial wisps, not mere abstractions, but "things" in the mind. As Chatman puts it, "The transformation of psychological verbs into nouns argues the substantive character of thought" (22). This accords with Raymond Williams's argument that language is not simply a tool for the expression of reality, but is a "material" activity by which people create the world together. Williams's understanding of language as material is based in Marx's theories that people build their lives and meet their needs socially through making material things.

For Williams, making material things and building a common world in which to live can only happen through shared language. Further, language's material reality is demonstrated by its active shaping through social use in these mutual endeavors toward survival. Thus, for Williams, language has material reality and efficacy: its articulation of social meaning makes possible the social creation of the material world (*Marxism and Literature* 39).

Though his starting point is not social or economic theory, James comes to a similar sense of language as more than mere words, implying a material efficacy for thought that he expresses through grammatical and syntactic methods that give agency to mental processes. It is this effect of James's language, the suggestion that it has material efficacy, that I read as not only allowing him to depict the subtleties of characters' inner lives by suggesting their thoughts and feelings have substance, but even more importantly as pointing to the possible existence of non-reified space within a person and especially socially, between people. In a world becoming ever more deeply and rapidly reified by capitalism, James saw that language could be used to counter this effect.

The theoretical definition of reification that I am using, and that I argue articulates James's own sense of the impact capitalist ideology was having, comes from the writing of Georg Lukács. Expanding on Marx, Lukács argues that when commodities are produced as they are under capitalism, by workers who sell a portion of their humanness as "labor," the commodity form changes the entire metabolism of society. When labor becomes a detachable attribute, no longer an inherent quality of the human being, but a commodity itself, says Marx, commodities come to embody the labor of the workers who make them (*E&P* 108). Commodities are valued in relation to each other in a purely

quantitative way, he explains, by abstracting the labor so that any connection to the actual worker is removed (*Capital* 311). This commodification results in relations between things replacing relations between people and redefines everything, including people, as things (Lukács 87).

Thus all human beings and all their qualities and attributes become reified, “thingified,” under capitalism, according to Lukács. People living in a commodity-based system understand themselves as bundles of detachable qualities as if this were natural: their minds and their consciousnesses become reified, subject to the imposed categories of capitalism and experiencing them as natural. Lukács was writing in the 1920s, when capitalism had expanded its influence over culture and the process of reification had proceeded further than it had in 1886; Lukács points out that as industrial production becomes more specialized and the distance between worker and product greater, labor becomes more fragmented, resulting in people and their qualities becoming more reified. Though Lukács does not explore how reification affects individual people, nor does he quantify the degree to which reification has happened in society by the 1920s – indeed, he dismisses quantification as an activity of reifying capitalism (84) – it seems reasonable that not everyone would experience reification in the same way or to the same degree. I argue that James, writing 30 years earlier, saw the reification process happening, especially as the reduction of human purpose to fulfilling the roles of worker and consumer became more evident, along with its metabolic effect of recasting all relationships in economic terms.

The “thingification” of people and their qualities that capitalism brings into human understanding may sound eerily similar to making “things” of mental processes

within a person. James's use of abstractness to highlight the workings of his characters' minds does arguably originate from his own reified thinking; evidence of James's complicity in capitalist ideology will be explored in more detail later. In spite of its probable connection to the reification of a commodity system, however, the "thingification" of mental processes and the "thingification" that results from commodity relations are opposite movements. Reification as explained by Lukács comes about through the commodity system which establishes "thing-to-thing" as the context for all relationships and quantification of each thing as the basis of value. Such a system shapes human qualities and capacities into things, and relationships into economic exchanges. Labor or beauty, for example, is sold for a paycheck in the economic marketplace; in the marketplace of relationships, independence is exchanged for security in a marriage, or education for success in a career. To people living under capitalism, this context of exchange seems normal. The acceptance of one's own and others' reification, conceptualizing human relationships as quantifiable relationships between things, is proof that the mind itself has become reified.

By contrast, when James grammatically abstracts mental processes such as "thought," "impression," or "perception" and gives them substance and agency within a person, the effect is not the reification of these mental functions, but its opposite. For one thing, it is evident that these "thingified" activities within the mind of a character are not involved in the kind of "this-for-that" exchange that marks an economic context. More important, giving active agency to a person's thoughts and feelings individualizes the unique mental processes in each person, thus actually working against reification by implying that each person's inner life is unique and incommensurable with others.

Another way that Jamesian abstractness works against capitalist reification rather than replicating it is by suggesting that one must abstract one's consciousness from the reified world of commodity capitalism in order to see the possibility of deeper subjectivity and intersubjectivity in a non-reified space. In other words, making things out of thoughts and feelings grammatically has the effect of pulling one's awareness away from the reified world and refocusing on those mental processes in their uniqueness and evanescence. The ceaseless motion of thoughts, feelings, impressions, reactions, and other mental processes within a character's mind, motion that is the direct result of giving these processes independent existence as active "things" in the mind, defies the firmness and solidity that commodification requires. Jamesian abstractness, while emerging out of his own partially reified thinking, expresses human capacities and consciousness in a way that escapes reification, pointing to an understanding of human beings that surpasses the limitations of capitalist reification.

Psychological verbs and nominalization of mental processes, two of James's most frequently used techniques of abstractness, occur in *Princess* most often within momentary narrations from inside the mind of one character at a time, mostly when a character is thinking rather than speaking. Even though Hyacinth is with Mr. Vetch in the passage above, his thoughts are entirely self-focused; he is not thinking about Vetch or about what the older man might be thinking, but only about how Vetch's words and actions affect him. Hyacinth's subjectivity is here portrayed in a way that helps the reader to understand why he volunteers to be the assassin and why he cannot follow through: his consciousness is mostly self-referential and never free of bewilderment. The mental processes seem to happen within him; he is not the initiator or the actor, but an observer

of his own mind's activity which he sometimes does not understand. Abstracting mental activity from the person in whom it happens in this way allows, as Chatman points out, for the depiction of a relationship between the individual and his own mental processes. Subjectivity conceived in this way, as a relationship, increases the complexity of consciousness and thereby the possibilities for it to move outside of reified limitations. In Hyacinth, though we see towards the end of the passage above the stirring of a broader awareness, a capacity to think and apprehend beyond the confines of his reified mind, this capacity is not fulfilled in him. He remains limited by the economic roles in which he understands himself and others, seeing, for example, Mr. Vetch as not being a member of the gentry but a common person like himself, but unable to relate more deeply to Vetch.

As James develops and expands this technique into a dominant narrative style in his later novels, he uses the grammatical and syntactic methods of abstractness increasingly in contexts in which characters are actively thinking about each other, and even in dialogue. This context makes it possible to depict the intimate communion of two minds in ways that I read as opening a space for non-reified relationship, a space where reified views that people have of themselves and each other are left behind and the full range of human meaning can be brought into play. Nominalization and the use of psychological verbs, together with other grammatical and syntactic techniques that will be explored in later chapters, allow James to portray intersubjectivity intricately through an intense focus on the characters' thoughts as they "think toward" each other.

This level of intersubjectivity does not occur in *Princess*, but there are instances that show James beginning to develop this way of depicting relationships. Toward the end of the novel, after Hyacinth has had a change of heart about the anarchist plot and is

deeply troubled, he and Millicent take a walk in the park during which their conversation reaches toward a space beyond reification. Hyacinth does not reveal what he has promised to do, but he does tell her the secret of his parentage and the burden it has been to him. He is yearning for comfort and release, which Millicent does extend to him, even though they never speak directly about it.

During this encounter, the last one between Hyacinth and Millicent, the reader sees James's portrayal of intersubjectivity as the two seem to move toward each other's minds and look for a way to connect that is not limited by the world's definitions of who they are or even by their own assumptions. In this scene, told from inside the mind of Hyacinth as he responds to Millicent in the moment, it is clear that Hyacinth is seeking freedom, or at least solace, regarding his commitment to be an assassin, a role arising directly out of the limitations on his self-understanding imposed by capitalism. He would not be involved with anarchism if he were not in the working class, and he would not feel trapped by his promise to be an assassin if his life were not fraught with the inner conflict of his class identity. Even more, the reification of his mind has contributed to his passivity about his life, seeing others, such as the Princess and the anarchist leaders, as controlling the marketplace of relationships in which he acts. In this moment, Millicent reifies for him the safety and comfort he so desperately needs, but he has nothing to offer in exchange. Millicent, for her part, while certainly affected by the limitations of a capitalist identity in terms of her work as a shop girl and model in a clothing store, is not pushing against that identity but rather seems happy with it. She appears blithely to accept her own reification, both in her job and in her relationship with Hyacinth, yet she asserts a vital humanity in spite of it and seems to have a natural resistance to reification.

Despite the influence of reification on both of them, their conversation in this scene centers around how they understand each other as human beings, as they make efforts to meet each other without imposed or assumed self-definitions.

Hyacinth's movements toward Millicent are mostly unspoken yearnings for a moment of forgetting about the trap in which he feels caught; Millicent, despite her apparent coarseness, reveals her own sensitivity, her natural affinity for deeper intersubjectivity, by repeatedly understanding both verbally and nonverbally that Hyacinth is troubled, and offering compassion for his distress. The reader sees their intersubjective efforts from inside the mind of Hyacinth. Nominalizations and psychological verbs are italicized.

But when the *faculty of affection* that was in her rose to the surface it diffused a glow of rest, almost of protection, deepening at any rate the luxury of their small cheap pastoral, the interlude in the grind of a week's work... It *seemed* a pause in something harsh that was happening to him, making it all easier, pushing it off to a distance. His *thoughts* hovered about that with a pertinacity of which they themselves wearied, but they hung there now with an ache of indifference. (479-480)

This passage contains a psychological verb (*seemed*) with a vague pronoun subject, "it," and a nominalization of a mental process in Hyacinth (*thoughts*) clearly depicting activity that has an effect on him: his thoughts "hovered," "wearied," and "hung...with an ache." His sense of this task as "something harsh that was happening to him" clearly portrays his passivity about his own life. Millicent's mental processes, too, have an agency in

Hyacinth's mind: her "faculty of affection" provides a sense of warmth and safety that deepens his brief escape from the harshness of his life. Inhabiting Hyacinth's mind in this moment and feeling the movements of these mental processes and feelings, both his own and Millicent's, the reader experiences a moment of intersubjectivity with Hyacinth, feeling overwhelmingly the weight on his thin shoulders of the task to which he has agreed and the depth of his longing for the kind of comfort that Millicent's mere presence provides.

We do not see or feel intimately from within Millicent's perception, but filtered through Hyacinth's active mental processes, her subjectivity can be felt in the same way. The reader senses her affection as independently operating in her rather than something she herself feels, a "faculty" that "rose to the surface" in Hyacinth's presence. This leaves the impression that her affection may be rising now on behalf of Hyacinth but is also a capacity that is part of her character and something she freely offers, not in a context of exchange. Though Hyacinth does not tell Millicent that he has agreed to become an assassin, she senses his turmoil and her affection is stirred. Earlier in this scene, she says to him, in response to ambiguous comments about why he is unhappy, "I don't understand everything you say, but I understand everything you hide" (474). Her affection for him is apparent in this statement, as is her intuitive perceptiveness.

Such glimpses into the mind of Millicent are rare and brief, compared to the much longer passages depicting Hyacinth's mental processes. Nevertheless, this scene is an early example of James's portrayal of intersubjectivity through limited point of view particularly employing the techniques of abstractness. In this passage, the abstractness serves to highlight the mental activities of the two people as they move toward each

other's consciousness and express their interior lives both with and without words; the ambiguity of "seemed" and "hovered" maintains uncertainty about how close they actually are, how much Millicent does understand of what Hyacinth hides and whether he sees into her consciousness at all. Together, the focus on consciousness and the ambiguity about their connection suggests that they are moving toward, though not actually reaching, a space of communion unrestricted by reified concepts of identity. Their failure to reach it can be seen as resulting partly from Hyacinth's inability to transcend his own reification, and partly from the frequent failure of connection in all such instances of deep intersubjectivity in James, of which more will be said later.

### **James's reified mind**

Even though I have argued that James grasped the meaning of social revolution in a sophisticated way and sympathized with people who suffered under capitalism, as well as having a deep antipathy to the ways that capitalist ideology was reshaping human subjectivity and relationships and suggesting through his style a subversive way to avoid this influence, there is plenty of evidence that he is also complicit in with that same system in ways both obvious and subtle. According to Lukács, no person living in a capitalist system escapes the effects of commodification on consciousness and the mind (99), and James exemplifies this. As an author with a mind at least partially reified, James uses and validates some of the same principles, tools and effects of commodity capitalism that he also criticizes so strongly. From within the system that reifies everything, however, he is nevertheless able to suggest that subjectivity and intersubjectivity outside of the limitations of reified reality are possible. The apparent contradiction makes this suggestion all the more powerful and significant.

Exploring some of the evidence of James's complicity with capitalism will help to clarify this significance. In particular, the analyses of Jean-Christophe Agnew and Peggy McCormack, though they do not write specifically about *Princess*, are worth examining in some detail as their attention to James's language helps to shed light on my argument. Looking at the plots and characters as well as the language in James's novels, both Agnew and McCormack argue that far from rejecting commodification, the author actually embraced it and, on one level, uncritically portrayed a world in which social relations were based on reification of human beings, human qualities and intangibles of culture such as knowledge and language. Their analyses help to show that, while James was involved with capitalism in complex ways that included both purposeful and inadvertent complicity with its ideology—while his own mind was reified, in Lukács's terms—he also presented, both purposely and inadvertently, a deep discomfort with and even rejection of reification as an acceptable basis for human interaction..

Agnew affirms James's oft-cited repugnance for consumer culture as expressed frequently in his novels and most incisively in his travel essays in *The American Scene*, which Agnew says “foreshadow[s] the modern critique of the consumer culture industry as ‘mass deception’” (77). In these writings, James finds commodity culture deeply inadequate and even disgusting either as a basis for a national identity or as a medium for social interaction. These travel commentaries tend to focus on the wealthy class, pointing out that the commercialized culture of America with its concern for making money results in a lack of history, tradition, and long-lasting culture of the sort found in Europe (159, 164). However, he also writes about the interactions of ordinary people being negatively affected by the emphasis on the commercial in America, such as shop-owners

(236) and people living in severe poverty (202). Regarding the traveling salesmen, or “drummers,” whom he met on trains in the South, for example, he wonders at the lack of human development that has resulted from their singular focus on “the mere possibility of getting the better of his fellow-man over a ‘trade’” (427). The limitations on their humanity result, he understands, from the salesmen’s social and economic situation in which they interact primarily with each other rather than with people from a wider spectrum of professions and interests. They exemplify, for James, the “sterility of aspect and [the] blight of vulgarity” that result when education and experience do not expose a person to the variety of humanity. This lack of exposure seems a likely result when the economic functions of society become highly specialized.

Agnew sees the commentaries in *The American Scene*, however, as much as they bemoan the vulgarity and human limitation of American capitalism, as coming from a movement of self-defense of James’s own deep enmeshment in the world of commodity products and their qualities and values, and of commodified human characteristics and relationships. James’s characters, Agnew says, consist of “assemblages of effects” which are “contrivable, alienable, acquirable in James’s fictive world” (84). Thus, for Agnew, James’s way of creating and describing his characters uncritically validates the capitalist identities created in the marketplace. Agnew cites Chatman’s description of the abstraction of characters into nominalizations of their mental processes as evidence that James has accepted full reification of people (97). He points to the tension within James between embracing and rejecting consumer culture, and asserts that James’s deep enmeshment and fascination with it must be seen alongside his more outward criticisms. Tracing James’s relationship to commodity culture and his history of deep and avid

observation, Agnew argues, reveals his “relentless commitment to acquisition,” an orientation to life that not only belies his apparent rejection of such a culture but deeply informs his art by providing the “capital of his imagination” (82). This visual appropriation that becomes imaginative capital is clearly evident in James’s constant alertness to ideas for his novels in the world around him, such as the long walks that resulted in the character of Hyacinth and the themes of *The Princess Casamassima*.

These comments of Agnew that describe James’s very artistic process as involved in commodification shed new light on the complexity of his complicity with it. According to Lukács, people with artistic talent are particularly prone to the passivity of the observer. Lukács could be speaking of James when he writes of the way the artistic genius becomes reified: “...the specialized ‘virtuoso,’ the vendor of his objectified and reified faculties does not just become the [passive] observer of society; he also lapses into a contemplative attitude vis-à-vis the workings of his own objectified and reified faculties” (100). Selling his genius in the form of novels makes James a “virtuoso” in this sense, and as a committed and eager observer of the life around him, even turning his observations into parts of the genius and talent he sells in commodified form as novels, James seems to fit perfectly Lukács’s description of the reified consciousness. Ironically, James shows himself here to be as much a victim of capitalist specialization as the traveling salesmen he met on his travels. The result for him is not vulgarity and a lack of knowledge about other kinds of people, but in Lukácsian terms, a passive rather than active relationships to the work he does and the world in which he lives and even to his own inner processes.

Using Agnew's analysis in her critique, Peggy McCormack also finds James ambivalent about the culture of consumption that he seemed to hate so much, as well as complicit in it, though somewhat unwillingly. Like Agnew, she argues that James's characters produce themselves as bundles of commodified characteristics. The most important of these characteristics, for her, is language, grounded in the marketplace of the drawing room where the discourse originates and used as currency in the relationships between the characters. She asserts that the ever-present imagery of commodities and other economic language in James's novels demonstrates a tendency in both his characters and in his own mind to view the world through a quantifying lens (540). In addition, she argues that the ubiquity of reification in James's work comes from the framing of his fictive world in the form of an "exchange economy" in which all the characters' actions and interactions take place, an exchange that, she says, "turns human assets into cultural commodities valuable only when made public or exchanged in social interaction" (541).

James's novels always contain a group of characters who are members of the "linguistic ruling class," inhabitants of upper-class drawing rooms, according to McCormack. Using their control of the commodified discourse of this milieu, they set the rules of interaction – of exchange – to exclude, dominate or manipulate those who do not know the code. The best example is Madame Merle in *Portrait of a Lady*, who uses Isabel's ignorance of the discourse of wealth to entrap her into a hideous marriage to Osmond and the transfer of her material wealth to his control (542-543). Like Isabel, Hyacinth exemplifies a type of early protagonist in James's fiction who, according to McCormack, is victimized by a discourse he does not understand, and discovers the

linguistic rules of the game too late. She suggests that Hyacinth attempts a last-ditch effort to resist the controlling discourse of commodification by creating an alternative linguistic community, but the effort is unsuccessful. (McCormack states that Hyacinth engages with another character in this attempt; she does not name Millicent, but their long conversation in the park just before Hyacinth's suicide could be read in this way.)

The failure of this effort is what necessitates Hyacinth's suicide, according to McCormack, because "There can be no return to a preconscious relationship with a reified society" (545). In other words, if there is a way to live in a non-reified manner within a society that remains reified, it is not through a return to the kinds of relationships that existed before that reification took hold. For Hyacinth, who seems during his final pastoral with Millicent to long for a return to the beloved London of his childhood with her, before he became enmeshed with anarchism and the Princess, this dream of return is revealed as impossible when he sees Millicent with Captain Sholto and realizes that both his connection to his own innocence and the possibility of a continuing relationship with Millicent are lost. The "alternative linguistic community" has failed to solidify, leaving him no way out but death.

The commodification of human assets, including language, that James's characters exhibit aptly exemplifies Lukács's contention that in a capitalist system, every aspect of life becomes reified and every type of interaction becomes a marketplace for exchange. In James's novels, McCormack says, his characters learn how to participate in the world of commodity culture that reifies human values and traits because that is how he structures his fictive worlds. McCormack also, however, identifies a movement in James to give his characters a negotiated escape from that reified world by seeing it

clearly for what it is and not allowing others to dominate the reifying discourse any longer (556). This happens more in the later novels, she says, culminating with Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl*, who stops allowing herself to be victimized by the discourse of commodity values with which Charlotte and the Prince have been dominating the marketplace of relationships, and asserts her own values, getting Charlotte out of the picture and reclaiming the Prince as hers. The earlier protagonists, of which Hyacinth is one, learn to see how they have been commodified and their assets reified by those who command the language of wealth in their particular marketplace, but too late to assert any values of their own. This contradictory movement, both toward and away from commodity culture, functions to allow characters to find their own set of values, McCormack argues, but always subject to the limits of language within which they must live.

This tension in James that McCormack identifies, between promoting the dominant ideology that reifies human qualities and values, and pointing to a way of escape from reification, accurately portrays James's complex interaction with commodity culture. On the one hand, he is, in Lukács's terms, a reified being with a reified consciousness. He thus sees the world mostly from within consumer capitalist ideology and both consciously and unconsciously affirms its structure and values. However, McCormack reads James as being also able to see a way out of a fully reified life. She describes this way out as existing within the parameters of commodity culture, using its language to change the relationships from a basis in the reified values of the marketplace to the character's own personal, human values. McCormack is speaking about language semiotically – the language of economics and capitalism of which James's later

protagonists seem increasingly skilled at taking control for their own purposes. Although the way I see James using language to change the context of relationships between characters differs from McCormack's, her analysis helps to establish that even an author who is complicit with capitalist values and exhibits a reified consciousness can resist those values in ways that are not superficial, but profoundly integral to that author's own art.

### **Consumer Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century London**

Exploring the critical ways in which James presents consumer capitalism in *The Princess Casamassima* would not be complete without looking beyond the anarchist plot and Hyacinth's conflicted role in it, and seeing James's commentary on the ways that consumer culture was changing roles and relationships in nineteenth-century London. As he does in all of his novels, James portrays in *Princess* the impact that capitalism was already having on people's understanding of their subjectivity and their purpose as human beings, particularly as consumer culture and its ideology were narrowing the meaning of human purpose to the twin roles of worker and consumer. One of his most noticeable ways of commenting on this process is the character of Millicent and her job as a shop-girl, a line of work that was attracting young working-class women into a world of luxury and fashion as well as autonomy and self-reliance. Millicent, whose job includes donning articles of clothing to display them for customers, perfectly represents the commodification of human attributes in a consumer culture: her beautiful face and abundant hair, and her tall and perfectly proportioned body on which any article of clothing looks pleasing, are what she trades for her wages as a worker. Hyacinth, Vetch, and the men in the anarchist block exchange their skills and time for wages, exemplifying

the typical reification of human qualities and aspects of life in a system that alienates labor. But Millicent has no skill to trade for the means to live. The only woman in the novel who does is Miss Pynsent, who barely survives as a seamstress making hats and dresses by hand, supplementing her income by renting rooms in her house.

As a lower-class woman with no education, Millicent has little to sell but her personal attributes. Although James makes no implication of illicit sexual activity on the part of Millicent, Katherine Mullin explains that the job of shop-girl brought a new sexual power to young attractive women like Millicent, some of whom engaged in a kind of “erotic barter” with wealthy male customers, trading their attractive presence for dinners in fancy restaurants and visits to the theatre (220). Millicent, as Mullin points out, although she intends to marry well and therefore guards her virtue, is not above objectifying herself and engaging in some “erotic barter” with Captain Sholto, meeting him in London taverns and allowing him to gaze upon her beautifully adorned body as she models dresses. The proximity of the shop-girl role to prostitution was a concern of social reformers at the time, according to Mullin. For James, the resemblance of Millicent’s work to prostitution constitutes his comment on the tawdriness of consumer culture at this level and communicates sympathy for Millicent, whose background might easily have left her little option but prostitution if her beauty and stateliness did not allow her to sell her body in a less degrading way as a shop-girl. Further, since Millicent is often seen as representing the vigor and liveliness of London people, her commodification is also a commentary on the commodification of everyone.

In less obvious ways, the other characters also exemplify the reduction of human purpose to producing and consuming, and trading one’s skills, abilities, and time for a

wage. Their lives and consciousnesses are reified in the way Lukács describes: they see and experience only the world circumscribed by their roles in the system. Even those who do see beyond these roles, such as Hyacinth, whose secret awareness of his aristocratic heritage gives him a sense that this role as a worker is not really his only possible choice, or Paul Muniment, whose evident grasp of revolutionary theory also gives him a wider perspective, are still reified as workers. Hyacinth and Paul are aware to greater or lesser degrees that they live because they have something of themselves to sell in the marketplace, and that selling parts of themselves for pay alienates their work from them, and thus cuts them off from their full humanity. As Marx says, once the worker sells his labor, it no longer belongs to him: “it is the loss of his self” (*Manuscripts* 111).

Even though they meet and secretly discuss plots which they call “revolution,” the other anarchists do not see beyond tearing down the structures that exclude them. They appear to have no idea of what it might mean to live in and socially produce, as Marx and Lukács describe, a world not structured by capitalism and metabolized by the commodity form. Even when Hyacinth is moved by his love and admiration for the Princess to bind a book for her on his own time, his labor is alienated by his inability to present it to her when he is finished, as Rowe points out. The book, which he keeps because there is never an opportunity to give it to her, comes to represent his alienated love for her, as well as his alienation from himself because despite his belief that he made the decision himself to bind the book for her, he realizes that all along it was her desire that he was fulfilling, not his own (Rowe 179).

The Princess herself, a “class-passer” who is an aristocrat by marriage but started out in life as an illegitimate child in a low social class, produces herself through the

trappings of aristocracy because of her marriage. The contrast in wealth and social class between the Princess and Millicent could hardly be more distinct, yet despite her status as one of the wealthiest women in Europe, the Princess and her personal attributes are no less reified than those of Millicent and may be more so. In *Roderick Hudson*, the novel in which she first appears, the Princess (then known as Christina Light) literally sells herself to the Prince Casamassima in return for the status and wealth of being his wife, a transaction that differs even less from prostitution in its essence than Millicent's modeling. In *Princess*, Christina presents herself as wishing to deny her achieved class and produce herself as a revolutionary, attempting to identify with the working-class anarchists, but her reification as a princess prevents her from doing so, and even prevents her from seeing that she cannot do so. We do not know what happens to the Princess after the failure of the anarchists' assassination plot; like most of James's novels, this one does not tie up all the loose ends. Paul Muniment, one of the anarchists who has secretly been seeing her, has accused her of being ready to run back to her husband, the Prince, when her money runs out; by the end of the novel, when the reader has seen her increasingly as attempting to play an impossible role, it seems the likeliest outcome.

Even though the Princess is not a sympathetic character, the closing in upon her of life due to class constriction limiting her options, along with Hyacinth's death from his own sense of having no options, puts the final touch on James's commentary in this novel on the impacts of capitalism upon people in all social and economic classes. The anarchist plot's utter failure means that it brings about no change in the predominance of capitalism and its restrictive scope for human existence. Hyacinth's shocking suicide adds emphasis to the intractability of the system and its resistance to change. Yet

*Princess* does begin to suggest the possibility of the creation of a space beyond reification that offers an expansion in human possibility through intersubjectivity.

The next chapter, which looks at *The Spoils of Poynton*, follows some of the development and refinement of James's attempts to create a non-reified space through language and expands the analysis of how abstractness of language, as well as ambiguity of both language and meaning, can offer ways for characters to see themselves, others, and their relationships beyond the context of reification and economic exchange. This novel, written more than a decade after *Princess*, explores another facet of capitalism's impact on people by focusing on the practice of collecting.

### CHAPTER III

## *THE SPOILS OF POYNTON*

In *The Spoils of Poynton*, published in 1897, James delivers an extended critical commentary on consumerism and commodification and the impact of a reified approach to life on human character and relationships. His shift toward a stronger focus on characters' inner life in the 11 years since *Princess* is clearly evident in the increased use of the grammatical techniques of abstractness that take the reader inside characters' mental processes. This shift enables a more nuanced exploration of the ways in which commodification shapes subjectivity and works against intersubjectivity, creating the "reified reality" that Lukács describes by encouraging people to see not only the objects in their lives but also each other as things to own or possess for their reified qualities. At the same time, the increasingly intimate focus on what happens within characters' minds also allows a portrayal of subjectivity in terms of relationships among the active processes within a person. This way of approaching subjectivity defies individual reification as well suggesting that intersubjectivity can happen on a level that escapes the framing of relationships as economic exchanges. In the intimate participation of the reader in the mind of the protagonist, Fleda, the reader can experience intersubjectivity with her as well as begin to see the potential for language to open a space for non-reified intersubjective connection. In the moments of intersubjectivity in this novel that are of the Jamesian "deep" variety, the characters who come so close to each other without reification ultimately do not connect, a failure that echoes Hyacinth's inability to connect

with Millicent and which, paradoxically, does not signal the impossibility of encountering another in non-reified space, but does indicate the significant challenges to doing so.

*The Spoils of Poynton* is told primarily through the consciousness of Fleda Vetch, a sensitive, almost penniless young woman who becomes a friend and confidante of the wealthy middle-aged widow Mrs. Gereth, as that lady indulges in a variety of manipulations in trying to hold onto a mansion full of beautiful furnishings and items of décor that she and her husband had accumulated during their marriage. Because of English inheritance law, her son gets everything. Mrs. Gereth will lose Poynton and its contents unless Owen decides to break off his engagement to Mona Brigstock, a young woman of no taste whom Mrs. Gereth despises, and instead marry Fleda, through whose friendship Mrs. Gereth will remain connected to the things. As mother and son remain adamant in their positions, Fleda takes on the role of trying to facilitate an outcome that pleases everyone, including the spoils themselves, while hiding her love for Owen from everyone, including herself. After much missed communication and misunderstanding, Owen finally marries Mona and during their honeymoon abroad the mansion burns down with all the lovely things in it, no longer to be owned by anyone.

*Spoils* is one of several James works in which collecting as an obsession has a central role. Like *The American* and *The Golden Bowl*, which also explore this quintessentially consumerist and reifying activity, *Spoils* focuses on the ways that an obsession with collecting highlights commodification and the inevitability of material objects being valued for their intangible qualities. As the possessive owner of the collection initially, Mrs. Gereth exemplifies a consumer extraordinaire. Her obsession

with her things has shaped her subjectivity in distinctly commodified ways that bring to mind the mystical religious meaning of fetishism, as Marx uses it to describe the peculiar power that commodities have over people in a capitalist system. As he discusses it briefly in *Capital*, Marx defines commodity fetishism in the context of factory production where commodities are valued in relation to each other, not in connection with their own specific physical properties and purposes or the human labor that went into making them. Commodities are in a sense cut loose from their material, practical value and appear to have inherent value – they take on, like magical objects in ancient religions, a life and a power of their own. As Marx says, they become “social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses” (320-21). Commodities, in other words, can have attached to them visible or tangible attributes, such as size, texture, or color, which often carry abstract meanings; commodities can also carry imperceptible and intangible qualities such as taste, style, or status that accrue to the person who owns them. According to Jean-Christophe Agnew, market theory holds that it is these attributes, more than the objects themselves, that people desire and consume in a commodity culture (70).

Because of this almost magical way that commodities carry desirable qualities, people relate to them as far more than physical objects. As Paul Armstrong points out, parsing Marx’s argument and explaining its relevance to James, in the same way that religious fetishes come to control the people who believe in their powers, commodities come to mediate social relations between people and even have power over them: “Like Marx in his analysis of social structures at roughly the same period, James describes a situation in which the products of human activity – the things through which we express and objectify ourselves – control us more than we control them because they mediate in

the service not of community, but of power” (191). Armstrong does not state that James held a Marxist view of commodities, but the comparison of his concern to that of Marx argues for James’s awareness of the fetishistic power of commodities and their role as objectified expressions of human character. The collection of beautiful objects for which the novel is named seems to exert this kind of power over people’s lives and relationships, and examining this impact is the central concern of the work.

With this context, less political but no less rooted in a critical view of capitalism’s impact on people than *Princess*, this novel also suggests through language that people can relate to each other outside the structure of commodified relationships, in a space in which they are not exchanging reified qualities but seeing each other in the expansive and fluid context of human possibility. Mrs. Gereth’s extreme reification sets up the reader to imagine what this expansive and fluid space might look like by portraying a stark contrast to it. Relating to the things in her collection as if they were alive has shaped Mrs. Gereth’s identity in the context of thing-to-thing, and also shaped her relationships with people whom she often treats as things to be evaluated for her collection. The constriction of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity that Mrs. Gereth exemplifies makes it possible for the reader to imagine what its opposite, non-reified subjectivity and relationships, might look like. When people can conceive of themselves and each other beyond the limitations of reified qualities and economic exchanges, opportunities for understanding each other and exchanging thoughts and feelings in the expansive field of unquantifiable human meaning become possible. In *Spoils*, James shows us this contrast by exploring how the collection of things mediates the subjectivities of the characters and

their relationships to each other, and gives us glimpses of what might happen within and between them if they could enter the non-reified space language can create.

The commodifying effect on Mrs. Gereth and on Fleda of Mrs. Gereth's relationship to her collection, as well as the contrast between the effects of reification on each of them, are demonstrated in a scene between Fleda and Mrs. Gereth when they are visiting Ricks, the house that Owen hopes his mother will accept as her own when he and Mona move into Poynton. In addition, the scene contains glimpses of non-reified intersubjectivity as Fleda attempts to understand Mrs. Gereth's thoughts and feelings nonverbally. The language James uses in this scene, as elsewhere, demonstrates the way that abstractness and its companion, ambiguity, can point to non-reified possibilities for subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

As the two women walk around the house, the reader sees from within the perception of Fleda, whose sensitive consciousness is the center of this novel's limited point-of-view narration. Like Hyacinth, Fleda is one "on whom nothing is lost," and she observes and intuits Mrs. Gereth's mental processes minutely.

"Why it's charming!" [Fleda] exclaimed a few hours later, turning back again into the small prim parlor from a friendly advance to the single plate of the window. Mrs. Gereth hated such windows, the one flat glass sliding up and down, especially when they enjoyed a view of four iron pots on pedestals, painted white and containing ugly geraniums, ranged on the edge of a gravel path and doing their best to give it the air of a terrace. Fleda had instantly averted her eyes from these ornaments, but Mrs. Gereth grimly gazed, wondering of course how a place in the deepest

depths of Essex and three miles from a small station could contrive to look so suburban. (35)

Even though the narrator appears to be describing Mrs. Gereth's reactions from an objective point of view, the mention of Fleda's own response to the view from the window indicates that this description is Fleda's interpretation of Mrs. Gereth's reactions. Sensitive to begin with, Fleda has also spent enough time with Mrs. Gereth to be able to read her face and body language and even her mind. Mrs. Gereth's responses to the world, Fleda knows, are mediated through her relationship with the things in her collection; her responses to Ricks are entirely in the context of her reified identity as an owner and appreciator of beautiful things. Fleda herself, understanding Mrs. Gereth's responses through her own knowledge of Mrs. Gereth, is indirectly affected by the older woman's reified subjectivity. As well, she is already accustomed to Mrs. Gereth's habit of relating to her as a thing. Mrs. Gereth does not speak to Fleda, assuming that Fleda will share her own response; she does not treat Fleda as a subject.

In the rest of this passage, as Fleda interprets the mental processes of Mrs. Gereth, James does not use directly the techniques of abstractness that were evident in *Princess* – psychological verbs and nominalization of mental processes – but he does employ another of his favorite techniques of abstractness as cataloged by Seymour Chatman: expletive “it” and “there” as subjects with “be” verbs. This technique, like nominalization, has the effect of abstracting the activities of a character's mind, giving them an independence and a prominence over the person herself. At one moment in her rapid and intense observation and interpretation of Mrs. Gereth's mental processes, for example, Fleda evaluates Mrs. Gereth's reaction to Ricks, mingled with her own response

(“it” and “there” with “be” verbs italicized): “*It was* all, none the less, not so bad as Fleda had feared; *it was* faded and melancholy, whereas *there had been* a danger *it would be* contradictory and positive, cheerful and loud” (36). As Fleda continually opens her mind toward Mrs. Gereth’s, she expresses what is happening there through the filter of her intuitive awareness of Mrs. Gereth’s feelings as well as her hope that Mrs. Gereth will eventually come to accept Ricks. “There” as expletive subject, which James often uses with a psychological noun, according to Chatman, here abstracts “danger” and gives it an ominous potential for agency. “Danger” is not in itself a mental process, but expresses and contains what Fleda fears, reinforcing it.

These grammatical techniques draw attention to mental processes not mentioned in the sentence, an even deeper and more subtle way in which abstractness and ambiguity both draw the reader in and suggest unquantifiable and open-ended inner space. The vagueness of “it” invites the reader to imagine the whole complex of physical and emotional qualities of the house as they are being experienced by both women, allowing the referent to be so broad and encompassing that stating it clearly in words would only be possible with an extended and detailed narration, and possibly not even then. The use of “all” as the object of “it was” at the beginning of the sentence immediately expands the meaning of “it” from the house as an object to include the constantly changing succession of impressions and responses that each woman separately senses and notices, overlaid by Fleda’s interpretation of Mrs. Gereth’s perceptions. In this way the mental processes of the two women, their impressions and responses, are implicit in the narration, and the effect, as in *Princess*, is less to make these mental processes into things than to portray them as having independent existence and agency within Fleda’s mind. The way Fleda

thinks about Mrs. Gereth's responses, the vagueness of the narration of her thoughts, points to Fleda's consciousness being the locus of much activity and movement that cannot be clearly expressed or understood in words.

Although this scene does not depict direct communication between the two women, the vagueness and ambiguity of "it," combined with the abstractness of "there was a danger," illustrates a quality of the non-reified space to which I see James's grammar and syntax pointing: in this space, the continual movement of thought, feeling, perception, impression and all the other mental processes can be allowed their full play, both in the characters and in the reader. The space in which this movement happens cannot be reified, because, like the ever-shifting mental activity that happens within it, the space itself is open-ended, amorphous, and unable to be captured in a verbal concept. In abstracting mental processes, rather than reifying or solidifying them into abstract concepts, James paradoxically frees them from reification by setting them in motion. In using vague pronouns such as "it" that carry vast assemblages of meanings relating to this movement, none of which can be clearly grasped or articulated, his abstract and ambiguous grammar invites the reader to experience the ever-moving reality of human consciousness, to sense the expansiveness of the interactive space which cannot be reified, and to participate intersubjectively in that non-reified space along with the characters in his fiction.

Because Mrs. Gereth in her relationship to the beautiful things exemplifies so strongly the impact of commodification on human subjectivity and relationships, it will be helpful to take a deeper look at the spoils themselves and the role they play with her and the other characters. Among critics who have analyzed the economic commentary in

*Spoils*, there is disagreement on whether or not the beautiful things in Mrs. Gereth's collection are truly commodities; while it does not matter to my argument whether they fit a particular definition of "commodity," it is worth examining some of the different ways the spoils have been viewed by theorists in order to understand better how they shape Mrs. Gereth and human relationships in the novel.

Arguing a traditional Marxist position, Raymond Williams says the spoils embody "a certain kind of fetishism" by providing an example of the conspicuous display of wealth and the emphasis on class that happens when money and commodities take the place of social relations (*Politics* 258). Removed from the workers and cultures that produced them, the spoils are invested with layers of attributes that include disconnected elements of the cultural milieus from which they came and aspects of aesthetic beauty: this is the definition of a commodity made originally by Marx and more recently endorsed by modern market theory. Fotios Sarris, though he defends Mrs. Gereth as heroic rather than vulgar, agrees that the spoils are fetishized commodities because they are removed from their origins and because Mrs. Gereth's sources of wealth are obscured: "Hence, Mrs. Gereth's valorization of Poynton and her own high standards of taste are fetishistic in the Marxian sense insofar as both Poynton and her taste are isolated from the socioeconomic conditions that have made them possible" (56).

Thomas Otten, examining the question from the standpoint of body studies, argues that the spoils are not commodities because they are unique and made by hand (42). Commodities, he asserts, are specifically defined as things made in factories to look like hand-made items – the kinds of things with which the Brigstock home is stuffed, and which horrify and sicken Mrs. Gereth. Noting that the late nineteenth century saw

increased mass production of such commodities, designed to confer the appearance of taste on their bourgeois purchasers (such as the Brigstocks), Otten points to Mrs. Gereth's comments about such products flooding the market: "The world is full of cheap gimcracks in this awful age, and they're thrust in at one at every turn. They'd be thrust in here on top of my treasures, my own" (20-21). Mrs. Gereth, fully inhabiting her social class, warns of the threat to authentic taste and distinction posed by mass-produced commodities which imitate the kinds of things that make up her collection, and which Mona would undoubtedly place side by side with her treasures.

The individually handmade works of art that Mrs. Gereth so treasures are certainly not commodities in the vulgar sense, but they do exert a kind of power over her and the other characters. Indeed, the sense of their mysterious hold over people is intensified by the near absence of specific physical description or even naming of them, though their beauty is frequently mentioned. Combined with occasional suggestions that they are "alive," this mystery heightens the sense of the things as having magical, fetishistic power. James tells us in his Preface that more than the things themselves, it is their "felt beauty and value" that are being fought over (xlvi) – in other words, their layers of intangible attributes. For Mrs. Gereth, the hold of the spoils is strongest, since they represent, or reify, her refined taste and ability to appreciate their aesthetic beauty as well as her status as their owner. In fact, as the reification of status, taste, and ability to acquire them as possessions, they become her very identity – "the record of a life" (14), as Fleda realizes on her first visit to Poynton. But they also reify for Mrs. Gereth the history of their acquisition – the travels with her husband, the places they found each item, as well as the wealth and social position that enabled them to travel and make those

purchases. They even represent and substitute for Mrs. Gereth's relationship with her husband – certainly in memory, and, given the intensity of her devotion to them, possibly even while he was still living. These layers of reified meaning indicate that the spoils do function in this novel as commodities with fetishized power.

As a collector, moreover, Mrs. Gereth also exemplifies the degree of control that inanimate things can have on the person who makes them the focus of her life. The most obvious of these effects is evident in Mrs. Gereth's reduced ability to connect with other people in a meaningful way. Not content with simply allowing the things to represent her good taste and aestheticism, Mrs. Gereth constantly consumes the reified qualities of her collection, both in their presence and when she is away from them. This is why losing the things feels to her like an amputation (46). As she tells Fleda, "There isn't one of them I don't know and love – yes, as one remembers and cherishes the happiest moments of one's life. Blindfold, in the dark, with the brush of a finger, I could tell one from another. They're living things to me; they know me, they return the touch of my hand" (20). This statement clearly shows that she has become the spoils, relating to herself through her relationship with them. As Armstrong says, "It is herself she touches in touching them and herself who returns her touch. She revives her past self with the touch of her present being, and her past self responds by confirming and sustaining her sense of identity" (194). Sarris adds that, because they are "the record of [her] life," Mrs. Gereth requires this reciprocal touch from the things: "Mrs. Gereth's things always – and, according to her, always must – declare their relation to her" (57).

Although she seems to be relating to them in some sense as subjects – living things – Mrs. Gereth's tendency to treat other people – actual living things – as if they

were commodities clarifies the narcissistic quality of her love for her collection (Sarris 62) and completes the picture of how her own human character has been commodified. She treats Fleda as an object, physically shoving her toward Owen as a substitute choice for a wife, and telling Fleda at another point that she considers her to be “quite one of my best finds” (*Spoils* 169). Mrs. Gereth seems to be able to relate intersubjectively with her own past self, but very little with other humans in the present. (One wonders whether her obsession with the things, with finding them and continually appreciating them, had an impact on Owen as a child that resulted in his apparent lack of sympathy for her deep need for them.)

The spoils also exert a mystical power over Fleda that results in her own reification. Upon her first visit to Poynton, Fleda responds emotionally to their beauty. From this moment, she has a special understanding of the spoils themselves – not personally invested or deriving her sense of identity from them, like Mrs. Gereth, but appreciating them with a pure aestheticism, as art. Seeing that no one else has this deeper appreciation of the things, Fleda feels it is up to her to represent their interest (Sarris 76). In fact, James tells us in the Preface that she is the central consciousness of the novel because the things themselves, being inanimate, do not have a voice. “Fleda’s ingratiating stroke, for importance, on the threshold, had been that she would understand; and positively, from that moment, the progress and march of my tale became and remained that of her understanding” (xlvi). What she understands is the subjectivity of the things – that, as James explains, “they might have, and constantly did have, wondrous things to say” (xlvi). Sarris points out that in seeing them as subjects, Fleda obliterates her own subjectivity and becomes reified as the voice of the collection. He suggests that

Bourdieu's concept of "political fetishism," in which a person conceals her own identity and interest behind an impersonal duty to a person or group, applies to Fleda's acceptance of the responsibility to speak for the spoils (78). Since Fleda loses Owen and almost certainly loses her friendship with Mrs. Gereth as well, the sacrifice of her subjectivity to the spoils and their needs seems to require the loss of nearly everything in her life.

In her deep sympathy with the things, as well as her continual efforts to connect intersubjectively with others, Fleda demonstrates a Jamesian trait of his "sensitive" protagonists of being focused toward another person's consciousness with the intention of understanding that other's subjectivity. These sensitive characters enact the exploration of intersubjectivity that takes the place of action in much of James's fiction, especially in his later works. Intersubjectivity, which can be generally defined as a state of awareness, communication, or connection between conscious minds, can mean any kind of interaction. For James, however, intersubjectivity is often deeper than ordinary interaction, involving an attempt to reflect or mirror the other's consciousness and, further, to share conscious awareness in a space beyond words. In the later novels, such as *The Ambassadors*, this attempt at deep intersubjectivity sometimes happens on the part of both characters in a relationship; in *Spoils*, as in *Princess*, it is most often a one-sided affair in which one character reaches toward the other, but there is no reciprocal gesture. Mrs. Gereth's silence in the passage cited above exemplifies this unreciprocated effort toward intersubjective connection. When this happens, the reader watches the more aware character's movement in consciousness toward the other, and understands, through James's language that abstracts that character's mental processes, the effort she or he is

making toward intersubjectivity even though the other character may seem oblivious. The reader, in these instances, is not oblivious but enters into an intersubjective relationship with the character, reaching toward the character's mind and sensing her yearning to connect.

Whether intersubjectivity is superficial or deep, whether it occurs between characters or character and reader, or remains incomplete in unreciprocated mental gestures, intersubjectivity in James can be understood through a phenomenological approach to language. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, communication is a process in which each person projects her consciousness toward the other and "takes up" the other's intention (*Phenomenology* 185). The human body, according to Merleau-Ponty, has a "sense-giving intention" because it is through the body that we know the world. We approach objects in order to know them, either physically, by moving through space, or mentally, by moving our thoughts toward them. As he puts it, "Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body" (138-139). When we place our attention on an object, we project our consciousness toward it, and the knowledge we already have of objects meets the sensory reality of this specific object to make up our perception of it – we "perceive the thing in its own self-evident completeness" (185).

We do the same thing, says Merleau-Ponty, when we communicate with another person, except we are projecting ourselves toward the consciousness of an other whose body, like ours, also has a "sense-giving intention." This intention of the speaker projects "a certain lack which is asking to be made good," a lack which can be understood as the incompleteness of the communication when as yet the other consciousness has not understood the speaker's intention. The listener, in "taking up" the speaker's intention,

calls up existing linguistic meanings from previous expressions in her experience in order to make good that lack. These previous expressions are existing meanings that the two share, but they are given a unique combination and nuance in the moment of their exchange because of the intention that the two consciousnesses share in that moment. All this happens within an instant, and when it does, says Merleau-Ponty, “It is as if the other person’s intention inhabited my body and mine his” (185).

As the two body-subjects encounter each other, their speech and their listening are motivated by that same intention, to which they respond by projecting themselves towards each other in “a synchronizing change of [their] own existence, a transformation of [their] being” (184). As each subject perceives the subjectivity of the other, they are able to “espouse” each other’s thoughts by appropriating words and gestures that the other has used, and that are familiar to both through experience (*Primacy* 18). In other words, for Merleau-Ponty, when we communicate with another person, we are able to understand each other because we take and use each other’s words and gestures, reflecting them back. When you appropriate my gesture, my intention is now in your body – you internalize my intention; you espouse my meaning.

This description of intersubjective communication, in which consciousnesses project toward each other and experience a moment of expression that relies on shared meaning but is also imbued with inflection and nuance that are unique to that moment, closely resembles James’s depiction of intersubjectivity in his novels. George Butte calls this “deep intersubjectivity,” and identifies it as a narrative strategy that allows delicate and subtle depiction of intersubjective relationships through the multiple mirroring of subjectivities (130). As the characters see each other’s seeing, or reflect each other’s

knowing back and forth, they see ever more deeply into each other's awareness, to what Butte calls "the all-important third – and exponentially different – orbit in this solar system of subjectivities." In this third orbit, Butte says, "one perceives, or believes one perceives, in the other's body or language, a trace of one's own previous and now appropriated gesture, redirected to oneself for further embodiment or revision" (131). In these mutual and reciprocal mirrorings and revisions, deepening the conscious connection in each orbit, words are unable to convey the subtlety of meaning; intention, understood through intuition and often in the context of a gaze or an embrace, becomes the medium of the communication (132).

James's well-analyzed concern with subjectivity and consciousness lends itself in particular to a Merleau-Pontian reading, according to Butte, because of the intricacy with which James's characters think about each other and enact the projection of intention and the appropriation and mirroring of the other's gestures. Because Fleda is more aware than the other characters of others' subjectivity, this intricacy of thought and mirroring of gestures happen mostly within her mental processes and are not reciprocated. Much like Hyacinth, Fleda herself is not fully aware of her own intentions and tends to see things through a filter of her own unacknowledged motivations. Nevertheless, Fleda demonstrates the skills of deep intersubjectivity. The scene from which the passage above was taken, which occurs when Fleda and Mrs. Gereth visit Ricks for the first time, is one example of Fleda's intersubjective skill.

Reading this scene, the reader has a clear enough picture of Mrs. Gereth to be able, with Fleda, to enter Mrs. Gereth's mind and "take up" her intention. By the same token, our knowledge of Fleda and how her mind operates allows us to follow her

reflection and interpretation of Mrs. Gereth's mental processes and at the same time enter into Fleda's own perceptions. "*It was* all, none the less, not so bad as Fleda had feared; *it was* faded and melancholy, whereas *there had been* a danger *it would be* contradictory and positive, cheerful and loud" (36). As the reader encounters the vagueness of "it," he must reach into his imagination to discern or intuit its meaning; he seeks to take up Fleda's intention and thus moves toward her in consciousness. The reader is then able to enter that non-reified space with Fleda and, through her, also with Mrs. Gereth though she herself remains oblivious. In this way, the reader can see and perhaps even experience non-reified space in an intersubjective moment.

However, because Mrs. Gereth perceives herself as living completely within a commodified world, she remains unaware of this space and is unable to project her consciousness toward Fleda in the reciprocal gesture, as Merleau-Ponty would say, that would complete the intersubjective communication. In addition, because Fleda's own understanding of Mrs. Gereth is colored by Fleda's desire for a positive outcome and her secret love for Owen, she is not appropriating and reflecting Mrs. Gereth's movements of consciousness with complete authenticity, a holding back of which she herself is not aware but the reader is. Thus the reader, led by an effort to grasp the meanings of "it" and at the same time seeing that those meanings cannot be known and quantified fully, may come closer than either Fleda or Mrs. Gereth to an awareness of the non-reified space created through language, and to the perception that the commodified consciousness is unable to participate in this space.

Despite her sensitivity and skill at reading other people, the incompleteness of Fleda's ability to "take up" Mrs. Gereth's intention as depicted in this scene has

increasingly significant echoes as the novel unfolds. Her complex position in the triangulation with Mrs. Gereth, Owen, and the spoils themselves – and her unwillingness to admit, even to herself, that she also has a personal interest in the outcome – result in a series of misjudgments that escalate the conflict in the story, and that also exemplify the difficulty, in James, of making deeply intersubjective connections. In fact, as Butte points out, James’s deep and sensitive characters fail surprisingly often in their attempts to connect with and correctly interpret the intention in the consciousness of another – a failure that frequently drives the plots of his fiction and often contributes to the ambiguity of his endings (134). Butte finds in Merleau-Ponty’s image of the “chiasm” an explanatory model for the difficulty James’s characters have of connecting in a deeply intersubjective way, or even of connecting at all. Because Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm helps to elucidate the difficulty of embodying non-reified space even in a deeply intersubjective moment of communion between two people, it is worth exploring this concept in some detail.

Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm, named for the rhetorical figure in which the two parts of the sentence reflect each other (As I enter into the wood, the wood enters into me), is a depiction of the interaction between perceiving and being perceived embodied in the image of a person’s hands touching each other. In a way that mirrors the rhetorical chiasmus, each hand feels itself from the inside and feels the other hand from the outside: there is a reversal, a “crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible” (*Visible* 133). As it feels itself being touched, the hand becomes an object, but at the same time, as it touches, it is the subject touching an object, the other hand. According to Merleau-Ponty, each hand can either experience itself as the one touching or the one being touched

at any given instant, but not both. Because the two hands are attached to the same body, the shift between these two awarenesses occurs within the experience of the person, providing a built-in connection. “When one of my hands touches the other, the world of each opens upon that of the other because the operation is reversible at will, because they both belong (as we say) to one sole space of consciousness” (141). When the two touching hands belong to different bodies, however, these awarenesses of being the subject touching another or the object being touched by another subject become more complicated. This situation can present challenges to this full reversibility of the “sole space of consciousness,” but the potential for communion is there, at least in theory.

Merleau-Ponty draws an analogy between the tangible and the visible, asserting that to see a thing is to touch it visually. Because as human beings we are both “sensible” – we can be sensed or felt by another – and “sentient” – we can sense or feel another – we are open to others and are, in fact, apparently constructed to connect with others this way. The visible links us together, he says, in an adherence between sentient and sensed. Even though we do not inhabit one consciousness in the same way that one “sole space of consciousness” exists within each of us, and even though on one level we do not know exactly what another person means by any word, the visible makes it possible for us to understand each other’s specific meanings. For example, although one may not know exactly what a particular color looks like to another person, Merleau-Ponty maintains that when one person describes to another the meadow he has seen, they both recognize the color. This is because both have the same kind of body with the same kind of visual apparatus. “Then, through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see

passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own, I recognize in my green his green..." (*Visible* 142-143).

Through this reversibility, we each contribute to what the other sees, and each body-mind finds itself "fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life, of making itself the outside of its inside and the inside of its outside" (144). We are in a space together, the chiasmus of our touching and being touched, with its continual reversibility, opening us to each other, the vision or understanding of one passing into the other. The space described by Merleau-Ponty is phenomenology's way of understanding what I am calling the non-reified space of intersubjectivity, of consciousnesses connecting as subjects in a relationship in which neither is commodifying or reifying the other but rather they are sharing an expanded experience of each other as human beings.

Often, however, the chiasm is blocked or incomplete. As Butte explains, Merleau-Ponty, while occasionally transcendent, mostly keeps his philosophy grounded in the material body, and the body has a thickness and spatiality that seem to defy experiences like "floating in Being with another life." Connection with another consciousness is possible, but the body, with its stubborn refusal of transcendence, can block the way in spite of the most open and sincere efforts of people toward deep intersubjective connection. This ambiguity in the chiasm makes it a particularly appropriate image, Butte says, for understanding how deep intersubjectivity works and does not work in James's novels. The non-transcendence of the body – its opacity – makes it possible for a person to hide, deceive, or pretend, as well as to be unconscious of the potential for deep intersubjectivity and even unconscious of their own mental processes.

In terms of my analysis, a reified mind such as Mrs. Gereth's exhibits this opacity. The image of Mrs. Gereth touching the beautiful things and feeling that they return her touch expresses this clearly, providing a poignant depiction of the sad isolation of Mrs. Gereth as commodification works against intersubjectivity and she attempts to commune with objects that do not have consciousness and cannot meet her awareness. Instead of opening to the potential of deep communion with another subject, Mrs. Gereth's efforts at intersubjective communion with her things can only reaffirm her own sense of being a separate subject, and engage her consciousness in a closed loop in much the same way that capitalism interposes the commodified world between human consciousness and the social and material reality of life, obscuring the ways in which people are connected and interdependent with each other. Even in her sense of intersubjective connection with the things, her relationship with them is one-sided; unlike Fleda, who attempts to take up the spoils' "intention" and represent it, Mrs. Gereth can only commune with her own past selves when she touches her precious items. She cannot interact intersubjectively with them, only with the reified meaning they hold for her.

Fleda, although she does not commodify others in the same way as Mrs. Gereth, also demonstrates an opacity that is affected by her reification as the voice of the beautiful things. Seeing herself as speaking for and working on behalf of the spoils puts Fleda in a position that is not compatible with her role of attempting to derive an outcome that will please both Owen and Mrs. Gereth. For this reason, she does not acknowledge to them her sense of representing the spoils. In addition, her unwillingness to acknowledge own personal interest, her love for Owen and her desire to marry him, increases the complexity of the conflicting positions she has taken. The only way that all four interests

can be fully met is for Owen to break off his engagement with Mona and marry Fleda instead. However, because of her unwillingness to acknowledge her love for Owen, Fleda refuses to help him get free of Mona, pretending to herself that she is taking a moral stance in insisting that Mona must break the engagement. Affected by both her self-reification as the voice of the spoils and her internal dishonesty, Fleda exemplifies the opacity of deception that can prevent intersubjective connection.

Over and over, because of her inability to be transparent about her motivations, Fleda misreads the intentions of Mrs. Gereth and Owen and even Mona, who is presented as a relatively simple subject. Fleda seems to correctly interpret Mrs. Gereth's thoughts at some moments, such as her reaction to the conditions at Ricks as tawdry and disgusting, and she has moments of deep, albeit mostly one-sided, communion with Mrs. Gereth regarding the intensity of Mrs. Gereth's feeling for the things at Poynton. Yet, despite having understood Mrs. Gereth as "masterful and clever, with a great bright spirit, . . . one of those who impose, who interfuse themselves" (6), she is taken by surprise when she learns that Mrs. Gereth has effectively stolen the entire mansion-full of beautiful things. Later, having failed to correctly interpret Mrs. Gereth's understanding of Fleda's love for Owen, Fleda does not foresee that Mrs. Gereth will send the things back to Poynton on the assumption that Owen has broken off with Mona and become engaged to Fleda. Nor does Fleda realize that Mona, in her apparently sentimentless simplicity, does not care for Owen but is ready to act opportunistically to own both him and Poynton, reversing her position from wishing to end her engagement to Owen and instead exhibiting a determination to marry him as soon as she learns that the spoils have been returned. Fleda's determined efforts to find a solution that will please everyone fail completely.

The result is significant hurt and loss for every person involved, and ultimate destruction for the spoils themselves.

Fleda also exemplifies another reason for the incompleteness of the chiasm, as Butte interprets Merleau-Ponty, and that is simply that intersubjective clarity can be terrifying (Butte 133). Opening oneself to another consciousness entails a significant degree of vulnerability, and Fleda is unable to allow herself to be that close to anyone. This terror of closeness that blocks intersubjectivity from Jamesian depth is clearly shown in the most complex example of deep intersubjectivity in the novel. This scene between Fleda and Owen, a long conversation in which the truth of their love for each other is finally expressed, shows the delicacy and difficulty of making full connection (*Spoils* 125-135). The interaction depicts the gradual opening of each one's awareness to how the other feels through a succession of glimpses of each other's intention alternating with moments of opacity. The successes occur when both Fleda and Owen see each other's gestures taken up and reflected; Fleda's unwillingness to acknowledge her own feelings for Owen blocks the connection in other moments. A small portion of the long scene illustrates these movements.

He sat there a minute staring at her. 'Ah you're beautiful, more beautiful than any one,' he broke out, 'but I'll be hanged if I can ever understand you! On Tuesday, at your father's, you were beautiful – as beautiful, just before I left, as you are at this instant. But the next day, when I went back, I found it had apparently meant nothing; and now again that you let me come here and you shine at me like an angel, it doesn't bring you an inch nearer to saying what I want you to say.' He remained a

moment longer in the same position, then jerked himself up. ‘What I want you to say is that you like me – what I want you to say is that you pity me.’ He sprang up and came to her. ‘What I want you to say is that you’ll *save me!*’

Fleda cast about. ‘Why do you need saving when you announced to me just now that you’re a free man?’

He too hesitated, but he was not checked. ‘It’s just for the reason that I’m free. Don’t you know what I mean, Miss Vetch? I want you to marry me.’

Miss Vetch, at this, put out her hand in charity; she held his own, which quickly grasped it a moment, and if he had described her as shining at him it may be assumed that she shone all the more in her deep smile. ‘Let me know what you mean by your “freedom” first,’ she said. (127-128)

As Owen continually moves the conversation toward a discussion of how they feel about each other – in particular, how Fleda feels about him – Fleda repeatedly deflects and diverts, deliberately not taking up his intention either conversationally or within herself. When he tells her what he wants her to say – that she likes him and will save him — Fleda uses a classic diversionary tactic, answering a question with another question: why he needs saving. He takes this opportunity to tell her that he wants her to marry him. But she again puts him off. As the scene unfolds, this pattern is repeated – Owen directly states his feelings and asks her to state hers, and Fleda continually diverts the conversation away from a direct exchange of feelings. In these moments, it is clear

that Fleda, even when Owen says “I’m in love with you,” is not taking up this intention of his, but is avoiding the reflexivity that will put her in more direct communion with him. It is not difficult to see her terror at being more transparent.

As with each repeat of the pattern Fleda moves closer to revealing the secret she has held for so long, a moment of deep intersubjectivity finally happens when her defenses have come down and she has confessed, though only implicitly, that she does love him. In this part of the scene, the grammatical techniques of nominalization and “it” as a pronoun with a vague referent create the familiar abstractness and ambiguity of non-reified intersubjective space. When Fleda indicates to Owen that she cannot speak with him yet about the relationship they might have because he is still engaged to Mona, he wants to know when they will have this conversation: “‘Ah when *it* isn’t mere *misery!*’ The words had broken from her in a sudden loud cry, and what next happened was that the very sound of her *pain* upset her” (129).

As in the previous passage, “it” here encompasses a complex set of meanings including a reference to “when” they will be able to talk, but extending to encompass, in a moving stream, all of her feelings for him going back to the beginning when she fell in love with him, and all of the deception she has been practicing, including self-deception, and how that has affected her efforts to bring about a positive outcome for everyone and for the spoils. This complicated and multi-layered “it” also, both grammatically and by implication, includes the “misery” she is experiencing at this moment. “Misery” and “pain” in these sentences function as nominalizations of mental processes, portraying feelings as nouns that seem to exist as separate entities and have their own agency within Fleda. Putting the focus of the sentences on these feelings as they affect her, not on

herself as she feels them, allows the sentence structure to suggest that emotions, like mental processes, are active and moving forces within the human psyche. This, together with the amorphous and shifting sense of what “it” represents, points to the opening of a deeply intersubjective and non-reified space between Owen and Fleda, a space of movement where deeper levels of intention are mutually reflected and where nothing stands still long enough to be reified.

As Fleda opens to her own feeling of love for Owen, to this intention she has been projecting but not acknowledging even to herself, both of them become aware of each other’s awareness in the fashion that Butte describes as the “third orbit” of deep intersubjectivity.

*What* she did, *what* she had done, she scarcely knew; she was only aware, as she broke from him again, of *what* had taken place on his own amazed part. *What* had taken place was that, with the click of a spring, he saw. He had cleared the high wall at a bound; they were together without a veil.

She had not a shred of a secret left... (129)

In this chiasm, Fleda sees Owen seeing her secret love for him; yet her own self-awareness is incomplete. She feels the two of them together “without a veil,” and is acutely aware of Owen’s seeing how she feels about him, but she is still only “scarcely” aware of what she herself has done in allowing that veil to fall. The repeated use of the word “what,” which functions here in a similar way to expletive “it” with the additional nuance of a question, stresses her own ambiguity about what to think as it intensifies the sense of a space in which thoughts and feelings cannot be clearly expressed. It is the measure of Fleda’s deep ambivalence about her own inner life that even in this most

passionate moment, when Owen sees the depth of her love for him, she still is unable to lift the veil within her own consciousness – his mind is touching hers as one hand touching the other, but the reverse connection does not happen, because she is unable to reach out with her mind to touch his and create “one sole space of consciousness” between them. Fleda’s terror of closeness is also reflected in her efforts to avoid the physical actions of gazing and embracing that Butte identifies as integral to Jamesian deep intersubjectivity, as she avoids Owen’s eyes and quickly extricates herself from his arms.

Owen, a less sensitive and certainly less ambivalent participant in the moment, shows by his words and behavior that he has entered the “third orbit” of deep intersubjectivity: he sees Fleda’s innermost feelings, and also sees her seeing him see them. For him, the multiple reflexivity of awareness is of less interest than simply knowing that she loves him. But the narrator tells us that Owen also feels a kind of sadness, almost terror, in suddenly realizing that even though he now knows beyond doubt that Fleda loves him, there is still a barrier to their happiness “treacherously placed ... perhaps elsewhere” (129). Fleda’s inability to be honest with herself, Owen and Mrs. Gereth, a dishonesty reflected in her inability to enter the “third orbit” of non-reified space with Owen in this intense scene, blocks not only deep intersubjective connection but any connection at all, and foreshadows Mona’s triumph, the triumph of reification. Intersubjective communion in non-reified space has not succeeded; the path to it is shown, and the cause of its failure is also clearly evident in Fleda’s fear and dishonesty.

## James's Complicity

Though James clearly makes a multi-layered critique of consumer capitalism and commodification in this novel, there is also plenty of evidence that he embraced and perpetuated capitalist ideology both consciously and unconsciously. Exploring this evidence is important in order to clarify that even a person already enmeshed in a commodified culture can see through what Lukács calls the “veil of reification” that prevents people from seeing each other outside of a commodified context. As an artist in a reified world – one who, according to Lukács’s argument, is reified in a highly refined and spiritual way – James can be seen as exemplifying the ways that art supports and perpetuates capitalism. Indeed, he has been dismissed with this argument by many critics, including Fredric Jameson, who sees James’s limited point-of-view narration, with the third-person narrator sometimes offering ironic interventions, as unifying the private and the external in a way that limits morality to the personal (*Fables* 55-56); and Terry Eagleton, who argues that for James, art equals a consciousness which is separate from material life (141). Both cite the suppression of the characters’ sources of wealth as further indicating that James was caught up in capitalism and unproblematically embraced its impacts.

Other evidence that James’s mind was at least partially reified can be found in the evidence offered by Agnew and McCormack that James’s fictive worlds embrace the commodification and reification of social relations and of people. In keeping with this argument, relationships in *Spoils* look like transactions, and all the characters can be seen as commodified in some way. On one level, James is clearly offering a critique of this – Ms. Gereth’s identity with the things in her collection makes her a commodity like them,

and her commodification of Fleda, especially in the moment of offering her to Owen in return for a good relationship with his mother, is quite despicable. Fleda, in allowing herself to be commodified, and in pursuing in her own way the role of Owen's wife and possessor of the spoils without being fully honest about it, acquiesces in being commodified (M. Williams 143). She even embraces her own reification as the voice of the spoils by taking on that role, making herself a thing and participating fully in thing-mediated relationships. That Fleda, with her exceptional sensitivity to the thoughts, feelings and personal situations of others, at the same time enters willingly into the commodification of herself and her relationships with others offers a pointed warning about the effects on people and relationships of an excessive focus on commodities. But in other ways, the relationships on which James's critique of capitalism is based reveal an underlying complicity with the ideas and language of capitalism.

Using McCormack's analysis, this novel, like *The Princess Casamassima*, contains a dominant language of economics that commodifies both people and their qualities. Through most of the narrative, Mrs. Gereth is in command of this language, which centers on the reified value of the spoils. As an example, Fleda at first sight responds to the rooms and vistas at Poynton simply because they are beautiful. Seeing Fleda's tears of rapture, however, Mrs. Gereth understands them not as "the natural and usual sign of her submission to perfect beauty," which is the way Fleda initially describes them to herself, but as a response to the collection and a reflection of Mrs. Gereth's own love for it. Immediately upon hearing Mrs. Gereth interpret Fleda's emotion in this way, Fleda shifts her perspective to that of Mrs. Gereth, seeing the collection not simply as beautiful and hence valuable in its own right, but as a creation of Mrs. Gereth that reflects

her personality and shapes her identity. “She felt indeed, as this lady had promised her she should, both a respect and a compassion she had not known before; thus the vision of the coming surrender could but fill her with an equal pain” (14). Fleda’s consciousness immediately reaches toward Mrs. Gereth and takes up her intention; in doing so, she also concedes to Mrs. Gereth control over the dominant economic discourse regarding the spoils.

Yet, unlike other James characters described by McCormack who do not understand the dominant discourse until too late to challenge it, Fleda clearly does understand the different economic discourses and attempts to use them at the same time. Reaching toward Mrs. Gereth’s mind in intersubjective effort, she grasps the discourse of intense possessiveness and reification with which Mrs. Gereth talks about and understands the things, and at the same time hears the discourse of the spoils themselves—a discourse that James explicitly frames in economic terms in the Preface. “The spoils of Poynton were not directly articulate, and though they might have, and constantly did have, wondrous things to say, their message fostered about them a certain kind of cheaper sound – as a consequence of which, in fine, they would have been costly to keep up” (xlvi). James is referring to the difficulty of giving these inanimate things a voice of their own, and his choice of using words like “cheaper” and “costly” affirms McCormack’s assertion that in spite of overt criticisms of capitalism throughout his fiction, James seems comfortable using economic language, normalizing a capitalist attitude of framing everyday life in terms of monetary value. Fleda tries to hold the two economic discourses in tension, but unsuccessfully.

Whether or not James in *Spoils* is showing his complicity with capitalism in the ways argued by Jameson, Eagleton, Agnew and McCormack, and perhaps in other ways, he provides one clear example of his own reification as an artist. According to Lukács, in a commodified culture, in which everyone's skills, human qualities, and even consciousness are commodified, the artist may be the most commodified person of all. First Lukács notes that the unified structure of consciousness that capitalism creates, which begins in the working class through the alienation of labor and the replacement of social relations with commodity relations, affects of the upper class as well "in a refined and spiritualized, but, for that very reason, more intensified form" (100). This affects talented people particularly, he says, whose livelihood depends upon the selling of deeply personal qualities such as their creativity, talent, and unique perspective. The result, says Lukács, is a kind of passivity exemplified by the observer, a role in which James comfortably saw himself, as he noted in describing his walks through London in the Preface to *Princess*.

The contemplative attitude that the "specialized virtuoso" takes toward his own reified mind, according to Lukács, resembles the way a factory worker contemplates the machine he operates, perhaps thinking creatively about the machine and his work, but only within the parameters of the existing setup. The worker's consciousness is reified because he is unable to think beyond the laws and systems that operate within the factory and within the capitalist commodified culture at large, laws and systems that appear inevitable. The artist, whose consciousness is reified in a more subtle and intense way, also contemplates his own creativity as a reified quality, detachable, disposable,

dependent for its value on the market, and existing within the parameters of the consensual reality of those same laws and systems.

In this sense of reification, the unknown artists who produced the spoils can be seen as an analog for James as the creator of this piece of verbal art. Their skill and creativity were the commodified parts of themselves that they sold in return for money, just as James sells his commodified genius to his publisher and the readers who buy his fiction. The beautiful objects themselves, like James's novels, also reify those personal qualities in addition to the other attributes, including taste. By putting the spoils at the center of the story, James puts the focus on their reified value, not on the creative individuals who made them. Thus he implicitly accepts the things as commodities that mediate between those creative artists and Mrs. Gereth, as he implicitly accepts his own work as a commodity and his own relationships as reified.

Yet, in spite of James's reified consciousness, in spite of acquiescing in the commodification of his own talent and creativity and his acceptance of this commodification as a context for human relationships, he continues to push against the limitations that commodification places on human purpose and intersubjectivity. Although his explicit critiques of capitalism, including his ongoing resistance to these categories, can be seen as remaining within the bounds of commodified culture, his use of language as a means of creating non-reified spaces for human interaction represents a step outside of that culture, and into the understanding that language is a fundamental means through which human beings socially create their world. In the next chapter, which explores his late-period novel *The Ambassadors*, I present more evidence that

James pushed language past the limits of meaning, using the grammatical and syntactic tools of abstractness and ambiguity to find that intersubjective space beyond reification.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### ***THE AMBASSADORS***

*The Ambassadors*, like *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Spoils of Poynton*, contains pointed economic commentary in its plot, characters and themes. One of James's most critically specific novels in its attack on the consumer-culture activity of advertising, *Ambassadors* clearly indicates that James was aware of and unhappy with the increasing presence and influence of consumer capitalism in his moment, as it was becoming more hegemonic in its shaping of culture around the concerns of business, and its commodification of human subjectivity and relationships. Embedded in this critique, on the other hand, is further evidence of James's own embeddedness in the ideology of capitalism, including his apparent "love-hate" relationship with advertising. At the same time, James goes further in this novel in his focus on the mental activity of characters as a way of opening their minds to the observation of readers, using even more highly-developed manipulation of grammar and syntax in abstracting the mental processes from the character. In doing so, he also goes further in letting the vagueness and ambiguity of the words point to a space of nonreification for subjectivity and intersubjective connection.

As in *Spoils*, the potential for non-reified space within and between people in *Ambassadors* is presented through a strong contrast, here between the business-oriented culture of New England and the deep, complex, sensuous culture of Paris. Lambert Strether, a middle-aged widower from Woollett, Massachusetts, goes to Paris as an

emissary of his fiancée and employer, Mrs. Newsome, to rescue her son Chad from the French woman under whose unsavory influence Mrs. Newsome is sure he must be. As Strether gets to know the lovely and aristocratic (and not at all unsavory) woman, Marie de Vionnet, and to appreciate her apparent reshaping of Chad from a crass youth into a refined and urbane gentleman, he also slowly realizes there is more to Chad's transformation than meets the eye, including an intimate relationship with Marie, who is 10 years older than Chad and has a grown daughter, and hints that the changes in him may not be what they appear. All the while, the charm of Paris and Maria Gostrey, Strether's guide in seeking the truth of Chad's situation, open him more deeply to his own inner life, releasing his subjectivity from the restrictive business-oriented context of Woollett into the more open and fluid Parisian context. Strether find his own attitudes changing, and he stops urging Chad to return to Massachusetts to a job in his mother's industrial empire. Mrs. Newsome, impatient with Strether's failure to complete his mission, sends a second ambassadorial team to finish the job of bringing Chad home, though Chad has already decided on his own to return. Strether's relationship with Maria ambiguous and his future uncertain, he decides that integrity requires him to return to Massachusetts to face Mrs. Newsome.

James's economic commentary in *Ambassadors*, like that in *Spoils*, examines capitalism's impact on human character and relationships from a specific angle, in this case with less focus on consumerism's shaping of people and relationships and more on the ways in which a business orientation makes culture itself, as well as human beings and their connections with each other, more vulgar. He saw the growing predominance of the business mentality shaping United States culture and society, particularly the activity

of advertising that works on both sides of the production-consumption totality, as not just distasteful, but emblematic of the distortions of human subjectivity and relationships that come with advancing capitalism. The difference between Paris, with its openness and tolerance of ambiguity, and Woollett, with its no-nonsense, business-first attitudes, provides a contrast that contextualizes deeper exploration of these distortions. At the same time, this contrast becomes an analog for that between the language uses that prevent non-reified space for subjectivity and deeper intersubjectivity from forming, and those that do allow such subjectivities and relationships in a space outside the circle encompassed by the roles and relationships of producing and consuming.

As in *Spoils* and *Princess*, the grammatical ambiguity and abstractness in *Ambassadors* highlight the confusion and ambivalence of the central character at the same time as they allow for intimate and highly individual characterizations and help to create the intersubjective depth that is the context for non-reified relationships. The limited point-of-view narrative structure comes to full fruition in *Ambassadors*, which is told almost entirely from within the consciousness of Strether with extensive use of the technique of abstracting his mental processes and minutely examining the nuances of their activity within his psyche. In terms of narrative purpose, the multi-layered ambiguity of Strether's situation – his half-hearted commitment to his errand, his uncertain relationships with Mrs. Newsome and Maria, his unwillingness to see the truth about Chad, his unawareness of himself – allows for and even requires abstract and ambiguous expression. The intimacy this creates between Strether and the reader, an intimacy intensified by the occasional narrator intervention explaining some aspect of

Strether to the reader of which Strether himself is unaware, gives the reader experience of Strether's confusion and also his willingness to accept the ambiguity of his situation.

At the same time, Strether's exceptional tolerance for ambiguity is what opens him to the deeper possibilities for his own sense of subjectivity as well as relationships with others, particularly with Maria. Ambiguity, as Strether demonstrates over and over, is integral to going beyond a firm and quantifiable commodified sense of oneself and others, and is an essential condition for Jamesian deep intersubjectivity. Ambiguity, so discouraged by Woollett's capitalist context and Mrs. Newsome's industrialist attitudes but so encouraged by Maria and by Paris's culture of openness, is required for the open-ended, non-reified space where human purpose and relationships are not limited by capitalist categories or business's demand for certainty. In this experience of ambiguity, the reader is drawn into the opening of Strether's mind to deeper levels of himself and deeper possibilities for connecting with others. Before looking at examples of abstractness and ambiguity in the text and how they portray non-reified subjectivity and intersubjectivity, a brief look at the contrast between Woollett and Paris will help to contextualize the conditions for non-reified space as they appear in the process of Strether's unfolding consciousness.

In *Ambassadors*, the business focus of American culture is painted in unmistakably contemptuous terms, a reflection of both James's personal dislike for its vulgarity and his sense of the way it reduced people to worker and consumer. Unlike the upper-class Gereths in *Spoils*, the main characters in this novel are bourgeois, mostly connected with the lucrative Newsome family business. Like the Gereths, however, the source of whose wealth is never mentioned, the direct source of the Newsomes' money –

the product made in their factories – is also not revealed; though it is alluded to, the product is pointedly kept secret. In this way James is clearly making a critical point about the source of the Newsome wealth. During a conversation early in the novel, in which James lays out the backstory for Strether's mission as well as introducing major themes including his critical portrayal of advertising, Strether and Maria discuss how the Newsomes make their money (96-99). Strether claims that the item the factories produce is too vulgar to name in the grandeur of the theater where they are sitting. Maria suggests that the industry itself may be vulgar, perhaps tainted somehow, and this is why Chad is staying away. Strether denies it, but the suggestion of vulgarity in the bourgeois manufacturing industry constitutes one of James's direct hits on American capitalist culture.

An even more pointed "unmentionable" fact about the Newsomes that comes out in this conversation is where the family fortune came from in the first place. When Maria asks about how Chad's grandfather came by the money to start the factory, Strether tells her it "was not particularly noble" (98). Maria responds, "In business? Infamies? He was an old swindler?" Strether declines to answer. When Maria continues to press him, he admits that Chad's father was no better. As Jennifer Wicke points out, the strong implication of this conversation, with the secrecy on Strether's part and Maria's suggestions of infamy and swindle that he does not deny, is that the origin of the family money is not just vulgar, but possibly unethical or even illegal, though the truth is left to the reader's imagination (105). Maria's intuition that Mrs. Newsome's philanthropy is "a kind of expiation of wrongs" refers, according to Wicke, to the *Review*, the journal that Mrs. Newsome subsidizes, including paying Strether as her employee to be its editor. The

*Review*, which “go[es] in for the unpopular side,” Strether declares – it covers topics that are not necessarily pro-business, interprets Wicke – is Mrs. Newsome’s way of making up for the wrongs of her family’s past (106). Thus, in a few brief snatches of conversation, James suggests that the sources of wealth in the bourgeois capitalist business world of the United States are vulgar and unsavory, and the taint extends even to activities that are apparently critical of the impact of business on society.

The contrast between the bourgeois Woollett and the historically cultured Paris is embodied in the two women in Strether’s life, Mrs. Newsome and Maria Gostrey. This contrast comes through most clearly in the way Strether thinks about and compares them during a dinner with Maria before their visit to the theater. Describing the soft lighting of the restaurant and Maria’s delicate perfume, he feels confused and, as usual, somewhat ambivalent about the distinct contrast he notes to the atmosphere of his attendance at the theater with Mrs. Newsome, dates which involve “no little confronted dinner, no pink lights, no whiff of vague sweetness, as a preliminary” (89). In addition, Maria wore a dress that was “‘cut down’, as he believed the term to be, in respect to shoulders and bosom, in a manner quite other than Mrs. Newsome’s,” (90) and wore a band of red velvet around her neck, contrasted to the Elizabethan ruff which covered Mrs. Newsome’s neck above a high-cut black gown. The vagueness and softness of the Parisian experience with Maria, which echo the characteristics in which non-reified space can exist, contrast with the cold, austere imagery of being with Mrs. Newsome in New England, where business reigns.

Mrs. Newsome is also characterized through Strether’s thoughts about her and their relationship. After arriving in Paris, Strether finds that a packet of letters from Mrs.

Newsome, written since he left Woollett, have already arrived for him. Even though Strether does not allow himself any criticism of Mrs. Newsome, the way he feels comes through in the narration. "...she had lost no time, had followed on his heels while he moved, so expressing herself that he now could measure the probable frequency with which he should hear" (112). As he reads her letters, he seems to hear her voice all the way from Massachusetts: "His friend wrote admirably and her tone was even more in her style than in her voice – he might almost, for the hour, have had to come this distance to get its full carrying quality..." Though Mrs. Newsome presents herself as an elegant lady, she has the heart of a bully and a stalker, a vulgarity that seems to be in keeping with the strict domination she maintains over Strether.

It is a measure of Strether's self-doubt that he allows himself to be treated this way, but it is a measure of James's dislike for capitalism that Mrs. Newsome embodies the values of the capitalist bourgeois class in such a vivid way. In the reified world of capitalist culture, working for a wage is the definition of human fulfillment; the experience, as Strether demonstrates, is that of being treated instrumentally, as a commodity. Mrs. Newsome, representing the owning class, demonstrates the limitation and vulgarity that characterize human life and purpose for her class in the reified culture of American capitalism: personal austerity, moral superiority, commodifying each person and relationship in order to extract everything possible from them, always putting the business first and keeping control by any means necessary. With her life built around continuing and extending her husband's manufacturing enterprise, Mrs. Newsome exemplifies the distortions of human character that come from assuming the roles of capitalism.

In contrast to the commodification that shapes the lives and relationships of Mrs. Newsome and the other characters from Woollett, the people Strether meets in Paris exemplify the potential for non-reified subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Marie de Vionnet, when Strether finally meets her, charms him with her sweet but vague conversation, so different, he thinks repeatedly, from Mrs. Newsome and the way things are done in Woollett (210-213). Even Chad himself, at least at first, seems to be less a product of Woollett and more one of Paris, not showing up when Strether arrives but rather remaining ambiguously distant, and then presenting himself as refined and cultured in a way vastly different from the way he was in Woollett. From her first meeting with Strether, Maria Gostrey, who exemplifies Paris in its contrast with Woollett, models and exemplifies the subtlety and intuitive awareness that can arise in open-ended interactions.

As he adapts to Paris's culture, Strether, too, becomes less related to Woollett and more related to Paris. He opens himself to the ambiguity of situations he encounters that are so different from his customary experiences, and as he does, the complex grammatical structures that emerge from James's use of the techniques of abstraction and ambiguity invite the reader to share this experience. R.W. Short, who grammatically analyzes James's sentence structure in the opening paragraph of *The Ambassadors*, suggests that, in order to fully respond to this invitation, the reader must make significant effort to understand the abstractions and ambiguities. For Short, the vagueness and complexity of James's prose have the narrative function of reflecting Strether's uncertainty in the strange milieu of Paris. As Strether must find his way in a social and interpersonal landscape where the usual guideposts are scrambled or distorted, or even

completely missing, the reader also learns to interpret vague, abstract, or confusing meanings (Short 76).

The following passage, which minutely recounts Strether's rapid mental activity upon seeing Chad for the first time after waiting many days in mystification for Chad to respond to his efforts at contact, illustrates the way James's text pulls the reader intimately into the mind of Strether. It also demonstrates the level of reader engagement required to make sense of the text. The passage contains many examples of nominalizations of mental processes, psychological verbs, and "it" as a pronoun with a vague referent. It also uses another Jamesian technique of ambiguity: deictic pronouns such as "this" or "that" which refer to something usually vague and difficult to articulate. These constructions, italicized for ease of locating them, express the ambiguity of what Strether understands:

The momentary relief – as if from the knowledge that nothing of *that* [italicized in original] at least could be undone – sprang from a particular cause, the cause that had flashed into operation, in Miss Gostrey's box, with direct apprehension, with amazed recognition, and that had been concerned since in every throb of his consciousness. What *it* came to was that with an absolutely new quantity to deal with one simply couldn't know. The new quantity was represented by the fact that Chad had been made over. *That* was all; whatever *it* was *it* was everything. Strether had never seen the *thing* so done before – *it* was perhaps a specialty of Paris. (165)

Already confused about what exactly Chad is up to, Strether's bewilderment has grown with the delay in their meeting. In the passage, the first "that," which is italicized in the original text for emphasis, is a deictic pronoun that refers to Strether's increasingly vigorous efforts to contact Chad ever since Strether's arrival in Paris, described in previous paragraphs. The first "it" – "what *it* came to" – seems to mean Strether's strong but mixed feelings, the relief and recognition that are throbbing in his consciousness, as well as his inability to know what to do with those feelings. The next "that" – "That was all" – encompasses the multitude of small changes in Chad, as well as all of what went before, Strether's complex of feelings and his bafflement about them. "It" in the phrase "whatever it was, it was everything" joins with the vague words "whatever" and "everything" to express Strether throwing up his hands mentally at the incomprehensibility of Chad's transformation. The word "thing," another of James's favorite vague nouns, is used in the same way as "whatever" and "everything" – to represent the undefined and undefinable process that has apparently reshaped Chad so remarkably.

Strether's mental dithering in this passage highlights one of the central questions that drive the narrative: what actually has happened to Chad? The passage also exemplifies the ambiguity that Strether continually creates in his own mind in regard to this question because of his deep ambivalence both about actually knowing what Chad is doing and about being Mrs. Newsome's ambassador to bring him home. The nominalizations in the first sentence of this passage also show Strether being acted upon by his own mental processes: "relief," "knowledge," "apprehension," and "recognition" seem to operate autonomously within him, springing, flashing and throbbing within his

awareness. In depicting Strether's mental processes in this way, James is implying that there is a space within Strether's mind where this activity happens. Ascribing activity and agency to "relief" and "recognition" emphasizes Strether's own passivity and his essential bewilderment, which are key aspects of his subjectivity, while at the same time inviting the reader into the interior space in which these activities occur to experience them along with Strether.

This passage also shows how abstracting mental processes does not abstract the character, but rather allows a highly individualized and exceptionally intimate and nuanced look at a character's subjectivity by narrating his interior life as a scene of great interest. As with Fleda in *Spoils*, this technique invites the reader into the character's mind and into an intersubjective connection with the character. The reader also sees, progressively through the novel, the shift in Strether's subjectivity as his reified identity dissolves in ambiguity and open-endedness.

When a character's interior subjective space is real in this way, it can also open into a place where two characters can meet in deep intersubjectivity. During the long conversation between Strether and Maria at the theater, when the reader learns much of the backstory of the Newsomes and Strether's relationship to them, James also lays the basis for Strether's development of mental intimacy with Maria. One of the grammatical techniques for expressing this deep intersubjectivity in conversation is "it" as a deictic pronoun or expletive subject. In these constructions, "it" may be a subject or an object, and is often paired with a verb such as "brought out" or "took in," depicting movements into or out of a character's mind. As in *Spoils*, "it" stands in for an idea that was just spoken, a multi-layered meaning that has been developed through the past few exchanges

or even over the entire conversation, an unspoken meaning or motivation on the part of one of the speakers, or all of these together – a complex constellation of meaning that would be difficult if not impossible to state clearly. This use of “it” traces the growing intimacy between Strether and Maria by implying with each instance that they understand the spoken and unspoken meanings and implications of each other’s words in the same way. Both, in Merleau-Pontian terms, are reaching mentally towards each other in the effort to take up the other’s intention. She, an experienced reader of people, makes continual intuitive leaps in her perception of his situation and his inner life; and he, less experienced in this level of relating but intrigued by her keen awareness and aware of being attracted to her, opens his mind to her and begins to perceive what she is perceiving there.

The intersubjective connection deepens as they converse. For example, near the middle of the conversation, Strether has just explained to her about his editorship of the *Review*, and Maria has asked him if Mrs. Newsome’s name appears on the cover next to his name.

He waited a little. ‘Oh as for that you must judge if she peeps out.

She’s behind the whole thing; but she’s of a delicacy and a discretion –!’

Miss Gostrey *took it* all. ‘I’m sure. She would be. I don’t underrate her. She must be rather a swell.’ (100)

The “it” that Maria “took” refers not just to what Strether has said about Mrs. Newsome, but to what he has not said, a holding back that is communicated partly in his hesitation before answering, and partly in the vagueness of his answer. Maria listens carefully and hears everything, takes it all, demonstrating the skills of Jamesian deep intersubjectivity

as she grasps both Strether's intention, what he wants her to know about Mrs. Newsome, and what he tries to hide even from himself. In this part of the conversation, it is Maria who is doing the "taking up" and "taking in," with Strether mostly marveling at how much she seems to be reading his mind.

As they continue to talk, Maria discerns that Mrs. Newsome sees Strether as the best catch for a husband currently available to her, and advises him to

'...close with her.'

'Close with her?' he asked as she seemed to hang poised.

'Before you lose your chance.'

Their eyes met over *it*. (101)

In this case, "it" has a highly nuanced multi-layered meaning that includes not just Strether's somewhat precarious situation as Mrs. Newsome's fiancé, including implications about how she really feels about him and the power she has over him both personally and economically, but also his awareness of that situation.

As in the scene between Fleda and Owen, though with less emotion, this is a moment of Jamesian deep intersubjectivity as described by George Butte, where one or both of the characters are in the "third orbit" of reflected awareness, sharing spoken and unspoken understandings, and understanding each other's understandings. As their eyes meet over "it," Strether seems to be aware, at least to a degree, of his situation and also aware of Maria's awareness of it; Maria is seeing Strether see her awareness. Strether, like Fleda, does not allow himself to be fully aware of his own mental processes; in the same way that she does not acknowledge her love for Owen even to herself, Strether has never admitted to himself how he stands with Mrs. Newsome (even though, as with

Fleda, the reader has been let in on this secret). However, his words and attitudes have communicated this clearly to Maria, and in this moment, as she takes up his unspoken intention, she seems to reflect it back to him, so that he begins to see it more clearly. Strether makes little effort to grasp Maria's intention, except as it relates to learning everything she can about him. Yet there is evidence that the growing attraction between them is felt on both sides. In that sense, he does, without full awareness, espouse her intention.

The meeting of their eyes, an example of Merleau-Ponty's assertion that seeing is visual touching (*Visible* 134), reinforces the sense of intersubjective communion and supports Butte's contention that deep intersubjectivity often involves nonverbal interchanges (134). At the end of the scene, after Maria has extracted from Strether the most important fact of his situation that he has been hiding from himself – that failure to bring Chad home means he will lose everything, including his job and Mrs. Newsome – the sense of an intersubjective bond between them is captured in the image of Strether's hand on the door of the carriage into which he has just put her to go home. They are not physically touching, but because of the mental intimacy of their conversation, they are inhabiting a shared space of communion, a non-reified space paradoxically made possible by the abstraction of their mental processes and by language that allows for multiple and open-ended meanings.

### **Stein's ideas about grammar**

James's efforts to create a non-reified space through using language in particular ways, especially through deictic pronouns and vague nouns such as "thing," has a direct resonance within the linguistic experimentation of Gertrude Stein around the same time.

Stein's views of language add a grammatical perspective that helps to elucidate James's own idiosyncrasies; she even saw him as having a purpose to his grammatical experimentation that was similar to her own. Their common project, as Stein saw it, was to use language in ways that allow movement and that directly express reality rather than representing it through fixed ideas and concepts (225). For Stein, standard sentence structure, and especially the use of nouns, results in static, immovable prose because its unachievable purpose is to capture some aspect of the world in a kind of verbal snapshot. Words that convey fixed notions can never describe a world that does not stand still, she believed, nor account for the uniqueness of each specific thing. This is especially true of nouns: "A noun is a name of anything, why after a thing is named write about it" (209-210). Saying a thing's name over and over does not yield new insights, she insists, as expressed in her famous line, "A rose is a rose is a rose." Pronouns, however, are a preferable alternative because they do not conceptualize a person or a thing, but rather they allow some of the difference back in: "They represent some one but they are not its or his name," and this gives pronouns "a greater possibility of being something" (213). In other words, because a pronoun does not name a thing, its very vagueness opens it to potentially representing something real rather than a static concept.

James's often exceptionally vague referents for "it" or "this" affirm Stein's sense that pronouns allow more potential meanings because they are not names; vague pronouns can refer to multiple layers of nuanced meaning. In addition, far from being generalized concepts, James's referents for deictic pronouns, though grammatically vague, are specifically related to what is happening in the narrative. Stein does not directly analyze James's prose, and therefore does not explain how he can be doing

something similar to her project when one of his favored grammatical techniques is making nouns out of verbs. The specificity and individuality of the processes he names through those nominalizations, however, take them out of the realm of ordinary nouns of the sort that name, for Stein, concepts that do not allow for difference. Although grammatically nouns and in that sense abstractions, they remain within the psyche of the character in whom they are occurring, and are thus specific to that character in that moment. Paradoxically, in his efforts to portray the mental activity of characters, James found a way to use nouns that accomplishes one of Stein's concerns: to express things as they really are, not as reified concepts.

James's language uses also accomplish Stein's other concern, that language needs to allow movement rather than attempting to capture and concretize a fleeting moment. Both his nominalizations and his vague pronouns seem to move, to be somewhat slippery, and the reader must try her best to gather them into her understanding without, probably, succeeding completely. Nominalizing mental processes has the paradoxical effect of giving them agency within a person, which is to say, it gives them movement. In the passage above, for example, Strether's "relief" "sprang," and "cause," not a nominalized mental process in itself but a component of the activity in Strether's mind, "flashed." The vague pronouns in the last sentence of the passage exemplify James being in complete accord with Stein's view that pronouns in their very vagueness allow movement – as she put it, they "represent some one but they are not its or his name" and therefore have "a greater possibility of being something." A reader willing to do the work that James requires will find himself moving within the text to find out what that "something" is, and concluding that it cannot be fully clarified.

In these ways, James seems to be attempting the same purpose that Stein articulates for her prose: that sentences and paragraphs have “the balance of a space completely not filled but created by something moving as moving is not as moving should be.” She adds, “As I said Henry James in his later writing had had a dim feeling that this was what he knew he should do” (225). In other words, James’s style does not completely fill the space of his narrative, or of the relationships between his characters, or of the minds of his readers, but rather allows room in all these places for the inherent movement of reality to be present. Moreover, the space within his prose is created by that movement, which is not a concept of movement but simply movement as it occurs. This is non-reified space as James creates it with his grammar and syntax: it is the space that is not full of meaning already, as described by Stein, and that both creates and is created by James’s language that is less or not at all reified because it resists being conceptual, and because it points to or allows the communication of a reality that cannot be clearly and objectively described. The reality James is pointing to is an ever-moving, ever-changing, fluid and evanescent process that does not fill up the space but always leaves room for more movement. For his characters, this space is non-reified because it has no conceptual limitations, but rather the characters can move with the flow of each other’s ideas and open to deeper awareness of the reality they share, even creating it as they go.

In this effort to open words to allow the motion of real life, James is reaching for ways to use language that allow for greater depth and breadth, for the unpredictable and the mysterious, for shift and play in the meaning of what things and people can be, that, as Stein argues, typical language use closes down. In the increasingly science-based discourses of the late nineteenth century, including the new fields of psychology,

sociology, and journalism, the goal was to explain and describe fully the human mind, human society, and everyday occurrences, leaving nothing to mystery or even uncertainty. These ways of using language come out of a belief that everything can and should be conceptualized and quantified, and thereby understood, the worldview that emerges from reification of labor, people, activity, and consciousness. As Lukács puts it, “The reified world appears henceforth quite definitively ... as the only possible world, the only conceptually accessible, comprehensible world vouchsafed to us as humans” (110).

For James and Stein, the real is not conceptually accessible. Rather, discourses that use language conventionally, that try to fill up the space of language with meaning, cannot express the real world. As Stein puts it, “narrative that is not newspaper narrative but real narrative must of necessity be told by anyone having come to the realization that the noun must be replaced not by inner balance but by the thing in itself and that will eventually lead to everything” (245). Again showing similarity to James, who remains ambiguously silent in regard to what his vague, abstract, and ambiguous uses of language are intended to accomplish, she does not clarify what she means by “the thing in itself” or “everything.” However, in their shared concern about the impact of reified language on how people understand the world, what they both seem to be gesturing toward resonates with what Marxists mean when they describe the non-capitalist material and relational world that human beings create together as a world of direct connection to life, where people relate in ways that are primary and constitutive rather than commodified and passive.

For Raymond Williams, language is a primary activity, equivalent to labor in its evolutionary and historical efficacy. Because it articulates practical consciousness, he argues, language is actively constitutive of the human being – not in an essentialist way, but as an ongoing, unfolding process. Language makes possible the active social presence without which neither human relationships nor the material meeting of needs and production of human life can take place, he says (32). Far from being a secondary function that comes out of or after labor, for Williams language is “a making,” and involved from the beginning in all other material activity (38). In other words, language is, along with labor, a fundamental way in which people create and sustain their social world together.

According to Lukács, however, in a society structured by commodity capitalism, people are no longer aware of themselves as constitutive participants in their material life, because commodification has redefined their labor as separable from their humanness and has reshaped social relations in a way that reifies everything, including consciousness. Following Williams and Lukács, a capitalist system has the same effect on language, alienating it from people just as it alienates their labor from them. Although capitalism does not directly commodify language in the same way it does labor, the connection of language to consciousness means that language also becomes disconnected from the material base of life, becoming reified and ceasing to be evolutionarily and historically constitutive in the ways that Williams describes. Language in such a world, like labor, is detached from direct involvement in the production of human life, relationships, and material needs, and redirected into a closed loop with commodity production and commodity-mediated relationships. In such a world, language expresses

what is there in the most concrete way possible, rather than constituting what people create together.

In such a system, it is not only workers in the laboring class who become reified; the culture of commodification affects everyone, according to Lukács. Capitalism as it developed over time brought into being a unified structure of consciousness throughout society, he argues, and this structure took on a more refined and intensified form in people of the upper classes. In describing how every aspect of the human personality becomes commodified in a capitalist system, Lukács states that commodification

stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man; his qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things which he can 'own' or 'dispose of' like the various objects of the external world and there is no natural form in which human relations can be cast, no way in which man can bring his physical and psychic 'qualities' into play without their being subjected increasingly to this reifying process.

(100)

As an artist, bringing his "physical and psychic 'qualities' into play" in writing his books, James fits Lukács's description of the reified consciousness of the creative genius who contemplates and observes the world around him. In addition, as a person who identified with the upper class, James would also have experienced the reification of consciousness that affected the ruling class "in a refined and spiritualized, but, for that very reason, more intensified form" (100). Thus, as a bourgeois person and a creative artist, James was a member of the class whose consciousness was reified in the most highly refined manner, including the contemplative attitude toward his own reified creative genius. This

attitude is amply demonstrated by his eager embrace of the observer role, through which he obtained many of the seed ideas for his fiction, as he tells us in many of his Prefaces written for the New York Edition of his work published in 1907. The Prefaces themselves, in fact, constitute an extended contemplation on his own work over several decades. James could hardly be better described in terms of his entire productive output than as a contemplative observer.

### **Advertising**

James's observations of advertising that provided the material for his critique of this business practice in *The Ambassadors* indicate that while his consciousness was certainly reified, in keeping with the argument of Lukács, he nevertheless was able to see advertising as an insidious activity that was contributing to the constriction of what it meant to be a human being. In making this assessment, James was setting himself against an activity that was becoming a pervasive presence in American culture, born out of the Industrial Revolution and the vast increases in commodity production that it made possible, together with technologies that allowed companies to speak directly to people through mass communication and begin to address them as consumers. Always sensitive to the effects of marketing on people, as evidenced by the repeated references to shopping and shop windows in many novels, including *The Princess Casamassima*, James responded with dismay to the growing industry of advertising in America, its manipulative methods of persuading people to buy things, and the way it epitomized the importance of business and especially commodity marketing to cultural life in the country of his birth.

In the almost two decades since *Princess*, department stores had proliferated in London and elsewhere in Europe but especially in the United States, making new appeals to consumer desire through window displays and in-store spectacles, chronicled by William Leach in *Land of Desire*. The advertising industry was also expanding, taking advantage of advances in mass communication to reach a nationwide audience with its persuasive discourse. James was unhappy about the growing influence of these developments on culture in the United States, which was leading the way in these consumer-oriented activities at this time (Leach 12). In his collection of travel essays in *The American Scene*, published in 1907 after his first visit to the United States in over two decades, James discusses the changes in the social and economic situation in a number of East Coast cities with the new prominence of the economic focus. In many of these essays, he decries the “image-based economy” and the dominance of the business class and its concerns (Wicke 113). In one passage from an essay on New York City, James looks at the proliferation of windows in the skyscrapers that “speak the loudest for the economic idea” (95). On his visit to Boston, he describes the change in Park Street from a commercial area with character and distinction, “founded on all the moral, material, social solidities, instead of on some of them only,” to a place “violently vulgarized” (233) by a shift to selling mass-produced commodities.

Even though James had not made this visit yet when he wrote *The Ambassadors*, he was certainly aware of the increasing cultural influence of business in the United States. His deep antipathy for advertising is sometimes read as the distaste of the effete person for what his class sees as vulgar bourgeois activity; his dismay at the transformation of Park Street provides ample evidence for this view. Many critics,

however, credit him with a deeper reason for his aversion, and an acute, even vicious, critique of advertising for its influence on culture. The theme runs subtly throughout the novel, introduced at the beginning when Strether reveals that his mission is to bring Chad home to take over the advertising arm of the family business, and culminating in a scene near the end when Chad informs Strether that this is exactly what he intends to do. In between, through discussing the nature of the family business, exploring the character of Chad, and tracing the gradual awakening of Strether's own consciousness, the multi-dimensional critique of advertising unfolds.

In her historical analysis of James's responses to advertising, Wicke argues that advertising is not just a theme in the novel, but a subtext throughout it. She points to two moments during the conversation between Strether and Maria Gostrey at the theater to support this claim, both snippets of dialogue that do not appear to relate to advertising. As Strether explains the nature of the Newsomes' manufacturing business, Maria elicits from Strether that the business is very successful, but its continued growth could be in jeopardy. Wicke points out that American manufacturing businesses were at a crossroads at the beginning of the twentieth century, as many new companies were founded making their own versions of existing products. This meant that manufacturing companies needed to use advertising not just to describe their products and provide information about them, the primary role of advertising up till then, but to distinguish their version from all the similar ones and persuade people that it was better.

According to Wicke's reading, James is portraying the Newsome business as being at this crucial point when Strether says, "[Chad] can come into the business now – he can't come later," and a few lines further on, "The concern's a manufacture – and a

manufacture that, if it's only properly looked after, may well be on the way to become a monopoly. It's a little thing they make – make better, it appears, than other people can, or than other people, at any rate, do ” (96). The implication here, Wicke says, is that what Chad can do – develop advertising to keep the company on top of its competitors, and even make it a monopoly – has to be done immediately. For James to be cognizant of this watershed moment in the development of consumer capitalism indicates both attention to and understanding of how advertising was integral to the business focus of America. Paralleling James's detailed knowledge of anarchism in Europe at the time he wrote *Princess*, this understanding of the status of advertising as an industry and its relationship to economy and culture shows him once again to be an acute and knowledgeable observer not just of people, but of social and political changes and trends. This awareness gives a stronger foundation to his critique of advertising for its abuse of imagination, a critique which mostly plays out through the character of Chad.

Chad's way of presenting himself can be read as a commentary on the visual nature of advertising as well as its manipulative use of imagery, a development that printing technology was making possible in the early twentieth century. June Hee Chung notes that Chad represents himself pictorially – he manages his visual appearance and his surroundings to create certain impressions. Chad is absent from Paris at the time Strether arrives and remains away for several days, effectively taking control of how they meet by showing up unexpectedly in Strether's box at the opera. Strether is overcome by the powerful impression of Chad as notably changed, expressed in the brief passage discussed above. Chad has timed his arrival to the moment the next act begins, allowing the shock of his visual impression to be drawn out for some time. Strether, sitting next to

Chad, felt that “he was in presence of a fact that occupied his whole mind, that occupied for the half-hour his senses themselves all together...” (152). This, certainly, is exactly the effect Chad intends.

After the opera, Strether registers the impression that Chad not only looks different, but that his appearance seems to change from one moment to the next. As Chung puts it, “Strether is struck by how Chad repeatedly rearranges his facial expressions so that Strether imagines the young man’s countenance is an acquirable possession that can be detached and reattached at will like a mask” (315-316). In this sense, Chad exhibits himself as a commodity, deliberately presenting his own reified qualities such as his smile, the smoothness of his expression, the tone of his voice. Even his body postures – how he puts his hands in his pockets, settles himself back in his chair, turns his face to the light – function as an assemblage of images through which, as Strether becomes aware, he is always “designedly showing himself” (169). Chung notes that Chad seems to be all image: “Chad not only relies on nonmimetic, visual forms of representation, but his identity appears unstable and malleable because his real face or essence cannot be distinguished from his acts of artifice” (317). In this way, she adds, Chad’s self-presentation parallels the way advertising works to communicate a lot of information visually in a small space and to collapse the difference between reality and appearance. Richard Salmon amplifies this point when he notes that the “acts of artifice” by which Chad presents himself as vastly changed are credited throughout the novel to the influence of Marie de Vionnet in refining him from a coarse American boy into a cultured man with exquisite taste and manners. Chad’s transformation, Salmon says, echoes the message of advertising that people can remake themselves infinitely (159).

The depth of Chad's artifice becomes more clear when Strether realizes that Chad and Marie are romantically and sexually involved, a fact that Chad's careful management of appearances has kept Strether from seeing clearly. In spite of the shock of his experience of Chad's duplicity about his relationship with Marie, however, Strether is still taken by surprise when Chad announces that he intends to return to Woollett after all to become an advertising man, an about-face that will also involve leaving behind the woman who loves him. The conversation they have under a street lamp in front of Chad's apartment, when Chad waxes eloquent about the power of advertising, contains the novel's most direct commentary about advertising as an activity of consumer culture. As Wicke notes, the scene reverses the position and consciousness of the two men: Chad, who up till this moment has seemed fundamentally altered from a coarse American into a suave continental man, is now the crass and almost violent promoter of advertising, whereas Strether, who came urging Chad to return to Woollett and do his advertising job, is now telling him to stay in Paris (Wicke 111).

As Chad shows himself in one of his carefully crafted postures, with his coat thrown back and his thumbs in the armholes of his vest while his fingers "twiddle" up and down, he explains to Strether that advertising can do much more than improve sales of the product. "'It's an art like another, and infinite like all the arts.' He went on as if for the joke of it – almost as if his friend's face amused him. 'In the hands, naturally, of a master. The right man must take hold. With the right man to work it *c'est un monde*'" (504-505). All of the polish, taste, and refinement Chad has learned in Paris are only a veneer, a detachable surface. The experience he has gained in manipulating his own image will now be put to use in creating advertising for the "vulgar" product of his

mother's company, and to influence its sales "extraordinarily; really beyond what one has supposed" (504). Moreover, Chad treats the depth and nuance that Strether has experienced in Paris as a joke, laughing at Strether's disbelief. As Wicke puts it, "The infinitude that has opened up for Strether in Paris, his recognition of the fatal finitude of Woollett and all it stands for, is translated by Chad into the play of an infinitude of appearances, an infinite textual world that only a master can manipulate" (111). All of the deception, the false impressions, the deliberate manipulation of situations have given Chad a good deal of practice for the work of advertising, seeing the world as an infinite text of changeable surfaces.

Strether has experienced another kind of infinitude, one that has drawn him beyond the surface where words and images begin to dissolve into a space that is changeable in an entirely different way. Having tasted the third orbit of deep intersubjectivity with Maria, and having believed up until this moment that Chad had been having similar experiences as he shed his Woollett attitudes and adopted Parisian ones, Strether is deeply shocked at Chad's full embrace of the business mentality. The non-reified infinitude that gestures vaguely toward space that is not already filled with reified meaning has such power and appeal for Strether that he finds Chad's interest in occupying the reified world of business incomprehensible: "Strether had watched him as if, there on the pavement, without a pretext, he had begun to dance a fancy step" (505). The world Strether has seen and wants to experience, the world of Paris, is an "infinite textual world" that uses language as a primary constitutive activity, opening non-reified space and inviting human connection on a deep level outside the commodified relationships of capitalism. The infinite "textual world" that Chad wants to manipulate is

a world of words and images, of surfaces and masks, the texts of commodification that present the roles of worker and consumer as the fulfillment of human purpose. This is the “textual world” of New England and its business focus, the textual world of advertising.

In another analysis of James’s critique of advertising in *The Ambassadors*, Richard Salmon argues that James exhibits an awareness of Marxist categories and possibly even a deliberate use of them by his portrayal of advertising as a bridge between commerce and culture – between what Marxian terminology has called “base” and “superstructure.” In doing so, Salmon says, James is acknowledging that advertising, which would be considered a part of superstructure by classical Marxist thought, actually bridges base and superstructure, and at the same time it reinforces their separation. James’s portrayal of advertising thus indicates a clear awareness not just of the business and economic significance of advertising, but also of its cultural impact as it was emerging in his historical moment (156). In the final conversation with Chad, Strether comments that ““advertising is clearly at this time of day the secret of trade”” (505). This idea reverses the Marxist analysis that base creates superstructure, according to Salmon: “Strether’s later remark suggests not that commercial activity is the generative source behind cultural phenomena, but, conversely, that the cultural form of advertising is itself the ‘secret’ behind modern commercial practices” (157). Thus, as Salmon points out, James indicates his awareness that the creative influence between advertising and commerce goes in both directions: advertising creates new opportunities for commerce, and at the same time commercial activity and its needs create the same kind of opportunities for advertising.

As Wicke and Salmon make clear, then, James not only gives ironic scrutiny to the sources of the Newsomes' wealth by not naming them, but he also demonstrates a level of economic analysis that goes deeper than personal distaste or even acute observation. Further, Salmon argues against the criticism raised by Terry Eagleton, that suppression of the economic base of the well-to-do characters in James's fiction both creates and reveals an obliviousness to the sources of their wealth and its impact on workers. Salmon credits James with awareness that one of advertising's cultural effects is precisely to create uncertainty about the origins of the commodities in the productive base that generates wealth in the superstructure (157).

James's attitude towards advertising has another side, however, one that demonstrates the reification of his own consciousness. Chung argues that far from rejecting advertising, James actually liked it and even used some of its methods in his writing. He was intrigued, she claims, by the way that this newly imaginative and technically expanding activity could communicate a large amount of information through pictures combined with words. Print technology was improving to allow pictures and type on the same page, and James saw this as resembling the way visual and symbolic representation were used in theater, long a particular interest of his. The increase in figurative language in his late style reflects the growing presence in public culture of advertising, posters, and other forms of popular art using illustration, Chung says.

Further showing himself enmeshed in the culture of capitalism that he criticized, says Chung, James consciously adopted this style in an effort to sell books, indicating both awareness of his own market and its preferences, and also willingness to participate in that market as a producer of commodities (308). She argues that James shaped this

fundamental visual technique of advertising into a verbal technique by compressing a whole picture into a few words. She does not offer examples, but they are not difficult to find. The metonymic depiction of Mrs. Newsome as a black silk dress with a high ruffled collar, an image conveyed not in expository sentences but in a few phrases, provides a powerful picture of the whole of her character (90-91). The countryside through which Strether travels which he compares to a Lambinet painting is another example of a whole scene painted verbally in a few lines (453). In imitating this technique, James was implicitly promoting the very consumer culture that he seemed to despise, Chung says: “James both exploited and helped give credibility to an emerging business culture that increasingly relied on pictorial representation” (307). That he did so in order to make more money from selling his books, a purely economic motive, is distinct evidence of his acquiescence and participation in business’s shaping of culture.

Additionally, Chung argues that James reveals his willingness to use the manipulative techniques of advertising in the scene where Chad announces to Strether his intention to return to Woollett and take on the role of advertising boss for his mother’s company. Even though this scene contains open mockery of advertising, the sudden reversal of Chad’s apparent position and the exposure of his transformation as a superficial reinvention of himself constitute a twist as manipulative as anything advertisements do, according to Chung. This sudden reversal “simultaneously discloses James as a manipulator and advertiser, as an unreliable narrator of sorts” (330), she says, suggesting not only that James is willing to make use of an advertising technique in his own writing, but that his apparent disgust for advertising may be a false image, as subject

to reversal as Chad's attitude. Chad calls advertising an art like any other; in appearing to both satirize and agree with this statement, James reveals his own contradictory attitude.

Other evidence of James's complicity with capitalist activities and their influence on culture can be found in his comfortable use of the language of money and exchange, what Peggy McCormack calls his "quantifying mentality" (540). In the second paragraph of the novel, for example, Strether, who has just arrived in England, is relieved to realize that he has some time by himself before Waymarsh, his companion from Massachusetts, arrives on a different boat. Strether feels "like a man who, elatedly finding in his pocket more money than usual, handles it a while and idly and pleasantly chinks it before addressing himself to the business of spending" (56). Later, in Paris, he again compares his free time to spending money: "Strether hadn't had for years so rich a consciousness of time – a bag of gold into which he constantly dipped for a handful" (136). Comparing time to money is a common trope for James, one that echoes a familiar saying with roots firmly in the soil of business. Salmon, though he argues for reading a strong Marxian critique by James in *The Ambassadors*, points out that James uses this metaphor because he knows that time is money: "Quite literally, it is money which buys time, as James, so often vilified as an uncritical historian of the leisure class, was well aware" (155). Salmon, here pointing to James's understanding of the bourgeois mentality about money, also affirms that James was comfortable using this terminology in that same bourgeois manner.

Framing the world and relationships in economic terms also suggests familiarity, comfort, and even explicit approval of the commodification of everything, including people. As McCormack points out, the characters in the "aggressively capitalistic

societies” that James depicts in his novels “respond to this setting as an exchange economy in which they practice whatever form of commodities transaction they can afford. This exchange economy turns human assets into cultural commodities valuable only when made public or exchanged in social interaction,” she explains (541). While Chad is the clearest example, Strether also exemplifies this commodification of personal attributes. Since Mrs. Newsome does not wish to come to France herself to fetch Chad, she sends Strether. His previous experience in Europe becomes commodified as qualifying him for this venture; but more than that, his current positions as her employee and her fiancé are the commodities that weigh on the other side of the transactional balance. He must succeed in his mission in order to exchange them for the upgrades Mrs. Newsome is offering – as a higher-paid employee and her husband. In Strether’s case, the exchange is coerced, not his choice, affirming McCormack’s characterization of James’s fictive worlds as “aggressively capitalistic.”

In similar ways, most of the other characters also commodify themselves and their qualities or skills: Marie holds onto Chad with increasing desperation by trading her beauty as well as her skill and knowledge about making him more refined; Maria exchanges her knowledge of Americans to help them navigate European cultures and in doing so may benefit financially but certainly “bear[s] on [her] back the huge load of our national consciousness” (66); Chad has turned himself into a quintessential commodity, a collection of qualities he changes at will, depending on what he needs from another person. It is easy to see in these examples evidence for McCormack’s claim that in James’s fiction, “Society as an exchange economy promotes the saleable features of human beings” (542). What is arguable, however, is whether James sets up these

relationships in order to comment on them, or whether they reflect an uncritical acceptance on his part that the primary context of human relationships is economic.

The answer is, almost certainly, both. Even as a bourgeois man who wrote for a living and accepted the commodification of his talent, James was able to see the restrictions on his humanity of the capitalist context of this exchange and to kick against them. On a conceptual level, he could still see beyond the constructed limits of consumer capitalism, which was relatively new in his moment; the categories of “worker” and “consumer” were not as familiar and comfortable as they would become a generation later, and the ways in which they narrowed the definition of human purpose were as yet less obvious. Many novelists and writers of James’s era, including Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane and Emile Zola, delivered strong critiques of capitalism as it was changing the landscape in the United States and Europe, creating social misery as it turned farmers into factory workers and city neighborhoods into slums. Upper-class taste was reified in mass-produced commodities, and advertising manipulated imagination and desire to sell things to the bourgeois consumer class.

That James, despite being a fine example of an artist with noticeably reified faculties and consciousness, was aware of and commented on the impacts that consumer capitalism was having on both sides of the Atlantic is evident. That he was also able to intuit that a space for non-reified subjectivity and intersubjectivity was still possible, and that abstractness and ambiguity in language could point the way to it, argues for both the power of language and for a particular sensitivity on James’s part. It seems clear that, in spite of his seeming conformity with Lukács’s reified “virtuoso,” James retained a non-objectified, non-reified faculty somewhere within his consciousness. Perhaps his deep

immersion in the complexities of the English language allowed him to see its power as a materially creative force that could be used to open a “back door” out of a completely commodified world. His ability to imagine a vague, open-ended space that was outside of commodity culture and not already filled with meaning, a space where capitalism’s narrow definition of human purpose ceased to have power, invites us in our fully reified culture of the twenty-first century to join him in imagining that possibility.

In his 1897 novel *What Maisie Knew*, the subject of the next chapter, James focuses attention on how this space not only makes deep intersubjectivity possible, but can allow an individual subject to live in a non-reified way even within a commodified world. Although he wrote *Maisie* more than half a decade earlier than *The Ambassadors*, it is only in *Maisie*, who is six years old when the novel begins and about 12 when it ends, that James explores commodification, intersubjectivity and the operation and structure of the non-reified space from the perspective of a child who has few preconceived ideas about relationships and even about her own subjectivity. Rather than needing to undo existing assumptions about herself and her relationships in order to visit non-reified space occasionally, as Hyacinth, Fleda and Strether do, *Maisie* sees and experiences commodification and its impact through a less distorted lens, and sees also the cost of living a non-reified life. In tracing the growing complexity and depth of *Maisie*’s understanding, James offers an embodied example of the deep subjectivity and intersubjectivity that are possible to a person who chooses nonreification. *Maisie* provides us with the most concrete model in all of James’s novels of the potential, and the inevitable loss, of living in a non-reified way.

## **CHAPTER V**

### ***WHAT MAISIE KNEW***

In the 1897 novel *What Maisie Knew*, the three theoretical frameworks through which I am reading James's work – Marxist theory as interpreted by Georg Lukács, Merleau-Pontian intersubjectivity, and the abstractness and ambiguity of James's style – weave together most clearly into a powerful yet subtle defiance of consumer capitalism's narrowing of the potential scope of human subjectivity and relationship. James's economic critique is less obvious on a thematic level in *Maisie* than in the other three novels I have explored, but it is distinctly present as a subtext throughout the novel. This subtext, an extended exploration of the commodification of human beings and its effect on subjectivity and human relationships, both underlines and contextualizes his more subtle suggestion that language offers a back door out of capitalism's reified reality. Although commodification powerfully shapes human self-understanding and the context of intersubjective connection in its own terms, James points to the possibility that entertaining more a fluid and uncertain use of language can expand the scope for one's own subjectivity and for deeper connections with others beyond the effects of commodification and capitalism's categories of worker and consumer. Indeed, rejecting the reified language of consumer capitalism and allowing a more open-ended use of language can point the way to human re-engagement with the direct social relations through which we create reality together. This critique of capitalism in its impact on

people's understanding of the world is more nuanced and complex in *Maisie* than anywhere else in James's writing.

Even more important, the depiction in *Maisie* of subjectivity and intersubjectivity beyond commodification takes this experience beyond the realm of consciousness and shared intersubjective space in thought or dialogue, and moves it into embodied form. "What Maisie knew" can be understood as her growing awareness of the commodity nature of the relationships in her life and her gradual assertion of her non-reified subjectivity, in her conscious awareness as well as in her relationships, to counter that commodification. Maisie does not just encounter intersubjectivity and the possibility of non-reified space occasionally in thought and conversation, as Strether, Fleda and Hyacinth do. Rather, she experiences the real, material impact on life and relationships when one chooses to live in the ambiguous and uncertain world of non-reification. Maisie embodies non-reified space, and in doing so she gives us the clearest example in any of James's novels of both how to live consciously beyond the limitations of commodification, and the price of such a choice for the person who makes it.

Published between *Spoils* and *Ambassadors*, *Maisie* at first appears to downplay economic commentary in favor of social critique, examining personal dilemmas and difficulties in a society that increasingly accepts divorce but has no means of dealing with its familial complexities. Maisie, six years old when the novel begins, is the daughter of two exceptionally selfish parents, Ida and Beale Farange, who are divorcing. The court has ordered that she spend half a year alternately with each of them. However, within a couple of years they both remarry, and Maisie finds that her new stepfather, Sir Claude, and her new stepmother, Mrs. Beale (her former governess, Miss Overmore), both behave

more kindly and caringly towards her than her biological parents. When these new marriages, too, begin to fall apart, Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale, having met during exchanges of Maisie between the two households, become romantically involved with each other, even though they are still married to Maisie's parents. Complicating Maisie's life further, Mrs. Wix, the governess who replaces Miss Overmore, becomes a touchstone of personal caring for Maisie, but has little success in her ongoing efforts to provide her with an anchor of conventional morality amidst these ever-shifting socially transgressive couplings among her parents and stepparents.

As she grows up from the age of six to about 12 during the course of the novel, Maisie repeatedly realizes, on ever-deeper levels of awareness, that she must navigate her unsettled situation on her own by learning to "read" the intentions and meanings of her adults. Maisie's parents and stepparents, comfortable with their lives, do not seem to have much interiority. They are, says phenomenologist critic Merle Williams, people who "accept, quite unthinkingly, the basic conditions of their existence" (27-28), an uncritical attitude that indicates what Lukács would describe as the complete reification of their consciousnesses. The exploration of how Maisie develops a deep interiority with such parents is premised upon her being particularly sensitive, as James's protagonists almost always are. In addition, however, as Williams points out, Maisie is almost completely lacking in knowledge of social norms because her education has been chaotic at best, with changing governesses, parents who have little contact with her, and a life that never seems settled. "For Maisie stands on the threshold of experience; she has not been drawn into the acceptance of conventional values, she lacks even the rudiments of a normal nursery education," explains Williams (27). Rather, she is portrayed as innocent and

curious, relating to the world as “strange and paradoxical” and developing her own creative ways of finding meaning and engaging in relationships through experiment and reflection (31).

More importantly, Williams points out, Maisie differs significantly from the other characters in her sensitivity and her determination to seek the best outcome for all involved in any situation. Maisie’s efforts are always aimed at making “sustained effort toward reconciliation of those she loves” (30). She continues to strive for the inclusion of each human being, in spite of the adults’ repeated failure to reciprocate. As an essentially unsocialized child navigating both her life and her own growing up in the midst of a commodified set of relationships, Maisie models to the reader the process of learning first to see and understand reification – the questions she asks and her fearlessness in pursuing them quietly break silences, challenge often-unquestioned assumptions, and open up inquiries that the reader can follow – and ultimately, to reject it.

As James acknowledges in his introduction, choosing a child as the central consciousness of the narrative presents challenges for his favored technique of limited point of view. With Strether, Hyacinth, and Fleda, all of whom have secrets from themselves, the technique allows narrator interventions to clarify for the reader what is unclear to the characters in their own thinking. Because of Maisie’s youth, she is even less able than these adult protagonists to fully understand or correctly interpret either what is going on around her or what is happening within her own mind, requiring more extensive narrator explanations. For this reason, the grammatical and syntactic techniques of ambiguity and abstraction show up most often, as they do with Hyacinth, in moments of narration when the point of view is within or about Maisie, and hardly ever in

dialogue, as they sometimes do with Strether. Nonetheless, the specific techniques that I have explored in the other three novels, including nominalization of psychological processes and mental states, psychological verbs, deictics such as “this” and “that” with vague or complicated referents, and frequent uses of “it” with a vague referent, are also prominent in *Maisie*.

These techniques of abstractness and ambiguity also have the same set of impacts in *Maisie* as in the other novels and do the same kinds of work. They allow both a finer and more nuanced examination of consciousness in a given character as well as, paradoxically, a more individualized depiction; they invite the reader into the character’s consciousness in an experiential way; they suggest that the psyche is a site of movement and activity; and they point to the potential for defining subjectivity and meeting another consciousness without reification. The focus on Maisie’s mental activities in the context of her maturing efforts to understand and relate kindly to others guides the reader through her process of learning to treat other people as subjects. In addition, this focus draws the reader into the activity within Maisie’s psyche as she becomes aware of her own subjectivity. Sharing intimately in Maisie’s intersubjective encounters, the reader also experiences intersubjective connection with Maisie herself, learning to read her and to take up her intentions for the best outcome.

An example from early in the novel, when Maisie is no more than eight years old, comes in the context of her reflecting upon the smugness and derision with which Beale and Miss Overmore had met her questions about their relationship – how they felt about each other and what they did when she was not there (nominalizations and pronouns italicized): “Her *embarrassment*, of a precocious, instinctive order, attached itself to the

idea that *this* was another of the matters that *it* was not for her, as her mother used to say, to go into” (26). Although the sentence depicts mental activity going on within Maisie, the nominalization “embarrassment” abstracts this feeling, as if it were separate from her. As in the examples from the other novels, however, making “embarrassment” the subject of the sentence and giving it specific qualities – it is precocious and instinctive and even has its own agency in attaching itself – depicts her consciousness as a place of motion and continual, active change in a way that would not be possible if Maisie were the subject. The sentence structure allows the depiction of the actual movement of her consciousness as the feeling of embarrassment becomes connected to her understanding that some knowledge is only for adults, a realm she cannot yet enter. As readers, we sense this movement as a step in Maisie’s growth in understanding the spoken and unspoken meanings in adult communication, while we also empathize with her innocence. The unspoken meaning of what Maisie is not supposed to “go into,” the fact that Miss Overmore and her father are doing something she does not understand but does sense is wrong somehow, is contained in the deictic “this” and echoed in the expletive “it.” The ambiguity of these vague references strengthens the sense of ambiguity about adult relationships that is, paradoxically, becoming clearer to Maisie.

The abstractness and ambiguity in language that relates to Maisie and her growing consciousness contrast with a different kind of ambiguity that characterizes the way the speech and sometimes the mental processes of the other characters operate. This distinction highlights the way abstractness and ambiguity can create non-reified space through deep intersubjectivity when there is openness to deeper and more meaningful connection with others, but not when commodification dominates the character’s

relationships with others. This kind of ambiguity, related more to confusion and lack of critical awareness, characterizes people whose social relations happen only within the reified world of capitalism due to the excessive concern with surfaces that results from a consumer focus.

The reader does not get many glimpses into the mental processes of the other characters, but ambiguity and abstractness often characterize their ways of speaking. This ambiguity, however, instead of pointing to a non-reified way of relating to others, indicates an unwillingness to engage with others as subjects and a vague, sometimes chaotic and manipulative subjectivity. During the scene in the carriage, when Maisie tries to understand the nature of the relationship between Beale and Miss Overmore, both adults speak ambiguously, Beale in riddles filled with innuendo and Miss Overmore in vague references that she pretends Maisie should understand. Maisie asks Miss Overmore if Beale had liked her as much when Maisie was gone as when she was present. Before Miss Overmore can reply, Beale says, laughing, “Why, you little donkey, when you’re away what have I left to do but just to love her?” (24). In an effort to obscure the truth of his relationship with Miss Overmore, he speaks ambiguously, hoping Maisie will not understand but intending that Miss Overmore will. Miss Overmore calls his comments “horrid” without explaining to the child why it should be horrid for Beale to love her.

When another of Maisie’s questions elicits an amused response implying that Miss Overmore was not living at Beale’s house while Maisie was with her mother, Maisie is bewildered: she “was afterwards for some time conscious of a *vagueness*, just slightly embarrassing, as to the subject of so much amusement and as to where her governess had really been. She didn’t feel at all as if she had been seriously told” (26).

Here “vagueness” is the nominalization that has, if not agency, its own quality of being embarrassing. Even though Maisie is the subject of the sentence, her mental process is still the focus, as if the vagueness has its own existence. The abstraction, however, rather than making Maisie herself seem more vague, provides a more nuanced reader experience of Maisie’s character and at the same time portrays consciousness as a site of activity where learning takes place. And, beyond the sense of something illicit which Maisie does not understand, this scene also contrasts Maisie’s earnest search for understanding, for intersubjective connection, as it comes up against her adults’ slick surface that deliberately deflects such connection.

### **Commodification of Maisie**

The depiction of the ways in which the adults in Maisie’s life use her innocence for their own purposes makes this novel a social commentary of the most biting sort, presented in terms that are easily read as economic. James’s main concern is the development of consciousness in Maisie, the child whose small life is at the mercy of her parents’ and stepparents’ insistence, in their shifting couplings, on living in a commodified world of impulse gratification and superficial relating. Like the other novels, the economic commentary in *Maisie* includes examples of how living in a commodified world and enacting the role of consumer, with its focus on surfaces and the fulfillment of immediate desire, distorts character by commodifying human beings and their relationships. This commodification encourages people to see each other as objects, not subjects, and thereby makes impossible both the fulfillment of human subjectivity and purpose beyond commodified desires and also the potential for relating to each other in a non-reified, deeply intersubjective way. Using a metaphor of Maisie as a porcelain

cup, James shows clearly the commodified nature of relationships between Maisie and her adults. This metaphor not only depicts Maisie in a visual image, but, occurring near the beginning, it sets up commodification as a subtext throughout the novel.

After Beale and Ida divorce, they maintain their quarrel by giving their daughter hateful messages to deliver back and forth each time she switches households, and she complies in innocent trust. “What was clear to any spectator was that the only link binding her to either parent was this lamentable fact of her being a ready vessel for bitterness, a deep little porcelain cup in which biting acids could be mixed” (5). The fact that the cup is made of porcelain evokes the importance of class, wealth and appearance to Ida and Beale. As this exquisite little porcelain cup, Maisie dutifully delivers the vitriolic accusations of one parent to the other in her childish voice: “‘He said I was to tell you, from him,’ she faithfully reported, ‘that you’re a nasty, horrid pig!’” (11). The thoughts, words and feelings she carries back and forth exemplify the debasement of language from its primary constitutive purpose to one of individual self-expression, of people talking “at” rather than “with” each other, as Raymond Williams puts it (32). Further, in the role of the cup, she mediates their relationship – the role that a commodity carries out, according to Lukács.

Maisie acquiesces in being the porcelain cup for about two years, until it becomes clear to her that “she had been a center of hatred and a messenger of insult, and that everything was bad because she had been employed to make it so” (13). At this point, she makes a conscious choice to refuse to carry the messages by pretending not to understand. The realization that she could refuse, the narrator tells us, happened “in the depths of her nature,” and it created in her “the idea of an inner self, or, in other words, of

concealment” (13). Maisie’s interiority dawns as a childish awareness of her parents’ commodification of her and, with that, a realization that she can stop it. Thus, ironically, Ida and Beale, through their exclusive focus on themselves and their inability to relate humanly to their daughter, teach the precocious child to explore and develop her own subjectivity at the tender age of about eight. In their vicious commodification of her, they begin showing her that commodification is not inevitable.

The consumer-oriented characters and their commodification of Maisie can be understood in terms of Lukács’s argument that the reification of consciousness is a result of the way the commodity form structures not just the economy in a capitalist system, but also human beings and their qualities and attributes. Because a capitalist economy is based on the production of commodities by workers who sell their labor for a paycheck rather than participating directly with other people in the mutual building of the social world, commodities take on the function of mediating social relationships between workers and owners as well as between producers and consumers, according to Marx (*Capital* 322). Lukács takes this argument further when he argues that under capitalism the commodity form replaces human relationships with commodity relationships and makes these relationships seem normal. As this shaping of relationships around the commodity form penetrates throughout the social order, “thingification” comes to appear natural and inevitable, and the laws under which it operates seem unchangeable, he says. The apparent naturalness of treating others and oneself as commodities results in reification of the minds and consciousnesses of people. They can see no other possible basis for relationships.

Because his concern is to place his current moment in a historical context rather than to look in detail at the moment itself, Lukács does not examine how commodification plays out in the lives of individual people, and focuses his analysis on the proletariat, saying little about the bourgeoisie. He does say that reification affects bourgeois people differently, but not less strongly, than workers; in fact, they experience reification in an intensely refined and spiritualized way (100). Although Lukács does not explain or describe what this refined and spiritualized effect looks like, beyond brief discussions of the “virtuoso” genius and journalists, however, his argument can be extended to personal and bourgeois contexts. This exploration vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie, both individually and as a class, I argue, along with Wendy Graham, is the territory James takes on.

Comparing what Marx and Lukács have to say about the reification of life and consciousness under a capitalist system with James’s critiques of consumerism, Graham says that “James represents this process in terms of ethical, cultural, material, in short, ideological aspects of bourgeois life alone” (45). Graham’s inclusion of the ethical, cultural, and ideological aspects of life, in addition to the material, expands the exploration of how consciousness becomes reified to include and emphasize the importance of language in that process. This view accords with Williams’ argument that language is a primary activity through which human beings create their world together. Language is constitutive of reality, argues Williams, and its active social use by people is a material activity (31); it is a making, and what it makes is meaning, an essential aspect of the material production of life (37). When consciousness becomes reified, both labor and language seem to lose their material power, as commodity-mediation distances

people from the material base of their lives and their own role in using these primary creative forces in a social context. As Stein might say, the language of capitalism fills the space between people with pre-defined meaning, so there is no room for them to create meaning socially. Indeed, with reification, people become mystified about how the power of language as a primary constitutive activity has been shrunk to fit into the commodity-based relationships of capitalism, resulting in their unquestioning acceptance of reification.

Graham analyzes James's ways of addressing reification specifically in *The Spoils of Poynton*, where he "traces the process by which people lose their self-awareness, identity, through their association with objects and, indeed, come to think of themselves as objects" (42). Mrs. Gereth exemplifies this most clearly; even Fleda, reifying herself as the voice of the beautiful objects, subverts her own humanity. In *Maisie*, I see James exploring similar territory in tracing a child's growing understanding of the impact on human character and consciousness of living in a commodified, consumer-oriented world. *Maisie*, like many of James's other novels, depicts the effect on individuals of what Lukács calls the "veil of reification," a form of mystification that happens in a commodified system. For Lukács, this veil obscures the passive, non-engaged nature of commodified relationships and makes these relationships appear natural and complete (86). In addition, as advertising, with its wish-fulfillment messages, encourages adoption of a consumer identity and a focus on commodities divorced from the labor that produced them, the commodification of relationships also shifts language from what Williams calls a socially creative activity to one of individual expression (31-32). This further mystifies

people about the true power of language as a socially creative activity and so, in effect, disempowers them.

Inevitably, as Lukács's analysis makes clear, commodity culture recasts relationships between people as economic transactions, so that it seems normal for a worker to sell his labor, and for a consumer to buy it in the form of a commodity. For James's bourgeois characters, who are not selling their labor but who see their life purpose as exhibiting their style and acquiring the things they need, the veil of reification operates on the level of consciousness, dimming their awareness of other people as subjects and encouraging a disconnected, self-referential consciousness. Since relating to others on a deeply intersubjective level – an ability that James highly valued – requires connection, the veil of reification places limits on what it means to be human. Further, seeing relationships between people as economic transactions makes it normal for people to treat each other instrumentally and view interactions as opportunities for getting what one wants or needs rather than as opportunities to build the world together. In fact, James's bourgeois characters, such as Ida and Beale, seem unaware that any other way to treat people and relationships could exist; they exemplify how the naturalization of capitalism's commodity-based system stunts the humanity of individual people.

Literary critics such as Jean-Christophe Agnew and Peggy McCormack, as we have seen in their commentaries on the other three novels, have used this Marxist concept of commodification to argue that characters in James's novels are often commodified and their relationships depicted as transactions. In this process, aspects of their personalities or their skills and abilities can become reified as part of these relationships of exchange, like the abstract and detachable reified qualities of manufactured commodities (Agnew

70). McCormack argues along similar lines that the exchange economy depicted in James's fiction "turns human assets into cultural commodities valuable only when made public or exchanged in social interaction" (541). An individual's character – the set of attributes, skills, and capacities that make up personality – can thus be seen as a product of human labor, just as a manufactured commodity is.

In keeping with Agnew's analysis, one of the most evident characteristics displayed by all four of Maisie's parents is taste, reflected in their concern with their appearance and surface traits. Caricatures of the self-absorbed urban moneyed class of *fin-de-siècle* London, Beale and Ida's attention to dressing with exquisite taste and their concern with social notoriety indicate the superficiality of their values and subjectivities. Not apparently shamed by the public display of lack of parental concern for their child evident in the acrimonious divorce proceedings, as soon as the court rendered its judgment they "prepared with [Maisie's] help to enjoy the distinction that waits upon vulgarity sufficiently attested" (4). Their circle of friends is also ready to observe and avidly discuss the continuing spectacle. Described as being "occupied only with chatter," the social circle now has plenty of material for "desultory conversation...over teacups and cigars" (5). This "desultory chatter," far from being a material social activity, what Williams calls a "making," exemplifies the debasement of language in a commodified system. Though the self-involved and superficial values displayed by Ida and Beale and their circle do not necessarily have their origin in consumer culture, within a capitalist milieu where, as Lukács argues, people become things and relationships become transactions, commodity values are normalized. The invitation to focus on appearance and indulge desire, a message advertising and department stores were transmitting

throughout society in the late nineteenth century (Leach), reinforces the self-focus that is a structural part of a commodified culture.

The Faranges' inability to connect with their daughter as a subject is not necessarily a direct result of consumer culture's distortion of their characters; human disconnection, like treating others instrumentally, can result from personal experiences and even choice. However, James brings the connection with consumerism forward in juxtaposing Ida's and Beale's superficiality with Maisie's depth. This contrast shows their instrumental uses of her in a context that can be read as portraying the impact of commodification on individuals, especially bourgeois individuals. For James, an ability to understand one's own subjectivity beyond reification, and to interact with others on a deeply intersubjective level – to enter that non-reified space – is how people see through the veil of reification. Non-reified understanding of oneself and others and the ability to meet another consciousness in that space is, I would argue, a Jamesian equivalent of becoming aware of the material social relations on which society is built, the awareness that is obscured by commodity culture, according to Lukács. The self-absorbed and self-referential consciousnesses of the adult characters in *Maisie* exemplifies the operation of the veil of reification on individual bourgeois people who experience the normalization of such a narrowed sense of human purpose.

These characters also demonstrate the effect on intersubjectivity when language is seen not as a material social practice but as an instrument used by an individual to convey a message. Williams argues that language used in its full social power is a constitutive activity that makes people “not only able to relate and communicate, but in real terms to be practically conscious and so to possess the active practice of language” (32). When

language is used as an instrument of personal communication, as it is by Ida, Beale, and their social circle, its purpose is reduced to a means of individual self-expression. In this context, language as used by the adult characters in *Maisie* who have been shaped by living uncritically within a capitalist system denies the primary material force and purpose of language, and shrinks it down to a tool for the expression of their self-oriented thoughts and needs. As Williams argues, this view of language also changes intersubjectivity from a connection of “practical consciousness” to a disconnected moment in which two people are “speaking to or at each other, passing information or a ‘message’ between each other, ... rather than ever *with* each other” (32).

When neither labor nor language is understood as a means by which people actively create the world they share, says Williams, these activities cease to be seen as constitutive of “objective reality” (31-32). Rather than being directly involved in the constitution of reality, then, “subjects” merely contemplate or observe reality. Williams here echoes Lukács’s description of the contemplative stance of the reified mind – the worker who sees himself as part of the machinery that seems to operate independent of his active involvement (Lukács 89), or the creative genius who “lapses into a contemplative attitude vis-à-vis the workings of his own objectified and reified faculties” (100). When consciousness is reified, both these theorists seem to be saying, language loses its primary power as a socially creative activity. Extending this argument, when language is disconnected from its constitutive function, and people become contemplative observers rather than active agents in producing meaning in the world they share with others, both subjectivities and relationships become shrunken and distorted. Although James is, as I have said, less concerned with mutual creation of material reality

than with mutual creation of the reality of the moment by two people, he seems to share with Williams the sense of the primary power of language to constitute subjects capable of interacting creatively beyond reification.

### **Intersubjectivity**

The instrumentality of Maisie's parents' use of language in the interchanges in which they make use of Maisie, reinforced by their own evident misery and disconnection, highlights the debasement of language from its primary constitutive capacity. Their language also provides a contrast to the way that deep intersubjectivity, indicated by ambiguous and abstract language, opposes that shallowness. This contrast is most evident in two key scenes from the second half of the novel: Maisie's last meeting with Beale before he leaves her to go to America with his current love interest, a wealthy American woman known as the Countess, and her final time with Sir Claude before she leaves him to return to London with Mrs. Wix. Taking place several years apart, these two scenes demonstrate the growth in Maisie's awareness of how she is commodified and her ability to choose acquiescence or refusal; and, alongside this development, her increasing skill at intersubjectivity.

In the final scene with her father, the linguistic ambiguity and abstractness of deep intersubjectivity overlap with the language of human commodification to show that commodified relationships cannot be fully intersubjective. The first paragraph sets up the coming scene with a moment of wordless interaction. Abstract and ambiguous grammatical elements are italicized.

When he had lighted a cigarette and begun to smoke in her face *it was as if* he had struck with the match the note of some queer, clumsy ferment of

old professions, old scandals, old duties, a dim *perception* of *what* he possessed in her and *what*, if *everything* had only—damn it!—been totally different, she might still be able to give him. *What* she was able to give him, however, as his blinking eyes seemed to make out through the smoke, would be simply *what* he should be able to get from her. To give *something*, to give here on the spot, was all her own *desire*. Among the old *things* that came back was her little *instinct* of keeping the peace; *it* made her wonder more sharply *what* particular thing she could do or not do, *what* particular word she could speak or not speak, *what* particular line she could take or not take, that might for everyone, even for the Countess, give a better turn to the crisis. She was ready, in this interest, for an immense surrender, a surrender of everything but Sir Claude, of everything but Mrs. Beale. The immensity didn't include *them*; but if he had an idea at the back of his head she had also one in a recess as deep, and for a time, while they sat together, *there* was an extraordinary mute passage between her vision of this vision of his, his vision of her vision, and her vision of his vision of her vision. *What* there was no effective record of indeed was the small strange pathos on the child's part of an *innocence* so saturated with knowledge and so directed to diplomacy. (135)

This scene occurs just before Beale and Maisie, who is about 10, begin a conversation about their future. The silent moment full of mental activity clearly shows how commodification has shaped each one's character, and the relationship of that commodification to being able to relate to the other as a subject. The abstract language

James so favors is amply present, beginning with the two-sentence narrative glimpse into the mind of Beale as he contemplates how to make use of his daughter. The phrase “it was as if” refers to Beale’s striking of a match to light his cigarette as a metaphor for a bit of light flaring up in his mind, giving him “a dim perception” of his instrumental view of Maisie. The construction “it was as if” followed by a descriptive phrase used metaphorically is one of James’s variations on abstracting mental activity (Chatman 12), and here it is paired with the nominalizations “ferment” and “perception.” The tiny, short-lived flame of a match highlights the size and duration of Beale’s capacity for intersubjectivity.

As in other examples of nominalization, abstracting Beale’s mental processes and making them the main nouns provides the reader a more intimate look into his consciousness. What the reader sees is not the movement of growth or change, as with Maisie as well as Strether, Fleda, and even Hyacinth, but confusion. “Ferment” vividly depicts a chaotic and perhaps unhealthy mental process, and conveys Beale’s confused state of abstraction from his own consciousness, as does “dim” describing his perception. The sentences contain four examples of the cleft sentence, identified by Chatman as a Jamesian technique of abstractness that uses “what” as an expletive to highlight what follows (64). The structure emphasizes Beale’s commodified view of Maisie: she was, to him, “what he possessed in her” and “what... she might still be able to give him.” In the second sentence, his rumination ends with his trying to see, through the metaphorical smoke that clouds his vision, “what he should be able to get from her.” The abstractness and ambiguity of the two sentences communicate that Beal relates to Maisie as a commodity, not a subject – as a “what” rather than a “who.” Although he is not yet

speaking to Maisie, Beale's thoughts about her clearly exemplify the superficial intersubjectivity that, according to Williams, characterizes language which has lost its constitutive quality – interactions in which people speak to or at, rather than with, each other.

Maisie, for her part, sees that she is a commodity to Beale, and is still consciously willing to be what he needs her to be. She relates to him as a subject, willing to offer “an immense surrender” if that can bring about the best possible outcome for everyone. As in the sentences about Beale's thoughts, the narrative gives the reader a look inside Maisie's mind through nominalizations and vague nouns like “something,” “thing” and “it.” “Desire” in the third sentence strengthens the impact of “to give something” as the thought that saturates Maisie's consciousness. In the next sentence, in a parallel to the “dim perceptions” of the past in Beale's mind, we see Maisie also remembering. The sentence construction suggests that those “old things” have agency, or at least movement, as they “came back to her.” The second half of the sentence begins with expletive “it” referring to the movement within her consciousness of the desire to give and the coming back of her “instinct for keeping the peace,” underlining the sense that her mental processes and memories are acting independently within her: they “made her wonder.” This part of the sentence also echoes the narrative about Beale's thoughts in its use of “what” to create a series of cleft phrases, all focused on bringing about, for everyone, “a better turn to the crisis,” in contrast to Beale's interest in taking what he could get from Maisie.

This difference in how they relate to each other is drawn even more sharply in the second part of the passage, their mute exchange of thoughts as they each consider their

own hoped-for outcome for the conversation they are about to have, and try to imagine what outcome the other has in mind. In this intensely intersubjective moment, each projects her or his thoughts toward the consciousness of the other with the purpose of taking up, as Merleau-Ponty describes it, the other's intention. Because there are no words and very little physical movement – Maisie is sitting on Beale's lap, so they may not even be looking at each other – the gestures each is projecting and reflecting back are inaudible and nearly invisible, which adds a layer of ambiguity to the exchange and brings the reader intimately into the experience of the moment.

Maisie, who already understands that her father views her instrumentally, seeks to take up his intention with skill and awareness. Yet even in her movement toward him, as she acquiesces in being commodified, she indicates full awareness of what she is doing by keeping a part of herself out of the transaction: her attachment to Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale. At this point in the narrative, since Beale's vision is still dimly fermenting in his own mind, his idea is not clear even to him. Responding perhaps to the agitated way he lights his cigarette and blows the smoke around her, a familiar gesture of his, Maisie is able to take up his as-yet-unformulated intention without knowing exactly what it is: "her vision of this vision of his." Beale himself, treating Maisie as a commodity, attempts for his own purposes to understand her subjectively in this moment. His inability to comprehend her desire to give on behalf of the best outcome for all is evidence that he has never related to her as a subject, since this has always been her primary position, but even in his self-absorbed mind, he dimly recognizes her gesture of being still and quiet, familiar from the days when she decided to stop being a vessel of bitterness by

pretending not to understand. Even in the dimness of his mental ferment, he succeeds at least in seeing that she has a thought, an intention: “his vision of her vision.”

In this “extraordinary mute exchange” of visions, with both of them taking up the other’s intention to the extent they are capable of doing so, Maisie’s facility with intersubjectivity from spending impressionable years learning to read adult behavior in a highly nuanced way, combined with her openness to mutual creation of the moment, allows her to reach what George Butte calls the “third orbit” of Jamesian deep intersubjectivity: “her vision of his vision of her vision.” Perhaps it is in his own silence that Beale reflects back her still and silent gesture in this third orbit of their exchange, where Beale sees that Maisie has an idea about what she wants to happen, and Maisie sees that Beale has an idea of his own. But Maisie also sees Beale seeing her having an unspoken idea, whereas he does not see her perception that he has a thought he is keeping back.

The depth of the little girl’s insight – her ability to take up and interpret Beale’s familiar gestures as well as to see her own gesture of silence reflected back to her – is such that she perceives Beale perceiving her vision: “In this third orbit one perceives, or believes one perceives, in the other’s body or language, a trace of one’s own previous and now appropriated gesture, redirected to oneself for further embodiment or revision” (131). This extraordinary example of deep intersubjectivity carried on through inaudible and invisible gestures underlines Maisie’s deep sensitivity to others’ subtle messages and intentions and her openness to engaging in mutually beneficial construction of the moment. It also presents her as already clear, at the age of 10, about how far she is willing to allow others to commodify her in her quest for the best outcome.

What Beale “possessed in her” – what Maisie could do for him, or give him – becomes clearer during the long conversation that follows this mute moment. He expects her to recognize him as a good father; as in many previous moments, her very existence is a reification for him of his identity as a responsible parent in the face of great difficulty. After asking her if she would like to come with him to America, he reminds her that being her father has always felt like a burden to him. “You can’t say I don’t put it before you – you can’t say I ain’t kind to you or that I don’t play fair... I’ll take you again, just as I have taken you again and again” (138). Now, however, he also needs her to release him from his responsibility. The clear message is that he really does not want her to go with him, but he needs her to say that she does want to go. “... The child was momentarily bewildered between her alternatives of agreeing with him about her wanting to get rid of him and displeasing him by pretending to stick to him” (138). Her inability to meet both of his needs clarifies the deeper layer of commodification with which he seeks to use her to reify himself as a good father. “Then she understood as well as if he had spoken it that what he wanted, hang it, was that she should let him off with all the honors – with all the appearance of virtue and sacrifice on his side” (138). This is the idea that was fermenting in Beale’s mind: making Maisie responsible for a decision he had already made, allowing him to feel noble and irreproachable at her expense.

Even in his self-absorption and reification of her, Beale seems to show some sensitivity to Maisie’s consciousness, within the narrow context of getting from her what he needs. By contrast Sir Claude, Maisie’s favorite, while at times he treats her as a commodity, does seem truly interested in knowing her as a human being. Even before they meet, Maisie experiences a seemingly intersubjective moment with his image in a

photograph, responding to “the pleasant eyes that seemed to seek her acquaintance, to speak to her directly” (38). The promise of the photograph, that Sir Claude would want to know her, is sometimes fulfilled, in brief interactions when he tentatively attempts to relate to her on a deeper level. He honestly cares what happens to her, as when he tries to find out whether she is afraid of any of the adults in her life (85), or at Folkestone, whether she would like him to stay or leave her alone with Ida (158). Unlike Maisie herself, however, whose focus is usually the best mutual outcome, Sir Claude resembles Beale in needing her to absolve him of responsibility for his own decisions. His intersubjective efforts, while not as self-centered as Beale’s, are those of a person accustomed to commodifying others and, indeed, incapable of any other way of relating except in brief bursts.

The last interaction between Maisie and Sir Claude parallels the last scene between Maisie and Beale in presaging their permanent separation and highlighting Maisie’s openness to intersubjective depth in contrast to their inability to meet her there. As in the scene with Beale, the opening of Maisie’s conversation with Sir Claude is preceded by a narrative paragraph describing a wordless exchange between them in which the reader is shown the mental processes of each. Unlike the earlier scene, however, this time the perspective is entirely Maisie’s. There is also no “third orbit” reflection of thoughts as there is in the silent exchange with Beale, but only some faint and poignant hints at unfulfilled potential for a deeper intersubjective connection. For Maisie, however, this scene shows her movement toward embodiment of non-reified space as the abstract and ambiguous language fulfills its function in creating that space. As the gap of abstraction closes, the gap between Maisie’s mental processes and Maisie

herself, the sense of her consciousness as a site of movement and activity remains, allowing for the clearest depiction anywhere in James's writing of the space not already filled with meaning, where the next moment can be created.

The scene begins when Maisie enters the salon at the inn where she, Mrs. Wix, and Mrs. Beale have been staying in Boulogne, France, to meet Sir Claude, who has arrived from London. The four have come together to decide in what configuration they will continue from there. Ambiguous and abstract elements are italicized.

When she entered the salon it was empty, but at the sound of the opened door some one stirred on the balcony, and Sir Claude, stepping straight in, stood before her. He was in light fresh clothes and wore a straw hat with a bright ribbon; *these things*, besides *striking* her in themselves as the very promise of the grandest of grand tours, gave him a certain radiance and, as it were, a tropical ease; but *such an effect* only marked rather more his having stopped short and, for a longer minute than had ever at such a juncture elapsed, not opened his arms to her. His pause made her pause and enabled her *to reflect* that he must have been up some time, for there were no traces of breakfast; and that though it was so late he had rather markedly not caused her to be called to him. Had Mrs. Wix been right about their forfeiture of the salon? Was *it* all his now, all his and Mrs. Beale's? Such an *idea*, at the rate her small *thoughts* throbbed, could only *remind* her of the way in which *what* had been hers hitherto was *what* was exactly most Mrs. Beale's and his. *It* was strange to be standing there and greeting him across a gulf, for he had by this time

spoken, smiled and said: "My dear child, my dear child!" but without coming any nearer. In a flash she saw he was different – more so than he knew or designed. The next minute indeed *it was as if* he caught an *impression* from her face: *this* made him hold out his hand. Then they met, he kissed her, he laughed, she thought he even blushed: *something* of his affection rang out as usual. "Here I am, you see, again – as I promised you." (233)

In this description of Maisie's momentary impressions of Sir Claude, a few psychological verbs – "striking," "reflect," "remind" – indicate that we are observing the workings of Maisie's mind. The lens of narration shifts in and out, at times directly describing what Maisie is perceiving and at other times interpreting it for the reader. The middle of the passage contains its only examples of mental processes given independent existence – "Such an *idea*, at the rate her small *thoughts* throbbed, could only remind her of the way in which what had been hers hitherto was what was exactly most Mrs. Beale's and his." In this sentence, "idea" is an active agent within her psyche, reminding her of how much of her life has become part of theirs already. It is not she herself who throbs with this awareness, but her "thoughts," and this pulsating activity is vivid to the reader as well as to Maisie herself, inviting the reader more intimately into her mind.

Despite fewer uses of the grammatical techniques of abstractness that in other instances provide a closer look into Maisie's mind, however, in this passage James increases the sense of intimacy and immediacy by narrating most of her impressions and perceptions directly, without the mediation of a narrator voice naming them and describing their activity within her using action verbs. In this moment, as Maisie's

intersubjective skills are becoming more and more finely tuned, she seems more aware of her mental processes than she has up until now, or than characters such as Fleda and Strether ever are. Mental processes such as impressions and perceptions are no longer the active agents within her consciousness. Rather, the reader sees those impressions and perceptions being created as she responds to objects and events moment by moment. In the first sentence, for example, “these things,” which refers to elements of the way Sir Claude is dressed, strike her as a promise that their past relationship will continue. The psychological verb “striking” describes Maisie’s interpretation of the way that Sir Claude is presenting himself. At the same time, “these things” also give him, again within her perception, a radiance and ease. The “effect” of these impressions, in turn, is to create in her the perception of a significant delay in Sir Claude’s welcoming of her.

This section remains abstract in that the subject and active agent is not Maisie herself. She is still being acted upon, but in a way that separates her less from her own mental processes. Fleda experiences the misery of her untenable situation with Owen as something that happens to her and is beyond her control: “the very sound of her pain upset her” (*Spoils* 129). She experiences her mental processes passively, and the narrator is there explaining this. In contrast, Maisie experiences her impressions of Sir Claude’s appearance actively, immediately incorporating them into her understanding. The reader watches her learning, second by second, to better interpret what she is seeing: “His pause made her pause and enabled her *to reflect* that he must have been up some time, for there were no traces of breakfast; and that though it was so late he had rather markedly not caused her to be called to him.” The narrator voice is still present, but less to explain Maisie to the reader than to describe Maisie’s own consciousness as she understands it.

Rather than reducing the importance of Maisie as the subject in favor of a focus on her active mental processes, the effect of the abstractness here is to make her one with them. This gives the reader an even more intimate view of Maisie's moment-to-moment experience while at the same time closing the gap of abstractness that James's focus on mental processes tends to create. Maisie's mental processes are no longer separate forces within her, but become part of her subjectivity as her awareness of herself gets clearer. At the same time, the nominalizations continue to suggest that her mental processes move and change, and that this movement is taking place within her aware self.

In the last part of the passage, the reader gets a faint glimpse into the mental processes of Sir Claude through Maisie's perception that he was unaware of the change she saw in him: "In a flash she saw he was different – more so than he knew or designed." Maisie's active impressions allow her to take up his intention intersubjectively and to understand it more truly than he does. The briefest of intersubjective reflections of intention occurs in the next sentence: "The next minute indeed *it was as if* he caught an *impression* from her face: *this* made him hold out his hand." This faint moment of deep intersubjectivity, when Sir Claude sees his own intention reflected in Maisie's expression, seems to be the best he can muster. During the rest of the scene, the sense that he needs Maisie to be something for him – his commodification of her – prevents him from taking up her own intention and deepening their connection, exemplifying the failure of deep intersubjectivity that is, according to Butte, most often the outcome in James's fiction and giving Maisie the clear experience of this possibility. The contrast between the immediacy of Maisie's experience and the abstraction that continues to

separate Sir Claude from his own inner experiences underlines the growing distance between them and highlights the changes in Maisie.

As this final scene with Sir Claude unfolds, the intimate view inside Maisie's subjectivity that is provided by the focus on mental processes is exquisitely effective in moving the reader along with Maisie as she approaches her fateful decision about the life she will have – whether she will go with Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale and pretend to be a family in France; whether Sir Claude will give up Mrs. Beale and stay with Maisie and Mrs. Wix; or whether she will go back to London with Mrs. Wix into a life about which nearly everything is uncertain, even economic survival. As she and Sir Claude eat breakfast together, and then walk through the streets of Boulogne, Sir Claude, like her father, appears magnanimous in allowing her to choose her own future, while underneath he wishes her to make that decision in order to absolve him of responsibility for her life and his own. What Maisie wants is a life that includes Mrs. Wix and Sir Claude, but not Mrs. Beale; for Sir Claude, who is afraid of Mrs. Beale, this option does not exist.

Maisie listens as Sir Claude explains, “with fidgets and falterings, with lapses and recoveries, with a mottled face and embarrassed but supplicating eyes,” that he and Mrs. Beale are rightly her parents, and Mrs. Wix cannot be included because she refuses to countenance the illegitimacy of their unmarried relationship. His long speech, full of self-justification covering his inability to separate himself from Mrs. Beale in order to fulfill his parental responsibility for Maisie, “reached the child from a quarter so close that after the shock of the first sharpness she could see intensely its direction and follow it from point to point...” (245). At the end, he says, “I put it to you. *Can you choose freely?*” The reader is close enough to feel Maisie's shock, to see the shame and evasiveness of Sir

Claude's manner as she sees them, and to participate with Maisie in actively interpreting his spoken and unspoken intentions.

As in the earlier part of the scene, abstractness achieved through psychological nominalizations and other grammatical means appears less frequently here than in earlier passages, replaced more often by a narrative intimacy that unites Maisie herself with her mental processes and brings the reader from observing to directly sharing Maisie's experience. Much more often than before, Maisie herself is the subject of sentences: "Maisie smiled dimly; she saw what he meant." "...she looked at it as judiciously as she could" (246). When Sir Claude asks her one more time to give up Mrs. Wix and choose to live with him and Mrs. Beale, the reader experiences her response as she does, without the mediation of a nominalized focus on mental processes. The reader has fully entered intersubjective, non-reified space with Maisie.

Now in truth she felt the coldness of her terror, and it seemed to her that suddenly she knew, as she knew it about Sir Claude, what she was afraid of. She was afraid of herself. She looked at him in such a way that it brought, she could see, *wonder* into his face, a wonder held in check, however, by his frank *pretension* to play fair with her, not to use advantages, not to hurry nor hustle her – only to put her chance clearly and kindly before her. (247)

Even the brief intersubjective glimpse into how Sir Claude responds to her look is narrated with little ambiguity. His "wonder" and "pretension" seem to be separate from Sir Claude's own consciousness because this is how Maisie perceives and interprets his expressions – how she "takes up" his gestures and grasps deeply his intentions. The sense

that Sir Claude's mental processes are independent agents operating in him reinforces his lack of awareness of his own intentions; the adjective "frank," which usually means completely honest, with "pretension," which means the opposite, implies a person who does not know his own mind; to Sir Claude, his "pretension" to play fair seems honest, but Maisie, taking up his deeper intention, sees that his kindness is a pretense for burdening her with a momentous decision, just as her father did. The separation of Sir Claude from his mental processes also contrasts with the increasing integration of Maisie with her mental processes as she comes to embody non-reification.

As Maisie and Sir Claude wander past the train station, putting off the moment when Maisie will have to decide on her future, she imagines she sees in his eyes the proposal that they take the train to Paris and leave Mrs. Wix and Mrs. Beale behind, an abandonment of both the people who stand in the way of their being together and of the commodified reality that fills their lives with pre-determined meaning. It is a moment they could create together, and Maisie, though she is afraid, is able to imagine them doing it:

She knew that they looked exactly as if they were going to get into the train, and she presently brought out to her companion: "I wish we could go. Won't you take me?"

He continued to smile. "Would you really come?"

"Oh yes, oh yes. Try." (252)

There is a moment when it seems they are about to board the train, but Sir Claude hesitates, unable to assert his freedom from Mrs. Beale. The train leaves the station

without them, and with it Maisie's hope of a future with Sir Claude, bringing her finally to a point of losing her fear.

A short time later, in the climactic scene in which Maisie stands firm on her determination to go with Sir Claude and Mrs. Wix, or Mrs. Wix alone, but without Mrs. Beale, Maisie still tries for the best outcome for everyone but is unafraid to assert herself: "What helped the child was that she knew what she wanted. All her learning and learning had made her at last learn that; so that if she waited an instant to reply it was only from the desire to be nice. Bewilderment had simply gone, or at any rate was going fast" (260). Again, techniques of abstraction are still present, but in ways that clarify the merger of Maisie's consciousness with the mental processes that go on within it, the rapid ending of her bewilderment. Her "learning" seems to have its own separate agency, but the sentence also implies that this separation was in the past. The same is true for "bewilderment." As Paul Armstrong puts it, suggesting a meaning for the novel's title: "What Maisie knew is that she holds her existence in her own hands and that she must not follow Sir Claude in trying to avoid that burden" (28-29). She knows her own mind because she is now one with it, a subject in possession of her mental processes rather than passively experiencing them.

Throughout the novel, all the other characters want something from Maisie. They want her to be something for them, which is to say they seem unable to keep from commodifying her and reifying her qualities. By contrast, in the final moment, Maisie demonstrates her embodiment of non-reification by the fact that she does not want the others to be something for her; she wants everyone to choose freely with whom they wish to be. Sir Claude himself, although his fear of Mrs. Beale limits his freedom and is

clearly preventing him from remaining in Maisie's life, responds to Maisie's implicit appeal to freedom by gaily affirming that he cannot give up Mrs. Beale. At the same time, Maisie refuses to allow any of them to commodify her. Sir Claude, finding again the care for Maisie's well-being that he had occasionally shown in the past, supports her choice to go with Mrs. Wix, even though it means he will lose her. Momentarily noble, he takes up Maisie's intention and espouses it, even abandoning his fear of making Mrs. Beale angry in doing so.

While in this moment Sir Claude no longer wants anything from Maisie, however, still he is unable to talk about her except in commodified terms. As he answers Mrs. Wix's accusation that he has killed Maisie's moral sense, he replies, "I've not killed anything...on the contrary I think I've produced life. I don't know what to call it – I haven't even known how decently to deal with it, to approach it; but, whatever it is, it's the most beautiful thing I've ever met – it's exquisite, it's sacred" (258). Sir Claude articulates Maisie's consciousness in a way that verges on the intersubjective, but he can only understand her in commodified terms, implying she is a "product" of his own making and reifying her as a "thing." At the same time, by being unable to attach a name to what Maisie is, he implicitly affirms the evanescent, fluid nature of non-reified reality. He can see it, almost touch it, and one wonders, if he were able to detach himself from Mrs. Beale and continue sharing life with Maisie, whether he could learn to make that shift more fully. The reader, too, having watched and participated in Maisie's learning process and seen Beale and Sir Claude demonstrating their choice to continue living a reified life, now is able to see non-reified space in its ambiguity and complexity, and in its human embodiment in Maisie.

The intensity of this final scene underlines, however, that while Maisie's choice to reject commodification of herself and others may be beautiful, exquisite, and sacred, the cost for her is high. As Maisie's capacity for deep intersubjectivity expands, she is also confronted with the awareness that living without reification means giving up the security of a world of fixed and solid objects and relationships, a world already full of known meaning, in favor of a fluid, ever-moving reality that offers few familiar guideposts. As she contemplates Mrs. Wix's effort to remind her of the "moral sense" that they had discussed, a moral sense reliant on Mrs. Wix's conventional ideas of social propriety and religious precepts, Maisie suddenly senses the depths of this unknown: "... As if she were sinking with a slip from a foothold, her arms made a short jerk. What this jerk represented was the spasm within her of something still deeper than a moral sense... 'I don't know – I don't know,'" she pleads (258). What one sees when the "veil of reification" is lifted may be the sacred, beautiful workings of another consciousness; or it may be the emptiness of a missed connection. Butte points out that, in keeping with the chiasm and its partial opacity, complete intersubjective openness is rare in James's novels: "Intersubjectivity in James's paradigm is intimate but devious, multiple, wounding, sometimes clarifying, always terribly mixed" (34). For Maisie, rejecting the fixed categories of reality that reification establishes puts her face to face not only with the inability of others to connect with her, but with an unfamiliar reality in which she cannot rely on conventional knowledge.

Throughout this novel, and especially toward the end, the reader who has been engaged – who has followed Maisie from her childish bewilderment through her efforts to find the meaning of adult speech and behavior – has found himself in an

intersubjective experience with Maisie. Observing intimately the workings of her mind, the reader, with increasing clarity, sees her learning to understand the dynamics of the relationships in her life and takes up her intention to live as a subject, not a commodity. In working to comprehend the complex and layered meanings of vague pronouns and observing the activity within Maisie's consciousness, the reader has been able to join Maisie in a non-reified space that is not already filled with meaning but rather is open to the mutual creation of meaning, of a mutually beneficial outcome, or even of a spontaneous escape on the train. In sharing Maisie's sense of the potential of participating with another in the reality that is always moving rather than the reified reality of consumer capitalism, however, the reader has also shared her experience of the fear and uncertainty that often accompany this potential, especially when it fails. These experiences help us as readers to know what Maisie knew.

For people in a reified society such as that described by Lukács, seeing through the "veil of reification" implies the unknown because they must give up the familiar, though false, context of reification in social relationships as well as life and subjectivity. Although Lukács does not address the individual or psychological ramifications of reification or of its rejection, the exploration of these ramifications as James presents it through Maisie and her learning process has great relevance in our own era so heavily dominated by commodification. It seems possible that we can become aware, like Maisie, that reification's false reality denies the potential for deeper and more fulfilling personal relationships including the openness and mutual creativity of constituting our intersubjective world through language. Yet to live in a world not limited and distorted by commodification requires willingness to tolerate sometimes high levels of uncertainty

and ambiguity and to risk the emptiness and pain that come when the chiasm results in missed or refused connection. Maisie's choice to face the unknown, sensing the unreliability of conventional guideposts and social standards as the ground falling away from under her feet, gives us a model for taking that risk anyway. Having experienced deep intersubjectivity with her, we can learn that in spite of the ambiguity and potential pain that are an inevitable part of it, choosing to live in a world not already filled with reified meaning and to have relationships that are not defined in terms of commodification has the potential for being so humanly fulfilling that making that choice is worth the risk.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **RECLAIMING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN**

*What Maisie Knew* was not the last novel in which James used abstract and ambiguous language to point to the possibility of non-reified space for human subjectivity and relationships. He played with grammar and syntax for this purpose throughout his career as an author, increasingly so in his later work, experimenting with how these techniques could depict a space where human purpose and relationship were not confined to an economic context, a space not already filled with meaning, a space in which reality could move and change. In *Maisie*, however, James's concerns about capitalism and intersubjectivity come together with his nuanced grammar and syntax to create the character in whom non-reified space comes to life as in no other protagonist. In this novel, bridging his middle and late periods, he pushes the idea of non-reified space the farthest, pointing through his use of language to the uncertainty and fluidity, the ambiguity and abstractness that are essential for deep intersubjectivity and for the open-ended interaction that allows mutual creation of the moment outside the constraints of commodification. Although she is a child, Maisie clearly understands this space, to the point that she actually embodies it, and in doing so, shows the reader how to do that as well.

The whole of James's *oeuvre*, in portraying what commodification looks like in individuals and relationships, affirms the contention of Marx and Lukács that capitalism tends to replace relations between people with relations between things – to commodify

relationships, and thus to reify people and their qualities, including their minds. In his concern about the impact of the economic context to which capitalism reduces human purpose and relationships, James offers his own representation of the reification of human beings and their qualities – Hyacinth as a complex and troubled young man forced by the limitations of his social class into an untenable position; the well-meaning Fleda drawn into a reified role by the mystifying pull of the collection of things; Strether as a professional who becomes aware of the economic context of his relationships; and Maisie, the child who, in her innocence, is commodified by every adult in her life. In his depiction of the subjectivity and relationships of these characters, James also offers a way out of the false reality of reification, suggesting that the shaping of human subjectivity by capitalist structures and values need not be total or inevitable. Through language, and the willingness to tolerate ambiguity that leaves open the possibility for new meaning, people can find space outside of this false reality in which to reclaim our full humanity.

As inhabitants of a world even more thoroughly reified than Lukács described in the 1920s or than James imagined thirty to forty years earlier, we in the second decade of the twenty-first century live in a system that bears all the earmarks of a false reality. Consumer capitalism drives the global economy, with more separation than ever between people who make things and people who buy them. We have been called workers and consumers for so many generations that it seems natural to think of ourselves as fulfilling those roles. The word “consumer” is even used in public discourse to mean simply “person.” We are inundated with advertising messages teaching us to believe, with Ida and Beale Farange, that our surface is what matters, and to see ourselves, like Chad Newsome, as infinitely reinventable. Indeed, popular culture has taken from the

postmodern worldview the idea, reinforced daily by advertising, that human beings consist of nothing more than an ever-shifting series of surfaces. Not only advertising but public officials tell us our duty is to “go shopping.” Even our elections are framed in terms of marketing and branding, and our vote as the act of a consumer choosing a product. Culture that reinforces our disempowerment in creating the world around us, that reinforces our framing of our lives in economic terms, surrounds us daily in entertainment, news and advertising.

We also familiarly define ourselves as a certain kind of worker, finding our subjectivity to a significant degree in our job or career. We see nothing problematic about selling parts of ourselves – our knowledge, our skills, our creativity – in return for a paycheck, allowing our human qualities to be reified and quantified. For the most part we are, as Lukács described in the 1920s, passive observers of the workings of a system that operates on us, according to apparently inexorable and fixed laws. All this seems normal to us. Even without the words of Margaret Thatcher still echoing in the neoliberal atmosphere, telling us that “There is no alternative,” the system’s size alone, so vast and complicated, discourages us from seeing how life could be different and disempowers us from any sense that we could change it. The false reality of consumer capitalism appears to be our only reality, even when we are aware of it. Indeed, the notions that we have agency through consumer choice and that we have freedom of speech within defined parameters assuage our anxiety about how circumscribed we are, and reinforce our acceptance of this false reality.

As reified as we are in our era of capitalism, however, many of us sense that there is something more to being human than living within the reified world of consumer

culture. We may become aware of our passivity, and see it reflected in the characters in James's novels. Strether's uncritical acceptance, before his awakening, of a pre-determined role within the world that Mrs. Newsome controls may feel vaguely familiar. As we look into the tormented mind of Hyacinth, we may recognize the sense that the options between which we must choose arise out of the structure of the system, and, like him, we actually have little agency within it. We ache for Fleda to embrace Owen, but we also recognize the forces of a class system and consumer obsession operating against them, and we have the familiar sense of the failure of love in the face of such forces, from literature if not from our own experience. In these characters, we can relate to the yearning to express our full humanity and to engage more deeply with others, and to the frustration of those yearnings in the midst of a world in which, as Lukács describes, our minds have become reified to see the system that represses our full humanity as normal and natural, and to accept that creative agency is severely limited if not impossible. The brief moments of deep intersubjectivity, the flashes of non-reified self-awareness beyond constructed limits, are tantalizing, but Hyacinth, Fleda, and Strether return to the reified world having lost nearly everything they had.

With Maisie, however, we see more than the yearning, the failure of connection and the acquiescence to a disempowering system. Maisie moves from the passivity of childhood, a time when one's world is created by others and personal agency is of necessity limited, to taking an active role in her own life. From the moment of her decision to stop allowing her parents to use her as a deliverer of messages, when she understands that "everything was bad because she had been employed to make it so" (13) and that she need not be complicit in making everything bad, she develops the skill to

discern commodification and the agency to participate or reject it consciously. As she continually reaches toward her adults' intentions, always with her own intention of doing whatever would result in the best outcome for all, she experiences failure more often than success, and her successes, as when she sees that her father's intention about leaving for America is entirely self-serving, are less than beautiful. Nevertheless, she learns that non-reified subjectivity and relationships are possible, and, despite the repeated disappointments, preferable to accepting the falseness and dishonesty of passively accepting a commodified life. Her indefatigable efforts to distinguish false reality from something more real prepare her for her decision at the end to embody the uncertainty and ambiguity of living in a real reality instead of a false one. Watching her make that decision, we begin to see that the same pathway to choosing non-reified space is open to us in our lives.

Throughout this project I have used the term "non-reified space," implying a physical location where a person can live and connect with others that is outside of, or perhaps encapsulated within but separate from, the false reality of everyday life in a capitalist system. This spatial metaphor illustrates, somewhat ironically, the Newtonian solidity with which language meets efforts to articulate meanings that are not solid. As Gertrude Stein says in "Poetry and Grammar," words name things, which tends to fix those named things into ideas that do not change – to reify them. While this may make communication easier, in that everyone shares the same basic understanding of, say, what "space" is, it also presents us with a kind of false reality, according to Stein – false because what we may mean by "space" or any other word does not exist as a fixed concept but is part of a reality that is always moving. The word "space" is familiarly

understood as a physical place, an empty opening between physical things, but this fixed concept does not allow the movement that Stein argues, and I agree, must be allowed in order to express fully what anything is. Reifying language also tends to present the reality being described as the only possible one.

Seeing that “space” can be difficult, perhaps impossible, to conceptualize – that “space” may be something not completely spatial – may require acceptance of uncertainty and inexactness. This is the same uncertainty that James is actively invoking with his ambiguous and abstract language, as he points his readers to the understanding that words and the concepts they express do not reflect all of reality, and that allowing for movement and change, and not expecting full and complete depiction of reality through words alone, is a requirement for seeing the falseness of the fixed reality presented by concrete language. The “non-reified space” to which I refer is my way of describing a character’s or a reader’s awareness that the ordinary depiction of the world with conceptual language presents only a small perceptual view of a much larger reality that cannot be contained in language. Thus characters who enter (a word implying both spatiality and movement) non-reified space are able to some degree to entertain the thought that there is more to see, to know, to sense about the world than what can be expressed in clear and unambiguous words that reify. This willingness to allow uncertainty is what opens the “space” of their conscious understanding of what makes up reality. It also works against the reification that capitalism imposes, creating an awareness that reified reality may be only a sliver of a much larger reality which it is possible to know. Thus, while “non-reified space” is not spatial in the Newtonian sense, it is best understood as an experience or an awareness of an aspect of reality that exists

within or alongside the reified false reality. It becomes perceptible when the veil of reification thins, either spontaneously as people yearn to connect with each other, or by choice, as they become able to see and reject commodification.

With Hyacinth, Fleda, and even Strether, we see a slowly unfolding depiction of non-reified space, a depiction created by the abstraction of a character's mental processes, implying continuous movement within the character's mind or awareness, and the character's ability in varying degrees to share this awareness with another person. For Hyacinth, non-reified space is barely even a possibility, and even deep intersubjectivity largely beyond his capacity. We experience Hyacinth's mind as filled with confusion and longing, a place in which much of the mental activity happens beyond his understanding. As readers, our intersubjective connection with Hyacinth exists because of the narrator who explains and interprets Hyacinth's mental processes to us. We understand Hyacinth better than he understands himself, and we empathize with him in his painful isolation and confusion. We watch him struggle with the limitations of his class identity – is he an aristocrat? Is he of the working class? What do these identities allow him to aspire to as a human being – what can he do? Whom can he love? He senses that he is more than the self-definition rooted in either of the class designations, but he remains unable to think about himself outside of these reified identities, much less to connect intersubjectively with Millicent or anyone else. The intolerable ambiguity of his social class, coupled with the economic forces that operate to reinforce his reified identity as a worker, narrow his choices until only suicide seems possible.

In a similar way, as readers who can see the mind of Fleda more clearly than she sees it herself, we watch her mental processes as they both move her toward others by

taking up their intentions, including the spoils themselves, and also keep her from full awareness of her own intentions. In *Fleda*, we see a consciousness oriented toward bringing about the best outcome for everyone concerned, while denying that she has a personal interest in that outcome. Although *Fleda* is penniless, she is limited less because of her social class than because of her reification, by others and by herself, as the person who is going to resolve the impasse created by the uncanny power of the spoils. Much more consciously than *Hyacinth*, she reaches toward the minds of others seeking deep intersubjective connection, but the possibility of entering non-reified space with another eludes her. Sometimes this failure is due to commodification; *Mrs. Gereth*, for example, is unable to relate to *Fleda* except as a thing, as if *Fleda* were part of her collection, and so cannot reciprocate *Fleda*'s movement toward her. Other times, as in the climactic scene with *Owen*, it is *Fleda*'s acceptance of her own reification as the savior of the situation, and the limits that places on her ability to acknowledge her own interest in the outcome, that prevents her from experiencing a non-reified connection with *Owen*. For her, as for *Hyacinth*, options narrow: from the possibility of marrying *Owen* and sharing appreciation of the spoils with *Mrs. Gereth*, to the chance at owning one item, to the utter destruction of the collection and *Fleda*'s loss of all connection with any of the *Gereths*.

*Strether*, like both *Hyacinth* and *Fleda*, is not fully aware of the mental activities within his own mind, and the reader requires narrator interventions to explain what *Strether* does not understand or refuses to see. When he arrives in Paris, *Strether* sees himself in the economically configured roles of *Mrs. Newsome*'s employee and her fiancé, a relationship that exists because, as *Maria* puts it, he is the biggest "swell" that is currently available to *Mrs. Newsome*. His acceptance of his reification as *Mrs.*

Newsome's ambassador begins to loosen, however, as his growing confusion opens him to a greater tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty. Through his interactions with Maria, he tastes deep intersubjectivity. They experience non-reified space briefly at these moments of what Merleau-Ponty calls "floating in Being with another life," when Strether seems to glimpse an expanded reality that deeply attracts him. Although Strether is an apt learner of deep intersubjectivity, he remains mostly separate from the mental processes that operate within him and unable, except for brief moments, to see beyond the familiar economically-contextualized roles. Like Fleda and Hyacinth, he is left with a sense of narrowed options, feeling compelled to remain within those roles, within reified reality, as he chooses to return to the business-like Woollett.

These three characters exemplify, in somewhat different ways, the unawareness and confusion that seem to characterize, for James, the mental processes of people who live in a reified reality. Marx might call this confusion "mystification;" Lukács might label it "the veil of reification." The separation of labor from the worker, and the separation of the maker of a product from its user, as Marx explains and Lukács elaborates, give rise to a cultural process that masks the holders of economic power. This obscuring process creates at the same time both a false sense in ordinary people of economic efficacy and an acceptance as natural and inevitable of commodified relationships and the narrowing of human purpose into the twin roles of worker and consumer. Hyacinth suffers the ultimate loss due to this mystification, but he is unable to see or understand the source of his confusion. Fleda feels the mystifying power of the spoils differently than Mrs. Gereth does, taking on the role of being their "voice" with awareness of doing so, yet she, too, remains confused about the power they exert on her

and on her relationships. For Strether, the appeal of a relationship with Maria that could involve experience of non-reified space is strong, but he is unable to extricate himself from the economically determined roles and relationships of his past.

A significant symptom of mystification in these three characters is that their mental processes remain separate from their consciousness, at least in some degree; they experience their mental activity in a passive way, as if it is not actually part of them but something independent that acts on them. They operate mostly within a context of reification, without full awareness or acknowledgment of the ever-moving reality going on in their minds. As we enter deeply intersubjective connections with these characters, aided by the explaining and interpreting of the narrator, we identify with their confusion and passivity because we recognize it. These characters show us ourselves and help us to see how the veil of reification shapes the way we see ourselves and our relationships.

Maisie, by contrast, presents an example of a human being who, in her extreme youth, is largely passive in regard to the adults in her life and to her own mental activity, but who becomes gradually more conscious until her mental processes are no longer separate forces acting on her. At first, there is passivity in her outer life, as when she accepts being the porcelain cup of bitterness for her parents, and in her inner life, as when she accedes to bafflement in the face of incomprehensible adult behavior. As she grows up, however, and becomes more conscious of the commodification of her relationships, as she seeks the best outcome for everyone and continually runs up against her adults' unwillingness to meet her in that intention, her mental processes become more integrated within her.

Finally, in her last extended meeting with Sir Claude, the slight shift in narrative style indicates that her mental processes are no longer forces with their own agency, as they always are for the other three protagonists. She has moved consciously into that space in which mental activity happens, the non-reified space characterized by movement. Because the movement in that space is continual, and cannot be captured or held still, uncertainty is inherent within it. Because it is not already filled with the concepts and quantifiable, known meaning, the openness of this space of awareness to new meaning enhances the sense of uncertainty. And because static and quantifiable language characterizes the reified reality of a capitalist system, the space that that is not already filled with meaning but rather allows for movement exists outside of reification. Maisie's coming into full consciousness of her mental processes signals her embodiment of this non-reified space; she no longer passively, and sometimes confusedly, experiences mental processes happening within her, but rather stands in an active and fully aware relationship to them.

Maisie is uniquely qualified to exemplify the pathway to choosing non-reification because of her youth and her almost complete lack of education about people and relationships, which makes her learning transparent to the reader. As Merle Williams describes, Maisie's childhood is uniquely chaotic and unstructured, resulting in her having little socialization into any pattern of relationships. The adults in her life, who are often unconscious of her as a human being, do not explain to her why they act as they do, or how they regard her; she has to figure all this out for herself. Through her process of experimentation and reflection, she discovers the limits to the ways the adults in her life present the world to her, and realizes that she can refuse those limits, as when she refuses

commodification as the porcelain cup. This process also shows her the limits within the thinking of her adults, none of whom are able to see, much less let go of, the commodified pattern of their relationship to her. The novel unfolds her own learning process as she confronts choices that would place her within a predetermined reality in which she only appears to have agency; the final scene with Beale is an instructive example, where she realizes that her agency has already been usurped by her father.

As she experiments with and reflects on her own perceptions of the situations in which she finds herself, Maisie begins to see that the reality in which people treat each other as commodities is a false reality that offers a false agency. She does not have a Marxist analysis, only her own experience and the extraordinary understandings she gains through it. Yet she comes to an awareness of reification that resonates with that of Lukács, realizing that accepting the limited view of people and relationships that she has seen and experienced would be accepting a false reality. Ultimately, when confronted with the choice to live in the falsity of a pretend family with Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale – to accept the reified role of legitimizing their relationship in their own eyes, in return for the security of parental adults to take care of her and the chance to stay with her beloved Sir Claude – or to face an unknown future with Mrs. Wix, Maisie’s experience at distinguishing the false from the real enables her to reject the false, including the love within it, and to turn toward the real with all of its uncertainty.

As I have described Maisie and her learning process, the activity of this process and its results appear to be happening within Maisie’s mind. It is there that her perceptions and reflections accumulate, there that she reaches toward others’ intentions, and there that she makes her decisions not to commodify or be commodified. It is in her

own consciousness that she experiences the sudden drop, as if the ground were shifting beneath her feet, as she realizes the depth of the uncertainty that characterizes the uncertain, less reified reality in which she is choosing to live. I have argued that James is more interested in exploring this reality on a psychological and intersubjective level than on a social level; that he concerns himself with individuals as they encounter self and other in a space that is not reified, and that he gestures toward this space through language that is abstract and ambiguous. As Maisie exemplifies, however, this terrain of mental activity and mutual creation of the experience of this moment is continuous with the terrain of material reality; inner reality is not separate from the material reality of everyday life that concerns Marx, Lukács and Raymond Williams. In the same way, inner ambiguity is not separate from outer uncertainty.

Williams argues that language in its original power is more than a tool to express what we see and experience, or to reflect a reality that already exists. Rather, it is part of how we create that reality, a primary force of human social production. Its power, he says, lies in the human capacity to make meaning in a shared, social context. In a system metabolized by commodities, however, as Lukács describes, there is no space for human interaction that is not mediated by the commodity form. Relationships in a system metabolized by the commodity form, as illustrated in all four James novels, are instrumental, reifying and predicated on economic exchange. When people communicate in these relationships, they are using language to express their individual thoughts and needs, talking “to or at each other, rather than ever *with* each other,” as Williams puts it (32). The space of interaction is already filled with meaning, including the world with everything already put in place and the view of the other person as a known commodity.

Thus, communication in these moments contains no opportunity for people to make meaning in a socially creative way.

In order for that socially creative use of language to be possible, for people to make meaning together, there must be space for new meaning to emerge. Under capitalism, as Marx and Lukács explain, the mediation of the commodity form results in people having indirect rather than direct relationships with each other in a context of how material reality is built. In other words, people do not work together, through language, making the things, systems, institutions, and processes of their common life in a direct and responsible way, but rather accept and passively enact roles within the existing systems, institutions, and processes. They accept that reality is fully defined, the space of their material lives, like the language they use, is already filled with meaning, and as such everything is reified, “thingified,” known and defined. What Maisie shows us is that the non-reified space between two people, in which they create the next moment together without making it a transaction – when, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, they “[float] in Being with another life” – is the same kind of open-ended, mutual meaning-making relationship as when we use language to make social meaning together and to create the material reality of our common life. One characteristic of this kind of language use is some degree of uncertainty.

The language through which James depicts deep intersubjectivity correlates with an understanding of language as a primary activity in material production: both contexts involve people thinking together, taking up each other’s intentions, and allowing for the unknown. Williams argues for the primary power of language from a Marxist perspective, with a focus on the constitutive function of language in the social creation of

material reality. James's abstract and ambiguous language indicates that he also sees language less as a collection of signs and concepts that describe existing reality and more as a powerful force for creativity that can bring new ideas, thoughts, perceptions and understandings to birth – a constitutive aspect of our humanness. He depicts how a commodified social context can reduce language to a tool for people to talk at each other; Maisie's parents exemplify this in a deeply ironic and commodity-mediated way as they hurl insults at each other through her.

James also, however, explores language as a constitutive force in the development of subjectivity and deep intersubjectivity – what it might mean for people to take up each other's intentions and share in the creation of the next moment by making meaning together rather than reflecting and repeating meaning that already exists. Maisie has constituted herself through sifting the reified meanings provided for her about who she is – the porcelain cup, her father's noble sacrifice, the legitimation of her parents' and step-parents' relationships – and choosing to understand herself as none of these. What she is remains unknown and, for that very reason, full of possibility for how she will be constituted. Although the language of ambiguity and abstractness in the novel is almost always the narrator's rather than Maisie's own, the quality of uncertainty is, somewhat paradoxically, what makes it constitutive. Just as abstracting characters' mental processes and giving them active agency has the effect of presenting these activities as immediate, individual and specific rather than abstract, so ambiguous language makes the uncertainty inherent in non-reified reality a more real and unambiguous constituent of that reality.

The constitutive power of language can be seen in its capacity not only to reflect a pre-existing reality but actually to create new meaning and, out of that, something new in

material reality. On an individual level, language also not only expresses how we see ourselves and relate to others, but it is part of what creates our subjectivity and our relationships. In this way, Maisie exemplifies Williams's contention that language is a constitutive faculty and activity of the human being. It may seem counterintuitive that language whose primary characteristics are abstractness and ambiguity could have anything to do with creating subjectivity. The truth that this imprecise language points to, however, is that human subjectivity cannot be either fully constituted or fully expressed in words and concepts; or, put another way, if human subjectivity is fully expressed through language, it is of necessity reified and therefore limited and false. What James is doing with his abstract and ambiguous grammar and syntax is an effort to counter the reduction of humanness to a set of known quantities, and instead to suggest that there is more to being human than can ever be described through verbal concepts, and more to human relationships than what can occur when we approach each other as known, reified, quantified collections of attributes and our connection as an opportunity to get our needs met. The abstract and ambiguous language does not constitute subjectivity in and of itself, therefore, but does so by its intention to keep open some space for meaning to be made. This language implies that existing concepts of the human being and of individual human beings are not adequately constitutive, but that we must always have space for articulating aspects and meanings of our humanness, and that of each other, that are not yet known.

James also calls attention to the social significance of language through his intense focus on relationships as the place where we find the meaning of our humanness. According to Williams, language constitutes us as human beings when we use language

together to make meaning. As he points out, language is a social activity, one that connects us with each other and affirms our relationship (32). For James, even though most of the language that points to non-reified space is spoken by the narrator rather than by the characters, the context is always intersubjective. Hyacinth's chaotic mental processes are depicted in abstract and ambiguous terms as he reaches toward the mind of Mr. Vetch or Millicent; the language of abstractness and ambiguity describes Fleda's most intensely intersubjective moment with Owen. Strether and Maria share non-reified space in their conversation, during which both speak abstractly and ambiguously, and their conversation is described in the same terms by the narrator. Maisie's childish understanding requires frequent explanation from the narrator as she is attempting to understand the meaning of adult behavior or to take up their intentions and discern what she can do for a good outcome.

In her efforts to take up intentions of her adults, Maisie begins also to sense that the moments of deeper self-awareness and intersubjective communion, imperfect as they are, seem to offer an expanded space for understanding herself and them. In this inner ground she experiences a reality that, while it is not always happy and beautiful—in fact, it is seldom so—empowers her to meet life and honor her own and others' complex natures with integrity. Some critics analyzing the novel describe this as Maisie's process of developing a moral compass. I argue it can also be read as her embodiment of the intersubjective process of finding a non-reified space for human self-understanding and relationships. The portrayal of this process and the choices it entails gives us a kind of map, a new story through which we can both see our own reification more clearly, and

find the choice points where we can reject commodification of ourselves and others and step into the joy and uncertainty of non-reified life.

As we read *Maisie* and relate with her intersubjectively in the twenty-first century, we also may come to understand language in a different way. If part of our reification is accepting the false reality of consumer capitalism, then changing our relationship with language could help us see the falseness of that understanding. If we have lived under the assumption that language is merely a tool for individual self-expression and that it can only reflect the reality that is already there, we may finish reading *Maisie* with a deeper awareness of our complicity in our own disempowerment. We may, in fact, realize that language is a far more powerful tool for changing the world than we have been taught. Even if all we can do is to open some temporary spaces for relating to others in a non-reified way, as James demonstrates in all of his writing, this is worth doing. But language has more power than that.

Like *Maisie*, we can refuse to accept the false reality that capitalist language creates and sustains around us—the reality that satisfying our desires for things and status is the way to fulfillment, that people are commodities and our relationships are sites for economic exchange, that language's highest use is to categorize, explain and quantify the world and human experience in ways that align with the monetary basis of value in a capitalist economy. Like her, we have the opportunity to experience a different reality, one that sees human purpose as extending far beyond economic roles and human interactions as opportunities to reach for connection on a deep, non-instrumental level. With Williams, we can see a reality that restores language to its purpose as a socially creative force aligned with human depth and restores to people the power and

responsibility of creating our common life together in a direct way. With Stein, we can acknowledge the flash and flow of ever-changing conditions and see this as full of fascinating, as-yet unknown possibilities for what reality could encompass, even though we cannot grasp and possess them.

In moving toward this real reality, however, we need to remember that the unknown aspect of a moment or a reality not already filled with meaning requires us to let go of certainty. When Maisie feels the full impact of choosing to live in a non-reified way, she experiences for an existentially uncertain moment a sense of the ground dropping away beneath her. “I don’t know, I don’t know,” she responds to Mrs. Wix asking her to identify with a moral sense based in conventional ideas (258). As readers, we catch our breath with Maisie at this moment, feeling the same jerky sense of falling, and experiencing in our own bodies the anxiety of losing our foothold in a completely understandable and understood world and falling into an open-ended reality with so much that we do not know. Having this experience can give us a taste of what it might mean to follow Maisie’s example and say, “I don’t know” to the clarity and certainty of unambiguous knowledge. What would it mean if the false reality of reification dissolved? What would it feel like if the nature of reality changed from a world of fixed and solid meanings, relationships and concepts governed by the “laws” of capitalism, into a world and a life of unknown new possibilities? We will not be able to answer these questions unless we join Maisie in venturing into the unknown territory of an internal and external reality that cannot be fully defined.

James wrote during one of the powerful ages of capitalism as it was consolidating its dominance of economy, society and culture in the United States and other countries.

Even though he accepted his own reification, observing the world, selling his genius as a commodity, adopting the techniques of advertising, and freely sprinkling his writing with economic language, James also maintained a deeply critical stance toward the influence of capitalism in his time, especially in its imposition of severely restrictive limits on what it meant to be human. Now his works are speaking to contemporary readers who inhabit another such age of capitalism's growth as it transcends national borders, dominating the entire world and more strongly than ever shaping our perceptions of human purpose and our own nature. Reading James's novels with an awareness that he could be complicit with capitalism and at the same time critical of it can help us realize that despite our own complicity, we, too, can see through the veil of reification and glimpse a much larger reality. More than that, we may see that reality as not only present in fiction, but, inspired by the example of Maisie, as accessible to us in our material life.

Looking to the possibility of a prose that could allow for space not already filled with meaning, Stein says: "There could no longer be form to decide anything, narrative that is not newspaper narrative but real narrative must of necessity be told by anyone having come to the realization that the noun must be replaced not by inner balance but by the thing in itself and that will eventually lead to everything" (246). What Stein calls the "thing in itself," the unique, unquantifiable, nuanced, and always incomplete understanding of any individual person or thing, is a reality that can only be approached by open-ended uses of language like those we see in James's prose, and a willingness to allow uncertainty and incompleteness in the interests of making room for something new in our sense of self, our relationships, our views of the world.

Becoming able to see the reification of our lives and our world and experimenting with living even just for moments in a non-reified way will, of course, not bring about an end to capitalism or to reification. A material anti-capitalist revolution will not likely be fomented in this way. Yet, I would argue that people beginning to see through the veil of reification even in brief glimpses has the potential to weaken it and eventually pull it aside for everyone because the opaqueness of the veil is part of the consensual reality to which we all agree by not questioning it. Our sense of powerlessness within a system in which commodification has metabolized all relationships comes from the material fact of commodification, as Lukács argues; but it is perpetuated by consensual agreement throughout society that the laws operating within capitalism are beyond our influence to change. Reading James the way I have explored here does not change the power dynamics in society or even change anyone's life in a material way. What it does is more subtle and more fundamental: it offers to us highly-commodified twenty-first century people a perspective on ourselves, each other and our world that can open new possibilities for subjectivity and relationships. It offers an invitation to see that things, including ourselves, do not need to be as they are in capitalism's false reality, and a means available to all of us every day – language – through which to make holes in that falseness that have the power to shatter it.

While we may not be able to live “outside” this commodity-metabolized system, being able to see it around us opens possibilities that are invisible when we accept it as inevitable. Like the children in the fairy tale, we can begin to see that the emperor has no clothes: the reified reality is not as impenetrable as it appears. Realizing that language can, through ambiguity and open-endedness, point to a non-reified reality with room for

new meaning to be created potentially gives language back to us as a creative social force. How this would unfold socially is impossible to predict, though it is my belief that such a shift in the human perception of reality is already under way. Its consequences on a large scale, if this shift is indeed happening, are difficult to exaggerate. We would be in a position to reshape, revolutionarily, the world.

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