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"Divine William" and the master: The influence of Shakespeare on the novels of Henry James

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"DIVINE WILLIAM" AND THE MASTER: THE INFLUENCE OF
SHAKESPEARE ON THE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

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Master of Arts in English
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

“Divine William” and The Master: The Influence of Shakespeare on the Novels of Henry James

By

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Henry James’s most sustained commentary on Shakespeare comes in the form of an introduction to an edition of *The Tempest* that was published in 1907. In it, he remarks that the play is a reflection of Shakespeare “consciously tasting of the first and rarest of his gifts, that of imaged creative Expression...to show him as unresistingly aware” (1207). This praise ties unerringly back to James’s praise of the artist as one who views the world through open eyes and can capture the nuance of experience. James himself worked at the craft of fiction, and writes extensively in his notebooks and the New York Edition Prefaces of the origins of many of his stories and novels. That James admired Shakespeare is undeniable. James knew Shakespeare’s plays intimately, as a reader of the plays, a playgoer, and a reviewer. A close study of “The Aspern Papers,” “The Birthplace,” *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Golden Bowl*, and *The American* reveals the influence of Shakespeare’s plays on the shaping of characters and thematic elements of plot found in James’s works.

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CHAPTER 1

“DIVINE WILLIAM” AND THE MASTER: THE INFLUENCE OF SHAKESPEARE ON THE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

In a letter Henry James wrote to Manton Marble in 1902, he eloquently discounts Marble’s support of the Francis Bacon-as-Shakespeare-theory. James spoke of Shakespeare simply as “divine William,” a man who was “a Poet and Nothing Else” (*Life in Letters* 343). He refutes the Bacon theory in part by asserting that Francis Bacon was too much else, that all of those traits which Bacon’s supporters recommended – an upper-crust pedigree, prestigious education, and career in politics – rendered him incapable of also being an Artist. Finally, James expresses offense at the attack on Shakespeare’s authorship finding its source in the logic that a man as relatively uneducated as Shakespeare could not have possessed the gift of creative talent. For James, to be an Artist or a Poet, for James categorized creative endeavors of the writer, painter, photographer and the like under the umbrella of Artist, stemmed from more than education or wealth. James describes the “house of fiction” as containing “a number of possible windows not to be reckoned” (*Art of the Novel* 46) and thus the role of the writer lies in looking in to one possible window and successfully conveying the scene he or she sees to a reading audience. A critical component of this process emerges as the “enveloping air of the artist’s humanity” (Ibid 45). As James saw it, possessing academic

skills, intellect, or even great ideas does not render one a success as an artist. Rather, the inherent humanity of the writer plays an integral role in the success of the finished work. Shakespeare, for James, possessed this powerful sense of humanity in abundance, an ability to see into the depths of human experience and convey it back in myriad powerful ways. James's most sustained commentary on Shakespeare comes in the form of an introduction to an edition of *The Tempest* that was published in 1907. In it, he remarks that the play is a reflection of Shakespeare "consciously tasting of the first and rarest of his gifts, that of imaged creative Expression...to show him as unresistingly aware" (1207). This praise ties unerringly back to James's praise of the artist as one who views the world through open eyes and can capture the nuance of experience. James himself worked at the craft of fiction, and writes extensively in his notebooks and the New York Edition Prefaces of the origins of many of his stories and novels. Time and again, James's hearing of a story, or overhearing a snippet of conversation, or observing London life closely lead to the germination of works like *The Golden Bowl* and *The Princess Casamassima*. That James admired Shakespeare is undeniable. As the evidence in the following chapters demonstrates, James knew Shakespeare's plays intimately, as a reader of the plays, a playgoer, and a reviewer. A close study of "The Aspern Papers," "The Birthplace," *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Golden Bowl*, and *The American* reveals the influence of Shakespeare's plays on the shaping of characters and thematic elements of plot found in James's works.

Before exploring the relationship between James and Shakespeare in greater detail I will examine how Shakespeare became a prominent figure of early American literary and playgoing life. He proves capable of transcending boundaries in place for other

authors and playwrights, limits which kept these other authors from finding in favor in Puritan households. He also broke down boundaries between higher and lower social circles. His plays found popularity within those Puritan communities which otherwise banned the theatre, and yet they also found places within the libraries of statesmen like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Other American Founding Fathers such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson viewed Shakespeare as “a moralist and a philosopher; nothing so trivial as a journeyman of theatrical entertainments” (Webb 13, 62). Citizens of the newly forming and evolving America came to view Shakespeare as “a fellow traveler in the American fight against tyranny” (Cliff 120). The fact that he was technically English did not diminish American enthusiasm for his plays, both in published and staged forms. Indeed, as the chapter concerning “The Aspern Papers” and “The Birthplace” demonstrates, Americans thought of Shakespeare as fundamentally American and a brilliant mind whose works and life went vastly underappreciated by his home country.

Early in the American experience of community and nation-building, Shakespeare became enfolded as a brilliant playwright whose works stood for more than mere entertainment and his popularity spread from the Puritan colonies, to the libraries of statesmen, to the frontier as the movement west began. American presses began reprinting English editions of Shakespeare’s plays in 1794 (McManaway 514) and 1795 saw the publishing of the first complete Shakespeare edition published in America (Vaughan 27). Shakespeare collections gained strong popularity even amongst fur trappers. Mary Ellen Jones recounts the story of one such trapper, Jim Bridger, who purchased a copy of Shakespeare’s plays but was himself illiterate. He paid a German

boy forty dollars to read it to him. Bridger found out about Shakespeare by asking an officer at Fort Laramie to provide a reading recommendation (30). Nigel Cliff notes, “Shakespeare accounted for nearly a quarter of the plays performed during the nineteenth-century, and he was by far the most popular playwright on the frontier” (13), which emphasizes that productions of the plays ranged from the amateurish and often raucous productions of the frontier, to the serious productions of the American theatre houses. Shakespeare found favor with both the upper and lower classes in nineteenth-century America and “he became the focus of the tensions between them, from the deference of the Anglophiles to the counter claims of the nationalists” (Foulkes 20). Shakespeare’s writings could be both dignified and bloody, not unlike the early history of America. His characters also were unique, reflecting the American drive to build an identity unique and separate from England.

Parallel but opposite to Shakespeare’s rise to prominence in early American culture, James found affinity with England. James travelled throughout Europe with his family while he was growing up and James ultimately opted to make England his home. Indeed, once he relocated, he did not visit America again for some twenty-five years, returning for the first time in 1905. James’s introduction to Shakespeare began when he was still a young boy. In his unfinished autobiography, James recounts going to the theatre with his family. Of those plays, he writes, “We had our proportion of Shakespeare” (*Autobiography* 62). James reviewed numerous Shakespeare productions throughout his life, reviews which do more than simply give a playgoer’s impression of the staging. Instead, he proves “meticulously informed and more empathically decisive than one might expect” (Stafford 124). Additionally, a poorly produced or acted

Shakespearean play could draw James's ire. In his notebooks, he makes a brief entry concerning a 1912 production of *The Winter's Tale* directed by Granville Barker. He describes it as "incredibly stupid and hideous" (*Complete Notebooks* 368) and does not deem it necessary to elaborate further. In another instance, James lambasts the performance given by actor Henry Irving in a production of *Macbeth* noting, "Shakespeare's finest lines pass from his lips without his paying the scantest tribute to their quality" (*Essays on Art and Drama* 235). James praises Shakespeare for his "quality of his mind and the virtue of his skill" (Introduction to *The Tempest* 1210) and he certainly pulled no punches when he found that a Shakespearean production failed to honor this. The love of the theatre stuck with James throughout his own professional career, culminating in the disastrous production of *Guy Domville* which marked James's only attempt at mounting stage productions.

James also had a deep admiration and respect for both the works of Shakespeare and the man himself. James travelled to Stratford-Upon-Avon and comments that many Americans visit in order to pay "respects to the birthplace of Shakespeare" (*Collected Travel Writings* 174). As the chapter examining "The Birthplace" demonstrates, James did not appreciate those who came to gawk or to mythologize Shakespeare. James stays away from a false tone of awe when reminiscing about Stratford-Upon-Avon. However, he acknowledges the power Shakespeare holds over writers like himself commenting, "For a man of letters who endeavours to cultivate, however modestly, the medium of Shakespeare" (Ibid 22) that person must visit the place of Shakespeare's early life. The spectre of Shakespeare as a brilliant creative mind inhabits the area, as a force intangible and unknowable, but one which James sees less as menacing than frustrating. As much as

James strove for privacy in his own life, he admits to harboring a desire still to have the chance to know Shakespeare the man. The known facts of Shakespeare's life prove scant, which James describes as "strung together...as the pebbles across the stream" (Introduction to *The Tempest* 1208) and James cannot help but wonder what Shakespeare really was like.

Esther Dunn notes that Shakespeare "is the most quoted author by both Emerson and Whitman" (249) and while James does not with as much frequency opt for the direct quote, he nonetheless turns often to Shakespeare in his novels. What proves especially striking about James's admiration of Shakespeare lies in the casual manner in which he inserts Shakespeare into the flow of his daily life. In an 1864 letter James wrote to Thomas Sargeant Perry, James relates his frustration with William Thackeray. He writes, "Thackeray was up for a few days but was turned out for calling me a snob because I walked arm-in-arm with Shakespeare" (3). James's word choice, of walking "arm-in-arm" with the playwright, speaks not to James's snobbery, as Thackeray mistakenly apprehended, but rather to his lifelong sense of camaraderie with a fellow artist. Further still, in many of James's letters, he drops direct and oblique references to any number of Shakespeare's plays without otherwise directing his reader to their sources. Shakespeare was a part of James's vocabulary and he expected others to share his knowledge and appreciation. For James, Shakespeare epitomized the Artist, an individual both gifted with the ability to see into the core of human experience and express it and alienated from mainstream society by virtue of the selfsame gift. Dunn further observes, "Shakespeare is not all things to all men: he is rather the *alter ego* to each of these magnificent individualists" (249). While Dunn writes specifically of figures like Emerson and

Whitman, the sentiment applies equally to Henry James. James felt a connection to Shakespeare as he himself struggled throughout his career to fully connect with his audiences as a financial and critical success. While Shakespeare clearly enjoyed great accolades in his own lifetime, the thematic depths of his plays certainly require effort on the part of the playgoer to ascertain and appreciate. James, in his introduction to an edition of *The Tempest* found himself trying to understand the man behind the playwright, the creative mind of the artist he deeply admired.

James also pursued Shakespeare intellectually, as he did as a fellow artist, a reader, and a playgoer. James attended lectures on Shakespeare, as he records in his notebooks (*Complete Notebooks* 362, 382). This aspect of James's interest in Shakespeare was also present at the end of his life. In a terrible but perhaps fitting irony, Shakespeare loomed close to James in the last few months of James's life. In November of 1915, James notes his regret at having to turn down an invitation to deliver a lecture on Shakespeare (*Life in Letters* 564-565). James does not specifically mention his intended topic for the evening, but his distress at not being able to attend as planned is evident. James's health was failing by this point, and he suffered a stroke less than a month later on December 2, 1915. He died on February 28, 1916. In his introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Wings of the Dove*, critic John Bayley draws another parallel between Shakespeare and James at the ends of their professional writing careers. Bayley notes that by the time James wrote his final four novels, of which *The Wings of the Dove* is one, he "for all practical purposes bade farewell to the novel, as Shakespeare has been imagined to bid farewell to the stage in *The Tempest* (7). For James, *The Tempest* was Shakespeare's great masterpiece. James continued to write beyond *The Golden Bowl*, the

last of the novels of the major phase published in 1904, but critics often point to this work as James's great symbolic novel, his own masterpiece.

The first chapter in this dissertation examines two of James's works together, as they share a thematic tie. "The Aspern Papers" and "The Birthplace" fall under the category of what James deemed a "nouvelle," that which may not be several hundred pages in length, but possesses more depth and development than the short story. Indeed, both pieces may easily be classified as novels, albeit short of length, especially when compared to novels like *The Golden Bowl* or *The Wings of the Dove*. Further still, both works share a thematic relationship in that they pursue the theme of the artist who has died. "The Aspern Papers" deals with Jeffrey Aspern, a writer whose talents have gone unpraised, as the story's narrator asserts. "The Birthplace" turns its attentions specifically to Shakespeare, as James explores the public's fascination for the playwright and its need to create a story of Shakespeare's life where one does not otherwise exist. This chapter also explores in greater detail Shakespeare's relationship with the nineteenth-century American public, and James's own thoughts about the enshrinement of Stratford-Upon-Avon as a tourist attraction.

James felt a connection to Shakespeare which followed him through a boyhood in which he discovered Shakespeare at the theatre and through his own career as a writer. James's interest in Shakespeare moved beyond a simple appreciation of the playwright's work. As James developed his theory of aesthetics, which culminated in the critical prefaces to the New York Edition, he became certain that the true artist possesses an ability to see beyond the everyday world to one of ideas and possibilities. The artist must then be capable of conveying the foibles and triumphs of humanity back to a reading,

viewing, or playgoing audience, since James made no distinction between visual and reading arts. For James, Shakespeare wields the power to tap into the stream of human existence and presents to his audiences the mirror in which their own complex emotional lives reflect back at them. James's corpus of writings as a whole certainly reflects a similar concern with conveying the intensity of a scene, or a consciousness, as James thought of his central characters. The work of both authors defies simple or surface readings. Although one can certainly refuse to delve for deeper meaning and come away from a Shakespeare play or a James story with a basic understanding of plot and character, both authors require of their enthusiasts a close and careful eye.

Such is the case with "The Aspern Papers." On the surface, the story appears to be rather dark and dour. The narrator of the story wants Aspern's personal papers so badly that he is willing to swindle the Misses Bordereaux in any way necessary to obtain them, only to have the papers dangled just out of reach and supposedly burned. Yet James's story proves darkly comedic, filled with a cast of misfit and dysfunctional characters all trying to play one another for the fool. Above all, perhaps, "The Aspern Papers" chronicles the spectacular inability of either the narrator or Miss Tina to function as romantic protagonists. James reworks the tragic themes found in *Romeo and Juliet* to great effect in this regard. Shakespeare's play explores the intensity of young love, including the lovers' tendency toward rash decisions and the belief that separation from their beloved can mean only death. James's Miss Tina and the narrator are hardly young or innocent. The narrator attempts to court Miss Tina, invoking in one instance the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, but even he must concede that they share nothing in common with Shakespeare's young lovers. Instead, they are cold and calculating,

playing the roles of the star struck lovers without ever once feeling passion in their hearts. Miss Tina goes so far as to commodify love, attempting to trade the purported Aspern papers for the narrator's hand in marriage.

While James uses *Romeo and Juliet* as a point of exploration in "The Aspern Papers," he also focuses on the issue of the memorialization of the artist. Jeffrey Aspern is dead, has never gained any lasting fame, and now the narrator hopes to step in and capitalize on the author's private papers. However, the narrator needs for the papers to reveal an Aspern in line with his own internal creation. "The Birthplace" picks up on this theme and turns its attention specifically on Shakespeare. James explores the disconnect between the verifiable events of Shakespeare's life and the public's need to have a fully formed and interesting story placed before them. Thus, the purported birthplace of Shakespeare transforms into a tourist trap, with those from America especially rabid in their devotion to the story of Shakespeare's life. These tourists have an expectation as to what the caretakers, the Gedges, will say about each room in the house and the circumstances of Shakespeare's birth and upbringing to the point that they will become angered if there is any deviation from the "script." Morris Gedge, initially appalled at his role as the perpetuator of fiction, eventually comes to glory in his role as entertainer of Shakespearephiles. James cautions in this story against the mythologizing of any revered figure, but certainly and especially against doing so to Shakespeare. James himself fought his own desires to find evidence of the man behind the playwright, and took steps, such as the burning of a good quantity of his own personal papers, to prevent fans and critics alike from knowing intimate details. If the public focuses too much on the private life of

the artist, on Shakespeare's, then the grave possibility exists of creating a cult of personality built on fictions.

The Portrait of a Lady invites interesting comparisons to *The Tempest*, the only one of Shakespeare's plays that James spoke about in any sustained commentary, as he does in his introduction to the play. This chapter begins by looking in-depth at James's introduction to *The Tempest* before moving to examine those thematic elements the novel shares with the play. *The Portrait of a Lady*'s Ralph Touchett makes a clear and explicit comparison between himself and Henrietta Stackpole as being Caliban and Ariel. This statement alone provides an intriguing avenue of analysis, as Ralph likens himself to the twisted and monstrous Caliban, a troubling insight into his own self-image. Yet a second vein of exploration also opens with this analogy. If Ralph and Henrietta share traits with Caliban and Ariel, then one of the novel's characters must take on the identity of Prospero, the powerful illusionist of his lonely island. Certainly, Isabel Archer fits the role in many regards, not the least of which is the hold she has over both Ralph and Henrietta. Ralph admits to his deep and genuine love for Isabel, a love which begins with an act both generous and selfish: giving his portion of his inheritance to her. Henrietta is an outwardly independent and modern woman travelling Europe as a journalist in search of stories to send back home to America, yet still finds herself in Isabel's thrall. The novel concludes with Henrietta happily married, yet she maintains her determination to throw Caspar Goodwood into Isabel's life. Finally, James bestows upon Isabel not only the connection to Prospero, but also to Miranda. Isabel proves a complicated young woman, at once wielding power over those like Ralph and Henrietta and yet ceding everything to Gilbert Osmond. Miranda views the world with a wide-eyed

innocence, perhaps even a romantic view of the inherent goodness of those who shipwreck on her father's island. Isabel shares this predilection for the romantic, but for her, this focus on imagination will prove disastrous.

For *The Wings of the Dove*, James turned to one of Shakespeare's bloodiest tragedies: *Macbeth*. This novel of James and this play of Shakespeare's also tie the two authors together by the common theme of ambiguity. The chapter details how ambiguity informs readings of both selections. In *Macbeth*, the witches defy any solid interpretation. They are women and yet not women, existing in a place of gender instability that unnerves Banquo. He wants to believe they are women, but they are bearded and thus his conclusion is less definite. Further, Shakespeare implies that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have perhaps already spoken of murdering Duncan before the events of this play, an avenue of analysis present in the chapter. Additionally, Macbeth's own words prove ambiguous. Upon learning of his wife's suicide, he states simply, "She should have died hereafter" (V.5.17). Macbeth might be taken as callous here, beyond the point of caring for the death of his wife. However, he might also be expressing an intangible sense of exhaustion and resignation, an assertion that Lady Macbeth should not have died prematurely. Finally, he could be expressing a wish that the woman once so closely in his confidence should have died at a time when he could have mourned her passing.

Wings of the Dove proves similarly murky, with James eschewing concrete and inconvertible readings of the story in favor of a nuanced text over which critics do not always agree. The chapter delves into these elements of ambiguity in greater detail and they are striking. The very title of the novel itself lacks one concrete interpretation. The dove, a symbol associated with peace and also with Christ, can denote Milly Theale as a

benevolent being who transcends her own feelings of betrayal to help Kate Croy and Merton Densher by leaving Densher her vast wealth. Yet the dove with its outstretched, enveloping wings can also be taken as a symbol of suffocation, making the inheritance an act of vengeance Milly perpetrates to permanently estrange Kate and Merton. Whether Milly emerges as victim or martyr lies in the reader's interpretation of events and James denies one easy, definitive reading, as Shakespeare does with *Macbeth*. Finally, the blurring of gender occurs in the novel as well. Duco Van Oostrom notes, "At first, Merton and Kate are a "classic division of gender in which woman is linked to the body and man to rationality" (110). Yet James provides a less clear division than this describes. While Kate certainly relies from the first on her physical beauty, she also displays great cunning and an ability to rationally plan out her next moves. Merton, conversely, seems to exist in a world of his own, one more of mediocrity than rationality. Shakespeare similarly likens Lady Macbeth to the female body when she speaks of nursing. He twists the comparison, however, by having Lady Macbeth speak just as easily, even gleefully, of infanticide. A clear division of gender in the play becomes further problematized by Lady Macbeth's worry that her husband is "too full o'th' milk of human kindness" (I.5.18). Macbeth, initially by all reports a loyal and decent subject to King Duncan, loses his connection quickly to rationality as he becomes further enchanted by the witches' prophecies. Not even the outwardly stable categories of male and female hold in these two stories.

Ambiguity and James partner outside of the boundaries of his written works, a relationship strikingly apparent in the background behind the selection of the photographic frontispieces for the New York Edition. In the Prefaces to the New York

Edition, James devotes a good deal of time recounting his time with Alvin Langdon Coburn as the two scoured England in search of subjects to photograph for the Edition's frontispieces. Perhaps the most unique aspect of the photograph is that it does not do what a drawing may be capable of accomplishing. Where illustrations produced to accompany a written work often tried to emulate some character or scene from the book, "pictures don't give us visual highlights of gripping scenes or let us see exactly how the characters dress, or whether they have sideburns" (Harmon 301). By their very nature then, photographs can only ever be impressions of the stories they represent, perhaps conveying a general mood or the sense of what a character or place may look like. Never, though, will these captured images be a precise attempt to render words into pictures. The selection of photography as the medium of choice for the New York Edition frontispieces was a calculated move on James's part. Since the photographs "effect a more playful and problematic juxtaposition of two signifying fields, neither of which is endowed with absolute authority over the other" (Harmon 303), they are incapable of fully expressing the text, and the text cannot fully inform the photographs. The ambiguity of these two disparate art forms surely appealed to James by allowing him to play with his reader's expectations. He bowed to the public's desire for illustrations to accompany his work, but he did so on his own terms by refusing to select clear, vivid, but perhaps vapid, line drawings representing a given character or scene. Instead, the frontispieces selected for the New York Edition proved enigmatic and required a great deal of contemplation on behalf of the reader to make any sort of connection at all between word and image.

Coburn brought a distinctive style to his photographed frontispieces, each of which "is deliberately blurry, framed in a subtly self-conscious and arresting manner"

(Harmon 303). Specifically, the photographs were all slightly out of focus and slightly off center, putting the reader off kilter in the same manner as the subjects being depicted. These photographs are the complete opposite of the crisp, neat black lines constituting standard book illustrations. Insofar as these frontispieces deny the reader the ability to look upon them and immediately have a vivid image of a character or location in one of the stories within a given volume, James and Coburn proved utterly successful in stymieing the reader. James's choice of Coburn and his approval of the resulting photographs tie the author to Shakespeare along a shared talent for creating ambiguity. The following chapters find many instances of both Shakespeare and James utilizing the indefinite and the indefinable in place of the easy and concrete and explore them as they appear.

The Golden Bowl and *King Lear*, the subjects of the next chapter, focus on an uncomfortable theme: that of a bond too closely woven between father and daughter. *King Lear* explores Lear's journey to penance and reconciliation with his beloved Cordelia. Yet even once the pair has been reunited, with Cordelia demanding no retribution for her father's terrible mistreatment of her, the tragedy continues. Cordelia dies senselessly at the play's end, executed before a stay order reaches her captors. The image of Lear howling with rage holding Cordelia's corpse is one of the great indelible images of the stage. The rationale for killing Cordelia proves dark. Lear has been forgiven by Cordelia, but he still maintains the same fixation he has had on her from the very start of the play. Lear appears content with the knowledge that he and Cordelia are to be imprisoned together for life at Edmund's command. He comforts her, "We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage" (V.3.9), proving that Lear is still content with

Cordelia alone. Only through losing Cordelia does Lear complete the final portion of his penance. *The Golden Bowl* explores a similar, perhaps even darker, theme. Where Cordelia does separate from Lear and marry in the play, James's Adam and Maggie Verver do not separate from one another. The Ververs happily spend all of their time exclusively in one another's company, a pattern established upon the death of Maggie's mother, when Maggie was barely an adolescent. Both of them do eventually marry, but in so doing, they do not lessen their ties to one another to build new bonds with their spouses. Instead, they continue on as they have and leave Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant to their own devices. The resulting affair and its fallout finally separate father and daughter through necessity rather than choice.

The final chapter examines the strong parallels between *The American* and *Hamlet*. Both stories explore the complexities and problems with vengeance. Hamlet has been commanded by the ghost of old Hamlet to murder Claudius, both uncle and now king. The play follows Hamlet's journey as he transforms from grieving son, to murder sleuth, to something akin to the hand of providence when he finally fulfills his promise to the ghost and kills Claudius. Yet the act of vengeance is not without wide-ranging consequences. Hamlet dies, as does Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia, and Gertrude, not to mention Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The quest to assuage the ghost of old Hamlet requires a high price in blood in return. Only Horatio survives the events of the story, and he does so as a man horrified by the loss of reason he has seen unfold around him. Christopher Newman, the protagonist of *The American*, also reaches a crisis point where vengeance lies within his reach. After being soundly and humiliatingly rejected as a husband for Claire de Cintré by the Bellegarde family, he comes into information which

could ruin the aristocratic Bellegardes. As with *The Wings of the Dove*, James turns once more to ambiguity regarding the information in Newman's possession, which implies that Madame Bellegarde murdered her husband with the cooperation of her eldest son, Urbain. No concrete evidence exists, given that old Bellegarde has been long dead and the only witness to the events that night did not physically see a murder occur. In any event, Newman believes the information to be accurate and damning and threatens to expose the Bellegardes publicly. Before he follows through, however, he decides not to reveal his information. He chooses to let the events go, rather than to draw himself further into sordid events of the past. He emerges disillusioned but alive, and hopefully wiser for his experiences.

Critic Oscar Cargill notes, "a derivative book with James is more original than the utterly free invention of another man" (99). Although Cargill aims his comment specifically at James, it proves relevant to Shakespeare as well. The playwright did not create a legacy based on original invention – he did so based on his keen ability to find expression for the deepest secrets and tribulations of the human heart. When Henry James began to edit his works for the collected New York Edition, he took the time to reflect upon the process of revision. In the Preface to *The Golden Bowl*, James writes, "No man, accordingly, I was soon enough aware, could possibly be more confident and free than this infinitely interesting and amusing *act* of re-appropriation" (*Golden Bowl* I). James's comments certainly apply to the manner in which Shakespeare became situated in American life throughout the nineteenth-century, but also to James himself. The influence of Shakespeare on the novels of Henry James does not speak to James's lack of creative power of his own. Rather, in striking and inventive ways, James took thematic

and character elements of Shakespeare's plays and introduced them within the vein of his own works. A focused study on just these points of influence provides the reader with both a deeper appreciation for the universal nature of Shakespeare's depiction of human nature, and a keener understanding of James's own capacity for art. James, in his reinventions of Shakespeare, does not merely name drop Shakespeare here and there because the playwright enjoyed immense popularity at the time. Rather, he makes pointed and careful choices, sometimes with direct references to plays and characters, in other instances less directly, which testify to his deep appreciation for Shakespeare's complexity.

A Note on the Text

Unless otherwise noted, all act, scene, and line numbers for the referenced Shakespeare tragedies come from *The Norton Shakespeare: Tragedies*. Act, scene, and line numbers for *The Tempest* come from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Both sources are given complete citations in the Works Cited section.

CHAPTER 2

BUILDING MONUMENTS TO THE DEAD: "THE ASPERN PAPERS" REIMAGINES *ROMEO AND JULIET*, "THE BIRTHPLACE" SPEAKS NOT OF THE DEAD

A play about young lovers meeting a terrible end and a story about a quest for a dead man's personal papers. Upon a cursory glance, *Romeo and Juliet* and "The Aspern Papers" might appear to have little in common with one another. However, closer analysis of James's brilliantly subversive and perhaps even perverse story about the fetishizing of the artist reveals parallels to Shakespeare's play. Yet James does more with his story than simply provide the reader with a one-to-one comparison of nouvelle to play. His characters, from the otherwise nameless editor-narrator, to Miss Tina, to Juliana, exemplify the pathos underlying *Romeo and Juliet*. For Miss Tina and the narrator are not young and beautiful, nor are they passionately in love. Rather, the pair utilizes courtship as a commercial transaction. They enact a farce of a romance, devoid of the genuineness of feeling which renders *Romeo and Juliet* so memorable. "The Aspern Papers" presents the reader with two older, scheming "lovers," each wooing the other for nothing better than personal gain. Where *Romeo and Juliet* succeeds on the strength of the emotional intensity, beauty, and vitality of its leads, James's story holds its lovers up to the light and finds them utterly absurd. The home of the Misses Bordereau possesses

“a want of light” (10) as an indication of the lack of self-introspection and honesty in the story. Indeed, much of “The Aspern Papers” proves more satiric and darkly comical than it does tragic. Critic William Bysshe Stein asserts that readers and critics over the years are both guilty of having “unduly stressed its moral seriousness” (172). “The Aspern Papers” not only tells the story of characters mired in greed, but forces the reader to question the accuracy of many of its core details. Juliana presents Miss Tina as her niece, but she could just as likely be the old woman’s daughter, a product of her love affair with Jeffrey Aspern. The narrator and his fellow Aspern-worshipper both aver Aspern’s genius as an author, but no outside voices enter the text to confirm or deny this. Aspern could just as easily be a middling to poor poet whose appeal to the narrator only underscores his own poor taste and lack of literary judgment. Finally, the reader never learns whether or not the “papers” that the narrator yearns for so badly even exist. James occludes these details and in so doing, increases the farcical elements of the story. Indeed, one of the few concrete declarations one might make about the story lies in the narrator’s “polymorphous desire” (Veeder 27) as he lusts variously after Aspern, the papers, Juliana, and Miss Tina. The one firm element of the narrator’s character serves as evidence of his lack of focus. He later expands his gaze one step further to include the Aspern portrait, which holds “erotic power for the editor” (Veeder 33). The narrator proves remarkably similar in this respect to Romeo, who quickly and with a hint of inconstancy migrates his passion from Rosaline to Juliet. Romeo “makes himself an artificial night” (I.1.133) so he may fixate on love without outside imposition and James’s narrator also possesses tunnel vision as regards the object(s) of his ardor. Even the lack of a clear point of fixation for the narrator adds to the layer of uncertainty

enmeshing the story. As the analysis to follow demonstrates, Shakespeare relies upon ambiguity in *Romeo and Juliet*, but to explicitly tragic ends. Furthermore, both James's nouvelle and Shakespeare's play share a theme of fixation, to darker ends in the former while manifesting as passionate love in the latter. James's own recounting of the donee for "The Aspern Papers" finds him intrigued by a "Shelley-worshipper" (*Notebooks* 33) hungry for the poet's private papers. The choice of "worshipper" holds a negative connotation, in stark and ironic contrast to the genuine worship Romeo and Juliet feel for one another, and for their love in general. Where Romeo and Juliet end up undone in part "by the whole daylight world of social exchange that gives ordinary language its normal meaning" (Greenblatt 146), James's narrator attempts himself to create a rigidly controlled world comprised of his own rules for behavior as he and the other characters strive to control and possess both language and the written word.

"The Birthplace" comprises the second piece of this discussion. Although neither "The Aspern Papers" nor "The Birthplace" qualify as novels, they do bear inclusion in an overall study of Shakespeare's influence on James. James himself detested the conventions placed upon authors as to form. Basically, following the conventions of genre classification, one could write a long piece and deem it a novel, or a short piece and give it the title short story. James instead decided to call those works which fell in the middle ground between novel and short story "nouvelles," which describes both "The Aspern Papers" and "The Birthplace." Both selections are of sufficient length to qualify as short novels and while they do not approach the length of novels like *The Portrait of a Lady* or *The Wings of the Dove*, each of these nouvelles, or short novels, exemplify James's skillful craft. In "The Birthplace," James again deals with the subject of the artist

and his/her relationship with the public at large. Specifically, James examines the complicated relationship that Shakespeare shares with those who treasure his works, but who also actively seek to discover the man behind them.

He feared what would become of his own artifacts once he died and took the step of burning letters in his possession in the years before his death. James did begin to write his own autobiography starting in 1910, the first installment of which appeared in print in 1913. However, James did not complete the work, having ceased work on it in 1914.¹ The nature of James's autobiography offers insight into his continuing concern about the need for the private life of the author. The autobiography initially purports to be James's attempt to write a biography in commemoration of his older brother, William, who had died in 1910. Yet what James produces extends beyond the boundaries of a biography of William into an autobiography of himself. James includes in the work details of the James family and also of letters written by and to him and to some extent, it does provide an intimate glimpse into James's life, from his childhood forward. However, behind the scenes, James carefully planned the crafting of his life's story. James alone chose the details to be included, selected the letters to share, and decided upon the narrative elements of the autobiography. As much as the completed work provides an intimate look at the James family, it does so only so far as James decided he was willing to divulge the details. Frederick Dupee believes that James viewed "the literary vocation as a kind of second birth, a new soul which struggles into being out of pain and loss and humiliation" (Intro. to *Autobiography* xii). Thus, the work produced by an artist represents the deepest emotional truth of that individual. The quest for details, scandals, even the home in which an artist was born, hold no significant purpose and should be abandoned.

Maurizio Ascari argues that in “The Birthplace,” protagonist Morris Gedge “reverts to the creative power of his imagination, thereby remaining faithful – on an artistic, not factual, plan – to the genius who is revered in the house” (93) which indeed acts as a form of rebirth for Morris. However, the difference among James, Shakespeare, and Morris lies in James’s initial description of the Gedges, painting them as “nervous, anxious, sensitive persons, with a pride...above their position” (442). Gedge perhaps possesses the potential to move from the realm of embellisher to the role of the artist, but such an outcome James leaves to the reader to conclude. In “The Birthplace,” “James offers a typically oblique view of both the desire for myth and the need for compromise” (O’Sullivan, Footnote 139) and demands that the reader examine his or her own motivations behind fetishizing an artist.

“The Aspern Papers” reveals James’s close ties to Shakespeare. Both within “The Aspern Papers” and his Prefaces written for the New York Edition, James makes references both to Shakespeare generally, and to *Romeo and Juliet* specifically. His comments support a reading of the nouvelle as in part a darkly farcical take on elements found in Shakespeare’s play. James comments in *The Art of the Novel*, the collected New York Edition Prefaces, that “Romeo was not less the sport of fate for not having been interestedly sacrificed by Juliet” (24). James focuses here on both the lovers’ preoccupation with one other, Juliet’s “interestedness,” but also with the element of fate which moves characters into just the worst possible of places at the worst possible of moments. No such element of fate exists in “The Aspern Papers.” Certainly, its characters are “interested” in one other, with even the root of that word, “interest,” relating back to Juliana’s absolute desire for money. Miss Tina, Juliana, and the narrator all victimize

each other for their own personal gain without a hint of fate driving the events forward. Even Aspern himself, if reports of his womanizing were certain, could be accused of using others for his own gain. Certainly, he left Juliana with little but the relics of their long-concluded love affair. James's comment about Romeo leads to the conclusion that he certainly felt some sympathy towards him, where he lays the blame for personal strife solely at the feet of his own characters. James also speaks about the heroines of Shakespeare's plays in his Preface to the New York Edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*. Therein, he states that Shakespeare's heroines, including Juliet, form integral parts of the plays and further, that they matter in relation to their importance to the male protagonist, the audience, or both (*Art* 49-50). With this view in mind, Miss Tina necessarily takes on a critically important role in "The Aspern Papers." She appears at first as dimwitted, socially awkward, and without prospects. Certainly, she never appears to assert what might be deemed a vast intelligence. However, she increasingly matters to the narrator as the vehicle through which the papers might be obtained and her actions in the closing pages of the nouvelle paint her as cunning and plotting if not book smart.

James makes specific reference both to Shakespeare and *Romeo and Juliet* in "The Aspern Papers." In the earliest example, the narrator declares to Mrs. Prest, "You don't say 'Mr.' Shakespeare" (7), which he juxtaposes against Miss Tina's use of "Mr. Aspern" in her letter to his friend. He claims that "Mr." implies familiarity and intimacy, which places Shakespeare in a category all his own as an artist. One does not become "familiar" with Shakespeare as a literary talent – he always holds his audience and even other writers in thrall. This quote again calls into question the caliber of Aspern's own literary legacy. The narrator later comments that Shakespeare's sonnets are "ambiguous"

(31) in comparison to Aspern's work, which reminds the reader of the nouvelle's own theme of ambiguity while again calling into question Aspern's talent. The sonnets remain powerful due to their refusal to provide the reader with solid and solitary interpretations. Further still, the narrator's comments point to the sonnets' "homosexual or bisexual content, being addressed to a man or a woman" (Tambling 84), which focuses the text once again on the issue of the narrator's own murky sexual identity. James's parallel of the narrator's meeting with Miss Tina in the garden with Romeo's calling out to Juliet on her balcony will be discussed in detail at a later point as it relates to the narrator as a failed Romeo. James includes a reference to Orsino's opening speech from *Twelfth Night* which further focuses the reader's attention on the theme of deception in "The Aspern Papers." However, James's dialogue is with *Romeo and Juliet*.

Popular culture remembers *Romeo and Juliet* primarily for two plot happenings: the balcony scene and the final death scenes. Regrettably, these scenes removed from the larger context of the play bestow only a superficial understanding of how they relate to the larger thematic elements of the plot. Yet the power and ferocity of young love certainly captivates readers and playgoers of Shakespeare to this day. Therein lies the key to the play's success and one which James turns absurd in his story: Romeo and Juliet love with the vibrancy of their youth and their lives end before the reader has the chance to perhaps see that love degrade or fall apart entirely. James's narrator and Miss Tina become the twisted version of that love. Not only are they both significantly older than Shakespeare's protagonists, neither one of them values love at all. Love certainly does not become worthy of dying for in "The Aspern Papers" and indeed, little love exists in the story. Miss Tina arguably *wants* the narrator, but the reader gets the impression that

this is less due to the narrator's own merits and more do to the simple fact that he is there. The narrator, for his part, finds Miss Tina attractive only in what she can offer to him outside of and despite of herself, either bodily or emotionally. Two often overlooked elements of *Romeo and Juliet* both entwine in "The Aspern Papers": ambiguity and building monuments to the dead. In the tragedies, Shakespeare often opens the play by introducing the thematic element most closely related to the undoing of the protagonist(s). In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, the play begins with mention of the embarrassingly public feud in which the Capulets and Montagues continue to be embroiled. Yet the source of the conflict remains clouded, with the Chorus intoning that "From ancient grudge break to new mutiny" (I.1.3). The feud has no definable beginning and no definitive end. The play ends with the two mourning families seemingly at peace, but Shakespeare leaves the hint that the families will come to blows and strife again over the proper memorializing of their dead children. So too does "The Aspern Papers" become a study of the improper memorialization/fetishization of the dead.

"The Aspern Papers" and *Romeo and Juliet* share the love of words. Romeo and Juliet fall in love over the shared recitation of a sonnet, a careful give and take of language (I.5.90-107). However, Juliet's power over Romeo expresses itself even in this otherwise democratic expression of burgeoning passion. She refers to Romeo as a "pilgrim" and the title proves apt. As the play progresses, Romeo will be the one to journey into Juliet's garden and stand beneath her balcony. Romeo also will be forced into exile and becomes in this manner a pilgrim unknowingly taking the first steps toward both his death and hers. Yet the term "pilgrim" also contains the sense of the devout worshipper carrying out an expression of faith. For Romeo, Juliet becomes both faith and

religion: he idolizes her and the love which binds them. Juliet, for her part, remains by comparison more guarded about passion's ability to sweep away all reason. So too does the narrator show up at the home of the Misses Bordereau as a pilgrim yearning to worship the literary remains of Jeffrey Aspern. As such, he comes to the two women already less possessed of his reason than they are of theirs. Miss Tina proves as much by sublimating declarations of love in favor of dangling the possibility of Aspern's papers in front of the narrator's nose.

Indeed, the love of words transforms or perhaps masks all along a deep-seated love of money. Financial gain matters in "The Aspern Papers" whereas Shakespeare's depiction of the conflict between the Capulets and the Montagues sets financial gain inside. After all, both families, already chastised by the monarchy of Verona for their public brawling, stand to gain financially through the marriage of their children. Without the townspeople gossiping and witnessing the noble families' bad behavior, both the Capulets and the Montagues would seem easily poised to reassert their places among Verona's moneyed aristocracy. Here again the reader finds evidence of James's eye toward complexity in these characters and their motivations. Where the families of *Romeo and Juliet* act most often out of passion, without thought given to the consequences of their future actions, James's characters in "The Aspern Papers" each arrive in the narrative with individual sets of motives and motivations. Passion does exist in various forms, from the narrator's near-declaration of passionate love for Jeffrey Aspern, to Juliana's love of money, to Miss Tina's desire for the narrator himself, yet it often becomes sublimated to personal gain. The narrator covets the papers and since the story unfolds through his narrative control, his passion for Jeffrey's words appears

genuine. Yet he also understands the value, both fiscal and professional, in obtaining a set of documents unique to Aspern's oeuvre of work. The narrator implies that Aspern may not only be an author of questionable talent, but one who also receives little critical attention. He states, "Cumnor and I had recognized him most" (3), referring to his fellow editor and Aspernite. The revelations which the editor believes might be contained within the papers could well, he hopes, catapult Aspern to the level of one of the world's great authors. Aspern's increase in literary importance would serve to justify the narrator's professional and personal devotion to an otherwise obscure figure. The narrator, arguably more in love with Aspern than anyone else, declares, "One doesn't defend one's god: one's god is in himself a defence" (2). The irony of this phrase derives from the transference of romantic love from a tangible, available potential spouse in Miss Tina, to a dead and otherwise obscure male writer. Further, the narrator's defense of Aspern proves similar to Juliet's demand that Romeo "swear by thy gracious self, which is the god of my idolatry" (II.1.155-156). The young lovers might not require outside confirmation of their feelings, but the narrator places himself in a perilous position professionally if he relies only on his own value of Aspern and no one else's. The "fetishistic relics of Jeffrey Aspern" (Veeder 30) so necessary to him lose their value as words, even beautiful words, ceding instead as a substitution for a dead and sexually unavailable idol. The narrator also lacks a directness of speech in his recounting of the story to the reader. Rod Mengham argues that the narrator "dilutes the potency of the original situation" (44) in his recounting of the events at the home of the Misses Bordereau. As James's crafts it, "The Aspern Papers" leaves the most compelling mysteries of the story to the in-between spaces, the quiet interpretative space that lies beyond the narrator's spin on events.

Finally, Miss Tina and Juliana themselves, self-proclaimed protectors of the Aspern legacy, serve to “mask the meaning of Aspern’s poetry” (Stein 174) and indeed, neither woman seems at this point in their lives to truly relish Aspern’s words for their own sake.

Juliana represents perhaps the greatest perversion of the love for beautiful words. Although Miss Tina eventually attempts to force the narrator into marriage, the reader receives the distinct impression that she does so only after having being encouraged or commanded to do so by Juliana. Nowhere in “The Aspern Papers” does James imbue Miss Tina with a broad scope of mind. Indeed, Juliana undoubtedly prefers Miss Tina to remain submissive and attentive to her demands. Juliana dominates the younger woman and schemes to obtain for Miss Tina either more money from the narrator or his hand in marriage, which still provides financial security. Juliana appears to have her private papers hidden in her room, but in this nouvelle, appearance proves all. The narrator makes a desperate attempt at pilfering through the old woman’s belongings in search of the papers, but does not succeed. Her overwrought reaction to finding him in her room serves to solidify his belief in the existence of the papers, but no outside verification exists. Up until her death, Juliana claims to hold her relationship with Aspern sacred. She will bilk the narrator out of ridiculous sums of money, but seems to draw the line at actually allowing him to purchase the papers. However, Juliana holds great mastery over her outward conduct, evidenced by the shade always occluding her eyes. The shade also highlights her emasculating power over the narrator, who fears Juliana generally and “her penetrating gaze” (Veeder 24) especially. As opposed to the open-air balcony from which Juliet looks down on Romeo, Juliana and Miss Tina retreat “behind closed shutters that deny access to the object of his desire” (Ryan 107). Furthermore, as William Stein

argues, Juliana “would sell anything at a price” (177). James provides the reader with no concrete evidence to validate Juliana either guarding a legacy sacred to her or possessing one. The narrator never outwardly asks to purchase the papers, so Juliana never physically produces any evidence. However, the lack of any Aspern papers at all falls more in line with the darkly comic tone James establishes from the first. The absence of papers forces the reader to question Juliana’s overall impact on Aspern’s life. She was his muse at one point in her life, but if he did not leave her any personal papers, whether they be drafts of unpublished works or love letters, then Juliana becomes little more than a passing fling of a man who the narrator defends against claims of womanizing. She thus profanes the creative process of setting words to paper further by passing on to Miss Tina the possibility of getting the narrator to agree to marriage in exchange for the promise of access to Aspern’s papers. Words hold little meaning in the story and none of the main characters proves trustworthy. Although Juliana wears her shade, an explicit sign of both financial interest and deception, the narrator and Miss Tina too function entirely on hidden motives. *Romeo and Juliet* relies upon the power of the spoken vow to move the lovers toward their fate. In “The Aspern Papers,” the narrator does not have to break a vow; he chooses instead to avoid making any.

The narrator proves a poor simulacrum of Romeo. However, the two characters do share some similarities, most notably a fear of emasculation by women and a propensity towards excessive romanticism. The problem with these similarities lies in their respective ages. Romeo, although Shakespeare never specifically discloses the young man’s age, certainly is far younger than James’s narrator. Indeed, one can deduce from Romeo’s peer group and activities that he likely is little more than a teenager

himself. The narrator should have outgrown his propensity toward dramatics and an overwrought imagination. Instead, he relishes them and appears to have little else to his personality outside of his Aspern obsession. The narrator shares with Romeo the propensity toward and fear of domination by a female. Romeo confronts Juliet with his worries: "Thy beauty hath made me effeminate" (II.3.109). His fears echo Juliet's concluding words of Act II, Scene 1 where she utilizes imagery of Romeo as a captive falcon with her as falconer. Although Romeo claims to have been in love with Rosaline prior to meeting Juliet, his propensity toward using romantic hyperbole in speaking of her underscores his fascination with the idea of love, not love itself. When Romeo falls for Juliet, arguably his first taste of passion and love intertwined, Shakespeare makes the power of that emotion all the more powerful by allowing the playgoer to see Romeo's insecurities about the power Juliet wields over him. Benvolio scoffs at Romeo claiming, "Blind is his love, and best befits the dark" (II.1.32) yet the accusation does not prove completely true. Romeo and Juliet both embark on a perilous attempt to deceive their families, but neither one fails to apprehend the inherent danger in their actions. Rather, youthful love in the play might better be described as rash, with both Romeo and Juliet acting in the moment, at the height of emotional intensity, rather than waiting for the return of clearer heads. The idea of blindness inflicted from both without and within best befits "The Aspern Papers." The narrator remains single-minded in his desire to see Aspern elevated to the level of literary god, Miss Tina believes the narrator is blind to everything but the papers, and Juliana keeps everyone blinded to her inner self.

If Romeo fears emasculation at Juliet's hands, the narrator faces it from both Juliana and Miss Tina. Although, as Rod Mengham argues, the narrator spends the story

“flanking the two women alternately with adoration and violence, with submissiveness and oppression” (47), he spends far more time in a position of diminished power than he does in one of control. His attempts to con Juliana fail from the very beginning, as evidenced by some of Juliana’s first words to him: “You may have as many rooms as you like—if you’ll pay me a good deal of money” (18). He clearly goes to Venice with the intention of pilfering the Aspern papers from what he perceives as a couple of spinster women who “now lived obscurely” (1), but he immediately finds himself outmaneuvered. Juliana deduces his true purpose from the moment he attempts to let rooms on the claim that he adores their dilapidated garden. Furthermore, Juliana’s bank shade lends her the power of the penetrative gaze, another emasculating power. Miss Tina, although less quick of intellect than the narrator, absorbs enough from Juliana to attempt an entrapment of her own. Critic J. Hillis Miller argues that once the narrator refuses Miss Tina’s marriage proposal, “the reader must pass judgment on the protagonist’s decisive, life-determining act” (196). Certainly, the narrator finally encounters a price too high to pay for the Aspern papers. Yet James’s also has a bit of fun here at the narrator’s expense. William Stein asserts of the narrator that James “establishes him as a subject of ridicule, and he proceeds to mock his attempts to relive vicariously the tenuous legend of an American Don Juan” (175). With his gifts of basket upon basket of flowers, the narrator believes he will charm the Misses Bordereau out of all their Aspern relics. In reality, he proves little more than the earliest incarnation of Shakespeare’s pre-Juliet Romeo who spouted romantic hyperbole with little understanding of how human attraction functions in actuality.

Yet the narrator's problems with women extend beyond those created by Juliana and Miss Tina. Mrs. Prest, a minor character in the story, exerts excessive influence and power over him. He says of her, "without her in truth I should have made but little advance" (1). The narrator clearly wants the Aspern papers, but without the advice and prompting of a woman, he would have achieved nothing more than a polite rejection letter akin to that received by his compatriot Cumnor. James leaves open for the reader's interpretation an image of Mrs. Prest having a delightful joke at the narrator's expense as he sets off on his fool's errand. Perhaps she hopes to see him return cowed and humiliated. Dominant women perhaps are the least of the narrator's concerns. The narrator takes Romeo's fears of emasculation one step further by becoming in places better identified as female than male. James makes clear that the narrator's purest object of desire is Aspern himself. Denied the chance to bond with Aspern directly, the narrator deduces that the next closest source by which to obtain such a feeling of connection to Aspern lies in Juliana. Yet the narrator's interest in Juliana does not ever strike the reader as sexual. Instead, the narrator views Juliana with both awe and envy, as if he were a woman thwarted of her own chance to be lover to Aspern. So enamored is the narrator with thoughts of being in the presence of Aspern's one-time muse that the reader sees clearly his desire not to unite with her sexually, but to have somehow been able to have been her during her time with Aspern. As Jeanne Reesman argues, the narrator is "desirous of taking Juliana's place with Aspern" (56). Would he have found some means by which to accomplish such an aim, the narrator would have ruled over both the Bordereau mansion and Miss Tina as matriarch, not patriarch. Unlike Romeo, the narrator never wants or comes to feel true love, content instead with idolatry and passion.

Miss Tina does not emerge much better as a substitute for Juliet. As with the narrator and Romeo, Miss Tina shares certain personality traits with Juliet. However, Juliet matures as the play progresses while Miss Tina does not. Mrs. Prest, as an answer to the narrator's smug determination to charm Miss Tina as part of his plotting, says of Miss Tina's homeliness, "Wait till you see her!" (8). Yet Miss Tina lacks not only physical beauty, but emotional beauty as well. Her long years with Juliana have molded her into a woman at once sheltered and devious. When she finally proposes marriage to the narrator in exchange for the papers, her sexually charged wording strikes the reader as "an oddly worded version of playing doctor" (Ryan 51), given her insistence that with marriage, the narrator may make use of the "things." Her double entendre lacks any hint of seduction and exposes Miss Tina's sexual immaturity. Marjorie Garber describes the Juliet first encountered by playgoers as "wholly submissive, even passive (122). The young Juliet initially sublimates her own wishes and desires to those of her Nurse, mother, and father. Yet Juliet quickly evolves, pursuing freedom and the choice to marry for love in defiance of her parents' will. Miss Tina never evolves from the position of Juliana's inferior. Worse still, Miss Tina never claims a firm identity in "The Aspern Papers." Although she presents herself as Juliana's niece, and believes herself to be such, James hints strongly that she may indeed be the old woman's daughter. Juliana thus maintains her own reputation by denying her daughter full disclosure of her family history. Miss Tina says of Juliana, "Oh she has everything!" (52) and although she declares this to the narrator to keep him interested in the possibility of papers, her comments underscore Juliana as the ultimate figure of female power in their household. The progression of time should have seen Juliana cede her place of primacy and influence

in favor of allowing Miss Tina to prosper and perhaps start a household of her own. Instead, Miss Tina fails to establish an identity separate from that of Juliana. If anything, her ploy to gain the narrator's hand in marriage provides a sad twist on the image of Juliet-as-falconer as Miss Tina has no allure or power intrinsic to herself.

Shakespeare's popularity in the burgeoning America, from the first of the colonies up through the movement west and the creation of the frontier, transcended class distinctions. Playgoers of all socioeconomic levels attended performances of Shakespeare's plays, where "the hearers might miss beautiful subtleties in the plays' lines, but they responded enthusiastically to the unmatched power of the basic tales" (Webb 98). James's fiction and non-fiction both targeted a sophisticated reading audience, as opposed to the oftentimes rowdy frontier crowds who viewed Shakespeare plays performed on makeshift stages. However, James's familiarity with Shakespeare would surely have provided him with the understanding that the plays appealed to all levels of playgoers and readers. Further still, James's own reworking of thematic elements raised in various of the plays reveals his understanding of the distinction between the "subtleties" and "power" of the works. James utilizes Shakespeare references and quotations throughout his corpus of work, from his personal correspondences to his fiction. Herein lies the idea of the power of Shakespeare, the raw emotional tie that one feels when reading or viewing a moment like the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. James's reimagining of *Romeo and Juliet* culminates with the narrator and Miss Tina seemingly poised to recreate the young lovers' balcony scene. With what follows, James demonstrates his keen understanding of the subtleties of Shakespeare. The mechanism by which the balcony scene functions lies in the youth of the lead characters, complete with

their flowering declarations of devotion. James twists the scene in such a way as to reveal Shakespeare's own great genius by reworking the scene in a manner that will absolutely fail to evoke genuine emotional resonance. The scene as it plays out in *Romeo and Juliet* remains a popular source of emulation and quotation in popular culture outlets including sitcoms and in amateur and high school productions of the play throughout the country. James, who described Shakespeare as "the most precious intellectual heritage of the human race" (*Essays on Art and Drama* 335) and wrote numerous reviews of Shakespearean productions both in Europe and in America, appreciated the power of Shakespeare's ability with the written and spoken word. By slightly altering Shakespeare's phrasing and by placing the words in the mouths of his own pathetic and awkward characters, James not only recreates a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, but he also demonstrates his keen insight into understanding why that play, and why that scene, continue to hold sway over audiences, namely Shakespeare's young, passionate, and guileless lovers. Shakespeare's Chorus begins Act 2 using imagery intended to hold the audience in thrall until the interaction between Romeo and Juliet begins. The Chorus intones, "Passion lends them power, time means, to meet, Temp'ring extremities with extreme sweet" (II.1.13-14). The air thus becomes electrified with the promise of expressed passion to come, coupled with the inherent danger involved in any meeting between the pair. When Romeo finally does approach Juliet's balcony, he does so from the position of a supplicant, recalling the term "pilgrim" ascribed to him earlier by Juliet. He worships literally at the feet of his love and gives himself entirely over to his emotions. James's narrator, on the other hand, sets his scene up quite differently. He recalls entering the garden declaring, "It was delicious—just such an air as must have

trembled with Romeo's vows when he stood among the thick flowers and raised his arms to his mistress's balcony" (35). Yet his words fail to explicitly define the fundamental difference between Shakespeare's lover and his own entrance into the garden. He does not enter in a lower position to Miss Tina. They enter on level terms and the narrator realizes their equal positions of romantic and emotional inferiority. He concedes shortly thereafter, "Miss Tina was not a poet's mistress any more than I was a poet" (35). Not only does he disavow himself of any of Romeo's scope of verbal expression, he also circles back again to his incessant fascination with Aspern. Juliana represents the closest living sexual link to Aspern and that turns the narrator's fancy.

Once Miss Tina and the narrator become more closely intertwined, they become increasingly incapable of communicating with one another. The pair emulates Romeo and Juliet in their plotting and clandestine meetings. Yet no love exists between the two and instead, the reader can never be sure who uses the other and to what extent. Miss Tina later pushes for marriage, but given their utter lack of connection, her motivations clearly do not stem from genuine love but perhaps either lust or desperation. Early on in their acquaintance, Miss Tina does little more than relay her aunt's wishes and commands to the narrator. Indeed, "Tina has functioned throughout as an intermediary and go-between" (Miller 201), rendering her a mismatched amalgamation of Shakespeare's Friar and Nurse. The former's religious vows render him incapable of engaging in romantic entanglements while the latter's increasing age lessens her desirability. Miss Tina, James implies, may have a "romance," but it will be in name only. In a story otherwise concerned with words, the narrator and Miss Tina use them together to no avail. The narrator at one point inquires of Miss Tina, "Why don't you believe me?" and her reply,

“Because I don’t understand you” (41) speaks volumes. Although the narrator believes Miss Tina to be intellectually inferior, believing “her inefficiency was inward” (20) Miss Tina late in the narrative proves cunning and devious in her attempts at trapping him in a marriage. Indeed, both Miss Tina and the narrator fail to connect to other human beings. Miss Tina’s near-complete seclusion leaves her ill-equipped to conduct meaningful conversation while the narrator’s love of a long-dead poet curbs his desire to connect to anyone living.

After Juliana dies, the narrator and Miss Tina remain to resolve the issue of the papers. Miss Tina attempts to trade the Aspern papers for marriage. James twists matrimony into a commodity, with the resulting union causing schism rather than joy. Here, James perverts the conception of marriage as found in *Romeo and Juliet*. In the play, the well-meaning if not ultimately misguided Friar Laurence sees great promise in Romeo and Juliet and believes their love may serve “as a means to resolve the feud” (Greenblatt 148). Although the Friar sees the potential of the marriage having practical utility for the Capulets and Montagues, he does not force their bond, nor does he instigate it. Love exists first, and although the lovers do not enjoy a happy ending, their love remains undiluted by baser intentions like financial gain. For the narrator and Miss Tina, marriage can only exist as it relates to personal gain. Even Miss Tina’s language in proposing their union lacks any hint of a bond. She reasons, “If you were a relation it would be different” (89), never mentioning fidelity, attraction, or even the barest hint of affection. Instead, she manipulates his desire for the true source for his love/lust/obsession. Miss Tina’s attempt at manipulation of the narrator provides one consistent if not twisted parallel between her character and that of Juliet. Franklin Dickey

writes, “Juliet...is much less subject to the gusts of passion which blind Romeo” (270 check page). In the aftermath of the narrator’s rejection of her, Miss Tina takes obvious delight in reporting about the funereal burning of the Aspern papers. James provides as much textual evidence for the physical existence of the papers as not, but the plot instead hinges on Miss Tina’s active participation in tormenting the narrator by “killing” what he covets. Joseph Rosenberg comments that the act of destruction becomes a “refreshment” (257) for Miss Tina; therefore the act in which she takes most pleasure becomes the one in which she utterly devastates the object of her romantic attentions.

The overpayment for Aspern’s portrait stands as the final act of inappropriate memorialization in the story and provides a point of direct comparison to *Romeo and Juliet*. Playgoers may remember the stark image of the two young lovers lifeless on stage, but Shakespeare’s play continues beyond this point to bring the story to an even darker close. The remaining Capulets and the Montagues, seemingly bereft and contrite that their feuding led to the secret marriage and deaths of Romeo and Juliet, appear to finally set aside their conflict. Yet among Shakespeare’s literary talents lies an ability to blanket the endings of his plays with a sense of possible disaster looming on the horizon. *Henry V* concludes with the playgoers’ knowledge that the kingdom will soon come to disarray once Henry VI takes the throne. *Hamlet*’s curtain closes on a Denmark under the rule of Fortinbras. Even a robust comedy like *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* leaves the audience wondering if the emotionally immature Proteus and Julia will enjoy true happiness in marriage. The ending of *Romeo and Juliet* reads more like the promise of a new feud brewing. At surface glance, all seems to be coming to a point of peace. The children of the two families lie dead, united in both love and death. The surviving Montagues and

Capulets now have to deal with one another in the midst of such pointless tragedy. Montague promises to commemorate Capulet's daughter Juliet declaring, "I will raise her statue in pure gold" (V.3.298). Lord Capulet promises like for like in creating an effigy of Montague's dead son. Yet Shakespeare's tragedies, and even his comedies, often end with a sense of unease. Such is the case here, in this relatively quiet moment of solemnity and accord. The Chorus advises the playgoers from the very beginning of the play that the feud between the families has not only raged for numerous generations, but that no one even remembered its source. Clearly, the Montagues and Capulets do not have self-reflection and memory as their strong points. Once the monuments are built, or perhaps even before their completion, Shakespeare leaves open the very real chance that Romeo and Juliet died for each other, but did not succeed in ceasing their families' feuding. The Prince, whose lines close out the play, promises that "Some shall be pardoned, and some punished" (V.3.307) once a full investigation into the events has taken place. The Montagues and Capulets forge a tenuous peace now, but once punishments indeed come down upon them, one imagines the possibility of a much different reaction. Finger-pointing and blaming can easily take the place of shared grief and monument building. Indeed, as gold is forged and shaped into the statues, the families might again begin to compete and argue over whose monument shines the brightest or best commemorates the others' lost child. Shakespeare draws the curtain before such eventualities play out, but the Prince's ominous warning leaves no doubt that he wants the readers to feel discomfort over what lies on the horizon for the Montagues and Capulets.

Miss Tina denying the narrator the Aspern papers thwarts his own attempts at monument-making. The narrator ultimately purchases Aspern's portrait for an exorbitant

price, but the portrait serves as “a memento of the desired papers” (258), in effect a diminished monument to a lost monument. The narrator could possibly have attempted to “edit” the Aspern papers to raise the poet’s credibility in literary circles, thus creating a potentially viable financial legacy for himself and an “appropriate” memorial for his beloved Aspern. James circles “The Aspern Papers” around to end where it began, with the narrator yearning over Aspern as if over a lost lover. His final words, although the subject of critical divergences, act as the narrator-as-lover’s final lament for his dead beloved. The narrator confesses, “I can scarcely bear my loss—I mean of the precious papers” (96). Throughout “The Aspern Papers,” the narrator has had to choose “between the representation of feeling and the experience of feeling” (Mengham 41). In the end, he remains physically alone but strangely contented with Aspern’s representation on his wall. Romeo and Juliet died tragically but did so having fully *felt* emotions, from passion to sorrow. Miss Tina will remain isolated in Venice while the narrator medicates his loss of Aspern’s papers, a direct connection, with adoration of the portrait, a distant tie at best. Like the Montagues and Capulets, the narrator fills a personal void with a monument-as-representation of an otherwise absent object.

“The Birthplace” provides a second discussion of the danger inherent in fetishizing the artist. In James’s travel writings, he recounts his visits to Warwickshire and its environs, of which Stratford-upon-Avon is a part. In these writings, the reader sees James’s approach to Shakespeare-as-legend, a theme which he will expand upon in “The Birthplace.” None of James’s writings about Warwickshire, hallowed ground to some Shakespeare enthusiasts, discuss the dramatist himself in any great or protracted detail. Oblique and passing references occur regularly, as when James says of

Shakespeare that “a great genius is something supremely ripe and healthy and human” (*Collected Travel Writings* 78). However, James carefully avoids any insincere and fawning praise of Shakespeare. Instead, he takes his reader with him on his own journey through Warwickshire. He provides vast detail about his travels, where he walked, and what he saw and in so doing, he invites the reader to ponder the possibility that these may have been the same paths once travelled by Shakespeare. It is this idea of the possibility that James plays with by refusing to write an extensive paean to Shakespeare. No way exists of independently verifying where Shakespeare may or may not have walked. Even if he had once trod down the same paths as James through the English countryside, then certainly the vistas by virtue of time were not as they were. James focuses always in his writings about Shakespeare in the nature of the playwright’s skill, that if poetry in general “strains expression to the cracking-point” then under Shakespeare’s hand “it cracks and splits perpetually” (*Life in Letters* 502-503). The medium all but shatters beneath Shakespeare’s mastery. Herein lies James’s focus regarding Shakespeare. Critic Ernest Boyd laments that Shakespeare “is rendered inhuman by the Bardolators” (28), those uninterested in facts and concerned only with the image. James believed that Shakespeare’s talent spoke for itself. There was no need for James to tell his readers a story about how his footsteps marked the steps once walked by Shakespeare. There was no verifying such a statement and even if there were, this mattered far less than the body of work comprising Shakespeare’s literary legacy.

James’s doneè for “The Birthplace,” as he discusses in his Preface to Volume XVII of the New York Edition, specifically concerns the public’s fascination with Shakespeare’s home in Stratford-upon-Avon. James conceives of this place for his own

story as “a great place of pilgrimage, a shrine sacred to the piety and curiosity of the whole English-speaking race” (*Art of the Novel* (248)). His choice of wording, including “piety,” “shrine,” and “pilgrimage” speak to his anxiety about worshipping the artist as deity. The Gedge living quarters, adjoining the Stratford house, appears “as a sweet old parsonage is often annexed to a quaint old church” (445). James will play upon this theme in “The Birthplace” describing Shakespeare throughout simply as Him as characters conflate the playwright with divinity. Shakespeare as a character thus functions in much the same way as the absent Jeffrey Aspern. Aspern haunts the living characters in the story, an idol to some and a means of extracting money to others, though his own literary talents remain occluded. Shakespeare, for all his acknowledged literary genius, becomes most important to the characters in “The Birthplace” by virtue of his own absence. Were Shakespeare to have miraculously risen from the dead and stopped by during one of the Gedge’s tours of the Stratford home, he would forever have shattered the *idea* that takes the place of primacy in the story. Peter Rawlings describes a James’s review of an 1897 production of *Richard III* wherein James associates Shakespeare and his plays “with what is out of reach, intangible, and therefore intact” (*Abuse of the Past* 119). In “The Birthplace,” those flocking to the Stratford home prove incapable of truly understanding the nature of artistic genius.

James’s inspiration for the story goes even deeper. He had heard about the people charged in real life with being the caretakers for the Stratford home and then wondered about the odious task set before them in participating in the mythmaking of Shakespeare. He imagines the caretakers employed in a task “full of humbug, full of lies and superstition *imposed* upon them by the great body of visitors (*Notebooks* 195). These

caretakers, the Skipseys, would by virtue of their experience become “strange skeptics, iconoclasts, positive negationists” (James qtd. in Hope 62). Joseph Skipsey and his wife acted as the docents for the Shakespeare house on Henley Street, but Joseph especially hated showing off the artifacts placed within it. Although he did not doubt the authenticity of the house itself, the same could not be said for all of the baubles and the storytelling (Hope 61). James’s own fictional caretakers, the Gedges, “are not like the couple who engendered them, ‘strenuous and superior’ ” (Tanner 80), as James thought of them, but instead prove willing to sublimate their own feelings about Shakespeare in order to keep their position. Morris Gedge will at first appear poised to break free from this pattern and to ultimately refuse to participate in the mythmaking, but in the end, he becomes the most skillful liar of all.

Further still, “The Birthplace” “participates in the American literary tradition of housing Shakespeare by constructing a quasi-fictional Stratford-upon-Avon” (Rawlings 17). Indeed, the English felt threatened in the nineteenth-century by the American interest in Shakespeare. When the Henley house came up for auction in September of 1847, the English began conservation attempts in order to prevent the possible transfer of the site to American hands. Showman P.T. Barnum also threw his hat into the fray, so to speak, by threatening to buy the house, dismantle it piece by piece, and reassemble it as a museum in America. Although James focuses on Shakespeare’s birthplace for his story, events in 1903, the year the story was published, again brought to the English mind “the spectre of the American plunder of Shakespeare” (Rawlings, *Abuse of the Past* 85). In that year, American Marie Corelli attempted to have demolished several sixteenth-century buildings in close proximity to the Henley Street house. Although she ultimately failed in

her endeavor, of which James was aware, Corelli's actions again reminded both the Americans and the English of the uneasy tension which lay between them in their attempts to appropriate and commemorate Shakespeare. "The Birthplace" addresses both the American fascination for Shakespeare's relics and the larger theme of the idolization of the artist. William Stafford notes that the *nouvelle* contains four separate and distinct attitudes toward Shakespeare: the artistic, the critical approach, the public, and the domestic, as in financial security. These attitudes are embodied in order by Morris Gedge, the Hayses, the body/the public, and Isabel Gedge. James's attitude toward the danger of someone for whom Shakespeare "becomes an obsession, prolificacy, or persistence" (O'Sullivan 144) and thus embarks upon an intense focus on discovery rather than on the plays themselves becomes embodied by the otherwise nameless They and the crowds flocking to the Stratford house.

Morris initially possesses a great deal of arrogance and is offended for having to take work in a library filled with "granite, fog, and female fiction" (442). The library, although filled with literature, falls short of Morris's own interpretation of what constitutes "proper" reading material. He especially disassociates literature with women, aligning himself with those literati who refused to acknowledge the value and skill of women writers. This attitude becomes not only hypocritical but ludicrous in light of the Gedge's own admission that they do not own any Shakespeare and as they ponder the hope that the library might have copies they might borrow to brush up, it becomes evident they have not read him at all (446). They simply know him by reputation. Worse still, Morris dislikes the "granite" and "fog" of the library, both of which speak to a sense of sterility, of coldness, of living authors entombed and unknowable. Yet Morris happily

accepts a position with greater money and perceived clout that relies on exactly this: the importation and placement of the proper sort of furnishing and knick knacks that the tourists expect to see in the home where Shakespeare was born.

As Morris settles in to his position as caretaker, he begins to exhibit doubt as to the veracity of the stories he must tell and chafes at the authority of They who write the version. Morris repeats that as to the telling of the “facts,” “There can only be one way, one way” (453), almost hypnotizing himself into compliance. He evolves to develop a “cultivated hypocrisy” (McDonald 135) by the end of the story. Morris at least does not pull the blinders down over his own intellect, as Isabel does so readily. As he looks upon the melodramatically named “Chamber of Birth,” he finds it “sublime...because it was so pathetic” (455). Here, Isabel puts on the most elaborate and emotional show for the tourists. She points directly to a spot insisting that “there” was where Shakespeare came into the world. Instead, he is “a man caught between the two ‘Theys’” (Tanner 83), both the governing overseers employing him and the image of the birthplace cultivated by the previous caretakers. Further still, he must live up to the expectations of the tourists, most of them American (451), who expend a great deal of money and time to witness a proper spectacle. These visitors become “pilgrims...coming to see the Show” (456-457), a description which recalls to the reader’s mind reports of P.T. Barnum’s threat to buy the Stratford house and ship it to America.

Morris begins to buckle beneath the weight of the conflict between truth and fiction in which he is embroiled. While he never asserts a great love of Shakespeare one way or the other and knows him as a genius only by virtue of reputation and not direct experience, Morris appreciates the inherent problems in constructing the private history

of an author who left little but his written works as insight into the man. He can only definitively conclude, "There was somebody" (464), but who that person may have been, in the face of scant evidence, must necessarily remain unknown. Morris separates Shakespeare-the-playwright from Shakespeare-the-man, as James himself separated Artist from the reality of mundane, everyday existence. Morris begins to prowls at night, much like the ghost of Hamlet Sr. restlessly walking the battlements of Elsinore. During these quiet hours, without the pressure and expectations of the horde, Morris asserts, "I'm really with *Him*" (458). Morris does not devolve into an unquestioning idolater of Shakespeare, but rather feels an increasing affinity for a man who also possessed a definitive split between his public and private selves. The young American couple the Hayeses become Morris's greatest allies and confidants. Peter Rawlings argues that the Hayeses are the most like James as they visit the birthplace late in the evening once the tourists depart, displaying James's own preference for visiting such popular tourist attractions in peace and privacy (*Abuse of the Past* 92). The Hayeses appreciate Shakespeare as an author and know his works well, but they struggle like Morris with the inconsistencies of the stories told about his life. Mr. Hayes declares soundly, " 'The play's the thing,'² let the author alone" (472), a sentiment with which James would agree wholeheartedly. Of everyone in "The Birthplace," the Hayeses approach the Stratford house with both respect and skepticism. The nameless crowds trade respect for fawning while They care about nothing but ticket sales. They feel a desire to see the Stratford house, but refuse to leave their critical minds at the entrance.

Isabel represents something more mercenary, and thus perhaps more dangerous, than the adoring crowds vexing Morris. Isabel proves "a practical woman – and a shrewd

one” (Stafford 128) and concerns herself with the possibility of continued employment above all else. However, she reveals early on a high degree of arrogance toward those she feels to be of lower class. She believes that only the “refined” (444) should be caretakers, a ridiculous statement given the Gedge’s own modest means and their desperation for well-paying work. Worse still, Isabel again underscores her utter lack of familiarity with Shakespeare. The groundlings, those who paid one penny in order to stand during play performances at the Globe, formed a critical backbone of Shakespeare’s theatre. The groundlings, although of lower class, appreciated the theatre no less than their upper-class counterparts. These groundlings form as much of a legacy of Shakespeare’s history on the English stage as those of the “refined” classes of whom Isabel speaks. James cautions here against the literary legacy of the dead falling into the hands of those who seek to hide it away from those they deem unfit, whether intellectually or socially. This also brings James into the debate over Shakespearean authorship. As the nineteenth century progressed, some of those in literary circles began to propagate the theory that it was Francis Bacon and not Shakespeare, who wrote the plays. James comments on this controversy on several occasions and his thoughts fold back in to “The Birthplace” and its ideas of the dangers of creating an author’s past. Warren Hope and Kim Holston posit that in the nouvelle, “his subject is a symbolic rendering of the Shakespeare authorship question” (63), and James certainly also uses Shakespeare as a means to help him express and ease “his personal anxieties about the possibility of present and posthumous forms of exposure” (Rawlings, *Abuse of the Past* 69-70). Having the public at large taking the step to question the existence/authorship of a well-loved and profoundly talented author speaks to this very issue. James commented on the Bacon issue in his personal writings.

In a letter to American Bruce Porter, who plans a visit to England to investigate “bêtises,” or clues to Baconian authorship, James cautions Porter against the endeavor and calls the investigation “a misguided search for a sensation” (*Letters* 165). He expressed similar sentiments to Marton Marble, who published a book trying to prove the Baconian theory. James not only disregards the assertion, but he declares to Marble that Shakespeare is “divine William...a Poet and Nothing Else” (*Selected Letters* 343).

The Bacon issue circles back to Isabel’s thoughts concerning refinement. In order to choose Bacon as the author of the plays rather than Shakespeare, one discounts Shakespeare based on his lack of an extensive education and noble/upper crust background. Isabel, who wishes to “hold to reality” thus “disqualifies herself as an artist” (Rawlings, *Abuse of the Past* 88) and becomes the least like James of all the characters in the story. She never appreciates Shakespeare as anything other than a meal ticket. Worse still, she places a greater sense of value and respect in their boss Grant-Jackson. For Isabel, Grant-Jackson, “who represents worldly power, wealth, and prestige, is the true hero” (McDonald 140). Isabel without question presents the script of Shakespeare life demanded of her by Grant-Jackson and the other nameless Theys monitoring the running of the shrine. Morris early on voices what he sees as “the faults” (448) in the biography of Shakespeare which they will propagate, but he and Isabel at that point declare they will never speak of them publicly and will chastise any visitors who do. While Morris will eventually shift his stance on this issue, Isabel holds firm. While not blind to the inconsistencies of the stories she tells about the house, Isabel chooses to recount them to hordes of hungry tourists. In so doing, she not only refuses to intellectually pursue or discover Shakespeare, but she encourages others to do the same. She sets aside

Shakespeare's genius as an author in favor of dramatically recounting for the crowds the exact circumstances of his birth and in the room in which it took place.

The story ends with Morris triumphant, at least internally. At first, Morris seems hell bent on being fired from his position as caretaker by deliberately deviating from the standard script They and the tourists expect. Yet his attempt at an outward show of defiance produces unforeseen results. He "perversely begins to spin for them elaborate fabrications for which his stipend is doubled" (Stafford 126-127), with the council pleased with the attention his performance brings to the birthplace. Revenue matters to Them, and Morris brings it in abundance by lying to his heart's content. Isabel cares nothing for Morris's new embellishments given that their own financial standing ameliorates as a result. Even the Hayses return to inform Morris of the rave reviews his tales receive back in America. The final line of the nouvelle, spoken by Morris, leaves the reader denied of the show Morris shares with his adoring public. He says simply to Isabel as she gloats over their new success, "And there *you* are" (495). Yet James deliberately leaves the referent unclear. Morris could be speaking to the distance between himself and his wife as Morris moves more into the role of the performer/artist. More interestingly perhaps, he could also be speaking to the ever-absent Shakespeare. Shakespeare remains unknowable, which Morris acknowledges, but also finds new form as Morris's own literary creation. In any case, "The Birthplace" ends exactly as James intends it, with Shakespeare slipping through everyone's fingers. The smart ones, James implies, emerge as those who understand that Shakespeare said all he intended to say in his plays. Mythologizing an author lessens the power of his or her written legacy.

Critic Georgianna Ziegler recounts an occasion where noted Shakespeare collector Henry Clay Folger corresponds with his friend Howard Furness. Furness, in an attempt to entice Folger to visit, states that Henry James may decide to stop by the gathering as well (101). James himself “was a master at understanding and writing about the acquisition of wealth and the nuances of collecting” (Ziegler 101). That James was utilized by Furness as a means of obtaining a visit by Folger stands in firm support of James’s unease with the notion of someone idolizing an artist and as a part of that process, attempting to collect any and all artifacts of said person. “The Aspern Papers” and “The Birthplace” both contemplate the theme of collecting and of fetishizing a dead artist. As evidenced by his own words, James admired Shakespeare and was quite familiar with *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet James’s understanding of the play transcended a mere surface appreciation for the tragic elements of the love story. James grasped Shakespeare’s complexity in crafting *Romeo and Juliet*. The love story which remains so tightly focused in the minds of playgoers forms the largest element of the plot, but not the only one. The play focuses broadly on issues of memorialization and maturity, with the Montagues and the Capulets on stage in its final moments having failed to permanently change as a result of the deaths of their children and kin. Shakespeare also focuses the play on words and the art of crafting beautiful poetry. Romeo begins speaking in romantic hyperboles, but upon meeting Juliet, the pair simultaneously compose and recite a perfect sonnet. James’s “The Aspern Papers” perverts the love story of Romeo and Juliet by presenting the reader with the narrator and Miss Tina, both emotionally stunted and incapable of deep emotional connections. Would Romeo and Juliet never have met, with the former continuing on in his pining after Rosaline and the latter marrying Paris at

her father's behest, perhaps they would have ended up much the same. James also comments on the problems inherent in both idolizing and attempting to memorialize anyone, especially an artist. James implies that Aspern's written legacy should stand for itself and if it cannot last, then Aspern was no great talent. The narrator attempts to force Aspern upon the critical and reading public by obtaining the author's personal papers and thus obtaining some further proof of Aspern's legacy. In the end, the narrator leaves the story with nothing more than an overpriced portrait of Aspern on his wall and like Shakespeare, James closes the story with ambiguity. "The Birthplace" provides little comfort in its own right. Although James purposefully avoids naming Shakespeare in the story, his subject matter is clear. Shakespeare, fought over by both Americans and the English as their rightful literary legacy, became the figure of idolatry feared by James. For James, the author's work and genius should stand as testaments to the man, rather than physical relics like his purported place of birth. Such fetishizing of otherwise mundane and ordinary things, from a house, to a birth chamber, even to details of Shakespeare's own scant biography, proves detrimental in James's eyes. In "The Birthplace," Shakespeare "occupies a position beyond ascertainable and verifiable facts...beyond the reach of fiction" (Rawlings, *Abuse of the Past* 97), mirroring James's own discomfort at the thought of what others would write or infer about his own private life. The author is Artist and while he or she is undoubtedly also human, that human and private self does not automatically by rights become the domain of curiosity seekers and idolaters. The praise should be for the works themselves as that alone transcends time and place.

End Notes

¹ Frederick W. Dupee collected both pieces of the autobiography which were published in 1913 and 1914 respectively along with the unfinished portions and published them in one volume for the first time in 1956.

²A reference to Hamlet's line, "The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" which closes Act II, Scene 2.

CHAPTER 3

“MISERY ACQUAINTS A MAN WITH STRANGE BEDFELLOWS”: CALIBAN AND ARIEL IN *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*

Through his relationship with Isabel Archer, Ralph Touchett experiences a deep and abiding love that remains with him to his deathbed. Yet despite the strength of his feelings for his cousin, he never steps forward to assert himself as a possible suitor and thus exists in a state of limbo as he watches her movements. He lingers in the background of her life, a separation made physical as well as emotional once Isabel's inheritance allows her to travel the world and sets her in the path of Gilbert Osmond. Although he feels increasing horror and pity over the ruinous marriage Isabel makes with Osmond, Ralph finds comfort from the most unlikely of sources: Henrietta Stackpole. Early into their acquaintance, Ralph likens himself to Caliban and Henrietta to Ariel, that creates not only an intriguing link between the two characters, but to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as well. Ralph's designations, at least at the surface, appear apt. Caliban, heavy, twisted, and grotesque, remains inextricably tied to the earth, paralleling Ralph's inexorable journey toward the grave. Ariel, by contrast, possesses the power of flight and experiences far-ranging travels, as Henrietta does in her adventures as a roving reporter. Yet *The Portrait of a Lady* defies easy interpretations and the references to Caliban and Ariel prove equally dense. Isabel Archer unites Henrietta and Ralph and always exists in

the background of their lives. As such, she appears at first to serve as a Prospero-like figure, enslaving both with the power of her personality. However, Isabel enters the novel as a wide-eyed, Miranda-type and evolves into someone akin to Prospero only as she gains money and experience. This triumvirate of characters, Ralph, Henrietta, and Isabel, find their counterparts in *The Tempest* and an examination of their similarities and divergences illuminates them all.

Henry James thought highly enough of William Shakespeare as a dramatist to compose an introduction to an edition of *The Tempest*. Furthermore, others of James's works, such as the story "The Birthplace," along with his own personal writings, speak to a lifelong affinity with Shakespeare. Although James largely eschews traditional criticism and analysis of the play, his admiration for Shakespeare as a dramatist forms the backbone of the essay. He struggles with the relationship between Shakespeare as man and as artist, a theme frequently and eloquently explored in James's own writings. James also avoids concreteness as he explores both *The Tempest* and its author. Nina Schwartz describes the effect thus: "It works, in short, to produce a mystery" (72). Given that James's novels, tales, and short stories enjoy a careful attention to craft and detail resulting in works rife with secrets and ambiguities, James's lack of specificity here proves characteristic. Yet *The Tempest* itself shines in its ambiguities, including an ending that provides no definite resolution for Prospero save that he forsakes his magic and returns to Milan. Although James devotes the majority of his essay to exploring the elusiveness of Shakespeare, he does shower praise upon *The Tempest* and declares it, "The rarest of all examples of literary art" (*Shakespeare* 1208). He further describes the play as brimming with "the richly mature note of a genius" and praises its ability "to

place on the rack again our strained and aching wonder” (*Ibid* 1205, 1206). In the Preface to the New York Edition of *The Golden Bowl*, James muses, “What it would be really interesting, and I daresay admirably difficult to go into would be the very history of this effect of experience” (*Golden Bowl* lii). James struggled in the *Tempest* essay to come to terms with his desire to find some of means of connection to Shakespeare, but he also celebrates the play as the work of a fully matured genius. Following this line of thought, Shakespeare could only have written *The Tempest* when he did, as the culminating point of a career marked by success and tragedy, by all the experiences which sharpen the artistic eye of the artist. *The Portrait of Lady* places James’s thoughts into practice in a sense, with Isabel *becoming* by the act of her accumulated experiences, though she leaves the novel and the reader as a work still unfinished, a still-young woman not yet fully matured.

Although James’s introduction to *The Tempest* provides a sustained exploration of Shakespeare, James does reference both the dramatist and various of his characters throughout his prefaces to the New York Edition. William Stafford asserts that James points “to Shakespearean characters as precedent and example of what he is attempting in his own fiction” (123) and thus it becomes of less importance that James does not specifically delineate his purpose in utilizing references to *The Tempest* in *The Portrait of a Lady*. In the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, James speaks of Shakespeare’s heroines “mattering” in part because of their value to other characters (*POL* 11). Isabel Archer intersects with Ralph and Henrietta on just this same note, both as an enchantress and as a woman who makes a fateful choice in marriage. For Caliban, James reserved only the highest of praise, describing *The Tempest* overall as “a delicacy positively at its highest in

the conception and execution of Caliban” (*Shakespeare* 1213). The power of Caliban’s execution clearly affected James and the ambiguity with which the viewer leaves a production of *The Tempest* as regards Prospero’s base servant provides the perfect analogue to Ralph Touchett.

From his first introduction in the novel, Ralph exists as a societal outcast. The reader first meets Ralph as he and his father, arguably a bit of an outcast himself, enjoy tea. Further still, they have put together their refreshments even though the narrator cautions, “They were not of the sex which is supposed to furnish the regular votaries of the ceremony” (*POL* 11). Mrs. Touchett’s self-exclusion from her husband and life at Gardencourt necessitates the men’s assuming feminine roles. Yet Ralph’s initial description depicts him as anything but effeminate. The narrator comments, “He had an ugly, sickly, witty, charming face” and “His gait had a shambling, wandering quality” (*POL* 22). Additionally, Ralph casts a shadow “with an outline constantly varying but always grotesque” (*POL* 200) speaking to an inner state of turmoil. Caliban, offspring of the witch Sycorax, shares Ralph’s outer grotesqueness. An amalgamation of fish and human, Caliban repels all those with whom he comes in contact. Ralph and Caliban also share a lack of freedom. Although Ralph’s gait contains some hint of the wanderer and thus of stunted possibility, any ability that he had to freely travel the world disappeared with the onset of his tuberculosis. His movements revolve around the seasons and he travels to those places most likely to alleviate his symptoms rather than out of an interest to visit a given locale. If Ralph is a slave to illness and place in practice, Caliban is so in fact. By the time of the play’s events, Prospero had long ago enslaved the island native. Later on in the novel, as Ralph becomes increasingly attached to Isabel, his cousin holds

him in thrall. Ralph outwardly feigns indifference to his illness and isolation as a means of coping, but the narrator reveals, “His serenity was but the array of wild flowers niched in his ruin” (*POL* 58). His “wild flowers,” the blooms of his own stunted potential, barely thrive and he thus possesses a susceptibility to living vicariously through another. Even when he spends time with Isabel and Henrietta in happier times, he chooses to sequester himself alone in the dreary Winchester Square home for a good portion of their stay. In Isabel, Ralph finds “something worth staying alive to witness” (Poirier 29), rendering her an idol to be worshipped. Although Prospero holds Caliban by force, Caliban nonetheless expresses a grudging admiration for the master he once mistook for a god and comments, “His art is of such power” (1.ii.375). Tragically for Ralph, his inner vibrancy and strength of mind cannot overpower the decline of his body. Henry James, during his travels to Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwickshire, thought of Shakespeare and the inner mind of the artist. He commented, “A great genius is something supremely ripe and healthy and human” (*Travel Writings* 78), a statement which both illuminates his own admiration for Shakespeare and for the vibrant intellectual mind which could find inspiration in the old haunts of the playwright. However, James’s thoughts also provide further insight into Ralph. Ralph remains marginalized by his ailment and within it, his great wit and insights shrivel. The discussion to follow concerning Isabel’s relationship to both Ralph and Henrietta addresses the issues of art and power and their prominence in her bonds to both.

Another intriguing parallel binds Ralph and Caliban, of which Henry James would undoubtedly have been familiar given his admiration for and knowledge of Shakespeare. Simply put, “Caliban is an American” (Bristol 82) as is Ralph. Although

Caliban has remained in the place of his birth while Ralph has ended up as an expatriate, both share an American tie. *The Tempest* itself, as Frank Bristol argues, “was very probably inspired by the shipwreck of a company of Virginia colonists on the Bermudas in 1609” (60). With this event as the probable genesis for Shakespeare’s late play, it is no surprise that the play specifically, and Shakespeare generally, found such favor as America sought its own identity up through Henry James’s own time and beyond. James himself found *The Tempest* compelling and powerful enough to merit his writing an introduction to an edition of the play and he certainly could relate to the sense of displacement felt by both Caliban and Ralph. In a sense, *The Portrait of a Lady* becomes a story about ending up where one does not intend. Isabel, to keep with the shipwreck metaphor, runs aground despite Ralph’s best intentions. Henry James also landed on far away shores, remaining in Europe for some twenty-five years before visiting America again in 1905.

When Ralph first meets Henrietta, he takes something of a dislike to her brash, confrontational mannerisms. Yet as the novel unfolds, their relationship deepens to one akin to the bond between brother and sister. In Henrietta, Ralph finds an accessible confidante, one in whom he has no romantic interest and can trust. After Ralph and Henrietta conspire to spy on Isabel in the hopes of fulfilling Henrietta’s desire of a marriage between Isabel and Caspar Goodwood, the pair enjoys the following exchange with Ralph beginning, “I’ll be Caliban and you shall be Ariel.” Henrietta responds, “You’re not at all like Caliban because you’re sophisticated, and Caliban was not.” Ralph replies, “I’m only Caliban, I’m not Prospero,” and Henrietta concludes, “You were Prospero enough to make her what she has become” (140).

The comparison of Henrietta to Ariel proves apt. Carolyn Mathews writes, “Like each of the scenes featuring Henrietta, the arrival scene emphasizes movement” (193) and indeed, Henrietta remains in transit throughout the novel, coming to rest by conscious choice only when she accompanies Ralph back to Gardencourt and then maintains a death vigil at his bedside. Ariel, too, seems to be always in flux. Whereas Caliban does little more than menial, physical labor for Prospero, Ariel travels vast distances doing Prospero’s bidding. Henrietta’s duties as a reporter keep her relatively unbound, although her relationship with Isabel tethers her, as Ariel remains enslaved to Prospero. Ariel and Henrietta also share the trait of aloofness, with the former existing outside of the boundaries of human society by virtue of his status as a spirit of the air and the latter at first striking everyone as off-putting. However, both Ariel and Henrietta contain a depth of understanding about their natures. Ariel, despite his seeming amusement at casting sleeping charms and taunting Caliban, wants above all, “My liberty” (1.ii.248). Henrietta rails against the landed aristocracy in part by declaring, “Do you call that happiness – the ownership of wretched human beings?” (*POL* 325) underscoring the value she places, at least outwardly, on personal freedom.

Yet Henrietta reveals a tendency toward the same sort of self-isolation practiced by Ralph. Ariel is so different in type and substance that he cannot help but remain separated from the island’s human and even demi-human community. Henrietta, despite her horror concerning England’s landed aristocracy, seems content with keeping herself from mixing with the selfsame common folk she defends. She inquires soon upon her arrival in England, “Where are your public men, where are your men and women of intellect?” (*POL* 161). Caliban certainly wants to be free of Prospero, but Shakespeare

depicts his conception of freedom as different from that of Ariel's. Caliban wants to be left alone to do as he chooses, even if that means finding another master, disillusioned as he is with Prospero and smarting from the perceived loss of "his" island. Ariel desires freedom for its own sake, reminding Prospero several times of the magician's promise to free him. Shakespeare never hints that Ariel will simply seek out another means of enslavement, but instead depicts the air spirit as desiring the return of his subjectivity. Henrietta, for all her outward bravado, reveals her vulnerability to Isabel and thus also to the reader. When Isabel declares it charming that Henrietta's manners and education threaten men, Henrietta cautions, "I'm deeply human" (105). This proves a profound confession since it hints at her inner emotional depth and speaks to the degree of pain she feels when later confronted with confirmation of Isabel's misery. Although she aggressively and perhaps inappropriately pushes Caspar on Isabel, her simple statement at this early stage in the novel reveals her ability to feel deeply. Further still, her words reveal her keen insight into those around her. Regarding Isabel, Henrietta emerges as "the first of her friends to predict her disaster" (Sharp 218). Ralph homes in on Henrietta's ability to gauge others as well when he comments, "She's a great satirist; she sees through us all and she works us up" (*POL* 155). Henry James worried that Henrietta became a much larger character than what he had originally intended for her in the role of *ficelle*, but an unexpected byproduct of her larger role in the text lies in her subjectivity, which contrasts with Isabel's conception of selfhood.

Henrietta reveals her knack for unearthing the buried intentions of others through her likening of Ralph to Prospero. In response to Henrietta's description of him as too sophisticated to be Caliban, he strangely adds that he is nothing like Prospero. Certainly,

Shakespeare's Prospero possesses many traits from impatience, to great intelligence, to the desire for vengeance, and finally the capacity for forgiveness, but sophistication falls short as a descriptor. Prospero may be a powerful illusionist and a deposed royal, but this alone does not create sophistication as this trait stems from an inner sense of grace, style, and taste. Indeed, by the play's end, Prospero identifies with Caliban, specifically "to those impurities that constitute his human limitations" (Corfield 38). Henrietta immediately takes up Ralph's unprompted denial of himself as Prospero and makes him acknowledge that his decision to put a fortune into Isabel's hands has not been completely positive for his cousin. Ralph initially professes to have given up the lion's share of his inheritance in order to give Isabel wings with which to explore the world, certainly a noble gesture. Late in the novel, however, Ralph confesses that at times he wants Isabel "to be in his power" (*POL* 166), thereby sublimating Isabel's will to his own much as Prospero does with his daughter, Miranda. Henrietta does not allow Ralph to eschew admitting his responsibility for both the good and bad circumstances to befall Isabel and forces him to face it far sooner than when he vocally does so himself. By contrast, Ralph proves keenly insightful only as regards Gilbert Osmond, as when he reflects, "Everything he did was *pose - pose* so subtly considered that if one were not on the lookout one mistook it for impulse" (424). Where Henrietta freely and immediately warns Isabel about her romantic pursuits, Ralph internalizes his gravest indictment of Osmond until it is far too late.

Ralph and Henrietta depart from their counterparts in *The Tempest* along the lines of their increasingly close bond. Ariel, relatively free as he is in relation to Caliban, detests the grotesque and earthbound slave. Indeed, Ariel and Caliban share only two

commonalities: ties to Sycorax and enslavement to Prospero. As Cosmo Corfield notes, “Caliban occupies the bestial end of the scale, while Ariel approximates to the angelic end” (34), but James refuses to render the relationship between his characters to such diametrically opposed ends. Ralph and Henrietta eventually share a deep friendship, one arguably more genuine than the ones they share with Isabel since they come to each other with no expectations. Once Isabel enters the equation, Ralph proves capable of aspiring to be Prospero, while Henrietta reveals a life which to the novel’s closing page remains inextricably tied to hers. Isabel decides that Ralph and Henrietta are “ill-matched companions” (*POL* 162), but she proves completely wrong in the nature and quality of the friendship that develops between the pair. Tellingly, Ralph bequeaths his library to Henrietta, a profound and intimate gift that he bestows on her over Isabel, an avid reader.

When Mrs. Touchett first meets Isabel Archer, she finds a naïve young woman who spends the majority of her time sequestered away with her books. Isabel’s fascination with certain types of books will later align her with Prospero, but in these early passages, she holds far more in common with Miranda. Miranda’s journey though *The Tempest* bears the hallmarks of a “coming of age ritual” (Hamilton 24) as does Isabel’s. Both young women move from sheltered environments under the control of their fathers to experience love and marriage and the promise of a world unfolding with limitless potential. While Miranda leaves the play on the cusp of marriage and a bright future, Isabel leaves the novel having gained knowledge through sorrow and strife. Shakespeare’s young heroine remembers little of life in Milan before she and her father were relegated to exile. When she looks back upon her former life, at a time when she was only three years old, she views it as if it were a dream. She confesses to her father

that life in Milan exists “rather like a dream than an assurance” (1.i.45). James similarly muddies the waters regarding Isabel’s upbringing and imbues her early years with the same dream-like quality. The reader knows few concrete details concerning the young Isabel, save that her mother died, her father moved the family around frequently, and Mrs. Touchett disliked the now deceased Mr. Archer. Otherwise, James reveals only intriguing snippets of events, such as Isabel’s recalling being left in a hotel in the care of a nanny who eventually runs off with a beau. In a letter James wrote in 1869, he quotes a line from Prospero’s speech from Act 4, Scene 1 writing, “I already feel as if Boston were *the baseless fabric of a vision* (*Life in Letters* 23, my italics), a sentiment which will prove all the more powerful as James opts first to relocate to Europe then finally to accept British citizenship near the very end of his life. He recognized the power of the past occluded either by memory or time and employs it here with Isabel. Late in the novel, the theme of dreaming returns during the kiss passionately instigated by Caspar. For Isabel, the kiss “makes her feel as if she were dreaming” (Miller 43) and the reader understands that Isabel will likely rationalize or explain this event as fits her mood later, much as if she were filling in the details of a scarcely remembered dream. Mrs. Touchett feels an immediate affinity for the young woman whom she describes “as good as a summer rain” (*POL* 59) and brings Isabel to Europe. Joseph Friend writes, “The quest here is that of a young American woman who has come to Europe eager for the best that life has to offer” (86) much as Miranda happily leaves the island at the end of *The Tempest* with hopes for marriage and a new life. Indeed, Isabel approaches the European experience with open eyes and a sense of romantic wonder, but even at this early point in the novel, she exerts a desire for power. Isabel asserts early on, “I’m very fond of my liberty” (*POL* 35), but the

sources from which she has conceived of such freedom – books selected by their frontispieces and her own unbounded imagination – force her evolution into a Prospero-figure who relinquishes power as events unfold. As J. Hillis Miller writes, Isabel may indeed hold on to a “sovereign freedom” (41), but the power of possibility, of her forcefully reclaiming her subjectivity from Osmond, remains uncertain at the novel’s end. She returns to Osmond in the end as a “subject” (MacComb 76) whose subjectivity has been stifled, insofar as her husband chooses to regard her first as a trifle to add to his collection, then as an irritant to be broken. This represents an uncomfortable degree of triumph for Osmond, given that he “wished to add her to his collection as another object of great value” (Ziegler 101). Clearly, Osmond does not receive everything he wants, as Isabel proves a defiant figure, but she returns nonetheless. The reader can only hope for a definitive fissure in the marriage at some later date. Prospero journeys into a similarly vague future, one in which he has relinquished his magic and counts on nothing but that he will age, fade into obscurity, and die.

Isabel’s characterization aligns her quite closely to Prospero’s. James perceived of Prospero as “Shakespeare’s surrogate” (Rawlings, *Abuse of the Past* 94), with both character and playwright aging men approaching the twilight of their careers. Another deeper connection exists, however, and one which ties back to Isabel Archer. James ultimately concluded that there would be no “knowing” Shakespeare, however much he himself might have wanted to have a plethora of physical evidence shedding light on the man. Shakespeare, for lack of personal documentary evidence, remains the Prospero figure alone on an island. A 1905 review of James’s *The Golden Bowl* characterizes James as “a marvelous hermit on a lonely isle” (Moss 57). This phrase not only describes

the Henry James who wrote *The Golden Bowl*, the last of the novels of his major phase, but also readily applies and to Shakespeare himself, while also recalling to mind the powerful but stranded Prospero of *The Tempest*. James certainly identified Shakespeare as a great genius whose plays captured the public, but whose deeper meaning perhaps sometimes eluded them. James, in his essay introducing *The Tempest*, struggled with his own desire to find the man who wrote such astounding works of drama, comedy, history, and romance. Yet James, for much of his professional writing career, experienced the same sense of being isolated and alone. While some of his works, like "Daisy Miller," proved a hit with the reading public, others of his works, perhaps most especially the densely symbolic *The Golden Bowl* went underappreciated during his lifetime. James believed in the integrity of the Artist and his or her devotion to Art, be it painting, theatre, photography, writing, or whatever form such inspiration might take but his writings make clear that he understood there was a price to be paid. The true genius, the true Artist, struggled alone and often against a larger public unwilling or unable to grasp his or her complexity.

The reading and playgoing public can only look upon Shakespeare's works with reverence, as Caliban and Ariel both regard Prospero's magic powers. Isabel, too, begins in isolation. Unlike Shakespeare, she comes crashing to earth by virtue of Mrs. Touchett's bringing her to Europe and feels all too human. Isabel believes that her consumption of books, likely those of romantic or dubious quality, provides her with not only a superior intellect, but with a proper base of knowledge from which to view the world. She exhibits a propensity for self-confidence bordering on hubris, as when the reader learns, "She was in the habit of taking for granted, on scanty evidence, that she

was right" (*POL* 68). So, too, does Prospero reign over a dream-like kingdom of his own fashioning. Not only does he construct a world to suit his liking, but he constructs Miranda's as well, shaping her view of the world without a thought to truth, but rather to press his own view of events. Her views, it is clear, must need be his own.

Prospero's main source of power lies in his sorcery, with his beloved books as the source of all of his power. Without his books, even the poorly educated Caliban understands that Prospero is "but a sot, as I am" (3.ii.93). James's comparison of Isabel and Prospero invites the reader familiar with *The Tempest* to understand the dangers of losing oneself by succumbing to a world of imagination. Prospero loses his throne when his brother Antonio deposes him, and while this is certainly an act of filial betrayal, Shakespeare carefully points to Prospero's own culpability in losing his kingdom in part because he spent too much time reading in isolation. Isabel also shares Prospero's predilection for temporal power. For both of them, this takes the form not so much from the desire for material wealth as it does from the need to hold a place of primacy in the lives of those around them. She enjoys that others listen attentively to her opinions; indeed she almost expects it. Prospero displays similar traits most tellingly when he reveals to Miranda the whole of their history. Demands for attention pepper his speech in Act One, Scene Two, including such phrases as "notice me," "listen to me," "attend me," and "mark me." Miranda capitulates to her father's demands, but he does not gain a true sense of subjectivity any more than Isabel does. Both rely too heavily on the observation and attention of outsiders. Isabel herself "led a relatively secluded, permissive, protected life" (Friend 87) that renders her incapable of differentiating between true interest and subterfuge. Even before she meets Osmond, Isabel perhaps unconsciously already begins

to fashion her “portrait,” the outside image which she cultivates in order to elicit attention and notice from others. Unfortunately, this leaves her blind to the machinations of Madame Merle and Osmond and deaf to the cautions of her friends.

In her courtship with Osmond, Isabel exerts traits of both Miranda and Prospero. Miranda thinks of her eventual fiancée Ferdinand, “There’s nothing ill can dwell in such a temple” (1.ii.160), a proclamation made solely on the basis of his handsome physical appearance. Osmond similarly fools Isabel. She takes Osmond only at face value and only in the version presented to her by Madame Merle. She does not make any independent investigation prior to her marriage and stops her ears to the cautions of her friends. Isabel also champions her want of a marriage of equality, one in which her money will be freely given to Osmond and in exchange, the pair will live in emotional and intellectual harmony. Miranda shares a scene with Ferdinand wherein she offers to share his burden of moving logs, hinting at her own desire for a marriage of equality. Where Miranda seems poised at the close of *The Tempest* to enjoy a marriage marked by parity and balance, Isabel’s dreams of Osmond prove illusory. Prospero’s “art” consists of illusions, which prove “transitory [and] lacking in both substance and significance” (Chilton 225). Isabel creates an illusion of herself, a portrait of respectability and wealth highlighted by her “evenings” at Palazzo Roccanerra that she assumes in place of allowing it to be widely known that her marriage is bitter and loveless. Neither Prospero nor Isabel possesses an access point to a source of true power. Prospero, however intimidating and dazzling he appears to be, does not possess the ability to create. He can mimic life only, can only present simulacrum of goddesses instead of calling upon them to appear in fact.

Although Isabel possesses traits shared by Miranda, her love of imagination and artifice supersedes all else. Osmond does not have to exert himself very much at all in order to win Isabel's affections. Indeed, in many instances, his mere carefully timed encounters with the young woman prove enough to solidify her attachment to him. Isabel's gravest fault as regards Osmond lies in her "succumbing to Osmond's cultivation of her own pretensions to virtue" (Duban 172). Prospero takes great pride in dazzling others with his illusions as Isabel does in captivating others. In so doing, he never has to reveal his true self to others, or to himself. He can simply hide behind his glorified parlor tricks. Osmond latches on to this personality flaw in Isabel and exploits it simply by seeming to be taken in by her. Isabel may make "attempts to see beyond the boundaries of her knowledge" (Smith 588), but she invariably ceases to do so with Osmond when he flatters her. Only after Isabel realizes the complicity of Madame Merle and her husband does she indeed move beyond her illusions and imagination, albeit too late. Regrettably, Isabel shares some of the blame with Osmond for their ill-matched union. She asserts that Osmond never tricked her into marriage and that she shares blame for suppressing parts of her personality. The portrait, the illusion, works too well. Prospero's magic powers "have become impurely applied to mean and personal ends" (Corfield 42) by the start of the events in *The Tempest* and Isabel commits the same error. *The Tempest* ends with Prospero's relinquishing his vast library of magic books, *The Portrait of a Lady* with Isabel returning to Rome "to live a sadder, wiser, and more dignified life than that offered her by the equally domineering Caspar Goodwood" (Duban 164). James leaves the narrative thread open to the possibility that his heroine will in some way triumph over

Osmond, but the immediate reality is that she returns to assume the portrait so carefully cultivated over the years.

If Isabel cedes power to Osmond, she maintains it over both Ralph and Henrietta. Although Ralph inwardly wishes to keep Isabel in thrall, a Miranda to his own Prospero, he never manages to do so. When he decides to put a fortune into his cousin's hands, he does so partially for selfish reasons, as he himself later admits. Darker still, the playgoer learns of Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda, which earned him the wrath of Prospero. Caliban's thwarted act of sexual violence would have stripped away Miranda's autonomy in a reprehensible and aggressive act of male power. Ralph, in quietly allowing a fortune to fall into Isabel's hands, similarly removes her autonomy, even if the original act began out of a desire to set Isabel free. Ralph loves Isabel, but he also idolizes her, a situation proving problematical at best as it creates an unequal power balance in all their interactions. Caliban both grudgingly admires and despises Prospero in the role of master, but he also shows a tendency toward needing something to hold him in thrall, much as Ralph needs someone external to himself in order to "live." *The Tempest* contains a scene, comic at the surface, in which Caliban tastes alcohol for the first time and not only declares it unearthly, but promises to serve those who introduce it to him. Raymond Urban provides this explanation of the scene: "Caliban is being inducted into the religion of drunkards" (204). Ralph similarly becomes intoxicated at times by his cousin, both for her beauty and for the possibility to live that he sees in her.

Isabel maintains an affection for her cousin which blossoms into a deeper love as the years pass, but her life otherwise fails to intersect with Ralph's in any meaningful way. The relationship always exists on her terms. As Caliban is "manipulated easily by

Prospero" (Petry 28), so too does Ralph conform to Isabel's bidding. He only gainsays Isabel with regards to Osmond and in so doing, he stirs up such fury in her that he does not broach the subject with her again. Throughout the novel, Isabel spends time with Ralph when her travel schedule and his health permit a rendezvous, but after her marriage to Osmond, even these brief interludes all but stop until she defies her husband to see Ralph on his deathbed. On one level, she chooses Ralph over her husband, but her actions speak more to an act of open rebellion against a controlling and emotionally abusive man. Although Isabel appears to genuinely love Ralph, it only becomes more than a self-centered love when she realizes he is dying. Ralph dies heartbroken and alone since "Isabel's freedom can no longer be imagined" (Poirier 31). Caliban gains genuine freedom when Prospero abandons the island, but Ralph only finds an escape from loneliness and disappointment over Isabel's fate through his death.

Isabel's relationship with Henrietta proves more nuanced than the one she shares with Ralph. Where Ralph lives isolated and without industry, Henrietta is a more well-rounded person by virtue of her career and the experiences it affords her. However, Henrietta admires her young American friend in part because of what she lacks. Henrietta may be a journalist, but she never becomes an artist. It is Isabel who holds the power to "create" with her imagination, and this trait attracts Henrietta, at least at first. She later amends her opinion of Isabel and recriminates her friend saying, "You're not enough in contact with reality" (*POL* 238). Henrietta exerts an outward sense of bravado where Isabel is concerned when she begins to fear that her friend will definitively reject Caspar. Henrietta vows to Ralph that she would "give *her* up" (*POL* 191), but this proves to be a threat in name only. Although Henrietta tries at every turn to steer Isabel away from

Osmond, she does not succeed. Where Ariel remains unseen while he plays music in the background, so too does Henrietta attempt to manipulate Isabel by writing in secret, invisibly, to Caspar, but to no avail. By the novel's end, "she has listened to Isabel's confidences, but to no practical purpose" (Sharp 235) since she effects no real change in her friend. She fails to convince Isabel to divorce her husband and Isabel's eventual removal back to Rome and Osmond keeps Henrietta interested and thus enthralled. Although Henrietta "discovers a kind of compromise between self and society, and between male and female models of identity" (Miller 21), it is a qualified discovery. Up until the moment of his freedom, Ariel "is always available and at Prospero's disposal" (Johnson 209), and the same is true of Henrietta, save any sense of a clean break from Isabel.

Henry James's admiration for Shakespeare in general and to *The Tempest* in particular is undeniable. Throughout the corpus of his works, James chooses words, symbols, and references with great care and thus his choice to explicitly reference *The Tempest* in *The Portrait of a Lady* requires close critical scrutiny. James possessed a broad understanding of and keen insight into both the play and Shakespeare as its author and through his own literary mastery found the means by which to incorporate elements of the play into his own novel. James, in his musings, came to see that the serious problem inherent in the public's increasing need to "know" Shakespeare. He believed that the need "gives way to an overwhelming sense of what little survives other than the simplifying residue of what was" (Rawlings, "Shakespeare Migrates" 24). James's own introduction to *The Tempest* reveals his unease with trying to establish a firm history along with his conflicting desires to sometimes do exactly that. Yet his comments about

the ultimate futility of the attempt fold back in to *The Portrait of a Lady*. The reader leaves the novel with the vibrant residue of Isabel Archer and longs for that woman to reclaim her identity. James thus makes a personal and powerful choice in incorporating elements of *The Tempest* into *The Portrait of a Lady*. In so doing, James bridges both time and genre, while allowing the references to *The Tempest* to develop organically within *The Portrait of a Lady*. Moreover, James refuses to allow his characters to devolve simply into remakes of Shakespeare's. Instead, he takes Caliban, Ariel, Miranda, and Prospero and recasts them in his novel, providing points of similarity and contrast as he goes. As Mary Jane King asserts, *The Portrait of a Lady* abounds with repetitions of the word "touch" as both a theme and a word that she believes serves as a "suggestion of not only the loss of freedom but also the acquisition of responsibility" (346). Although physical touch does permeate the novel, perhaps best exemplified when Caspar intrudes upon Isabel's personal space and claims a passionate kiss, the characters in the novel seem to contact most often metaphorically with the earth, with reality. Isabel loses her wings and crashes tragically earthward, as does Henrietta when she decides, albeit with happier results, to marry Mr. Bantling. Ralph never really fully participated in the world around him and leaves the novel literally beneath ground in his grave. In *The Tempest*, Caliban and Ariel both reclaim their sovereignty as Prospero sets out into a life marked by obscurity as he passes into old age. Of James's characters, perhaps only Henrietta, maligned as she was by the author himself, enjoys a genuine sense of freedom even at the cost of "giving up her country to marry Mr. Bantling" (Miller 18). She leaves the novel having grown and evolved, having obtained knowledge about herself and the world that Isabel never quite attains save through tragedy. Yet even in this regard, James leaves

open the possibility of her Prospero, Isabel, remaining always in her thoughts and her plotting.

CHAPTER 4

GENDER TRANSGRESSION AND UNBRIDLED AMBITION: MERTON DENSHER AND KATE CROY AS THE MACBETHS

In Henry James's travel writings, he speaks with deference to the powerful influence of Shakespeare and the playwright's lasting imprint on London. James described London as the place "for a man of letters who endeavors to cultivate, however modestly, the medium of Shakespeare" (*Travel Writings* 22), and it was ultimately England where James chose to spend the great majority of his writing career. James turned to Shakespeare in numerous instances throughout his personal writings, often augmenting a thought or a comment in his personal correspondences via an allusion to a Shakespearean play. In one instance, James thanks a correspondent for a letter, deeming it a "sweet-tinted missive as Oberon might have addressed to Titania" (*Life in Letters* 239). He makes no explicit reference to Shakespeare or to *Twelfth Night*, but arguably expects his recipient to understand. As such, James clearly expected that his audience, his reading audience certainly included, to be versed enough in Shakespeare to be able to grasp such references. In some of James's novels, including *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The American*, these references to Shakespeare stand out explicitly in the text. James quotes verbatim or nearly verbatim from Shakespeare in order to make the connection between novel and play unmistakable. Yet James, especially in his last great symbolic

novels, including *The Wings of the Dove*, alludes to Shakespeare less overtly, inviting his readers instead to draw these comparisons. James himself preferred Shakespeare “for reading” (*Essays on Art and Drama* 491), and this seems to stem from his frustration over actors incapable of properly doing justice to the playwright’s characters. That being the case, it is not a stretch to envision James turning the most intense thematic elements of a tragedy like *Macbeth* into a subject for a novel while avoiding having to explicitly declare his intentions. Such is the case with *The Wings of the Dove* and its parallels to *Macbeth*. Critics of the novel, most notably John Bayley, compare Kate Croy and Merton Densher to the Macbeths.¹ James never directly makes such a comparison in his novel, but the similarities between the two couples prove uncanny, and an understanding of the role of *Macbeth* in interpreting Kate and Densher allows for a more nuanced reading of the novel.

Kate, Densher, and Milly form an uneasy romantic triangle, with Densher as the point of interest for both women. Yet even once Milly succumbs to her disease late in the text, her absence proves just as unraveling as her presence. In *Macbeth*, Duncan and Banquo both function by virtue of their absences from the play. Duncan haunts Lady Macbeth psychologically, figuring as a looming symbol of guilt which undoes the once steel-spined woman. Banquo appears bloodied and battered in ghostly form only to Macbeth, which temporarily causes Macbeth to lose his demeanor. James originally titled the novel *The Girl Who Is Dying*, in much the same way as *Macbeth* might be entitled *The King Who Is Dying*, given that through dying, characters form a death grip on the living. Shakespeare employs a similar technique in choosing the title *Julius Caesar* for a play in which the Roman emperor dies violently in the first act. Yet Caesar haunts

the living conspirators as surely as Duncan and Banquo, figuratively or no, haunt the Macbeths. James's ultimate choice for the novel's title, *The Wings of the Dove*, maintains the sense of something intangible and just out of reach. The dove, Milly, spreads her wings, but in so doing, suffocates Densher and Kate. James explores the initially close relationship of Densher and Kate and depicts this very intimacy as the source of their cleaving in such a way as to recall to the reader's mind the relationship between the Macbeths, also marked by intimacy but finally steeped in alienation. In James's own Preface to *The Wings of the Dove*, he remarks that Densher and Kate "are far from a common couple" (*WOTD* 48) and indeed, these two characters prove strikingly uncommon. As with *Macbeth*, the transgression of proscribed gender roles leads to the fracturing of once intimate relationships.

James provides the reader an intimate look into the consciousness of Milly Theale, at least through the first portion of the novel. Critic J. Hillis Miller asserts that this glimpse vanishes, that "Milly's consciousness disappears from representation at just the point when she presumably finds that Densher has, tacitly at least, lied to her" (*Literature as Conduct* 160). This abrupt break in the reader's direct connection to Milly supersedes the representation of Duncan provided by Shakespeare, yet both characterizations move toward the same end point. Interestingly, as James began to plan out the plot of *Wings of the Dove*, he did not always have firmly in mind the exact nature of the Milly character. He muses initially about "some young creature" on the verge of death, but he notes in an aside "it seems to me preferably a woman, but of this I'm not sure" (*Notebooks* 102). Although James never explicitly declares it to be the case, one wonders if he may have had the spectre of the murdered Duncan in mind, a male figure

rendered vulnerable and weak in place of a female. James's nineteenth-century readers surely would have expected a woman prone to physical frailty but a male would certainly have shocked much as the gruesome murder of a sleeping Duncan shocked Shakespeare's playgoers. The journey taken by each of these characters, rich young American woman and aged king, leads to the same conclusion: a lonely death. While Duncan bears the obvious sign of royalty through his kingship of Scotland, Milly too bears a more subtle mark of royalty. She is the dove of the novel's title, a bird certainly symbolizing peace, but also associated with Jesus when a dove descends to impart the Holy Spirit upon him. As such, Milly becomes almost holy, a benevolent and ethereal creature lovingly enfolding Kate and Densher in her wings. Perhaps James also wants the reader to recall to mind a similar image found in the Book of Isaiah which reads, "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (40:31). This line of reasoning proves intriguing. While Milly could again be likened to the faltering delicate creature who finds her strength and courage in God as she moves closer to death, a good deal of ambiguity exists. The eagle, while majestic and beautiful, also possesses keen skills as a predatory hunter. Milly emerges again as a complex, perhaps even dubiously intentioned character enveloped by an outward cocoon of grace, fragility, and dignity. As further discussion will examine, James may not intend for the reader to take such a benign view of Milly.

That James patterned Milly in part on Minnie Temple, his beloved cousin who also died at a young age, certainly is attested to by James's own musings on the creation of the novel. Yet this does not mean that James intends for Milly and Minnie to be one in

the same, thus allowing for Milly to become a complex and perhaps not completely loveable character. Where the two women, fictional and real, share the greatest similarities lies in the men they leave behind to commemorate them. The memory of Minnie haunted James throughout his life, arguably becoming increasingly idealized as time passed, as Milly does for Densher. James visits the theme of commemoration throughout his fiction, most especially relating to musing over how one should or should not commemorate an artist. Works like "The Aspern Papers" lead to the conclusion that idealizing one who has died can be quite perilous. James perhaps works out some of his own uneasiness over his own internal idealizing of Minnie by allowing the reader to see Milly from both sides. Milly exists as a consciousness and also as an externalized object to those around her. The reader witnesses Milly's thoughts and actions, then sees the image left in her absence, branded upon and in some sense created by Densher's mind.

Upon learning of Kate and Densher's betrayal, Densher reports Milly "had turned her face to the wall" (456), a shocking devolvement from the Milly who strove to live all she could despite her terminal illness. The image of Milly emotionally defeated and voluntarily removed from the company of guests begins the idea of Milly as a haunting presence. Her refusal to interact and to participate in social interaction serves as the first indication to those around her of what her physical loss will feel like upon her death. Although Milly grants a final audience to Densher, reported by him to be one in which she forgave both him and Kate for their deception, she still dies alone. Life as she had framed it, with Densher as a knight in shining armor filling her last days with romance, crumbles and the image shattered. The reader does not directly witness Milly's final breath, but rather hears the acknowledgement that her death occurs from Kate. Duncan

also dies offstage. Undoubtedly, the intensity of regicide explicitly depicted on stage would have horrified both Shakespeare's audience and King James, whose own mother and father had died violently. However, the absence of the directly viewed death lends intensity to the play. As is the case with Milly, Duncan's death is reported back indirectly by the Macbeths discussing it amongst themselves. Notably, Lady Macbeth, such a strong parallel to Kate Croy, provides the most graphic report when she comments upon the volume of blood splattered in Duncan's chamber.

Yet Milly, while alive, becomes much more than a background figure in the novel. Where Duncan serves as the catalyst for the Macbeths' terrible downfall, Milly thrives for much of the novel as a strong character in her own right. However, Duncan's death serves to underscore Macbeth's own woeful inadequacy as king. From the opening act, Shakespeare inserts references to clothing not fitting Macbeth, a condition all the more exacerbated when he takes the crown of Scotland. When Macbeth is hailed as the Thane of Cawdor, not having yet known of the death of the current Thane, he demands, "Why do you dress me in borrowed robes? (I.3.106-107). Here, alarmed and surprised by the first portion of the witches' prophecy coming to pass, Macbeth provides a sense of self-reflection. His words not only speak of his confusion over being addressed as Thane of Cawdor, but also to Macbeth not wishing to take something which does not rightfully belong to him. He wishes nothing for "borrowed robes," instead implying that he wants a title which he has fully earned. His decision to murder Duncan sets this initial glimpse into his personality askew. Late in the play, once Macbeth's actions have compounded, he no longer offers such insights. However, those around him now recognize the Macbeth as a sort of fraud playacting as king. Angus, a Scottish thane seeking to remove Macbeth

from the throne of Scotland, comments, “Now does he feel his title hang loose about him, like a giant’s robe upon a dwarfish thief” (V.2.2-21). Money, not clothing, will be the focal point for Densher and Kate. While at first the pair unites under the desire to obtain Milly’s wealth so they may be married, eventually for Densher, the fortune emblemizes his own duplicity in tricking Milly. He never was a wealthy man and cannot in the end stomach assuming Milly’s fortune for his own. Kate, who has the manner and dress of a wealthy socialite but no money of her own, acts in this instance much as Macbeth does: to the novel’s end, she remains willing to take Milly’s fortune. The betrayal of Milly shines a brutal light on Densher and Kate’s own shortcomings, as the murder of Duncan does on the Macbeths. However, James takes care to complicate Milly as a character.

Milly indeed assumes the role of the dove of the novel’s title. As much as the image of Milly as the dove lovingly enfolding Kate and Densher resonates with some readers, so too does the interpretation of Milly as smothering the pair, exacting her revenge for their betrayal. Where Duncan’s early loss permeates *Macbeth* by virtue of the degeneration of the kingdom under the rule of Macbeth, Milly takes a more active role until her death relatively late in the novel. In an early description of Milly, James writes that she appears “seemingly quite without design” (130). James never minces his words in his stories, so his careful wording here requires scrutiny. The choice of *seemingly* indicates to the reader that something about Milly’s outer façade does not quite match her inner self. Indeed, Milly appears to be trying too hard. That she is *quite* without design renders Milly outwardly guileless and harmless, a set of characteristics few people ever live up to. Yet for Milly, the careful cultivation of such an outward appearance consumes a good deal of her effort. She dresses carefully, conservatively, in

expensive gowns which give the appearance of modesty if not being outright funereal. Milly takes great pains to hide her illness, yet at the same time, she exudes an aura of pristine mystery by taking on the appearance of one carefully groomed so as to appear the picture of innocence. Lady Macbeth and Kate Croy both prove consummate performers as well, as later discussion addresses.

Milly's terminal illness itself becomes an interesting point of discussion when examining her character. Although she staunchly refuses to acknowledge her impending demise to anyone, herself included, until her acknowledgement of her coming death while gazing at the Bronzino, she decides to all but confide her condition to Kate. She does not outwardly and explicitly state the nature of her health problems, but she leaves no doubt in Kate's mind that she seeks out the care of Sir Luke because he is a doctor competent enough to handle grave diagnoses. Whether Milly allows this partial confession to Kate out of a need to unburden herself of her secret or out of a need to keep Kate captivated by the possibility of a mysterious illness James opts to leave indefinite. In the end, "Milly's own motives remain incalculable" (Bayley 15) to the reader. Ironically, Milly's admission becomes the spark for Kate's plot to marry off Densher to Milly in the first place. Milly certainly exhibits no desire to be used by the couple and her feelings for Densher appear genuine, yet her own plotting, her careful cultivation of an image, leads them all down this path.

Furthermore, Milly willfully refuses to find out the truth about the relationship between Densher and Kate, even when provided ample opportunity to do so. Never does Milly come across as stupid or ignorant, so her steadfast refusal to see people and circumstances as they truly are stems from a choice Milly makes to avoid truths she does

not want to accept. One description of Milly has her “forever seeing things afterwards” (154), but again, this does not stem from Milly’s inability to perceive her environment but rather her decision to recreate it so as to have it conform to her own desires. When Milly passes on the opportunity to explicitly inquire of Kate as to the nature of her relationship with Densher, her friend and travelling companion Susan Shepherd confronts her about this decision. The narrator states, “Milly, however, easily explained that she wouldn’t have asked for the world” (185). For Milly, no option exists but the one she chooses: to bury her own suspicions about the nature of Kate and Densher’s romantic entanglement. In so doing, she may remake Densher as she likes, turning him to her idealized vision of a lover. To have wrung the truth from Kate would have been to staunch her own ability to force the world to fit into a narrative of her own choosing. Tellingly, in this story, Milly does not exist on the sidelines as a benevolent figure, but instead features dead center in a romantic love story with Densher.

James does not allow the reader final access into Milly’s death chamber. His choice proves shrewd, as “it is to dramatize the pain and stimulus which Milly’s grimness and silence cause to others” (Bellringer 21). Further still, James reveals through his own correspondence that this reader exclusion resulted from a calculated decision as to the focal point of his plot. He addresses criticism for the omission of the final scene between Milly and Densher arguing, “I had to make up my mind as to what was my subject and what wasn’t...the subject was Densher’s history with Kate Crow...and Milly’s history was but a thing involved and embroiled in that” (*Selected Letters* 342). However much Milly may want to be centrally involved in the action, James deliberately writes her as a catalyst figure, one whose absence wreaks more havoc still. While Milly certainly feels

deeply the pain of Kate and Densher's betrayal, her decision to turn her face away from those, like Densher, who come to spend time with her in her final days, also ties back to James's initial descriptions of Milly. Milly understands the power of the image, further evidenced by her connection to the Bronzino. Just as carefully as Milly set a face before the world filled with joy and boundless enthusiasm for life, she later chooses to forcefully restrict access to her company and her person.

Although Milly eventually allows Densher back into her company, the damage has been done. Densher now loves a dead and idealized image of Milly, precisely the type of image she attempted to cultivate during life. Milly bequeaths her fortune to Densher as Kate had planned for, but what Kate failed to account for was the possibility of Densher feeling an emotional tie to Milly. Herein lies the key to Milly's victory, and also its great tragedy. Her power comes through her death and at the cost of learning knowledge she could have possessed prior to becoming completely swept up in her romantic musings about Densher. Wade Mackey and Nancy Coney explore gender roles across time and place and propose that the Milly Theale type – physically weak and sickly – would not have “won” against stronger women. They write, “Those women who wielded power adroitly and with impeccable timing became our ancestors” (160), a woman not unlike the Lady Macbeth first encountered by playgoers. Milly comes to wield tremendous power over the living, and in this sense she does claim victory over her rival Kate, but her death tempers such a victory. In his notebooks, James reveals that he had not always seen Milly's death as an inevitable component of the story. He writes that Milly might “revive and cleave to him, and the curtain would fall on their embrace, as it were, and the *possibility* of their marriage and of her living” (*Notebooks* 107). Although

Milly's ultimate future remains tenuous, James conceived during the planning stages of the curtain closing on Milly and Densher together. What does remain consistent, then, is the dissolution of the relationship between Densher and Kate resulting from the bequeathing of Milly's fortune. As the breakdown in the intimacy of the Macbeths marks the point of no return in both their relationship and their respective fates, so too does the sundering of the affair between James's characters remain a focal point of the novel, even as James shifted other details.

Where Milly works within the boundaries of her gender to manipulate and participate in the world around her, using in effect her money as an extension of her gender as enticement for Densher, she never otherwise crosses into behavior more suitable for a male than a female. Milly acts with a high degree of outward independence, as her money bestows upon her as a travelling American a good deal of freedom of movement, but the source does not stem from a desire to step outside of her prescribed gender role. Milly can act with latitude not only due to her fortune but more importantly because her death looms near. Milly can attempt to snare Densher and marry him, dangling her fortune before him as incentive, because she knows that she will die shortly into their union. Anna Kventsel asserts, "Kate's ruthless, animal vitality is a source of anxiety to Milly" (75) and this lies precisely in Kate's tendency toward stereotypically male behavior and aggression. Milly's final actions concerning Kate and Densher certainly do speak to her exacting a form of revenge on the couple, but she does so within the most feminine of means: by appearing to be a nurturing and harmless mother-sister-dove figure. Milly's turning away from company upon learning of Densher's betrayal also signals an appropriately feminine response as James's audience would have

interpreted it. Her self-imposed isolation proves reminiscent of so-called “rest-cures” for histrionic women, wherein the sufferer would be locked away from the world. Milly does not, as Kate does, act or react in ways more appropriate to the masculine gender. If anything, she fits the role of the dying flower/weak woman too well and dies with too much attention to doing so as a proper woman. She rebels against her fate and acknowledges it fully while in the Uffizi, but she faces the actual moment of her death with nearly preternatural grace. After Milly dies, Densher confirms a statement made earlier by Kate. He reminds her of her prediction that Milly “wouldn’t smell of drugs, that she wouldn’t taste of medicine. Well, she didn’t” (459). Milly dies in an externally pristine state, with no medicinal odors to interfere with her female body dying. With Densher and Kate, however, prescribed gender roles blur and go awry, as they do in *Macbeth*.

For critic Duco van Oostrum *The Wings of the Dove* focuses on “a man battling women for mastery” (103). Milly and Kate both utilize their femininity in an attempt to draw in Densher, but Kate will go further to assume a dominant and masculine role to exert control over him. James’s initial description of Densher does little to instill a sense of his masculinity or physical prowess in the reader. His first name alone, “Merton,” sounds akin to “murky, and “Densher” just one letter away from “denser.” Little seems definite and tangible about Densher. Where Kate dazzles with her beauty and social graces, Merton appears “longish, leanish, fairish” (85). This description contrasts with the initial characterization of Macbeth, a martial man who has won renown on the battlefield. Outwardly at least, Macbeth’s manhood remains unquestioned. Densher lacks control on both the public and private spaces of the novel. Further still, James opts to begin the

novel in Kate's consciousness, not with Densher's. The novel's strongest source of will, Kate, appears in a clearly rendered portrait long before her fiancé. Where Densher's body lines blur, with the implication that no one would pick out Densher in a crowd or perhaps even remember having met him, Kate enters the novel with a painful clarity. The female before the male, the almost-effeminate Densher and the aggressive Kate – in every sense, James begins the novel by turning expressions of gender on their ears. Here exists a strong parallel to the opening of *Macbeth*. When Banquo and Macbeth meet the witches in the first act of the play, Banquo especially expresses a sense of unease due to their appearance. He says to them, "You should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so" (I.3.45-47), beginning a theme of the play wherein normalcy and the bizarre/grotesque rest uneasily against one another, often morphing into one another. Densher will eventually assert masculine dominance over Kate, but here, he is a man drawn into the power women and "their arts of power" (Stevens 28) just as surely as Macbeth becomes ensnared by the prophecies of the witches.

Some of Densher's inability to appear wholly masculine stems from "his private inability to believe he should ever be rich" (95), as the narrator reveals. Money becomes inextricably tied with the masculine and thus with power in *Wings of the Dove*, where women like Milly and Aunt Maud wield the greatest influence. However, wealthy men populate the novel as well, including Sir Luke, a well-known physician, and Lord Mark, pressed upon Kate as a more appropriate suitor based on fortune. Critic Julie Olin-Ammentorp argues that Sir Luke "defines powerful masculinity in the novel" (41) in stark contrast to Densher. Likewise, Macduff becomes the foil for Macbeth, a highly masculine character in his own right who exerts in the end physical mastery over him.

James explores in *The Golden Bowl* Prince Amerigo, a titled young man otherwise penniless who must marry out of financial necessity, so Densher's situation is not unique in all of James's corpus of work. What does become unique about Densher as situated in *this* novel centers on the successful men serving as counterpoints to the unsuccessful Densher. Densher winds up very much in the situation of many a young woman of James's day who hoped to find a moneyed match. What makes Densher's failure as a man all the more pitiful lies in the opportunities in business and industry afforded to him that would be prohibited to women. The reader never learns exactly why Densher from the very start ponders his lack of success and thinks of it as inherent to his character.

Macbeth possesses aspirations to be king, so certainly he does not suffer from a lack of drive, but Duncan's choice to name his son heir to the throne effectively robs him of that choice. Shakespeare's play has in its background the imminent announcement of Malcolm as heir to the Scottish throne and this proves critical in moving forward the plans of Lady Macbeth and her husband. Under normal English rules of succession of Shakespeare's day, the throne would pass to the eldest son of the monarch. The Scottish throne, however, could be passed to whomever the current ruler named as official successor. Macbeth, a long and loyal subject of Duncan's up until the events of the play, was not thus out of line for believing that he might be named next in line to the Scottish throne. One can understand his disappointment in being passed over, as one can sympathize with Densher's lack of funds interfering with marriage to the woman he genuinely loves. What occurs in both narratives and with both characters lies in the matter of degree to which each man will act to obtain what he desires. Macbeth agrees to murder Duncan, a king to whom he provided loyal service for years, while Densher

becomes persuaded to con a dying woman out of her fortune. Shakespeare strongly hints that the Macbeths, prior to events in the play, discussed the possibility of assassinating Duncan for their own advancement. When Lady Macbeth initially suggests that they murder Duncan, Macbeth does not respond the way the audience might be expecting. Instead of expressing any degree of outrage over her words, he says instead, “We will speak further “ (I.5.70), which thus sets up Macbeth as a character already prone to plotting. Although Densher and Kate have never plotted in a similar fashion, James’s introduction of Densher as an emasculated character likewise creates a situation in which a seemingly easy solution to his problem becomes appealing. Macbeth “seeks shortcuts to greatness” (Time 64) regarding the throne of Scotland as Densher does with obtaining money.

However redeemed he may be by the novel’s end, Densher does not get excused from his own appalling behavior. Densher’s own family history provides interesting commentary on his own character. His mother made a living producing copies of famous paintings, thus rendering her an artist, perhaps even a good one, but one wrapped in the images and ideas of others. This ties back in to the image of Macbeth as a man wearing ill-fitting clothes – his own potential becomes swallowed up by increasingly horrific pursuits. Densher grows up, then, with a mother who makes a living through her talent, but only indirectly: Densher proves an even more flawed copy of his mother by failing to even earn a living through something akin to counterfeiting, like his mother. The only pursuit he makes for money in the novel centers on an emotional counterfeit through the courting of Milly. This background, based in emulation rather than original expression, follows Densher into his relationship with Kate. From the moment the pair meet, they

both recognize “the range and limit of their tie” (91) as their lives become inextricably bound to another. The Macbeths share the intense intimacy and closeness of Kate and Densher, and some of the flaws. Macbeth harbors desires for the throne coupled with the real fear he will never attain it, and they both come to contend with increasing ambition. Both couples exist in a near vacuum. They interact certainly with the outside world, but they close off a good portion of themselves from outside influence. As a result, ideas which might otherwise never be acted upon, be it the extreme of regicide or the using of Milly, flourish in an environment which becomes claustrophobic rather than nurturing.

With Densher, “James begins to objectify the feeling of pathos” (Bellringer 21) and herein lies the source of Densher’s redemption as a character. Through Densher’s pathos and his empathy toward Milly, Densher recovers from the role of villain.

Although Densher makes the sacrifice of breaking from Kate in order to avoid the taint of Milly’s fortune, his change in character proves not without its pitfalls. He shifts from idealizing Kate and agreeing to go along with her schemes to idealizing Milly, turning her from a human being into a saint. As such, Densher becomes “rapt into a wholly different centre of consciousness, that of Milly herself” (Bayley 14) rather than developing a sharply defined sense of self, something lacking in his relationship with Kate. James never paints Densher as a perfect character, merely one who has tried to rectify a morally wrong action. As such, Densher does not transform suddenly from an almost inert figure of a financially struggling young man to a driven success. Instead, he trades one idealized love affair for another. Kate represented the tangible, physically present, but unattainable wife while Milly comes to represent an abstracted vision of womanhood as saintly, pure, and sterile.

Densher indeed does not cry “Hold,” mirroring Macbeth’s ultimate choice to see his actions through to their final consequences. Macbeth’s decision to continue to fight Macduff after realizing he will not survive it proves the key to his redemption. Upon learning that Macduff fulfills the witches’ prophecy of not being technically born from a woman as he was delivered by caesarean section, Macbeth initially declares, “I’ll not fight with thee” (V.10.22). Macduff taunts Macbeth, calling him out as a coward and stating that he will die anyway and here Macbeth changes his mind and makes a choice. He decides to fight anyone and warns, “Lay on, Macduff, and damned by him that first cries ‘Hold, enough!’” (V.10.33-34). Macduff dispatches Macbeth and the play closes with the next scene. However, Macbeth’s choice at this moment brings the action of the play full circle to where it began. Macbeth, despite Lady Macbeth’s taunts against his manhood should he do otherwise, nonetheless chooses to murder Duncan. He knows the witches’ prophecies have started to come true, but the witches can only influence him so much. They can tempt him to fall, but he must ultimately opt to do so. After all of his plans unravel and he stands before Macduff, Macbeth surely understands his hubris in trusting the witches at all. Their prophecies and the visions they showed him were true, but not directly and obviously so. He neglects to consider the possibility of his own misinterpretation of their meaning, especially regarding Macduff. At the moment of his imminent defeat, other choices lie before Macbeth. He can run away as a coward would and be cut down by Macduff anyway, but a further possibility exists. He can call out to the witches for their assistance, an action which would forever condemn his soul both on earth and in the afterlife. Instead, he chooses to set aside prophecy and sorcery in favor of seeing his actions through to their final consequence: death at the hands of Macduff.

Further still, Macbeth reclaims his masculinity in these final moments, both from Lady Macbeth's earlier denigrations of him and then later from his own acts of murder.

Densher does not face his own mortality, but seeing Milly's shakes him and sets him down a path to reclaim his own masculinity as Macbeth does. The fallout of his regret over having plotted with Kate leads Densher down a different path of redemption than Macbeth. Macbeth, coming to act alone and with nearly indiscriminate violence, must die himself in order to bring the narrative full circle. Although Shakespeare's tragedies universally end with the death of the protagonist, in the case of *Macbeth*, this conclusion appears all the more appropriate.

Densher's redemption brings him full circle as well through his final dealings with Kate. He chooses to reject Milly's money outright – he recognizes that to take the fortune means to allow the taint of the actions needed to secure it to follow him forever. First, he forces Kate to read for herself the letter confirming his receipt of Milly's money, disallowing her the chance to later interpret, misinterpret, or reinterpret his report of it. Finally, and most importantly, he asks her to choose between their relationship and the money. Kate understands, "You'll marry me without the money; you won't marry me with it" (508), again an instance in this novel where James does not have his characters leave thoughts half-spoken or unspoken. The frank intimacy of their early relationship returns and here, Kate rejects Densher, where Macbeth comes to reject Lady Macbeth to plot on his own. Although James leaves in doubt whether or not Kate takes the money, which Densher declares he will sign over to her, the relationship undoubtedly remains sundered. Kate tells Densher simply, "We shall never be again as we were" (509) and thus concludes the novel. Hugh Stevens argues, "Naturalization of gender is the last thing

the novel accomplishes” (21) and as a whole, that statement proves accurate. Yet in this last relatively quiet moment between Densher and Kate, the two relate without Kate’s excessive aggressiveness, or Densher’s usual passivity. They meet, then, on equal terms only in a situation which marks the end of their union. Herein lies another significant tie to the structure of *Macbeth*. The novel “begins and ends with bequeathing” (Bellringer 24), with Kate being “given” to Aunt Maud at first, and then Milly’s fortune bestowed first on Densher, then transferred to Kate. The play also utilizes the image of bequeathing to begin and end the narrative. *Macbeth* commences with the title of Thane of Cawdor bestowed upon Macbeth, coupled with the witches providing him with their prophecies. It ends with Macbeth’s death, which he has in a sense given to Macduff, and the passing of Scotland to Malcolm.

Densher’s usual mode of action leaves him passive in the presence of Kate’s powerful personality save for one marked break after they have agreed to trick Milly. Kate miscalculates in a sense by going “too far,” as James often writes in his works². She pushes Densher, bullies him even, and convinces him to go along with her plans, but it will not be without consequences for her. From this emerges the first major break between the couple. Prior to this point, the pair existed as two against the world, battling their circumstances in the hopes of marrying. Now, their unity has been upset by Densher’s demand for sexual favors. In effect, he prostitutes Kate himself as she trades sex for Densher’s cooperation in a plot to obtain money. He acts as Kate’s own family members have: trading her beauty and emotional well-being toward a financial goal. In exchange for his complicity, Densher demands of Kate simply, “Come to me” (378). If James opts to avoid an explicit conversation about sex, he implicitly states it. Kate agrees

to visit Densher unchaperoned in his rooms, where James again closes the scene without depicting what goes on within, but the scenario is clear: Densher wants to bring Kate under his sexual power. Densher “has submitted Kate to his will and thus relegated the dominant Kate firmly to a passive, female role” (van Oostrum 117) and the emotional fallout for both of them must be severe and profound. The Macbeths experience a similar rupture in their initial power dynamics shortly after the murder of Duncan. Macbeth soon plots to kill Banquo and Fleance in order to better cover his tracks, but he refuses to allow his wife into his confidence. She asks, “What’s to be done?” to which he replies, “Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, till thou applaud the deed” (III.3.45-47). He chooses from this point on to decide his own course of action and does not include her in his plans. Clearly, given Lady Macbeth’s heavy complicity in the killing of Duncan, Macbeth does not act to spare her criminal culpability. Few crimes could be deemed worse than regicide. Indeed, his use of the endearment “chuck” seems at odds with Lady Macbeth’s steely strength, excepted pointedly by her inability to kill Duncan herself. Like Densher, Macbeth attempts to reclaim masculine power by dominating over or excluding his female counterpart. Earlier, Macbeth responds to his wife’s berating of him for hesitating to kill Duncan by declaring, “I dare do all that may become a man; who dares do more is none” (I.7.47-48). As the play progresses, he equates masculinity with violence and the exclusion of his once-powerful female partner. Densher dominates Kate sexually as a means of reasserting his perceived lost manhood. Kate, despite this episode, proves a vivid and complicated woman in James’s hands.

James, a prolific reviewer of the theatre, both Shakespeare productions and other plays, commented indirectly on Lady Macbeth in a letter to Henrietta Reubell written in

1889. As often proves the case with James's commentary on Shakespeare's works, James does not explicitly address Lady Macbeth as a character. His thoughts on actress Ellen Terry, commemorated by John Singer Sargeant in 1889 in a portrait featuring her in her Lady Macbeth costume, reveal volumes. James does not believe Terry to be a good actress. He first makes clear that Terry "is beautiful as an image and abominable as an actress," but adores this image of her with its "shining barbaric crown," "her wondrous pale, fatal, painted, terrible face." He further asserts that the public "will stare and be idiotic and frightened, and not understand" (*Life in Letters* 215-216), insinuating that those who understand the play and Lady Macbeth will appreciate this portrait, at once terrible and great.

The portrait, in which Lady Macbeth prepares to place the Scottish crown upon her head, indeed possesses a good deal of ambiguity, a feature of so much of James's own fiction. Her expression, which James so aptly describes, defies a clear-cut interpretation. She appears larger than life in the portrait, filling the frame as well as the viewer's eye. Her eyes, striking in their ice-blue intensity, might convey horror over Duncan's murder to some, a barely contained expression of triumph to others. Perhaps at this early point in the play, Lady Macbeth herself feels conflicted over the actions taken by her and her husband. Only as the play continues does Lady Macbeth's guilt expand to overtake her reason and sanity. James surely must have both appreciated and enjoyed this ambiguity, both in the portrait and also in the play. Lady Macbeth, as Shakespeare intends, remains memorable due to her creator's refusal to present her as either as a definitive and motiveless source of malice. In James's words, Kate Croy emerges as a similarly complex protagonist. While Kate uses those around her for her own gain,

James provides the reader with in-depth insight into her consciousness, something he avoids with similar characters like Madame Merle. Indeed, the reader spends one volume of the novel completely in Kate's consciousness.

Unlike Densher, who regrets their choice of using Milly, and unlike Lady Macbeth, ultimately driven to madness by her guilt, Kate remains adamant in the rightness of her choices. The witches alone share the opening scene of *Macbeth*, with one of the first lines being "Fair is foul and foul is fair" (I.1.12). Kate fits this description as well as any of the characters found in Shakespeare's play. While no one would mistake her outwardly for a man, as Banquo does initially with the witches due to their beards, Kate contains this duality to her nature. Despite her outward beauty, she is inwardly foul, defying the idea that physical beauty denotes the same within. While most readers will likely find it hard to rouse sympathy for Kate given the callousness of her plans, they may also find it challenging to hate her outright. James carefully crafts Kate as a character and a consciousness and avoids demonizing her by providing a glimpse into her strange history with her father and her family's constant fixation on money. As such, she becomes mired in the idea that her worth stems from her ability to draw in a financial windfall. Unlucky for Kate, the man she loves has nothing to offer in this regard. Lady Macbeth surely must have felt at some point in a past otherwise unexplored by Shakespeare the pressure to enter into a marriage with a man suitable in social standing³. The reader initially feels some degree of sympathy toward Kate, who feels trapped by the "wonderful gilded claws" (103) of wealthy women like Aunt Maud. Michael Trask argues that James plays with the idea of "choice" in the novel, which in his time would have been understood more as "opportunity" (363), and Kate best embodies this as she

increasingly makes calculated choices designed to propel her social and financial standing.

James begins the novel with Kate and with a line which in part reads, “She waited, Kate Croy” (55). His wording proves critical to his portrait of Kate as a character. Already, Kate is objectified through James’s word order. The reader is not simply told, “Kate Croy waited” and James’s phrase should not be interpreted as meaning precisely that. Kate is first “she” – that woman there – devoid of her individuality. The descriptions of Kate’s great physical beauty and attention to dress compound this sentiment. Kate does not strike anyone except Densher as “Kate,” but rather as the sum of her outward appearance. For her family, this appearance must be utilized as a means of marrying into money. Kate waits for her father, a male who dominates her utterly in the brief portion of the text James devotes to his character, and this relationship contains no trace of normalcy. Kate offers herself, in effect, to her father in a scene eerily reminiscent of her later surrender to Densher. She wants to live with him and take care of him, but if she does so, then her wealthy Aunt Maud will disown her. Her father’s wishes are clear. Not only should she go to Aunt Maud, but father and daughter need not see each other again. He chooses to give up his daughter “frankly forever” (66) in the hopes of Kate rising in social standing with Aunt Maud’s help and never once displays a bit of love toward Kate. Clearly, Kate already has learned to value objects and money over people. She concedes, “material things spoke to her” (72) but the reader also learns that “outside...her eyes showed as blue, with the mirror, they showed almost as black” (56). Her father’s influence acts as a corrupting force and has already done a good measure of harm. Worse still, the nature of Aunt Maud’s contempt for him never fully materializes. Kate never

wants to speak of his actions directly, stating only, "I don't know – and I don't want to...something or other happened that made him impossible" (98). James leaves open the possibility of Kate being victimized directly by her father and this lack of certainty again serves to deepen Kate as a character. To make her wholly evil would be too simple and too easy and instead, James invites his readers to sympathize with Kate's situation while at the same time never losing sight of the fact that Kate knows what is wrong and chooses to do it anyway. She emerges as "a woman who is both restless within her prescribed sphere and doing her best to exploit the possibilities that exist within it" (Olin-Ammentorp 39) and these seeds were planted from the time Kate was a young girl under the influence of her father.

Shakespeare introduces Lady Macbeth in a mode of waiting as she reads a letter from Macbeth and awaits his return from battle. Although literacy in women was not commonplace in Shakespeare's time, it was not unheard of, but it would have been anomalous in the eleventh-century Scotland of the play. Lady Macbeth already sheds the norms of gender through the simple act of reading. Later, she bemoans the limits placed on her by gender as she famously demands, "Come you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty" (I.5.43). She does not so much want to become literally male as she wants to set aside what she views as nature's limits on her actions due to gender. Kate, even more so, needs her outward femininity, it being one of her most valuable assets, one which Aunt Maud values enough to take the girl under her wing. Yet she, too, harbors masculine tendencies toward aggression and dominance. Thus, both women spend much of their time performing. Kate's great talent lies in "her ability at self-presentation, and her art of

representation” (Stevens 24) as she carefully cultivates an outward image of being the perfect and beautiful woman and friend of Milly. Lady Macbeth must also carefully cultivate her outward image after the murder of Duncan. She must ensure that no suspicion falls upon her and Macbeth and when Macbeth publicly and embarrassingly acts out when he claims to see Banquo’s ghost during a banquet, she steps in quickly to provide an explanation to the startled guests. Yet representation and performance do not come without a price. Tessa Hadley argues, “There is élan as well as sacrifice involved in the huge effort of performing well” (133) and although she writes of Kate, the sentiment equally applies to Lady Macbeth. Initially, both women appear revitalized and exhilarated as they await the fulfillment of their plans. Lady Macbeth eventually loses her ability to perform entirely as guilt consumes her. Where Macbeth becomes an insomniac, Lady Macbeth begins to sleepwalk. Worse still, she all but confesses her complicity in Duncan’s death in her sleep, thus losing completely the ability to force the world to view her as she chooses.

Kate’s possesses obvious and explicit reasons for deciding to scheme against Milly, where Lady Macbeth’s seem slightly more complex. Certainly, she believes that her husband has been unfairly passed over as heir to the Scottish throne and that he deserves it. Victoria Time argues that Lady Macbeth “is altruistic in the sense that she destroys out of love for her husband and her husband’s benefit, not from what she stands to gain,” (36) but this assertion proves problematical. Lady Macbeth will absolutely gain, as surely as Kate will benefit from Milly’s money. She may not be able to directly rule Scotland, since authority would lie with Macbeth, but she would be queen. As such, she would not be devoid of influence and power and given the closeness of the Macbeths at

the play's start, she has every reason to believe that he would confer with her in matters of importance to the state. As "Kate attempts, through Densher, to use the system to her own ends" (Olin-Ammentorp 40) so too does Lady Macbeth need her husband given she cannot herself be king.

Kate views Milly as the gateway to a fortune and thus to marriage to Densher, importantly a union of her choosing. Milly must thus devolve into something less than human, an objectified thing. Kate begins this process by referring to Milly both as "duck" (221) and "dove" (236), neither of which allows for Milly to claim a firm identity. The former denotes something harmless and benign and might be more appropriate as a term of endearment for a young child. The latter venerates Milly beyond the status of a young female in love with Densher and acts as no less a dehumanizing tactic. Where Densher appears sincere at the novel's end about his view of Milly as the beatific dove, Kate's words here ring false. She must contextualize Milly as something else, something other than the victim of her scheming. Later, Kate calls Milly a "thumping bank account," (283) dropping even the earlier pretense that her nicknames are harmless and charming. Kate's attitude proves markedly similar to that adopted by Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth does not view Duncan as a man – she cannot if she is to see his murder through. She attempts to view Duncan as nothing more than the crown he wears upon his head, or an obstacle blocking her husband's ascension to the throne. John Bayley asserts that both women lack a "true sense of others" (15) and that for Kate, "Milly's fate has been wholly appropriate because, after all, she loved Densher" (16).

However, Lady Macbeth does not always prove successful in completely occluding Duncan's humanity and therein lies the key to her unraveling. Tellingly, she

laments to Macbeth of Duncan, “Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done’t” (II.2.12-13). Further still, the image of Duncan’s bloody corpse haunts her up until her death. At the moment she looks in on the ghastly scene, she forever eliminates her ability to keep Duncan objectified and unreal. Literally and figuratively, blood covers her hands and she can no longer avow as she once did, “A little water clears us of this deed. How easy is it, then! (II.2.71-72). Alan Sinfield asserts that Lady Macbeth’s “initial bold behavior is succeeded eventually by a reversion to ‘feminine’ passivity, with an episode of nagging the husband in between” (Sinfield 56), but this sentiment fails to capture the complexity of her character. Certainly, her calls for the gods to neuter her, to remove her femininity and by implication, her empathy and gentler nature, fail and she does lose her initial aggressiveness. Yet she does not so much become passive as she does overpowered by Macbeth’s further scheming and exclusion of her as he devolves and her own very human guilt over her actions. Lady Macbeth eventually commits suicide, but Kate seems determined to ignore the consequences of her actions. Densher momentarily gains sexual power over Kate and certainly that exchange of power however brief damages their relationship, but Kate never budges in her attitude toward Milly. Once Milly dies, Kate does not react with any level of grief at all. Indeed, she argues that they did Milly a favor and that Milly “wanted nothing more” (462). If being female, in either *Macbeth* or *The Wings of the Dove*, necessitates feelings of empathy and caring toward others, then it is Kate who steadfastly remains a masculine figure. She continues to view their dealings with Milly as if it were a business transaction and nothing more, where Lady Macbeth cannot in the end set aside Duncan’s terrible suffering.

Densher and Kate, despite their separate attempts at dominance over one another, eventually succumb to the wedge driven between them by their plotting. At the novel's start, such an outcome seems inconceivable. The couple harbor no doubts about their predicament as they acknowledge "Life might prove difficult – was evidently going to; but meanwhile they had each other, and that was everything" (95). Anna Kventsel writes of the novel, "Life's adventure thus seems to be predicated on a symbolic shipwreck"⁴ (60), and Densher and Kate fully understand this reality. Michael Trask argues with similar imagery that Densher and Kate don't have a planned courtship and are subject to "the eddies of sheer fluke" (355), but again, the couple seems fully prepared to contend with obstacles to their marriage. They go off track when presented with the possibility of circumventing such circumstances and issues by using Milly, as the Macbeth's do through the plan to murder Duncan. Densher begs of Kate at one point, "Don't fail me. It would kill me" (290). Such a passionate plea transforms into irony as the novel unfolds. These two people, seemingly so in synch and in love, choose actions in which they fail each other. Densher vows that as regards Kate, he will "back her up in her mistakes" (299). He fails on a fundamental level to differentiate between the support given in a relationship between equals and one in which there is either a severe imbalance of power, or when the aims of one partner can only lead to ruin. The Macbeths, although they never make such an explicit statement, implicitly agree from the moment they plot against Duncan to support one another in the endeavor. After the Macbeths experience a permanent distance between one another, they begin to cope with the aftermath of Duncan's murder in disparate ways. Macbeth goes on to commit further bloodshed, while Lady Macbeth's guilt expands to consume her. Upon learning of her death, Macbeth

reacts with the words, "She should have died hereafter" (V.5.17), a line subject to great critical scrutiny and interpretation. At the most surface level, Macbeth's sentiment can be interpreted as a sign of his utter disregard now for the loss of his wife. He only has irritation at her choice to die at an inappropriate time for him personally. However, in a play otherwise marked by ambiguity, such a reading should not be the immediate stopping point. Macbeth, within just a few scenes now of his own death, cannot afford the time to mourn for the loss of his wife, and thus expresses the desire that she should have died at a time when he could properly feel her loss. Finally, he might be expressing lament over her having died at all. The "hereafter" of which he speaks refers to the wish that she might have survived and died of natural causes after having lived out the remainder of her life. Given that Macbeth still has not succumbed to his imminent defeat, his reaction to Lady Macbeth's death likely combines elements of all possible readings, combining the previous closeness of the couple with the alienation which followed. The witches opening conversation about "hurley-burley" "suggest the kind of metaphysical pitch-and-toss which is about to be played with good and evil" (Knights 35) and it thus follows that Macbeth's final sentiments toward his wife contain no clear cut delineation of meaning. Moral ambiguity certainly forms the backdrop of *The Wings of The Dove* money becoming the symbolic representation of corruption and chaos, much as the witches are in *Macbeth*. Less ambiguity surrounds Densher and Kate's final meeting, though not by much. Densher appears sincere in his declaration that he will gladly marry Kate "as we were" (509), but he remains firm that he will not do so should Kate opt for the money. Kate's expression that they cannot return to their pre-Milly state speaks to the finality of their parting. The only point left in question lies in whether or not Kate takes

the money. Where Macbeth and Densher both reject the sources of their temptation and personal corruption, Kate does not display adequate strength or desire to do so. Although James does not explicitly show Kate taking the money, everything about her character, even her final lack of regret over Milly's treatment, points to no other conclusion. Rather than attempt to navigate a future of her own making, free of outside influence be it money or the haunting presence of Milly Theale, Kate seems doomed by her own choice to be beholden to Milly's memory by accepting her fortune.

James understood the dramatic tension possible in a story based upon the closeness of a relationship which unravels by means of the same. In a letter to fellow author Mary Ward, James defends Densher and Kate's plotting over Milly's fortune writing "that understanding was *in its explicitness* simply the subject of the book" (372). Densher and Kate do not plot offstage, or in the quiet spaces between what is said, as sometimes is the case with James. Rather, like the Macbeths, Densher and Kate scheme over Milly's money with no room left for reader misinterpretation. They are simply too close as a couple so as to keep their thoughts private – they nearly function as one consciousness, at least at first. The movement toward their desired goal – money enough to marry – soon irretrievably breaks the once close lovers apart forever. As James's novel moves toward its conclusion, a palpable sense of sadness engulfs the story. None of the three main characters, Milly, Densher, or Kate, achieve a sense of true happiness. Milly attempts to live as much as she can, but she cannot escape the fact that her body will fail her. Further still, her own unwillingness to face uncomfortable truths enmeshes her with Densher and Kate in ways she might otherwise have avoided. Densher loses Kate, but also now carries the burden of having internally idealized Milly. She haunts him as

readily as Banquo haunts Macbeth. And then James gives the reader Kate, a complex and keenly aware young woman undone by the promise of an easy fortune. She may or may not take the money – James leaves that unstated – but she did also does not walk away from her plotting unscathed. Without making explicit references to *Macbeth*, James nonetheless distills the essence of that play, the intense intimacy between the Macbeths, into his own characters. He dispenses with the violence and gore of Shakespeare’s play and instead heightens the problem inherent in a relationship marked by claustrophobic closeness and an inability to view others as anything other than objects to be manipulate as needed to fulfill the couple’s desires. John Bayley writes of *Wings of the Dove*, “Love requires a mutuality of consciousness” (13), but such companionship possesses within it the potential for its own destruction. Densher, Kate, and also Milly, exist “in a state of continual decision-making organized around the conditional syntax ‘if only’” (Trask 363) and the reader comes to share this regret by the novel’s close. The greatest tragedy of both *Macbeth* and *The Wings of the Dove* lies in the sundering of bonds which begin with the promise of fulfillment and happiness for each of the couples. In the end, each of these characters leaves their respective stories alone.

Endnotes

¹ Critic Andrea Cabus-Caldwell asserts that James returned to the character Lady Macbeth in the titular character of *The Princess Casamassima*. She writes, “The Princess becomes the tangible center of the text – the central object that reveals specific qualities in all of the characters that relate to it” (127). Certainly, Kate can arguably be described as the focal point of the text, although she is not the only possibility. Given that Kate, Densher, and Milly relate to one another as points on a triangle, any one of the three at a given point in the text serves as this axis point. The conclusion of *The Princess Casamassima*, darker and explicitly bloodier than is typically found in James, supports some tie with *Macbeth*. At the novel’s end, Hyacinth, disillusioned and on the verge of committing a political assassination, instead turns his gun upon himself and commits suicide. James vividly describes the resulting scene as “a mess of blood, on the bed, in his side, in his heart” (595), which calls to mind the pervasive instances of blood imagery in *Macbeth*.

²As an example, Isabel informs Ralph, “You go too far” after he deems Gilbert Osmond “a sterile dilettante” in *The Portrait of a Lady* (373).

³In her 2008 novel *Lady Macbeth*, author Susan Fraser King explores just such a story. Although she draws in large part from historical sources and states that her purpose lies in writing a story separate from Shakespeare’s play, the reader cannot help but view the novel as a commentary on the Lady Macbeth so entrenched in popular culture.

⁴Kventsel draws parallels in her book *Decadence in the Late Novels of Henry James* between *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Tempest*, not the least of which lies in the imagery of the shipwreck and its consequences for all involved.

CHAPTER 5

A BOND TOO TIGHTLY WOVEN: ADAM VERVER AND KING LEAR

For Shakespeare's first audiences, his version of *King Lear* must surely have shocked the Globe into silence. The basic story of *King Lear*, that of the father who forces his daughters to declare their love for him in order to secure their inheritances and the resulting exile of his loyal daughter Cordelia, had already been in circulation prior to Shakespeare's production taking the stage. Yet Shakespeare's reworking of the ending of the story proved drastic: in other extant versions of the story, Cordelia survives (Greenblatt 538), at least to the end of the immediate events of the story, that of Lear reconciling with her. Shakespeare's *King Lear* ends with an utterly broken old man howling over the senseless execution of his beloved child. For Shakespeare, Lear must go through the process of physically losing Cordelia and then die himself in order to truly be redeemed. The key to understanding Shakespeare's radical and immensely sad choice lies in the relationship between Lear and Cordelia, one in which father fixates too heavily on daughter. For Henry James, Lear, along with Hamlet, shared the designation of "being finely aware" (*Art of the Novel* 62), meaning they possessed an incredible depth of perception as consciousnesses, which thus in turn compels the audience into giving over their full attention to these characters. Certainly, Adam Verver of *The Golden Bowl* similarly grabs the attention of the reader as he displays a certain level of this self-same awareness as Lear. Verver understands that his appeal to Charlotte Stant lies not in physical attraction, for he is old enough to be her father, but rather in his ability to

provide her with the financial security she has been otherwise unable to secure for herself. At the start of Shakespeare's play, Lear is both possessive of his favorite daughter Cordelia and certain she will publicly and eloquently declare her love for him, and James's Verver shares the same uncomfortable fixation on his daughter. Verver internally admits "his imagination...got over the ground faster than his judgment" (107), and this manifests itself most damning in his relationship with Maggie.

The Golden Bowl, while sharing many parallels to *King Lear*, also diverges in one striking regard. In James's novel, no exile of the once-favored child exists – Verver and Maggie continue to exist nearly in their own little world, with Maggie's husband only able at some moments to pull his wife's attention away from her father. As such, the novel becomes an examination and continuation of the claustrophobic bond between father and daughter, which in both texts at times possesses a hint of the incestuous, in mind if not in practice. Had Cordelia decided to follow her father's demand to declare her love for him, the two would not have separated and indeed, Lear intended to follow Cordelia to the home she was to make with her new husband and live out his life under her care, turning her into a mother-wife-daughter in the process. Cordelia declares to her father that upon marriage, her allegiance will also belong to her husband, but the intensity of Lear's demands renders her ability to do so unlikely. Cordelia shares this role with Maggie, as she becomes "daughter, son, wife, mother" (Cox 150) to Lear as he prepares to relinquish both his person and the largest portion of her estate into her keeping. The relationship between Verver and Maggie underscores just how unnatural and damaging such a tie can become. Father and daughter do continue to live together after their respective marriages, and dote on Maggie's son, Verver's grandson, as if he were the

biological father. Walter Wright argues that as a result of their insulation, “selfishness is unavoidable” (65), but this fails to take into account the choice they each make in continuing to choose each other over their respective spouses. Prior to their respective marriage, Adam and Maggie could arguably be said to have so little by way of outside intrusion that they have grown overly dependent on one another’s company. Once they both choose love interests, and certainly Maggie passionately loves Amerigo, their continued fascination with one another stems from their choice to consistently exclude their spouses. *King Lear* moves thematically through issues of inheritance and entitlement, love, madness, reclamation of identity, and moral decay, many of which appear in *The Golden Bowl*.

James, in his notebooks, wrote that the inspiration for the novel began with a story he had heard about what he deemed a “simultaneous marriage” (*Notebooks* 74) between a father and his only daughter. The image of the father and daughter becomes one of co-dependence in James’s mind as he fleshes out the plot. He envisions that the pair “cling together, and weep and wonder together” (*Ibid*), a description not at all out of place when applied to the relationship between Lear and Cordelia, most especially toward the play’s end when father and daughter prepare to live out the rest of their lives imprisoned but together. As is often the case with James, his keen sense of a potential story transformed snippets of conversation and stories into densely complex narratives of his own. James wrote in his correspondence of *The Golden Bowl*, “I hold the thing the *solidest*, as yet, of all my fictions” (*Life in Letters* 404) and he imbues a relatively simple story, that of two marriages and one affair, with dense symbolism. James, in his Preface to *The Golden Bowl* for the New York Edition explored the act of revising and revisiting a previous

work writing, “No march, accordingly, I was soon enough aware, could possibly be more confident and free than this infinitely interesting and amusing *act* of re-appropriation”(GB I) Shakespeare shares a similar trait with James in this regard. Shakespeare’s legacy stems not from his own persistent originality in terms of basic plots and characters, but of his ability to re-envision stories already known to his audiences. His eye for complication, for imbuing his characters with vivid humanity, whether expressed in the idealistic or the despotic, propels his plays over the stories he reworked.

In the Preface to the New York Edition of *The Golden Bowl*, James describes the characters as “deeply involved and more or less bleeding participants” (TGB xlii), which manifests in the novel most strikingly through the physical shattering of the bowl itself and in *King Lear* through the sickening blinding of a helpless and restrained Gloucester. Both moments serve as signals that the inner decay and loss of a moral compass pervading the stories can no longer be kept under wraps – they explode outward in two violent and impulsive acts. James also appreciated the power of poetry, of the ability language possesses to move a person out of him or herself. He wrote in a letter, “Poetry strains expression to the cracking-point” with Shakespeare and Dante singled out as individuals successful in actually cracking it altogether (*Life in Letters* 502-503). Further still, James asserts in the same letter that “we like it so tortured and suffering” (Ibid). Shakespeare’s ability to create anxiety, horror, and grief in a play like *King Lear* appealed to James as the highest expression of the artistic endeavor to create. Thus, the similarities between *The Golden Bowl* and *King Lear* can be seen as stemming from this sentiment, that good poetry, be it poem, play or novel, not only can entrance an audience, but does so best when the audience suffers emotionally along with the characters. *The*

Golden Bowl becomes a novel in which “everyone wants to behave well in this story and everyone behaves badly” (Brudney 398), feeding the intensity of the storyline which culminates in Adam Verver dragging Charlotte Stant off to America. Good intentions on behalf of all the parties involved yield to the baser emotions of the self and thus draw in the reader.

The novel’s title, as proves true with the manner in which James carefully constructs sentences and builds imagery, resonates beyond the plated and fissured golden bowl found in the novel. James must surely have been familiar with the reference to a “golden bowl” found in the Bible in Ecclesiastes 12:6. The line containing the specific referent reads, “Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.” However, the preceding and following lines provide further guidance into determining James’s intentions in selecting the title. This passage of Ecclesiastes begins with the warning that one should “Remember your Creator” (12:1), with the lines that follow asserting the essential temporary nature of one’s possessions. The thought completes with the line, “Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, all things are vanity!” (12:8). Indeed, the novel’s four protagonists, Amerigo, Maggie, Charlotte, and Adam, all make the mistake of privileging ego over both heart and common sense. Amerigo allows Adam to essentially “buy” him for Maggie, Maggie marries Amerigo knowing her father essential gifts him to her, Charlotte marries Adam for money and security, and Adam reigns over them all as if the curator of a museum possessing the world’s great treasures. The golden bowl of the novel, the one imitating something much more precious and already marred by a hairline crack, represents the impermanence of the life James’s characters construct based in large

part upon the pursuit of self-interest, but they all fail to heed the warning signs. Within the first couple of dozen pages, James peppers the text with images of both vessels and shipwrecks. An early conversation Amerigo has with Fanny Assingham contains words including “vessel,” “ship,” “dock,” and “berth” (21) foreseeing both the sundering of the bowl itself, but also of the symbolic shipwreck the characters make of their lives. Nautical imagery need not only serve as omens of doom, but in James’s novel, no evidence of positive associations exist. Even the voyage by ship at the novel’s end presages misery for Charlotte as she and Adam depart of American City.

Fanny assumes the role of the Fool in the novel. At the very level of her name, both her first and last (Assingham) associating her with both an “ass” and also a donkey, a beast of burden used by Shakespeare in *A Misummer Night's Dream* to denote the unlucky buffoon Bottom. Although all the novel’s characters arguably act foolishly, Fanny alone comments on the behaviors of those around her, often with keen and biting insight. Fanny, often maligned as a mere meddler in the romantic affairs of those around her, also stands outside of the most intense action of the story. She observes events, even provides the opportunity for Amerigo and Charlotte to begin their affair, but James also utilizes her outside status to provide relief from the claustrophobic interactions between his four protagonists. Fanny, for all her posturing, emerges as more ridiculous than anything. She looks “fed upon sherbets and waited upon by slaves” (26) speaking to an over pampered and overindulged woman careful to cultivate the outward appearance of wealth. Yet the reality proves the polar opposite. She actually possesses “a want of children” and a “want of wealth” (27). Although Fanny does have a husband, her lack of children and an apparent lack of fertility resonates later in the novel with Charlotte and

Adam, and also to Lear, episodes to be explored in greater detail further on. The immediate impact of Fanny's childlessness lies in her lack of her own family affairs to draw her attention away from those around her. She focuses her observations and advice completely on people like Maggie and such activities form the basis of her social and personal life, much as the Fool's sole purpose lies in interacting with Lear. The role of the Fool, and also of Fanny, both prove essential to their respective plots. The Fool alone enjoys the freedom "to speak of things to the king which may be necessary but dangerous to say" (75), evidenced by Lear's exile of his ally Kent after he questions Cordelia's punishment. The Fool forces the king to confront his belligerent behavior and also his essential lack of importance as an individual over the needs of his daughter and king by referring to Lear as "nothing," a quote explored in greater depth further on.

Fanny's actions blur the line between deviousness and truth teller, with James never providing the reader with a definitive portrait of her. Of everyone, Fanny assumes the role of "the most audacious player of this language game" engaged in by all the characters, but she also delivers a "bewildering disorientation of language" (Heyns 227). Fanny first tells Amerigo of Charlotte's arrival (28), knowing full well the two had been romantically entangled previously, but her intentions for doing so are not explicit. She could well be providing Amerigo with the information out of her own sense of amusement. She knows Amerigo will marry Maggie and his knowledge of Charlotte can only complicate that romance. Critic James Duban asserts that Fanny does not "acknowledge the social and personal benefit that motivates her to be a misadventurous matchmaker" (127). Yet Fanny does not act consistently in every situation, nor does she always seek to be the matchmaker. As such, Fanny need not be viewed in such a dark

light. As other episodes featuring Fanny demonstrate, she often provides those around her with simple truths, information which they owe to their own failure to think situations through then turn into calamities. Her revelation about Charlotte also serves as an implicit warning to Amerigo, one which he fails to heed. One of the Fool's earliest declarations to Lear after Cordelia's exile reads, "I am a fool; thou art nothing" (I.4.159). Certainly, Fanny does not possess this level of insight. She maintains a certain affectation, a need to appear to be viable as a lady of society. As such, though, the reader apprehends her as the fool. Her identity as such, however, remains stable throughout the novel. Amerigo, Charlotte, Maggie, and Adam will lose everything along the way, will become nothing, as the Fool says of Lear, but Fanny at least remains constant.

Fanny's role as more than just a trouble-maker emerges shortly after the scene with Amerigo, which finds her speaking this time with the newly-arrived Charlotte. Charlotte arrives with the idea of seeing Amerigo again, even knowing of his engagement and impending marriage. Fanny does not play the matchmaker in this instance, and instead tries to dissuade Charlotte from her plan of taking Amerigo with her to shop for a wedding present for Maggie. Fanny implores, "Can't I help you to decide?" (46), which places the question of the choice solely into Maggie's hands. After all, Fanny would be the more acceptable choice socially to accompany Charlotte on her shopping trip, a fact which certainly cannot escape the young woman's attention. Both are of a roughly parallel social standing, both lack a great fortune of their own, and an attractive and compelling personality like Charlotte would be better escorted by the older Fanny than by a young prince engaged to be married. *The Golden Bowl* enjoys a "complex perspective" (Wilson 24), evident here in these early scenes featuring Fanny as a hub of interaction. If

Fanny intended simply to meddle with the lives of others, whether from boredom, inexperience, or malice, she has a prime opportunity in this moment to facilitate Charlotte and Amerigo's excursion. Instead, she provides herself as an alternate escort and allows Charlotte free will to choose, in much the same way that the Fool comments on Lear's foolish behavior, but lacks the influence to change his behavior directly.

Fanny's most problematic choice lies in her decision to find Charlotte a husband, with Adam becoming her eventual spouse. Again, malice does not seem to motivate her choices and perhaps here she becomes guilty of Duban's accusation of "misadventurous matchmaking," but it does not appear to stem from her own desire to further herself. Although Adam takes the first steps in making overtures toward Charlotte, Fanny certainly encourages his endeavors. Here, she recognizes the inherent chaos that a single Charlotte can throw into Maggie's life and most misguidedly, she somehow reasons that marrying Charlotte thus defuses the threat. She also recognizes that Maggie's own marriage only serves to compound what she perceives as Adam's lonely widower life. A union between the two thus eradicates two potentially damaging situations. Further still, she may believe that marrying Charlotte to a much older and wealthier Adam will provide Charlotte with the financial comfort she has sought for years. In so doing, this line of logic would follow, Charlotte would privilege the monetary windfall over any physical attraction she feels toward Amerigo. What Fanny fails to take into account takes two main forms, and in this sense she definitely becomes more foolish than the Fool. First, given Fanny's own attempts at mingling in high society, she mistakenly assumes that Charlotte will be content with money and that security under Adam's roof will trump any notions she has of pursuing Amerigo. Fanny overlays too much of her own

insecurities and motivations in her reading of Charlotte and fails to fully understand that renewing a relationship with Amerigo has been in the young woman's mind all along. Second, and along this same line of thought, Fanny does not understand that placing Charlotte and Amerigo in such close quarters will only lead to trouble. Given her own precarious place amongst higher social circles, Fanny undoubtedly believes that Charlotte will follow all the rules of propriety expected of her. Neither woman possesses the means on her own to act as she will without a thought to the consequences.

One of Fanny's greatest mistakes lies in misapprehending Maggie's character. Much is made amongst some readers and critics, including Duban, of Fanny's role in introducing Maggie to Amerigo. Again, she does assume that role of matchmaker, but her motivations again possess no hint of ill intent. She cannot possibly conceive of a future situation in which Charlotte returns and makes overtures toward Amerigo. Maggie will be treated in great detail further on, but as Fanny sees her, Maggie "wasn't born to know evil" (59) and this belief propels Fanny to try to keep Charlotte and Amerigo apart, with Charlotte's marriage to Adam becoming the worst possible means of achieving this. Moreover, Fanny is not confident that Maggie could withstand the revelation of a previous love affair, presumably sexual in nature, between the pair. Maggie certainly enters the novel as an overindulged young woman naïve to the ways in which people willingly deceive one another. However, part of what she learns as the novel progresses is "what is involved in gaining access" (Brudney 405) to people whose company she wishes to keep. This does not indicate that Maggie would find matters such as seduction appalling, but rather that she must observe those around her and find the means by which she can herself manipulate circumstances to her own liking. This will prove the case in

her handling of both Amerigo and Charlotte later in the story. After Adam and Maggie marry Charlotte and Amerigo, James crafts a scene wherein all but Maggie play a card game. Maggie watches, perplexed and seemingly struggling to follow the fast-paced action, an analogy for her “imperfect understanding of the game of life” (464). Maggie’s goal lies in learning how to master others. Critic Daniel J. Schneider agrees that Maggie possesses “a sense of sin” (923), although in his overall argument he contends that Maggie remains a sympathetic character. In no instance does James paint Fanny as overtly and intentionally cruel, so Fanny’s failure to disclose Amerigo and Charlotte’s former involvement stems from her lack of scope of vision, regarding both Maggie’s ability to contend with unsavory matters and Amerigo and Charlotte’s willingness to commit adultery.

Later in the novel, Fanny comes to Maggie’s defense, and also to Adam’s, in defending what she deems his “perfectly natural interest in his daughter” (191). However, Hugh Stevens argues that this is simply an outward show of unity, as Fanny truly sees “Maggie’s incestuous attachment to her father” (57). As with Lear’s Fool, loyalty remains key. However, Fanny does keep silent to Maggie regarding her own suspicions about Amerigo and Charlotte, an instance where she should have declared what she knew and allowed Maggie to follow her own course of action from there. Maggie brings her suspicions and her jealousy to Fanny, but Fanny lies about her own and says of the possibility of an affair, “Never for an instant” (387). James does not exclude Fanny from the remainder of the novel after this episode, nor does he render her less important as a touchstone/truth speaker in the novel. Indeed, she redeems herself for her prior silence. James writes that Fanny takes hold of the golden bowl and “dashed it boldly to the

ground" (430), rather than leaving the task to Maggie, perhaps the immediately obvious choice since her husband commits the act of infidelity with her best friend. Instead, Fanny shatters the symbol of the Verver family's outward harmony, signifying again her role as both outsider and the one character who interacts with the four principal protagonists of James's plot, much as Lear's Fool interacts with and comments on the interrelationships between the play's characters.

In the most striking parallel between Fanny and Lear's Fool, Fanny treats Adam Verver "as if she were nursing a sick baby" (101). Her overly attentive care of Adam supports a misguided Fanny who supports his marriage to Charlotte, but not one who seeks to deliberately cause him pain. Although she outwardly defends Adam's close ties to Maggie, James's choice of phrase here implies that she feels more concern for Adam than she reveals publicly. But tending to Adam as if he were a "sick baby" implies that she apprehends Adam's need to have something more in his life than just his daughter. Her flaw, again, lies in going too far with identifying herself as a mother-protector of Adam, rather than a woman of roughly the same age. Lear's Fool cares for the king in a similar manner, although the Fool eschews the problems of viewing his relationship with Lear in terms of father and son. Instead, he refers consistently to Lear as "nuncle," a contraction of "mine uncle," thus avoiding the problems Lear already has with the children in his life while at the same time refusing to assume that selfsame role. He nonetheless stays at Lear's side, even when this means a night out exposed to the elements and a raging tempest, and cares for an increasingly unhinged Lear as best he can. Moreover, he bluntly attempts to force Lear into acknowledging his own faults when he comments, "Thou madest thy daughters thy mothers" (I.4.138-139). Fanny, perhaps

blinded by a maternal instinct to protect Adam, fails to make a similar comment to him, namely that of making Maggie mother-wife-daughter and this omission, this lack of total outward honesty, does Adam the greatest injustice. Adam never has to confess any misgivings about his actions to any outside party since no one confronts him. The Fool's bluntness with Lear produces the opposite effect: an early recognition of his terrible wronging of Cordelia. Lear admits to the Fool of Cordelia, "I did her wrong" (I.5.22) and although Lear will go on to rail against his daughters and persist in proclaiming the rightness of actions against everyone, this admission proves striking. James, with the character of Fanny Assingham, provides both a Fool and a fool, a woman capable of great concern and care, but whose lack of foresight and understanding of those around her, leads her to stay silent when her intercession proves most needed. In *The Golden Bowl*, "All of James's characters, Maggie included, are both selfish and, as Fanny Assingham says, 'innocent'" (Schneider 922) and in a profound way, Fanny acts as the reader's touchstone to both these elements as she interacts with the novel's foursome.

Maggie and Charlotte form an interesting duality in the novel, one in which both women prove equally capable of conniving and underhanded behavior. Although Maggie remains the obvious tie to Adam, and also to *King Lear* in the role she shares with Cordelia as devoted daughter, James does not do as Shakespeare does¹. Where Cordelia remains above the ugliness around her, Maggie eventually willfully enters the fray. Charlotte, too, complicates matters. Although her brash invitation to Amerigo to come shopping with her initially paints her as the seductress, James forces the reader to examine this initial presentation by the novel's end. If Cordelia emerges as the undisputed victim of the ugliness of humankind's basest actions and desires, Maggie does

not quite so easily fit the same role. James instead forces the reader to contend with the possibility that Charlotte, worldly and unfaithful though she is, becomes the most victimized character of the novel. Although James gives the reader the opportunity to view events through Maggie's eyes, James opts not to show Charlotte's consciousness directly. He "never lets us see inside her" (Welsh 26) and as such, without the benefit of seeing her inner mind at work, the reader struggles to place her along a continuum running from instigator to victim. Jean Kimball asserts that while Maggie functions as both a consciousness and a "reporter of the action," she may not be "the novel's heroine" (450). Kimball goes on to liken Charlotte to Milly Theale, another character whose ultimate purpose in the text, whether as innocent sacrifice of others' machinations or calculated plotter, although Kimball falls on the side of finding her to be much more of the victim. The novel closes with Maggie, thus since her "interpretation is the last" she "draws us closer to her vision of events" (Yeazell 171), yet this does not by default render her heroic, but simply more adept at winning, with Amerigo as the prize. Charlotte must figure out how to survive.

Certainly, Maggie's upbringing impacts her development. Her mother has died some years past, and even while she and Adam were married, the union was not a happy one. *The Golden Bowl* shares this narrative feature with *King Lear*, that of the absent mother. Maggie's mother dies when she is ten, while Shakespeare does not account for the fate of the mother of Lear's children. In both cases, the lack of a maternal presence unravels the relationship between father and daughter, allowing it to become co-dependent at best, with a hint of incestual interest at worst. The relationship between Maggie and Adam will be explored in-depth further on, but Maggie unmistakably "was

her mother, oh yes – but her mother and something more” (109). John Landau writes of Maggie’s mother, “were she in the novel, Maggie’s relationship with her father would surely be very different” (133) and arguably, even if her mother had lived longer into Maggie’s teen years, the intense bond with Adam could not have formed to the same extent. Maggie does seem to be attracted to Amerigo, and both she and her father find his title absolutely captivating. However, Adam and Maggie share a “travesty of a marriage vow between a child and her parent” (Welsh 25) so Amerigo enters an already crowded symbolic marriage bed.

Thus when Maggie marries, her motivations are less genuine and deeply felt love than a fascination with a lively gift her father’s fortune purchases for her. She has remained the eternal child, inextricably bound to her father and she has failed to form an identity separate from him. Marriage does little to change that. Maggie weds “without giving up her father” (Kimball 455) and although she does eventually have a son with Amerigo, that child does little to bond husband and wife. Instead, the child becomes “a link between a mama and a grandpa” (115). Cordelia recognizes the inherent problems that an overly close relationship between father and daughter can have on her own marriage, a danger not seen by Maggie. Part of Cordelia’s reasoning for refusing to praise Lear as her sister’s have done before her centers around the issue of marriage. Cordelia acknowledges the limit of the father-daughter bond declaring, “I return those duties back are right fit – obey you, love you, honour you” (I.1.95-96) but once she marries, “Half my love with him, half my care and duty” (I.1.100) transfer to her husband. Maggie instead mimics her father’s tendency to treat all others as pieces in a collection devoid of feelings and motivations of their own. Even after the revelation of Charlotte and

Amerigo's adultery, "Maggie fails, however, to move toward the cardinal recognition of her own and Adam's culpability in placing the 'sposi' in a position of great temptation" (Landau 115). Maggie and Adam remain "unseen, unfollowed" (117) by all including Charlotte and Amerigo. Even to the novel's last scene, Maggie views both herself and her father as innocent victims of their spouses, without ever considering the possibility that their own refusal to fully commit as spouses themselves created both distance and opportunity needed for the affair to take place.

Maggie does become wise to the world enough that she begins to both worry about and resent Charlotte and Amerigo's closeness and she correctly deduces that they are conducting an affair. Walter Wright argues that Maggie needs Amerigo and Charlotte "because she also is imperfect, because she lacks understanding and must come of age" (64), but he does not view her in a negative light. Her actions and words both challenge this interpretation of her character. She takes her knowledge to Amerigo, not to her father, and in so doing appears perhaps poised to break free of Adam. Yet James does not provide Maggie with so quick or easy a transformation. Maggie enjoys a closer relationship with Amerigo than Adam ever does with Charlotte, with the revelation of his infidelity locking them closer together through this shared shame. Certainly, neither Maggie nor Amerigo has an interest in those in their social circles finding out about the matter, nor would either benefit from divorce. Amerigo would lose any interest in Maggie's money, while Maggie remains unwilling to concede defeat in losing Amerigo. She reveals an ugliness to her character through her ability to rationalize Charlotte's pain as a woman trapped in a loveless marriage and soon to be separated from her love, Amerigo. Maggie understands that Charlotte will suffer, but "Maggie speaks and thinks

of that sacrifice almost as if it were a celebration” (Yeazell 176). Maggie watches her father lead Charlotte away and imagines a “long, silken halter looped round her beautiful neck” (523). She then proceeds later to turn her eyes away from the spectacle of Charlotte and Adam leaving and buries her head in Amerigo’s chest, an act which speaks more of possession than affection. Indeed, “Maggie weeps, but Maggie wins” (Schneider 924). She proves more cunning than Charlotte ever anticipates. Where Cordelia maintains a consistent goodness, Maggie acts in her own best interests as well as her father’s. Charlotte’s banishment secures Maggie’s marriage to Amerigo and prevents Adam from finding out about the affair. The father-daughter bond finally breaks by virtue of the distance between them now, but where Cordelia understood that this was a natural part of the process of becoming a wife, Maggie gives up her father only because no other option exists. Indeed, Adam’s decision to bring Charlotte to America “would be very much to Maggie’s taste” (Landau 104) and allows for her to see Charlotte punished. Maggie thus shares only the intense relationship with her father with Cordelia. Although both women begin as innocent victims, Cordelia remains thus throughout the entirety of the play. Maggie, on the other hand, evolves to her changing circumstances. She matches the scheming of those around her and effectively exiles her romantic rival, even at the cost of finally being forced to give up her father.

Charlotte comes from less ideal circumstances than Maggie and expends a good deal of her energy attempting to find a husband of secure financial standing. Although Charlotte is never described as a stunning beauty, she is a “strong, charming girl” (34), one whose personality proves magnetic to men, including Adam and Amerigo, but who ultimately has not found a spouse. She fails, however, to recognize the inherent freedom

she possesses in being unattached. She does not realize that having “existence” (44), as the narrator says of Charlotte, should be privileged over the possibility of financial security in a marriage of convenience. She enjoys an “independent quality” (Kimball 458) and proves less emotionally dependent on others than Maggie. The reader could scarce picture Maggie acting in kind, accustomed as she is to the constant company of her father. Charlotte’s arrival heralds the last opportunity she has to see Amerigo, demonstrating that while she might like to place a higher value on love than on money, in the end she cannot. She tells Amerigo she wants “to have one hour alone with you” (67) but despite their compatibility, neither one will risk a moneyless marriage. In this respect, James aligns Charlotte with Lear’s daughters Goneril and Regan. Like them, Charlotte will do what outwardly needs to be done to secure her financial position. In so doing, she agrees to marry Adam, not as a victim but one who “walks open-eyed into a situation with all the ingredients for unhappiness” (Kimball 452).

Like Fanny, Charlotte misapprehends Maggie’s character. She underestimates Maggie’s capacity for both hurt and revenge when she comments, “She lets it go” (76), referring to anything negative someone she loves does to her. This confidence in Maggie’s saint-like ability to forgive any and all wrongs drives Charlotte to see Amerigo before his marriage to Maggie. Even if Maggie were to find out about their previous romance, Charlotte expects her friend to put it out of her mind. Of the novel’s four principal characters, Adam, Maggie, Charlotte, and Amerigo, “intimacy is absent” (Brudney 403) between them, save for Adam and Maggie. Although this becomes most readily apparent after the two weddings occur, James sets the stage for this lack of understanding others early. The reader learns only that Charlotte and Maggie have a

friendship and keep up some level of correspondence. The pair never appears to be truly friends, though. Never do they share inside jokes, stories, shared experiences, memories. In keeping with the theme of collecting prominent in the novel, James presents the two women as simply having acquired one another without true thought or care. Moreover, Charlotte does not let her guard down by her own admission, except with Amerigo. She encounters two sets of people: those who “make use of her” and those “so afraid she’ll make use of *them*” (134), leaving no evidence of trusted people in her life.

The golden bowl of the novel’s title enters the story by virtue of Charlotte and by extension Amerigo, who accompanies her on her shopping expedition. It emerges as the novel’s most profound symbol of discord and pain. When Charlotte spies the bowl in a curio shop, she admires it for its oddness, believing that the randomness of the cheap bowl as a gift would delight Maggie to no end. However, this bowl, supposedly “cut out of a single crystal” (85) already has a “weak place” (87), or a visible fissure running through it. Amerigo first notices this crack, not Charlotte, foreshadowing the renewed romance with Charlotte. More pointedly, the flaw in the bowl will not cause it to shatter into pieces, but will instead cause it to split (87). Charlotte does present the bowl as a gift to Maggie, flaw and all. That the flaw does not eventually split the bowl into pieces proves interesting, as it takes Fanny’s calculated smashing of the bowl to the ground which finally breaks it to pieces. The fissure’s presence from the start signifies that these two marriages would never have succeeded under any circumstances. This deflects blame away from Charlotte as the villainess of the novel. She does enter in to an affair, but if that were the action on which the plot turned, then James would surely have not revealed a fissure in the bowl until after the revelation of adultery. Therefore, the ultimate failure

of these unions finds its source elsewhere, with all evidence pointing to Adam Verver, who works in concert with his daughter.

The golden bowl represents more than the sundering of trust and fidelity in the novel. The bowl also represents fertility, and thus sexual vitality, as well. Critic Robin Hoople finds that the novel contains imagery such as the bowl and the silken halter which are “all perfectly metaphorical, but all part of the sensual character” (236), specifically regarding their appeal to the senses, not to sensuality. Yet the tactile nature of the bowl, its roundness affecting both vision and touch, also speak to a sense of sensuality and fertility. Although Maggie bears Amerigo a son, Charlotte does not experience the same fortune. This lack of children pains Charlotte, as she comments, “Ah, if I could have had one--!” (225) and James heavily implies through his wording that the fault lies with Adam and not with her. Charlotte suggests by both the choice of “could” and the dashes cutting off the remainder of her thought that her current situation as Adam’s wife makes conception impossible. One of two possibilities exists: either Adam is no longer fertile himself, or the pair was never or had quickly ceased to be sexually intimate. The issue of barrenness becomes tied many times in literature to a failure of a king or ruler to properly tend to his duties, or some other catastrophic problem with the land and its people. As brief examples, King Arthur’s Guinevere tries unsuccessfully to bear children, and the Fisher King of the grail legends has a wound in his thigh, another symbol of infertility. Again, James places the systemic failure of the Verver unions back to Adam. *King Lear* also touches on themes of fertility and sterility. Lear reserves one of his ugliest invectives not for Cordelia, but for Goneril. He curses her by invoking the heavens, “Into her womb convey sterility. Dry up in her the organs of increase” (I.4.240-241). Lear’s rifts within

his own family also become tied to issues of fertility. Not only does he genuinely wish barrenness on his daughter, but he selfishly fails to realize how a lack of offspring only serves to cut his own legacy short. Indeed, all three of Lear's children die before producing offspring, bringing the line of the king to an abrupt end. Another child might perhaps have allowed Adam to move forward, away from the intensity of his tie to Maggie and into a happier marriage to Charlotte. Instead, the pair remains incompatible on all levels and this lack of intimacy becomes systemic, infecting all four of the protagonists.

Although Charlotte takes actions which serve her own interests, from contacting Amerigo to marrying Adam, James imbues her with striking similarities to Cordelia, more so even than Maggie. She may be amoral at best, immoral at worst, but Charlotte never lords her affair over Maggie. Indeed, James never depicts her as committing adultery so as to be able to wound her friend with the knowledge of it. Further still, the act of fixating becomes of paramount importance. Maggie and Adam fixate on each other, Maggie fixates on the attentions of her husband, and Adam focuses on the behavior of Charlotte and Amerigo, his newest acquisitions. Amerigo's attention splits between his wife and Charlotte, along with attempting to keep up the appearance and behavior of a proper son-in-law to Adam. However, Charlotte alone is the "only character who is herself concerned with only one relationship" (97), that of her and Amerigo. Maggie and Adam both look upon Amerigo as a sort of figure come to life, a prince who can delight and amuse them. Charlotte alone possesses a deeper connection with him, rendering their relationship the most honest of any in the novel. This parallels Cordelia's own unwavering honesty and loyalty. She alone refuses to participate in Lear's love contest

because of its inherent distastefulness, and she also welcomes her father back from the brink of insanity with the simple words, “No cause, no cause” (IV.6.69) when Lear tries to apologize for his actions. Cordelia and Charlotte both suffer exile for their honesty. If Cordelia gains “presence-heightened-through-banishment” (Reid 124), and since as Charlotte does share striking parallels to Cordelia, the question emerges as to whether or not Charlotte gains in like kind from her own banishment to America. The halter Maggie fancies she can see around Charlotte’s neck parallels the rope with which Cordelia is hung at the play’s end. It proves such a powerful symbol that some productions of *King Lear* have the severed rope still bound around Cordelia’s neck when Lear carries her back on stage. Charlotte meets her fate willingly, but at the expense of her spirit and her freedom. In the end, both women become the victims of a male-centered system to which they fall prey. Edmund manipulates the system of crime and punishment so that Cordelia winds up executed before his stay order can be delivered while Adam uses his money and identity as Charlotte’s husband to whisk her away to America. Both women, too, find little comfort in the companionship of women. Cordelia’s sisters care for little beyond their own self-interests, while Maggie emerges as a woman capable of profound vengeance.

Amerigo acts as a bridging character internal to the immediate action, as opposed to Fanny’s more distanced position. As such, he connects the reader to Maggie and Charlotte as eventual rivals for his attention, yet also to Adam. Like Charlotte, Amerigo enters in to his marriage with Maggie understanding that to the Ververs, his value lies in his title and the bragging rights his assimilation into their family subsequently provides. James writes, “The Prince had always liked his London” (3), and both the choice of

referring to him in the abstract as “the” Prince (James’s capitalization) and having the Prince consider London “his” paint him as a man interested in maintaining his slipping status. He knows full well that his marriage to Maggie centers on money, given his own dwindling resources. Instead of matchmakers or romantic evenings together, Maggie and Amerigo unite only after the Verver’s lawyers “had reached an inspired harmony with his own man of business” (4). Herein lies a striking parallel to the opening scenes of *King Lear*. The play opens with the question of the division of Lear’s kingdom, and of which daughter will receive the best portion of his estate. Lear awaits a public declaration of love from all three of his daughters, with these outward professions, whether genuine or not, becoming the key to fortune. The matters of money supersede honesty of feeling, as it “lies in the impropriety, indignity, and necessity of asking whether one is loved” (McEachern 228). Additionally, Cordelia’s marriage to one of two suitors also factors in to the actions taken at the start of the play. When Cordelia refuses to effusively fawn over her father, Lear reacts decisively and furiously by both rejecting her and refusing to deliver on her promised dowry. Lear “is expecting that Cordelia will lack a husband as she lacks a dowry” (Goodland 33), but he miscalculates. Indeed, France continues in his pursuit of her hand declaring, “Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor...I take up what’s cast away” (I.1.248, 251). A marriage which once would have been sealed with a handsome dowry now occurs solely due to emotions. Amerigo appears to have little interest in a similar arrangement with Maggie. His eye wanders to other women, and thus other possibilities, from the start. He ogles women he passes, looking for “possibilities in faces shaded” (3) by hats and parasols and thus only by virtue of the Verver’s money does Amerigo agree to give up the bachelor life. Amerigo may begin as little more than

Mr. Verver's "spoils" (15), but he assumes the role willingly, even gladly. Amerigo, Maggie, and Adam all fail to entertain the dangers inherent in a marriage initiated over the discussion of finances, a situation avoided by Cordelia.

Amerigo ultimately chooses to stay with Maggie, but James avoids an ending in which Amerigo's reasons for doing so appear with clarity. Walter Wright argues that Amerigo "is prepared finally to love his wife without reservation" (71), but this analysis proves far from definite. James himself describes Amerigo as "a foredoomed, entangled, embarrassed agent in the general imbroglio, actor in the offered play" (*Art of the Novel* 329). The descriptor "foredoomed" is of special interest. Although Amerigo enters into marriage with Maggie fully aware of that he needs their money and they want his title, the implication of doom carries further than just this fact. Amerigo's last line of the novel, spoken to Maggie as Charlotte and Adam depart for American City, reads, "I see nothing but *you*" then Maggie "as for pity and dread of them (his eyes), she buried her own (her eyes) in his breast" (567). He recognizes that his fate will be permanently bound to Maggie and his means of coping lies in fully embracing his doom. Maggie instinctively apprehends this and cannot bear to witness what she has both wanted (his focus exclusively on her) and bought at great price. James asserted that Shakespearean drama often takes as its subject "the passion of princes" (James qtd. in Kventsel 135), and in his own novel, he depicts the potential disaster of just such a character.

That the novel ends with images of both seeing and blindness recalls one of *King Lear*'s most horrific sequences: the blinding of Gloucester. Mark McDonald describes the blinding as "the most horrible scene in all of Shakespeare" (133) and few could resist being moved to pity the sight of the old man restrained and Cornwall physically gouging

out his eyes. At this point in the play, all sense of community is lost in a moment of depravity and madness. As Cornwall prepares to blind Gloucester, one of his servants tries to prevent it, declaring, "Better service have I never done you than now to bid you hold" (III.7.72-73). Regan kills the servant for daring to defend Gloucester. This act of cruelty so moves a loyal servant that he risks his own life to avoid seeing it come to pass. Shakespeare presents evidence early in the play supporting Regan and Goneril's concerns over Lear's destructive retinue. Here, however, no justification at all exists and this event represents a turning point in the action and heralds the violence and agony yet to come.

The Golden Bowl contains an odd dialogue between Charlotte and Amerigo. It takes place after both marriages, but prior to the two commencing their affair. Amerigo and Charlotte discuss places they would like to visit together, leading to "Gloucester, Gloucester, Gloucester," a phrase and word repeated several times over the course of a few pages. In the first instance, Amerigo repeats "Gloucester" in his mind (262), then he speaks it to Charlotte (263), then he and Charlotte speak it back and forth in conversation (265). The repetition and the awkwardness it produces, jarring and strange as it is in the novel, certainly merits the importance James placed on its placement. James knew London and its environs intimately, having lived there by the time of *The Golden Bowl* for many years and having visited even prior to that so it seems doubtful that he selected "Gloucester" without some deeper symbolic purpose in mind. Adam and Maggie speak of themselves as being "married" (127) to one another, leaving Charlotte "deposed from her rightful position as Adam Verver's wife" (Kimball 461) and Amerigo equally alienated. Amerigo and Charlotte, effectively abandoned by their spouses, now stand on the precipice of a choice from which there will be no turning back.

Shakespeare imbues Lear with ambiguity, beyond that of a possible incestual interest he may have in Cordelia. Lear outwardly wears the accoutrements of the king: even after he “retires” from the throne, he continues to refuse to surrender the power and command afforded him by his office. Later, he moves into the ambiguous and liminal space of insanity as he battles the storm, the heavens, and his own abominable treatment toward Cordelia. James wraps much of *The Golden Bowl* in a shroud of ambiguity, forcing the reader to deduce the nature of the adultery between Charlotte Stant and Amerigo, whether it is fully consummated or not, as well as the manner in which the novel’s characters truly relate to themselves and to one another. Although some of Verver’s motivations remain clouded, especially as regards his knowledge, or not, of Charlotte’s affair with Amerigo, Maggie emerges as the character most entrenched in and guilty of ambiguity.

James, in one of his letters, differentiated between the reality of aging and its process. He wrote that while he does not mind “being old,” he does not “like growing *older*” (316). Perhaps aging becomes easier to contend with were it to simply occur overnight in marked leaps. One would simply awaken to a new paradigm, a new and permanent way of relating to body and mind. The mechanics of aging, of the slow decline from possessing all of one’s faculties to diminishing both physically and mentally, and the span over which it occurs makes all the much harder to bear. Certainly, Lear shares this sentiment, this reluctance to acknowledge the coming of time and for Lear, the relinquishment of power it brings. Lear wants to enjoy the best parts of growing older, namely his “retirement” after relinquishing the throne, but he cannot come to terms with the other consequences of his loss of title and advancing age. When challenged first by

Cordelia's refusal to indulge him with words, then later by Goneril and Regan's reluctance to entertain his disrespectful retinue, Lear sets everyone save Cordelia down a path of increasing escalation of cruelty and madness. Critic Lawrence Schehr, "Incest characterizes Lear's desire that his daughters love (desire) him" (62) and certainly, the possibility of incestual desire haunts both Shakespeare's play and James's novel.

However, Lear's possessive interest of Cordelia also stems from the diminishment he feels with the coming of advancing age. He needs for Cordelia especially to confirm for his court her deep love for him, providing him with both paternal pride and confirmation of his power as sovereign power. Instead, familial bonds disintegrate. *The Golden Bowl* hinges in large part on similar themes, of a father and daughter in this case both guilty of excessive interest in one another. Adam Verver attempts to dominate others, except his power stems from money, not from title. As the story progresses, the value of individuals disappears. Instead, "value is determined in relation to other things, other values, other interests" (Heyns 235) with the self becoming the Other as much as characters alienate themselves from one another.

The relationship between Maggie and Adam gains much critical focus, divided between those who view the relationship as dysfunctionally close and those who see a hint of incestual interest between the pair. Critic John Landau acknowledges, "The hint that there is more in their relationship than a 'normal' father-daughter intimacy has been much commented upon" (106) and such debates shall remain without definitive textual proof. James never overtly and explicitly displays anything sexual between Maggie and Adam, with Adam appearing almost asexual as he relates to Charlotte. However, evidence abounds supporting that they feel incestual desire but have not acted upon it. By

their own words, evidenced earlier in this argument, they view themselves as married to one another. Alexander Walsh asserts that “Lear seems to have thought he would please Cordelia” (25) as he compares Lear and Cordelia’s relationship to the uncomfortable “marriage” between Maggie and Adam. Indeed, Adam “buys” Amerigo for his daughter without ever intending to cede his place in her life. Most darkly, Adam is “employing another man to make love to his daughter and his wife” (Person 152) since he cannot have a sexual relationship with Maggie and he later seems unwilling or unable to do so with Charlotte. Maggie only begins to show a hint of developing an interest in someone other than her father after she marries Amerigo. The reasons for this prove quite troubling. Amerigo fascinates her and she finds him sexually desirable, allowing her to indulge her libido in a socially appropriate manner. This results in a twist on the traditional fairy tale patterns which tends to end with the marriage of a young woman to an appropriate suitor. Maggie and Amerigo marry at the beginning of the novel, but “the triangular relation of father, daughter, and suitor that is latent in most stories of courtship is here brought into daring prominence *after* the marriage” (Welsh 24). Since Amerigo assumes a subordinate role to keep in Adam’s good graces, this potential triangle quickly loses potency as a source of conflict. Maggie remains in Adam’s company for most of her marriage. Adam marries under different but equally dubious circumstances. He sees marrying Charlotte as a means to please Maggie, a “service to his daughter” (154). James sets this scenario up for failure: Adam has a spouse, Maggie has a spouse, Adam and Maggie maintain their intimacy since the spouses can entertain one another.

Adam shares the worst of traits with Lear, extending beyond an excessive interest in a daughter. Both men wield power to suit their whims, and both do so with disastrous

results. Lear expects his daughters to do whatever he wants them to in order to obtain their inheritances, then uses his power as king capriciously to banish both Cordelia and then Kent. Further still, Lear's whole purpose in dividing his kingdom before his death proves troubling. He uses his power as king to abdicate his throne, an act Shakespeare's playgoers would have taken as one in defiance of God himself. If monarchs rule by divine right, then they cannot simply "retire" from the duties of the position when retirement begins to become more appealing. Yet Lear does not even do this. He wants to cede the duties and obligations associated with being king without relinquishing his title. He wants to still do as he pleases, even bringing an overly large and destructive retinue with him to Goneril and Regan's homes. Adam wields his immense fortune as his own means of controlling the behavior of those around him. A king collects subjects, hangers-on, courtiers, and the like. Adam also collects people. The narrator describes Adam as "one of the great collectors of the world" (75), and Amerigo and Charlotte become the prized pieces in his impressive inventory. Adam justifies marrying Amerigo to Maggie since in his mind, his love of Maggie "justifies any use" (Heyns 245) of anyone or anything. Robert Reid writes of Lear, "Through the illusion of self-creation Lear asserts his absolute godlike being and potency" (123) in the face of the threat of death, yet this phrase has larger implications for both Lear and Adam. Lear *always* acts under this illusion, this idea that he alone has the power and right to shape his world as he sees fit. As such, he can victimize or indulge as the whim takes him. Similarly, Adam uses his money to force the world into one of his own making. He will bring people into his and Maggie's lives, but makes sure that both his money and the threat of being denied access

to it will keep them in line. Lear and Adam will move through a process of loss as a means to try to rectify their characters, albeit with guarded success.

Robert Reid sees *King Lear* as working through two separate cycles, both of which featuring Lear as catalyst. The first chronicles Lear's use and abuse of power, the second in which he "enforces his own humiliation and exile" (126). Adam follows along much the same trajectory, save for the issue of humiliation, which James keeps ambiguous. Even up until the very last act of the novel, Adam attempts to control the behavior of others through the power his great wealth affords him. The novel concludes with Adam abandoning Europe altogether to return in exile from his daughter to America. He takes Charlotte with him, leading to the possibility that he has known of her infidelity with Amerigo and opts for a solution by which he and his daughter save face and keep their spouses while precluding the possibility of the affair continuing. What remains unclear is precisely what level of knowledge Adam has of the intrigue going on under his roof. Critic R.B.J. Wilson wonders what Adam might be capable of "if Maggie's happiness were in any way imperiled" since it "is the one emotional tie he indulges" (137). Regan says of her father Lear, "He hath ever but slenderly known himself" (I.1.288-289) and Adam proves guilty of the same tendency. His refusal to do little but participate in self-indulgence leaves him blind to the inherent problems of his early actions, namely "buying" a husband for Maggie and marrying a beautiful young wife with the understanding that she was being added to his own collection. Taking Charlotte to America takes care of any suspicions Adam might have about his wife and Amerigo, preserves Maggie's happiness, and allows him to continue to view the world as he sees fit. If he indeed does not know of the affair, and given the level of confidence between

father and daughter, one would expect him to have brought his suspicions to her, his actions allow him to continue to live in a deluded state. Without confirmation to the contrary, he can believe in Maggie's happiness with the prince he bought for her and enjoy the control he has over his own wife. Interestingly, this renders "Adam himself...an accomplice in his own cuckolding" (Person 159) and separates him from that which he most desires, his Maggie. An insistence on ignorance coupled with an inability to loosen his ties to his daughter once they are both married leads him to lose what he claims to most love. Lear similarly suffers and Shakespeare's reimagining of the Lear story leaves no option but for Cordelia to die at the play's end. Once Lear and Cordelia are reconciled and they learn of their sentence of life imprisonment, Lear reverts back to his fixation on his daughter. He appears pleased by the prospect of living out the rest of his life in close quarters with her stating, "Come, let's away to prison. We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage" (V.3.8-9). Lear began the play by declaring, "'Tis our fast intent to shake all cares and business from our age, conferring them on younger strengths while we unburdened crawl toward death" (I.1.36-39) and intending to live out his dotage under Cordelia's careful attention. Now, he appears poised to have that wish carried out and this would sunder Lear's journey through madness to reclaimed sanity. Shakespeare leaves no choice: Lear must lose Cordelia for his lesson to be fully learned. The trauma of the event leads Lear to lose his life as well, but he must endure the agony of holding Cordelia dead in his arms. Although James never hints that the distance between Adam and Maggie will lead to death, the reader sees the same necessity for separation. Adam and Maggie cannot or will not learn to put others above themselves.

James believed in “the creation of works of art having reverberations for indefinite generations of readers” (Duban 142) and by the time of *The Golden Bowl*, Shakespeare had firmly established some two-hundred years of legacy as one of the world’s great authors. In a letter to William Dean Howells’s wife about the subject matter of *The Golden Bowl*, James felt it “*overtreated* – but that is my ruinous way and why I have never made my fortune” (*Life in Letters* 417). Certainly, consistent commercial success eluded James throughout his literary career. Where Shakespeare found favor with audiences ranging from the aristocracy to the groundlings, James felt alienated from this level of recognition. Yet James himself, in his various writings about Shakespeare, considered the possibility of Shakespeare as a man, as a great and rare genius producing plays which were enjoyed, but perhaps not fully understood. For James, Shakespeare stood apart and James’s thoughts on his own writings reveal a similar sense of disconnection from more commercially viable authors of his day. *The Art of the Novel*, for instance, focuses entirely on James’s conviction that writing made one an Artist, and that this calling required more than simply writing for the mass market. Both men strived for connection, to use words as a means to tie them to others, but to James’s mind, both struggled with the inability to fully feel that connection formed. James’s essay introducing *The Tempest* finds James envisioning Shakespeare as a man apart, one who dedicated himself to the life of the Artist. James further expresses his own desire to reach through time and know the man behind the fame of the playwright, perhaps sensing a kindred spirit. Although underappreciated upon its initial publication, *The Golden Bowl* has increasingly established its place as one of James’s own masterpieces, one which cements his own literary legacy. It shares with *King Lear*, perhaps the most wrenching of

all of Shakespeare's tragedies, the thematic exploration of the upper limits of the bond between father and daughter. Like Lear, Adam Verver finds himself in the position which he most tried to avoid: separated from his daughter and alone. Where Lear mercifully dies shortly after Cordelia, Adam's fate will stretch out into years. James destines him for a life in exile in American City with his equally unhappy wife bound to his same fate.

Endnotes

¹ Jeremy Tambling sees a parallel between Maggie Verver and Miranda of *The Tempest*. He argues that both women, despite the plotting going on around them, see only “the world, the beautiful world – or everything in it that is beautiful” (192). Certainly, both stories involve a close and isolated relationship between father and daughter. However, in order for the comparison to hold, the reader must believe Maggie to be both naïve and guiltless in what transpires between Charlotte and Amerigo. Ample evidence abounds in the novel which supports a reading of Maggie as a darker, more nuanced character than the wide-eyed Miranda.

Anna Kventsel argues for a comparison between *The Golden Bowl* and *The Winter's Tale*. She asserts that this parallel exists although “it is the daughter, not the mother, who descends from the pedestal, and her reanimation seems to depend on the loosening of her father’s emotional hold on her” (193). This certainly proves an apt point, although Maggie and Adam do not separate at the novel’s end by choice, but rather by necessity. The reunion of Leontes and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, possible only after Leontes’s protracted period of guilt and mourning, brings the play full circle by uniting a husband and wife. Whether or not Maggie thrives now that her father has left for America remains to be seen. Although she clearly is taken with Amerigo, her ties to Adam are deep and long-standing. Maggie could well be entering her own stage of mourning and guilt that could only be, perversely, lifted by her reunion with Adam.

CHAPTER 6

OF VENGEANCE AND NUNNERIES: *HAMLET* AND *THE AMERICAN*

Hamlet's journey toward revenge and a subsequent reclamation of his own identity culminates in his declaration, "This is I, Hamlet the Dane" (V.1.241-242). From this point on in *Hamlet*, events move with increasing speed as the staging of *The Mousetrap* confirms for Hamlet Claudius's guilt and leads him inexorably down a path of vengeance. The Romantics re-fashioned Hamlet as a man crippled by inaction, but such a reading fails to account for Hamlet's need to carefully weigh out the ramifications of his choices. Indeed, after hearing the compelling and anguish-filled plea for revenge from the ghost of his father, Hamlet struggles to set aside the immediate desire for action against the need for certainty in his ultimate course of action. Although not the central theme of *The American*, the problem of vengeance plays a key role in the final development of Christopher Newman. Newman, cast aside by the Bellegardes for being an unsuitable husband for Claire, discovers information about the matriarch and her son which would damage them irreparably in the eyes of their wealthy peers. Yet unlike Hamlet, Newman ultimately eschews revenge as a futile and perhaps self-damaging gesture. Newman's journey to come to the point where he decides to forgo vengeance provides both striking similarities and divergences from Shakespeare's development of Hamlet, but other events and characters found in *The American* also tie it strongly to the play. From an Ophelia-

like Claire crumbling beneath the power of parental authority to the hot-headed Valentin and his similarity to Laertes, the reader finds numerous threads connecting *The American* to *Hamlet* and by uncovering such connections, a deeper and nuanced reading of James's novel emerges.

As with others of Shakespeare's plays, Henry James mentions *Hamlet* specifically in his writings. A notation from January of 1914 in his notebooks records James having seen a production of *Hamlet* (389), but further evidence exists of his deep familiarity with the play. In his Preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, James describes Hamlet and King Lear both as "being finely aware" which "makes absolutely the intensity of their adventure, gives the maximum of sense to what befalls them" (*Art of the Novel* 62). As a result, James argues, the reader more closely identifies with characters such as these due to the keenness with which they perceive events unfolding around them. Although Christopher Newman does not begin with this level of self-awareness, arguably neither does Hamlet, at least at first. Newman enters the novel self-absorbed in his pursuit of experiencing the tourist highlights of Europe and in obtaining a suitable wife. Hamlet takes the stage self-absorbed by the power of his own grief. Only after Hamlet encounters the ghost of his father does he begin to look at the world around him with fully open eyes. Newman does not reach this same level until late in the text, not until the Bellegarde's rejection of him proves absolute. At this late point in the novel, although the reader likely knows from early on that his marriage to Claire will never come to pass, the reader's sympathies fully engage with James's Newman. This Newman, like the Hamlet staggered by the ghost's assertion that Claudius murdered him, feels alive to the reader as he works through a gamut of emotions from rage to acceptance as he decides whether or

not to take his revenge. James goes on to comment on Hamlet in both the same Preface and the Preface for *The Tragic Muse*, remarking that no matter the costume Hamlet might wear he “has yet a mind still more than he has a costume” and that he possesses “a prodigious consciousness” (*Art of the Novel* 68, 90). Again, Newman remains enrobed by his American identity, which colors how he perceives Europe and its inhabitants, far longer than Hamlet remains unaware of the treachery within the walls of Elsinore. However, Newman’s eventual self-awareness proves profound and life-altering and Max Schulz aptly describes Newman as an “awakening consciousness” (50). Finally, in the Preface to *The American*, James outlines in part his original idea for the novel, that Newman “should suffer at the hands of persons pretending to represent the highest possible civilization” (*American* 4). Claudius, a member of Hamlet’s own royal family, starts off the play’s chain of events through the murder of Hamlet’s father. Later, Gertrude, Polonius, and arguably all the play’s characters save for Horatio not only betray Hamlet at some level, but also act in ways unbecoming of members of the court.

James struggled with *The American* as a finished product, most especially regarding the Bellegarde’s ultimate rejection of Newman based on his social standing and manners. For the New York Edition, James made substantial revisions to the novel that form the basis of a subset of criticism concerning the novel. One of these changes proves especially striking in making a thematical comparison between the novel and *Hamlet*. Late in the novel, James inserts another reference to *Hamlet*, which makes the parallels between Newman and Hamlet even stronger. This particular scene will be discussed further on as it relates to Newman deciding against revenge. However, a few of the other structural changes for the New York Edition further align the novel with aspects of

Hamlet. Max Schulz discusses at length the addition of castle and castle-related imagery to the revised novel. He writes, “Although this castle image describes Newman’s attitude towards the old nobles, it also pinpoints the area in which they have reality for him” (44). This provides a compelling parallel to Shakespeare’s depiction of Elsinore, especially at the start of the play. The changing of the guard which opens *Hamlet* depicts a scene of chaos and disarray as Barnardo and Francisco patrol Elsinore’s battlements. The playgoer later learns that Elsinore has devolved into a place of chaos, with nightly parties and the shooting off of cannons filling the darkness on a regular basis since the crowning of Claudius as king. The walls of Elsinore wall in all the play’s characters save Hamlet himself, who Claudius attempts to send to his death in England. Fortinbras remains outside of the castle until the final scene of the play, but when he enters, he represents the external dismantling of Hamlet’s dynastic hold on the throne of Denmark. Fortinbras harbors no ill will toward Hamlet and his entrance heralds a return of reason and order to Denmark. After all, it is to Fortinbras that Hamlet passes the kingdom as he draws his final breath. The castle imagery proves similar in its functioning in *The American*. The name “Bellegarde” itself translates roughly to “well guarded” hinting at both family in general and Claire specifically. When Newman first meets Claire within her own set of rooms, he notes, “The white had turned to yellow and the gilding was tarnished” (91). As Elsinore bears the signs of crumbling morals, so too does the Bellegarde estate. As Madame Bellegarde and Urbain close ranks, Newman becomes the besieging figure trying to bring sanity to a closeted house of stifling madness. Another of the textual alterations changes the focus of the ending. In the New York Edition, the reader sees the final words and thoughts of the novel turn to Claire. Newman himself “is wrapped up in

intense and fine reflections” (Watkins 88) containing no hint of regret over his lack of revenge, as Hamlet expresses no regrets over his own divergent path. Finally, critic Royal Gettman discusses the changes to the language found in old Bellegarde’s letter. The revisions hint at the possibility that Madame Bellegarde “sought consolation in extramarital motives” (474), perhaps even one with Claire’s own betrothed Cintrè. The implication in *Hamlet* is that Claudius’s own fascination for Gertrude provided motive for his murder of his brother. In both texts, the patriarch of the family becomes a victim of his own self-interested kin.

One need look no further than the early references to *Hamlet* in *The American* to see that James found thematic similarities between his own story and Shakespeare’s. Indeed, the first direct reference tying *Hamlet* and *The American* occurs in the novel’s second chapter. However, James makes reference to a second of Shakespeare’s tragedies. The novel contains two pointed references to *Othello*, one concerning Newman and the other Claire, which both bear analysis and do contribute to a critical reading of the novel, but James’s novel as a whole relates thematically to *Hamlet* much more so than it does to *Othello*. *The American* remains underpinned by its study of revenge and its possible outcomes. Christopher Newman and Valentin, both faced with the chance at vengeance, choose very different paths and with vastly different consequences. The novel also presents Claire as an Ophelia-like woman who, in trying to be dutiful to her family, ends up with suffocated and stifled for it. Finally, James’s novel focuses on the inner-workings of a family, the Bellegardes, harboring secrets and boasting of a bond between mother and son which recalls Hamlet’s own complicated bond with his mother Gertrude. James plays off of elements of *Hamlet*, in some instances providing direct correlations but in

others, reshaping elements of Shakespeare's play in ways which challenge the reader's understanding of both works. Very early on in the novel, Newman declares to Noémie that the best examples of literature include "Shakespeare and Milton and Holy Writ" (26) and indeed for James, Shakespeare remained a figure of great admiration.

Newman enters the novel with little specific information provided as to his background and history. Indeed, the reader "learns little about his background and life" (Watkins 1) even by the time the novel draws to a close. Although Newman's consciousness has grown and changed, James leaves his protagonist's history occluded. Newman discloses that he was a successful businessman and hints that he had some unsavory dealings which have led to his sojourn to Europe and retirement from the business world. Yet the nature of these dealings, even the exact businesses in which Newman dabbled remain only hinted at, never fully elucidated. So too does Hamlet's past remain just out of the grasp of the playgoer. Hamlet had been a student, where he met Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He and Horatio, also, have had a long-standing friendship and Hamlet has had a romantic involvement with Ophelia. Few other tangible details can be found. For example, the playgoer infers from Gertrude's and Claudius's calls for Hamlet to throw off his "nightly colour" (I.2.68) that Hamlet has not been prone to excessive fits of melancholy in the past and that this marked change in Hamlet's countenance in the aftermath of his father's death alarms them. James and Shakespeare both avoid a full reckoning of their characters' pasts, instead inviting or perhaps challenging the reader to do so him-or herself.

James's first explicit alignment of Hamlet and Newman occurs as Newman and Mr. Tristram converse at the Palais Royal. Newman hints at his own self-discovery to

come in the novel as he feels, “A vague sense that more answers were possible than his philosophy had hitherto dreamt of” (34). The phrase closely parallels an early exchange between Hamlet and Horatio as the ghost of Hamlet Sr. demands that they swear that none on the battlements of Elsinore will speak of what they have witnessed. Hamlet remarks, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (I.5.167-168). The exact wording of the line remains in dispute and further informs James’s choice to include a variation of it in *The American*. The Quarto 2 version, along with many printed editions today, use “your” whereas the Folio version, along with printed modern editions including The Norton Shakespeare edited by Stephen Greenblatt, opts for “our” instead. The use of “your” provides a distinct means of separation between Hamlet and Horatio. Hamlet tends to act and react on an emotional level, even in his initial encounter with the ghost. Although Hamlet does pause in exacting revenge against Claudius in order to verify the ghost’s charge of murder, the ghost’s claims of constant torture and agony unnerve him. Horatio reacts quite differently to the appearance of the ghost, challenging it directly by demanding that it speak to him. Further, Horatio does not immediately believe that the ghost is truly Hamlet Sr., instead accusing it of having “usurp’d...that fair and warlike form” (I.1.44-45) of the king. Herein enters the complications of opting to utilize “your” or “our.” Should Hamlet declare that philosophy, the domain of reason and of logic, belongs to Horatio’s scope of knowledge, then by implication Hamlet places less credence on philosophy and more on intuition and emotion. The use of “our” places Horatio and Hamlet in alignment so far as their proclivities towards logic and reason.

James's use of the phrase in *The American* might at first suggest that the author wants the reader to view Newman as a Horatio-type instead of as Hamlet. Yet further textual evidence supports a reading of Newman as a character who evolves along a trajectory much more in line overall with that of Hamlet. However, Newman shares in common with Horatio an increasing awareness of his emotional self. Yet where Horatio witnesses the deaths of Denmark's royal family and the knowledge of Claudius's treachery and initially begs Hamlet to allow him to die as well, Newman matures as a result of his experiences with the Bellegardes. This early description of Newman as a man of philosophy, as opposed to a man of emotional intensity, proves important in understanding James's evolution of his character. When the reader first meets Newman, he displays an utter lack of an eye for art. He follows his guidebook to make sure he sees the famous paintings in the Louvre, but he has no great appreciation for them himself. Indeed, his eye drifts to the work of the copyists surrounding the originals and the narrator confesses, "he had often admired the copy much more than the original" (17). Newman does not place much credence in reading fiction either, admitting "he had never read a page of printed romance" (41) in his life and never boasts of an educational pedigree. Newman later expands upon this initial comment to declare, "I'm not proficient in literature" (140), encompassing the romances of the previous comment, but also the classics and burgeoning American literary contributions. This contrasts with Hamlet's entrance back on stage in Act 2, Scene 2 after he has begun feigning madness. Hamlet reads a book on stage and prior to this, implored Gertrude and Claudius to allow him to return to his studies at Wittenberg. Furthermore, Newman comes to Europe in search of a wife and informs Mrs. Tristram that he wants "a great woman" because "that's the one

thing I *can* treat myself to” (48). He has no emotional depth in these early scenes: he wants a wife who will most suit his success, not the one to whom he feels the greatest emotional connection. As Jeffory Clymer states, “The thrill of classifying and possessing women intrigues Newman” (131). Further still, Newman appears to have little experience dealing with women as individuals in their own right. The narrator describes Newman’s viewing women with a “rapture of respect,” but that “this emotion was not at all theoretic, it was not even in a high degree romantic” (41). James’s phrasing proves difficult to decipher here, but the reader can only conclude given the specific exclusions of Newman as either “theoretic” or “romantic” that he must be pragmatic in his romantic dealings with the opposite sex. The respect he exudes, then, becomes less a genuine product than it does one which becomes a necessary component of a successful courtship. Newman begins in many ways as an opposite to Hamlet, a man who strikes the reader as cold and calculating in his pursuit of a wife and his devouring of Europe’s tourist destinations. This early set up makes Newman’s evolution over the course of the text and subsequent comparisons to Hamlet all the more striking.

However divergent Newman and Hamlet are from the outset of *The American*, the pair do share profound similarities in their characters. When the reader or playgoer encounters Hamlet and Newman, both bear the mark of previous hardship. Of Newman, James writes that his face contains “two premature wrinkles in the cheek above” (19) his moustache. Max Schulz theorizes, “It is not business he disapproves of, but rather, sharp dealings and excessive cupidity” (48) and Newman’s experiences with both leave indelible markings. Interestingly, Hamlet becomes disgusted with Claudius and Gertrude, prior to knowledge of his father’s murder, out of their own cupidity. Hamlet’s face also

bears the outward expression of inner grief and turmoil, evidenced by all those around him instantly reading the deep depression into which he has sunk. For both men, the inner battles of both past and present manifest themselves as physical marks upon the countenance. Despite the hint of the toll that Newman's past business battles have taken on him, he nonetheless approaches his European excursion with confidence crossing at times into arrogance. Aside from his stated desire to obtain a proper wife, Newman also "believed serenely that Europe was made for him and not he for Europe" (72).

Shakespeare provides clues which hint at a Hamlet's similarly at ease both at home in Denmark and while abroad for his studies. When Hamlet first encounters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the play, he displays a change in demeanor and a break from his heavy grief. He greets them warmly and sincerely, remarking "My ex'cellent good friends...good lads, how do ye both?" (II.2.220-221). Before Hamlet suspects that his friends act in the interests of Claudius and Gertrude and not his own, he interacts playfully with them, revealing glimpses of a life before the death of his father.

Furthermore, his relationship with Ophelia appears marked by a fervent courtship and mutual interest. For Newman, "exertion and action [are] as natural to him as respiration" (33) and so too does Hamlet seem to have once enjoyed such an active state as well. Newman's ease breaks under the actions of the Bellegardes while Hamlet's life of leisure and ease as Prince of Denmark does so due to Claudius's treachery.

Newman and Hamlet share another striking similarity as regards early character flaws. Hamlet's grief, while justified, alarms everyone around him with its scope and intensity. Although Gertrude can hardly be agreed with in her call for Hamlet to put on a happy face and drop all pretense of mourning so soon after the death of his father, her

concern for her son's mental well-being is genuine. Certainly, prior to the death of his father, Hamlet never displayed a tendency toward this level of sadness. Hamlet's dark state of mind provides the impetus for his initial empathy with the ghost. In Shakespeare's age, the true nature of ghosts was subject to intense scrutiny. While a ghost could well prove to be exactly what he or she averred – an otherworldly emanation of a person who once lived – such a spirit could just as easily be a demon sent by the devil to wreak mischief upon humans. Hamlet decides to spend a great deal of time confirming the ghost's story, thus delaying his revenge, but his grief nonetheless sends him into a liminal space wherein he hears the testimony of the ghost, outside the earshot of Horatio and the guards. Given the ghost's tormented state, evidenced by its declaration, "My hour is almost come when I to sulph'rous and tormenting flames must render up myself" (I.5.4-6), the reader does not erroneously conclude that the ghost and Hamlet share an attraction grounded in torment. Where Hamlet at the start of the events of the play now possesses a tendency towards moroseness, allowing in effect his emotions to rule over his logical mind, Newman proves prone to fancy. During an early encounter with Claire, Newman contemplates a smile she bestows on him, feeling that it "pleased him by allowing him to fill it out mentally" (108). The reader learns later that Claire has been guarded and even enigmatic all along due to her family's constraints upon her, but Newman chooses not to read any possible negatives into her expression. While it could certainly be argued that Newman's infatuation with Claire clouds his judgment, the arrogance he displays earlier in the text also factors in here. Newman prefers by his own admission to create Claire's own inner life. Although differing and opposite emotions cloud the judgment of both Hamlet and Newman, the net result for

both characters is the same: a departure from rationality. Hamlet eventually finds purpose through the ghost's call for revenge and his decision to follow through with his pledge. The ghost appears early in the play, and indeed is mentioned from the opening scene, but only in the fullness of events does Hamlet come into his own. Similarly, Newman considers the possibility of encountering "something stronger in life than his personal, intimate will" (34). James creates for the reader the same sense of anticipation that one feels toward Hamlet in this early line. Newman possesses a strength of personality, but the reader now expects a derailment of his previous method of engaging with the world.

Critic James Calderwood writes of the importance of Hamlet's declaration about readiness, stating "Readiness is an achievement" (267). Both Hamlet and Newman can be better understood as developing characters through this statement. Hamlet's inaction, sometimes singled out as a fault, is in actuality a process of becoming. Hamlet moves from sorrow, to investigation, to confirmation, and finally to the act of revenge itself. At the point at which he is ready, ready both to acknowledge Claudius's guilt and take retribution, Hamlet has come fully into himself. Newman, also, shares the accomplishment of having moved from a state of inaction to one in which he is capable of acting. Although Newman ultimately eschews revenge against the Bellegardes, he does not wind up less successful as a character for it. Readiness represents a state of potentiality, one in which any number of possible outcomes can be achieved. Hamlet ultimately opts for physical vengeance against Claudius, while Newman decides that it was enough to simply be ready, to be poised on the brink of vengeance only to decide in the fullness of his own power not to follow through. Lewis Saum argues that Newman possesses "insufficient stomach for revenge" (7) and given Newman's disgust concerning

some of his previous business dealings, it may well be argued that he simply wants no more involvement in sordid affairs.

Newman's movement toward action begins in earnest once he decides that he must have Claire for a wife. He deliberately begins to court Claire with an eye toward finding the means by which to win favor with her, rather than put on display his own proclivities regarding romance. He believes that "pretty speech...was simply the instinct of the practical man who had made up his mind to what he wanted and was now beginning to take active steps to obtain it" (123). As Newman becomes increasingly embroiled in the workings of the Bellegarde family, including Valentin's reckless duel, he begins to exhibit stronger outside signs of physical agitation. Much as Hamlet begins to drop the veneer of created insanity in favor of that of a driven son plotting the details of revenge, so too does Newman trade one mode of being for another, in this case from disinterested American tourist in Europe to lovesick suitor. As Newman finds his access to Claire increasingly blocked, he becomes "a restless, prowling, time-keeping ghost" (244). James certainly must have had *Hamlet* in mind when he selected this description of his protagonist and the image of the ghost of Hamlet's father is one which he turned to on more than one occasion. He utilizes a portion of the ghost's tormented speech to Hamlet in *The Ambassadors* as a means to demonstrate trust between Miss Gostrey and Lambert Strether (46). The ghost of Hamlet Sr. prowls the battlements of Elsinore in much the same way that Newman does in this passage, but the ghost's own words support the similarity. When Hamlet meets with the ghost and it speaks at last, he sees its fixations with time and wandering. The ghost warns, "My hour is almost come" (I.5.4), as it cannot abide in the daylight and then continues describing how it is "doomed for a

certain term to walk the night "(I.5.14). James draws the parallel between the ghost and Newman by choosing one of *Hamlet's* emotionally tense scenes. The ghost, although wearing armor, does not rest easy. Newman grows increasingly wraith-like himself as he waits for those times when he can interact with his beloved, much as the ghost enjoys only brief respites from its otherworldly torment. From this point on in *The American*, James begins to increase the tension in the story as Newman begins to realize the extent of the power Urbain and Madame Bellegarde hold over Claire. For James, *Hamlet* possesses "threat, rapidity, passion, magic" (*Essays on Art* 333), characteristic he once found lacking in a theatrical production of the play. Up to this point, *The American* has contained all of these elements, from the quick courtship of Claire and Newman to the reader's understanding of the Bellegarde's distaste for the union. From this point on, James tightly weaves all of these traits even more tightly together as his narrative propels forward to its conclusion.

Newman experiences the cost of vengeance first-hand through the death of Valentin. He detests the youthful rashness which leads Valentin to lose his life and certainly has no respect for the physical violence of the duel. Yet Newman soon faces his own trials with the Bellegarde family. James again evokes events in *Hamlet* when Newman finally pushes his way into Claire's chamber after being told by Mrs. Bread of her imminent departure. He breaks with all semblance of propriety in this moment and allows his emotions to dictate the movement of his feet as he enters the room unbidden. He enters the room and "walked straight to Madame de Cintrè and seized her by the hand" (249), a show of masculine force he has heretofore eschewed. Also in the room are Urbain and Madame Bellegarde, who turn the room into the site of a terrible betrayal as

they finally declare that Newman's marriage to Claire will not take place. When Hamlet confronts Gertrude in her private chambers, the scene also devolves into one of rage and emblematically represents what he perceives as his mother's sexual and emotional betrayal of Hamlet Sr. Hamlet does not feign madness here: his language escalates into a scathing denouncement of both his mother and Claudius and in the end, he cannot reclaim control over himself. Akin to Newman physically seizing hold of Claire, Hamlet too lashes out physically as he stabs through the arras and kills Polonius in the process. These moments in the novel and in the play prove a crucial starting point for their protagonists' movement toward action. Newman now knows unequivocally that the Bellegardes have reneged on their agreement to allow him to marry Claire. Hamlet's behavior has now escalated to include the murder of Polonius and a near-violent confrontation with his mother. For each character, the decision begins to loom as to how best to deal with betrayal. At this point, Newman and Hamlet evolve distinctly from one another. Hamlet's feigned madness transforms from this point on into something far darker and nuanced. He has moments where he truly breaks with reality, evidenced by his confrontation with Gertrude. In this scene, the ghost of Hamlet Sr. appears again, but this time only Hamlet sees it. In its previous appearances on the battlements of Elsinore, the ghost is in plain view of everyone, including Horatio and the guards. Whether Hamlet "sees" the ghost as a manifestation of his own psyche, one which stays his hand against doing violence to Gertrude, or whether the ghost can choose to be apprehended only by Hamlet and intervenes to stay his son's hand proves a point of critical debate. Regardless of the interpretation, Hamlet in this scene has lost control. Later, Hamlet envisions himself increasingly as the hand of Providence taking an almost God-ordained revenge

against Claudius. Conversely, as Newman contemplates revenge, he exhibits moments of madness akin to Hamlet's in Gertrude's chambers. The narrator describes Newman's erratic emotional state: "Some days he would hang his head and fold his brow and set his teeth...on others he would indulge in laughter that was almost rude and make jokes that were bad even for him" (322). Newman's situation builds to its crisis point.

After Claire officially enters the convent and Newman understands there will be no last minute reprieve, he attempts in earnest to wound Urbain and Madame Bellegarde. He begins by revealing Valentin's contempt for his family's actions toward Newman, then attempts to obtain Urbain's "confession" of their scheming against him. Newman's minor attempts at self-satisfaction transform into a larger plan for revenge after he learns of the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of old Bellegarde. Mrs. Bread provides the information which implicates Urbain and Madame Bellegarde in his death, but also unintentionally provides a caution against holding grudges. She speaks of her own feelings toward urban and Madame Bellegarde declaring, "My grudge has faded too; it's a very pale pink; but it lies here yet" (302). Hamlet's vengeance takes the form of bloody violence and leads, through Claudius's plotting, to his own demise and a definitive conclusion to his journey. Newman, Mrs. Bread's words warn, faces two possibilities. He can find a way to resolve his feelings toward the Bellegardes or else he might be like Mrs. Bread, still embittered after so many years. James certainly does not want the reader to absolve the Bellegardes of their culpability in the family patriarch's death, but rather to realize that hatred and resentment corrupt from the inside and leave one with no peace. Once Newman possesses old Bellegarde's letter accusing his wife and son of having murdered him, he can opt to keep the information to himself as proof of

their corruption, confront only the Bellegardes, or expose them to outside scrutiny. Initially, Newman not only confronts the Bellegardes, but also sets about on a plan to expose them to their peer group of the wealthy and connected. While not enough evidence exists to convict the pair through legal means, Newman does have the power to potentially ostracize them from the community in which they are so desperate to remain. The Bellegardes have nothing but the strength of their name and the influence it wields within their circle of friends and admirers.

Ultimately, Newman realizes that to humiliate the Bellegardes before their friends proves an act in futility. He finally apprehends the men and women of society to whom he has been introduced as self-interested and amoral as the Bellegardes themselves. Newman will not force anyone to improve morally in the aftermath of his revelation, so he opts instead to remain silent. Newman exhibits a great deal of maturity by turning away from revenge here, although he may not even realize it fully at the end of the novel. Even after Newman chooses not to shame Urbain and Madame Bellegarde, thus breaking his thematic ties with Hamlet, James chooses to include two more telling references to Shakespeare. The first finds Newman still distracted and disturbed after everything he has experienced. The narrator says of Newman, "His occupation had gone" (356 and Footnote 396). These words echo Othello's after Iago successfully tricks him into believing Desdemona unfaithful. Othello believes he has lost everything and concludes, "Othello's occupation's gone" (III.3.357).⁴ James's choice again proves deliberate, not happenstance. In his personal correspondence, James himself quotes *Othello* in a letter to Eliza Linton, herself a novelist and essayist. He writes of the plot of *Daisy Miller*, asserting that the main momentum of the plot derives from Daisy and her mother both not

comprehending European social conventions. He writes, “This is the only witchcraft I have used” (*Life in Letters* 123), which matches nearly word-for-word Othello’s line “This only is the witchcraft I have used” (I.3.168). Philip Horne comments on the reference stating, “HJ (Henry James) is often drawn to Othello’s insistence that he won Desdemona not by magic but by his narrative art” (Footnote 123). If one extrapolates upon both Horne’s observation and James’s own words, an intriguing insight emerges into the inclusion of an *Othello* reference in relation to Newman. Newman initially declared his intentions to obtain the best sort of wife, in large part because his fortune allowed him thus. Now, the reader gains a great deal of insight into how Newman has changed. He did not, in the end, win Claire’s affections with his money. Although the Bellegarde family coveted his fortune, Claire herself forged a deeper bond to Newman. Newman’s money, his own means of “witchcraft,” in the end had no effect on Claire. Thus, when he loses her, the loss becomes that much more acute for it having been the severing of a deeply felt emotional tie.

Furthermore, the allusion calls to mind Othello’s outsider status within the white Venetian community of which he has become an integral part by virtue of his martial skills. Although most modern audiences and readers know the play simply as *Othello*, Shakespeare’s complete title is *Othello: The Moor of Venice*. The choice of the definite article “the” proves critical to understanding Othello’s precarious position within Venetian society. Clearly, Shakespeare cannot be suggesting that Othello is the *only* Moore in Venice. However, Othello by virtue of both race and his social standing does become an anomaly. The accusation of witchcraft becomes an accusation against Othello’s race: certainly, the argument is made, Desdemona could not possibly have been

attracted to Othello save for his use of native sorcery. Desdemona and Othello, in the eyes of her father and her community, commit an act of miscegenation by virtue of their marriage. To a large extent, Claire and Newman's own nuptials are viewed by Urbain and his mother with the same contempt. Newman is, after all, "the American," both in terms of being the novel's titular character and in being a social outsider. Othello fails in part "to escape, elude, overcome, and transcend those differences" (McGuire 76) as a man of color and Newman fails to win over the Bellegardes despite his vast wealth.

In the novel's climatic closing scenes, Newman must find a way to exorcize this malaise which still consumes him. He must, in effect, find some means by which to reclaim his "occupation." He does so by tossing into Mrs. Tristram's fireplace the letter given him by Mrs. Bread. While he watches it burn, Newman for the last time becomes associated with lines spoken in *Hamlet*. He seems to "draw his breath a while in pain" (361), a description which closely echoes Hamlet's dying words to Horatio, which read in part, "Absent thee from felicity a while, and in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain to tell my story" (V.2.298-301). This line was added by James for the New York Edition (Footnote 396), thus supporting the view that he sought to strengthen the ties between his novel and Shakespeare's play⁵. Hamlet speaks his lines while near death and he effectively compels Horatio not only to live, but to recount the terrible events befalling Elsinore. The story will not draw to a close, but instead the emotional anguish of both Horatio and Hamlet will continue to endure to some far away point in the future. Newman, although experiencing a mixture of regret and sadness over his experiences, has ceased the cycle of vengeance by burning the narrative that held the potential to bind him long-term to the Bellegardes. He chooses instead to write his own story free from their

involvement at any level. This chapter in his life truly seems likely to come to a definitive end and indeed, James confirms this by shifting the focus in the novel's closing line of "Poor Claire" (363) away from Newman as a victim.

Once he comprehends that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have pledged their allegiance to Claudius and Gertrude, Hamlet counts Horatio as his only friend. Newman forges friendships with Mr. Tristram and the gravely serious Babcock, but neither relationship fully satisfies him. In the young and hot-headed Valentin, Newman finds both a friend and a confidant. Newman finds something compelling about the "free and adventurous" (97) Valentin. Although the narrator declines to fill in all the details of Newman's youth, the reader can infer that Newman either recognizes a spark in Valentin which he once possessed or finds himself envious of the younger man's carefree nature. Valentin admits that he does not want to perform "a mere ceremony" (98), implying that he wishes to really live, to experience despite the consequences, a common theme in James.¹ Valentin's words provide an intriguing parallel to *Hamlet*. Clearly, Valentin proves to be hot-headed, hardly placing him in line with Horatio. James instead cautions the reader to keep Laertes in mind when watching Valentin's character unfold. Laertes cannot control his impulses and thus finds himself easily manipulated into dueling Hamlet. His emotions get the better of him again at Ophelia's gravesite, as he demands of the priest conducting her funeral rites, "What ceremony else?" (V.1.205). Laertes, enveloped both by his grief and by his contest with Hamlet to "out-mourn" Ophelia, does not allow himself to simply experience the fact that she has died. Instead, he fights to participate in the superficial expressions of grief, here in the form of funereal rites. Valentin, although protesting here that he would rather live life directly, also operates "by

instinct rather than by theory” (101), a trait which leads to early death. Despite Valentin’s youth and impetuosity, Newman sees in him “magnificent manhood” (101), even as Newman’s view of Valentin evolves over the course of the novel. Although Valentin and Newman remain loyal to one another until Valentin’s death, Newman cannot stomach the young man’s insistence upon dueling over a woman of questionable morals like Noémie. Valentin apprehends Newman’s disdain over his choice, but the two nonetheless remain loyal friends. Indeed, Newman, not any of the Bellegardes, stands vigil while Valentin lies dying and Valentin denounces openly the treatment of his friend at the hands of his brother and mother. Among Valentin’s final words is the repeated phrase, “Broken faith, broken faith” (271). Certainly, he refers here to his family’s breaking of Newman’s engagement to Claire. His words also recall the main themes of both *Hamlet* and *Othello*, the two plays James alludes to in *The American*. Hamlet’s uncle Claudius breaks faith with everyone, including the Danish subjects over whom he comes to unrightfully rule. Additionally, Hamlet feels the sting of betrayal from Gertrude, Ophelia, and nearly everyone else around him save Horatio. *Othello* turns on Iago’s ability to persuade the Moor that Desdemona has committed adultery. Othello’s murder of his wife stems from his belief that she has broken her marriage vows.

The Newman of the early sections of *The American* deliberately seeks out the company of rich families like the Bellegardes. Moreover, Newman does not believe that the wealthy should dwell within plain houses but instead “his ideal of grandeur was a splendid façade” (54). These words prophetic as Newman finds exactly this in Madame Bellegarde and Urbain: the outward appearance of opulence which masks an inner corruption. Where Newman finds romance and kinship with Claire, Valentin, and even

Urbain's wife the Marquise de Bellegarde, he can make no headway with Madame de Bellegarde and her eldest son Urbain. Mother and son prove excessively close, with Urbain acting as a de facto head of household and by extension, uncomfortably like a husband to the Madame. The narrator disclosed that the Madame "had paired with her eldest-born" (137) and while James does not necessarily intend this to serve as outright proof of an incestuous relationship, the pair certainly share a strange bond at best. James again has *Hamlet* in mind as he delineates the relationship between Urbain and Madame Bellegarde. Much critical attention concerning the play focuses on the relationship between Hamlet and his mother, specifically whether or not that relationship, too, crosses the boundary between the parental and the incestuous. The 1990 film adaptation of *Hamlet*, featuring Mel Gibson in the titular role and Glenn Close as Gertrude, certainly and explicitly takes the stance that their relationship had crossed the line. As Hamlet confronts his mother in her chambers, she pulls him down into a passionate and decidedly non-parental kiss.² Shakespeare depicts Hamlet as keenly interested in his mother's sex life, but otherwise refrains from characterizing Hamlet as physically in love with Gertrude. However, enough of a hint lingers in the play so as to keep the issue alive in both critical debates and in its stage and film versions.

Urbain and the Madame represent the very darkest permutation of the Hamlet-Gertrude relationship. Urbain, in plotting with his mother to kill his father, transforms into the Claudius figure, rendering him son-husband-murderer in the novel. Madame Bellegarde twists the Gertrude role in that James depicts her as actively involved in her husband's demise. Where Gertrude's guilt lay in marrying Claudius so quickly after her husband's death, with the added complication that this relationship itself was viewed

during Shakespeare's time as incestuous, the Madame takes an active role in eliminating her husband. James forces the reader to piece together the events that took place the night old Bellegarde died, much as Shakespeare asks the playgoer to conclude whether or not Gertrude and Claudius may have been carrying on an affair prior to old Hamlet's death. Certainly, the ghost explicitly absolves Gertrude of directly having a hand in his murder – he cautions his son, “Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven” (I.5.86). Yet this injunction does not preclude the possibility of an illicit affair beginning prior to the murder. The only proof that Urbain and his mother actually killed old Bellegarde stems from two sources: the servant Mrs. Bread and the letter purportedly written by the ailing man himself. Murder excepted, the concrete timeline provided in the novel finds Bellegarde seemingly recovering from his illness under the care of a physician. At some point during this treatment, Madame Bellegarde sends the doctor away and secrets herself and Urbain in her husband's bedchamber. Bellegarde dies shortly thereafter. Whether or not a deliberated murder took place, and James certainly provides enough textual evidence to view it as such, as Carolyn Porter argues, “It is clear that had she not intervened in his medical care, he would have survived his illness” (112). Urbain assumes the role of Claudius in *The American* due to his claustrophobic closeness to his mother and his role in the death of his father. James Calderwood writes of Claudius that he “has unwittingly fashioned a part for himself that he has no desire to play” (272) in the form of his ultimate death at Hamlet's hands. Urbain, too, in his disdain of Newman vastly underestimates him. Newman recognizes early on that Urbain possesses “a fine nervous dread” (156) although he has no impetus at this point to explore its possible sources. Later, with Newman stirred to anger, Urbain finds himself outmaneuvered by a man he

perceived as a wealthy but otherwise uncouth American. Instead, Urbain faces the possibility of exposure and humiliation and even though Newman does not follow through with his threats, he certainly shakes the young Marquis's sense of self to the core. Claudius believed he could easily formulate a plot to eliminate Hamlet, first in the form of sending him to England, then in the duel with Laertes, but he fails to recognize Hamlet's own cunning and mettle. Urbain also finds himself checked by a man he disregarded as unfit for his family.

Hamlet's vicious verbal attack on Ophelia once he realizes she conspires with Polonius and Claudius culminates with his demand that she remove herself from Elsinore and take up residence in a nunnery, which means both cloister and whorehouse. James splits the dualistic meaning of nunnery into two very disparate and separate characters: Noémie and Claire. As different as the two women are, in everything from breeding to personality, both women in effect have become commodified, Noémie by her own desires and Claire through the machinations of her mother and brother. Ophelia herself becomes a convenient pawn for her father and the king, both of whom demand that she pretend to reject Hamlet as a romantic interest in order to gauge his response. Her own feelings factor naught in this arrangement and her compliance mandatory. In this manner, Ophelia and Claire share much in common, a connection which will be examined in detail to follow. Where James ends the novel on a note of lament for Claire and her decision to enter a convent rather than once again bend to the will of her family, for Noémie he leaves no room for sympathy whatsoever. Although the argument could be made that Noémie markets a potentially lucrative commodity in the form of her sexuality, James negates this line of reasoning early on in the novel. Newman encounters Noémie first, as

does the reader, as he watches her hard at work copying the masterpieces of the Louvre. Her father outlaid a great deal of money to place her in the best art schools, but his daughter now shows little of that initial potential. Her paintings are good enough to warrant Newman's interest, but hardly good enough to be more than decorative pieces bought at a cheap price. Newman's exuberance over her work illustrates his lack of artistic taste rather than her own applied skill. Noémie, unlike Claire, possesses much more of an ability to choose the course of her own life. Where Claire's mother and elder brother control her with rigid authority, Noémie's father proves incapable of directing, advising, or reigning in his daughter's increasingly promiscuous behavior. Further still, should Noémie have applied herself in industry, whether in painting or some other trade, an avenue to a comfortable life would have presented itself. She opts instead to use her sexuality as a means to bypass meaningful work as she quests for riches.

Hamlet spends the majority of the play denouncing his mother's sexual frivolity and certainly Newman harbors no patience for women expressing sexual latitude. Understandably, Hamlet's reasons for his enmity toward his mother and her new husband run deeper than misogyny. Nonetheless, he equates sexuality with depravity throughout the play, as when he decries the "rank sweat of an enseamed bed" (III.4.83) shared by Claudius and Gertrude. Mr. Tristram and Newman converse about Noémie's "type" right away, with Mr. Tristram cautioning against the danger of a woman "grown...for the use of millionaires" (49). Although Noémie manages to get Newman to part with large sums of money for her paintings, she fails to obtain anything more. James carefully constructs Noémie as a contrasting character to Claire from the beginning. As she and Newman peruse the paintings at the Louvre, she specifically points out to him a picture entitled "A

Marriage of St. Catherine” (66) to Newman. Depicted in the painting is the metaphorical marriage of St. Catherine to Christ. While Noémie may well select this painting for its obvious irony given the manner in which she chooses to live her life, it proves tragically prophetic as regards Claire. Although one might mount the argument that Claire need not choose the convent, that she could instead opt to defy her family, the discussion concerning Claire to follow proves this argument unfeasible given her character. As critic James Tuttleton writes, “From saint to sister is, indeed, Claire’s direction in the novel.” (101). Noémie has already been heading down a completely opposite trajectory. As she later tells Valentin, “Everything I have is for sale” (149), a declaration made without hesitation. Noémie proves driven and fiercely independent and thus James avoids depicting her as a victim of a masculine system of authority.

Noémie bears no mark of the victim. Indeed, she relishes the power her beauty and the promise of sex wield over wealthy men. Even when her coquettishness costs Valentin his life in a duel, she exhibits no remorse over the role she played. This blatant exhibition of sexuality and power sickens and frightens Newman, yet also exposes his naïveté. He calls Noémie a “creature” (211) and urges Valentin to break with her completely, a warning the young man fails to heed. However, he does not seem to fully recognize that Noémie does not just flaunt her sexuality, she markets and sells it as well. At a gathering at the Bellegarde stronghold, Newman comments to Urbain’s wife that she might select green bows for her gown for an upcoming event. He has no idea that this display of green on a woman’s clothing would identify her as a prostitute (Footnote 393). Not until after Claire enters the convent and Newman encounters Noémie one final time does he finally appear to recognize her as a prostitute herself. He declares her “an odious

blot on the face of nature” (347). Newman now sees both aspects of the term “nunnery,” with Claire cloistered away and Noémie now on the arm of another wealthy man. However hard Noémie might try to outwardly don the accoutrements of an upper class woman, she fails in comparison to Claire. Carolyn Porter writes, “If Noémie is a copy of the upper-class women whose ranks she aspires to join, Claire de Cintrè is the original *par excellence*” (109). Of the two women, Claire, although isolated by choice, obtains a level of authentic power by virtue of her choice. Claire becomes “reified as a symbol in proportion to the erosion of what she symbolizes—a non-commercial, uncontaminated, and incorruptible value” (Porter 103). Noémie follows the easy route made possible by her willingness to exploit her sexuality. Worse still, she becomes one of James’s “vampire” characters, draining the life both literally and figuratively out of young men like Valentin³.

Despite other major changes made to the novel, James remained adamant in his decision not to marry Newman to Claire. In a letter to William Dean Howells, James defends his decision writing, “The whole point of the dénouement was...in his losing her” (*Letters* 137). Certainly, Newman cannot progress as a character should they have married. James’s characters often come to maturity, whatever their physical age, but it comes at a great price or through the loss of something dear. Newman realizes both his astounding miscalculation of how old European money would view him and his ability to turn away from the chance at revenge. Even from inside the walls of her cloister, Claire haunts the novel. She remains with the reader up through the very last words of the novel, which lament her state. Similarly, Ophelia haunts the play even after her death in a scene played out at her grave. Like old Hamlet, Ophelia is an innocent party caught up in and

brought to death by the machinations of others. Although by this point in the play Polonius has already been killed and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will soon be dispatched upon arrival in England, Ophelia's death, whether suicide or accident, proves the first death within the play of an innocent.

Claire loves Newman, this much James wants the reader to apprehend for certain. What begins for the pair as Newman's whirlwind desire to make her his wife deepens into a bond by which both are affected. In this sense, James creates a subtle allusion to *Othello*. Othello and Desdemona "do not know each other very well: the courtship has been brief and superficial" (Hamilton 57). So too does Newman quickly make the leap from interested suitor to fiancé. However, James allows his couple time to develop and to know each other better. The terrible irony lies in the fact that even with time, Newman fails to see the possibility that the Bellegardes will turn on him and that Claire will not go with him anyway. Yet Claire admits she will not suffer for love (156). Earlier still, the narrator describes Claire's face as "almost as portentous as a tragic mask" (124) and the reader understands that Claire's mother and brother act as the puppeteers manipulating her behind the scenes. That James includes this description at the moment when Newman proclaims his intentions to marry her leaves no doubt that Claire possess no true power should she remain outside of the convent she ultimately chooses. According to Mrs. Tristram, Claire had been denied personal autonomy since the time of her earliest girlhood, an admission which makes Claire's choice all the more powerful. Mrs. Tristram makes an interesting observation to Newman saying, "Remember what Shakespeare calls Desdemona: 'a supersubtle Venetian.' Claire de Cintrè's a supersubtle Parisian" (131). She attempts here to place doubt in Newman's mind as to Claire's honesty and self-

representation in an allusion which recalls the events of *Othello*. Therein, Iago's entire scheme hinged on his ability to cause Othello to doubt Desdemona, a plan which succeeds to horrific ends. As James Tuttleton argues, "Implicit in the Desdemona allusion is the notion of the betrayal of a lover" (104). Mrs. Tristram's warning proves far too vague and inaccurate to properly apprise Newman of the complexity of Claire's situation. While Claire does betray Newman on the simplest of levels, it is the scheming of Urbain and Madame Bellegarde which ultimately render their union impossible.

Claire's decision to enter convent emerges as a stifling choice, yet one which ultimately does provide her with a means of escape. Hamlet furiously demands that Ophelia remove herself to a nunnery, but his meaning proves complicated. He clearly knows that someone, in this case both Polonius and Claudius, eavesdrop on the pair. That Ophelia allows this situation to be proves to Hamlet her betrayal of him. The nunnery insult becomes, in effect, a veiled plea for Ophelia to remove herself as pawn to the powerful men commanding her. Ophelia does exactly as societal expectations demand she should: obey her father, her brother, and her king. In so doing, she loses herself both metaphorically and physically, as she devolves into insanity. As Sharon Hamilton writes, "Ophelia's rewards for subservience are humiliation, madness and death" (80), a reward indeed. Claire feels the same obligation to pay her mother as she states, "You may never say Nay to your mother, whatever she requires of you" (86). Claire escapes Ophelia's fate by deciding voluntarily to enter the convent, an act which both confines her and sets her free forever from the scheming of her family. She finds freedom through a figurative death behind the convent's walls. Urbain and Madame Bellegarde clearly hope to treat their sister and daughter as if she were no better than a whore to be passed to the highest

bidder. Claire instead opts for the cloister where her sexuality cannot be bought or traded. Even Newman, despite his own deepening feelings, admits he wants “possession” (171) of Claire, a statement which implies control over her sexuality as much as it does her person. Claire’s choice, then, denies Newman her “sexual and maternal promise” (Silver 289) as Ophelia denies Hamlet first through her decision to obey Polonius and Claudius and later through her madness and death.

Newman’s very name hints at the character’s trajectory in *The American*. He is one of the new breed of wealthy Americans who bring money, but not title and pedigree, with them in their European travels. Yet Newman becomes someone quite different than the cocky man in hunt of a wife at the novel’s start. His encounters reshape him, forging him again into another “new man” entirely. Newman’s development parallels the trajectory followed by Hamlet, save for the turning away from revenge at the final moment. Claire emerges as a strong if not tragic young woman. By utilizing allusions to both Ophelia and Desdemona, James brings to the reader’s mind the stories of two young women who both made choices concerning conforming to male authority. Ophelia forces down her feelings for Hamlet, first at her brother’s insistence that she guard herself against Hamlet using her, then at her father and the king’s insistence that she participate in their plan to spy on him. She plays the part of the dutiful daughter and loses her sanity and her life for it. Desdemona, in stark contrast, defies the will of her father by choosing to marry Othello without his consent or his knowledge. Her act of open rebellion leads to her death as well as Iago’s plotting. James carves a different, but no less harrowing path, for Claire. She refuses to conform to Urbain and her mother’s demand that she not only refuse Newman as a husband, but marry another wealthy man of their choosing. Having

already been given in marriage to a man she did not love, Claire balks at doing so again and makes a choice the pair did not foresee. She cloisters herself away, but in so doing reclaims power over her person and her heart. James makes it clear that Claire's choice will prove emotionally difficult for the young woman, but her very survival, a marked contrast to her counterparts, proves some small victory.

Endnotes

¹ James explores the theme of the life fully lived in such works as *The Ambassadors*, “The Beast in the Jungle.” Often, as is the case with Lambert Strether from *The Ambassadors*, an older character comes to the conclusion that the only life is the one experienced without reservation. “The Beast in the Jungle” provides a darker take on this theme in that John Marcher realizes only too late that what he has been waiting for all his life has been in front of him all along.

² The casting of Glenn Close as Gertrude and Mel Gibson as Hamlet provides a striking visual component to the incestuous tendencies in their relationship. On-screen, the two look much more like brother and sister than they do mother and son.

³ Many critics, including Leon Edel, have commented upon James’s exploration of the vampiric character. Such a character, including Gilbert Osmond of *The Portrait of a Lady*, or the governess from “The Turn of the Screw,” drains the life literally and metaphorically from those around him or her.

⁴ Critic Hugh Stevens points out that James make use of the same basic phrase, that of someone’s occupation being gone, in the novel *Roderick Hudson*. In that novel, the line is spoken by the character Rowland Mallet (65).

⁵ Critic Oscar Cargill draws parallels between Hamlet and Hyacinth, the young male protagonist from *The Princess Casamassima*. He argues in part that “too many reflections press in upon Hyacinth and floor him” but like Hamlet, Hyacinth possesses “an acute perceptiveness” (116). In the Preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, James references Hamlet and Lear, characters both “finely aware” and “surrounded, amid their complications, by the stupid and the blind, who minister in all sorts of ways to their

recorded fate” (*Art of the Novel* 62), the latter of which Cargill believes might be interpreted as a description of Hyacinth as well. James asserts that this idea of constructing a character “finely aware” allows for the reader to become engrossed in his or her adventures (Ibid), as opposed perhaps to a dull-witted or very dense character incapable of ever understanding the magnitude of what transpires around him or her. *The Princess Casamassima* offers hints in support of Cargill’s comparison of Hyacinth to Hamlet. Although Hamlet’s studies abroad and status as a member of the royal family surely convey far greater life experiences than have been had by the poor and lower class Hyacinth, both characters develop over the course of their stories. Hyacinth begins “both ingenuous and slightly wasted, amused, amusing, and indefinably sad” (59), a description not entirely inapplicable to Hamlet as well. Both Hamlet and Hyacinth are closely associated with books, Hamlet through his reading and Hyacinth through his trade as a bookbinder. This difference privileges Hamlet as the greater of the two consciousnesses, as James would call them. Where Hyacinth handles volumes of literature, it is Hamlet who actively seeks to broaden his awareness through the act of reading.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The parallels between Shakespeare and Henry James are striking. Both men sought to heighten the experiences of their playgoers and readers by depicting the deepest elements of human nature. Both wrote comedy and tragedy, yet they resisted the strictest conventions of genre. Shakespeare's comedies often end on a somber note, as is the case in *Twelfth Night*, which concludes in part with Malvolio unappeased and promising revenge. Yet the most serious of his play may include comic elements, like the boisterous and bawdy ramblings of Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*. Within comedy lies pathos, and pathos in comedy, paralleling the complex and sometimes absurdly incongruent experiences of life. James similarly blends genres. "The Aspern Papers" contains moments of great if not dark comedy, yet the reader cannot help but find characters like Miss Tina and the story's narrator inescapably pathetic. Capturing life and human experience with integrity and honesty forms the basis of both men's literary endeavors. James did not content himself simply with the act of writing, but he instead engaged the world of writing and studied it from all angles. His play and book reviews form a large portion of his professional work and in them, James continues to evaluate these works based on his conception of the duty of the Artist. James set to paper his thoughts on the craft of writing in sustained form in the Prefaces to the New York Edition of his writings,

and they provide a valuable contribution to literary criticism. What emerges from James's analysis and musing of literature and its creators is a deep and abiding appreciation for Shakespeare. Peter Rawlings writes that James formed "a general tendency...for recruiting Shakespeare in the proximity of the unutterable" (*Abuse of the Past* 69), an observation which underscores James's feeling of affinity with Shakespeare.

Rawlings cites two specific instances in which James employs Shakespeare in this manner, the first being James's use of references to *The Merchant of Venice* when discussing the American War of Independence, the second being James's references to *The Tempest* when discussing a poet who had died young (Ibid). The last instance especially proves interesting. James's Introduction to an edition of *The Tempest* finds him pondering the disconnect between Shakespeare-the-artist and Shakespeare-the-man. He worries, as he did in the case of the dead poet, about the memorialization process which occurs after the death of a famous or promising artist. James remained leery of such efforts at mythologizing, yet with Shakespeare, James himself found it difficult to refrain from doing so himself. He admired the plays Shakespeare wrote, had seen them performed on stage from the time he was a young boy, and he could not help but wonder about the man who had produced such powerful dramatic works. This was a theme which James visited specifically in "The Birthplace," in which "the concern...is with the potential yield from the processes of commodification and memorialization he also satirizes" (Rawlings, *Abuse of the Past* 87). James understood the financial windfall possible for those who could sell the public on a set of stories about Shakespeare's life, but it clearly troubled him as well. Further, he worried about what others would write of his private life after his own death.

James's fears prove founded, both for himself and for Shakespeare. Any number of fictional or quasi-fictional works have attempted to fill in the blanks in the known life of Shakespeare. *Shakespeare in Love*, which won 1998's Academy Award for Best Picture, imagines a young, brooding Shakespeare in love with a young woman who eventually masquerades as a male so she may act in his productions. The film further imagines the composition and first staging of *Romeo and Juliet*, and ends with Shakespeare envisioning the plot of *Twelfth Night*. James would argue that whether or not the film itself was merit-worthy, its subject matter was pure speculation and did less to advance Shakespeare's plays than it did to further idolize the man. Author Gary Blackwood targets young audiences with his two books, *The Shakespeare Stealer* and *Shakespeare's Scribe*, published in 1998 and 2002 respectively. In these novels, Blackwood's character Widge comes to work for Shakespeare and comments upon Shakespeare and his acting troupe along the way. Yet these are only two in a vast pool of examples. James has been the subject of similar musings. *The Master*, a 2005 novel by Colm Toibin, overlays autobiographical and biographical accounts of James and overlays them with a fictional narrative which explores James's inner thoughts. In effect, James becomes the main fictionalized character in a fictionalized account of his life. Numerous critics and authors like Toibin have also speculated about James's sexuality. Although one can argue that the intimate details of Shakespeare and James's lives provide scholars with a complete picture of a remarkable life, James would have been appalled at the intrusion. An author's writings should be enough. Yet audiences, captivated by both men's ability to weave complex and powerful narratives, struggle with the need to know everything about them.

James's admiration of Shakespeare finds its way into some of his own novels, as this dissertation has explored in-depth. As the body of scholarship centering on James has grown, so too have those instances where critics find parallels between Shakespeare's plays and James's fiction. What has been missing, however, from existing scholarship is a close, sustained analysis of the implications of such references. For example, the footnotes to the 1997 Oxford Edition of *The American* make note of several references to *Hamlet* and to *Othello* occurring in the novel, yet they do not further delve into the vast textual implications of such references. James, I would argue, does not include such pointed references to Shakespeare without precise intent. Peter Rawlings also finds numerous instances of James turning to Shakespeare, which he deems "complex deployments" (*Abuse of the Past* 98) and indeed, this proves to be the case. James usually did not quote Shakespeare directly. Instead, he made veiled references, or paraphrased Shakespeare rather than quoting verbatim. That does not mean that every time James made a reference to Shakespeare requires extensive literary analysis. Indeed, James might call to a reader's mind something like the forest of Arden in "What Maisie Knew" (Ibid 159) to invite the reader into young Maisie's mind as she meets the Captain for the first time.

Those novels of James included for analysis here contain Shakespearean references which inform readings of the text. By delving deeper into the implications and reasons why James opted to reference *Hamlet* and *Othello* in *The American*, for example, opens up avenues of critical exploration heretofore largely unexplored. This study provides readers with another avenue for Jamesian scholarship, and it builds upon those critics who have commented upon and who have written about the relationship between

Shakespeare and James. What emerges, above all else, is the profound tie between a dramatist and an author, two men both now known as masters of their craft.

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Publications:

"Huck and Jim at the Bare Bodkin's Point: *Hamlet's* Mangled Soliloquy as Textual Commentary." *The Mark Twain Annual*, No. 5, 2007. 69-81.

"Interior/Exterior in the *Harry Potter* Series: Duality Expressed in Sirius Black and Remus Lupin." *Papers on Language and Literature*, 44:1, Winter 2008, 87-108.

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"Monoliths of the Past: Beautiful and Tragic." *DoubleTake/Points of Entry*, 2:2, Fall/Winter 2007, 101-102. A book review of *The Neon Boneyard* written by Judy Natal.

"Recent Ben Jonson Theatrical Events and Productions." *The Ben Jonson Journal*, 15.1, 106-111.

"Frances Teague's *Shakespeare and the American Popular Stage*." *The Ben Jonson Journal*, 15.1, 146-150.

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“Cosplay,” “Anime,” and “Manga” - three entries for the upcoming book *The Encyclopedia of Asian American Popular Culture* edited by Dr. Felicia Campbell. Forthcoming in 2008.

Book reviews of *The Spike* (1000 words) and *And Ladies of the Club* (750 words) for *The Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction*, to be published by Facts on File. Forthcoming in 2008.

“The Critical Reception of *The Great Gatsby*.” Forthcoming in a literary essay collection from EBSCO Publishing and Yardley Books.

“Crying, Dancing, Laughing: The Breaking and Reunification of Community in *Beloved*.” Forthcoming in a literary essay collection from EBSCO Publishing and Yardley Books.

“Remedios the Child Bride: The Forgotten Buendia.” Forthcoming in a literary essay collection from EBSCO Publishing and Yardley Books.

Conferences:

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“Moral Culpability in the *Star Wars* Series: Obi-Wan Kenobi and the Genesis of Darth Vader.” Far West Popular Culture Association Annual Conference. January 2008, Las Vegas, NV.

“The Subversive Undercurrent to *Foster’s Home for Imaginary Friends*: Blooregard Q. Kazoo Decontextualizes American Popular Culture.” Far West Popular Culture Association Annual Conference. January 26-28, 2007, Las Vegas, NV. Also served as session chair for my panel.

“Interior/Exterior in the *Harry Potter* Series: Duality Expressed in Sirius Black and Remus Lupin.” South Atlantic Modern Language Association 2006 Annual Convention. November 10-12, 2006, Charlotte, NC.

UNLV Graduate and Professional Student Research Forum. March 25, 2006. Invited to present research completed for project analyzing Lady Gregory’s plays.

Far West Popular Culture Association Annual Conference. Presented paper entitled “Negotiating Sexual Awakening: Transformations in Modern Fantasy

Films. January 27-29, 2006, sponsored by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Also served as session chair for my panel.

Ireland and Memory – Mid-Atlantic Regional ACIS Annual Meeting. Presented paper entitled “*The Story Brought by Brigit and The Golden Apple: Amalgamations of the Mythology and Folklore of Ireland*”. November 11-12, 2005, Drew University.

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“Divine William” and The Master: The Influence of Shakespeare on the Novels of Henry James

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