

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: STRATEGIC NONNARRATION IN HENRY JAMES

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This dissertation coins strategic nonnarration as the literary device of withholding significant characters and events from a work's entire narrated text and, through repeated textual acknowledgement, calling attention to that withheld material. The aim of this study is to show how the withholding of direct presentation operates as a narrative strategy to foster interpretive freedom and to prompt the reader to assimilate the events that are not directly presented. There are several strategies by which the text prompts the incorporation of withheld material, including foregrounded reference, metonymy, vicariousness, mimesis, silence, temporal simulation, and doubling of character and reader. The following chapters explore Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Princess Casamassima*, *The Lesson of the Master*, and *The Ambassadors* as well as James's criticism and several brief non-James examples in order to assemble diverse cases of strategic nonnarration and to illustrate its didactic and representational functions. Reader response criticism and narrative theory provide both context and contrast for the narrative gaps in presentation this study explores and the potential assimilation of that withheld material.

STRATEGIC NONNARRATION IN HENRY JAMES

By

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Preface

I didn't describe to you the purpose of it . . . at all, I described
to you . . . the effect of it—which is a very different thing.
— *The Sacred Fount*

Henry James, in “The Art of Fiction,” endorses the “suppression of the very thing that we are most curious about” and suggests that withholding significant material from the reader prompts increased engagement to shape a more complete narrative from incomplete information. The reader’s conjectural vigor and potential to experience such suppressed things foster greater collaboration in response to the narrative vacancies often found in James. This dissertation explores several cases of strategic nonnarration indicative of a broader pattern and expectation of reader response to gaps in presentation. These texts also demonstrate strategies to condition the reader with regard to narrative vacancy and to facilitate the engagement and imaginative interaction with this withheld material.

By engaging with these gaps and the formal underpinnings of this withheld presentation, the reader that James consistently articulates in his criticism and prefaces “formulates something that is unformulated in the text”; this convergence of text and reader that Wolfgang Iser argues “brings the literary work into existence” is what the James reader accomplishes through noticing, reflecting on, and piecing together the events and characters that constitute strategic nonnarration (*Reader* 287, 31). Umberto Eco’s claim that certain texts assume a certain reader as part of their generative process informs James’s withheld presentation, the technical formulation of which in turn assumes a particular reader. Strategic nonnarration is constructed based on expectations

of the reader's performance and cannot be understood irrespective of a certain caliber of reader. Although James questioned the vitality and dramatic force of his narrative vacancies, these doubts and reflections further illuminate the pivotal role of an adequate reader. James's apprehension about his works' technical experimentation underscores the narrative innovation and the potential impact of such gaps on both text and reader.

The origin of strategic nonnarration lies in the aspiration to discover what may be effectively conveyed without literal communication, what may exist for the reader without existing on the page. Although withheld presentation textually fills no space, it may pervade the reading experience. Drawn to silence over speech and deferral over disclosure, the personal and intellectual foundation of this exploration rests in texts that impart understanding and experiential encounters through rich, cultivated blanks or lacunae. Throughout James's oeuvre, knowledge is highly fragmented, and James's characters and narration tend to reveal very little, thus often leaving the reader to realize events, intentions, and motivations. While strategic nonnarration is a textual acknowledgement of characters and events, the referenced material is allowed no concrete place in the text but rather in the mind and potential assimilation of the reader; it exists as executed technique and the possibility of grasped experience and meaning. Given this adequate acknowledgement and at least one strategy (of several that this study poses) to induce what James calls "felt life" and to incorporate a sense of presence, this dissertation's fundamental assumption is that a well executed narrative gap or series of gaps in presentation will prompt a multiplicity of response and will foster greater interpretive, experiential freedom on the part of the reader.

This project began as an attraction to profound, pervasive, haunting absent-presences and soon became an exploration into what happens offstage—a theatrical term well suited to capture the unseen quality of absent characters and events in fiction as well. Playwrights elect not to stage significant events in order to veil them in uncertainty or competing interpretations, thus prompting the audience to imagine what has been withheld. In fiction, these significant withheld moments often result in the same interpretive richness and collaboration. Like a play’s audience, fiction readers may be acutely aware of not being shown something. During this project’s middle stage, as the absent narration of each explored gap began to crystallize, “the offstage” no longer sufficed and began to evolve into the lack of presentation—in the literal and figurative sense of showing material—to the reader. To control the scope of “the offstage,” to distinguish it from vast, proliferating absence and from all things missing, the concept and term “nonnarration” fully captures both the lack of narration and the deliberate textual acknowledgment of the gaps in presentation. A missing depiction is not nonnarration until the text signals the representational absence. While nonnarration denotes elective, consciously constructed narrative vacancies, the “strategic” modifier marks withheld presentation, and foregrounded reference to it, as an attempt to generate a desired effect on the reader.

The clearest enactment of withheld presentation and its strategic effect on the reader is James’s *In the Cage*. The novella’s telegraphist protagonist spends her days, literally in a cage, wiring cables. These messages contain limited knowledge, cryptic phrases, and multitudinous gaps, all of which the telegraphist tries to reconstruct. Her cage, however, never receives messages; technologically incapable of receiving them, she

can only send messages. Therefore, the telegraphist is aware of “how much she had missed in the gaps and blanks and absent answers” (287). Without access to disclosed meanings and filled-in blanks, she is exposed only to the limited knowledge of her outgoing messages—telegraphs with their many innate gaps. This telegraphist is one of James’s clearest reader figures who encounters the most blatant withheld material and meaning. Constantly “filling out some of the gaps, supplying the missing answers,” the telegraphist—fueled by her careful attention to the telegraphs’ subtle clues and to the great many things she “notices”—would “guess all sorts of impossible things” (258, 234). The text emphasizes the telegraphist’s noticing as well as “the very quantity of imagination that it demanded” to decipher all the meaning she could out of scraps of data (237). This literal reader who “piece[s] together all sorts of mysteries” reveals the rigorous, highly engaged response that withheld presentation requires (233). Beyond depicting the ability of a discerning, imaginative, persistent reader to confer an experiential presence on otherwise withheld material, *In the Cage* also cultivates a palpable presence out of pervasive, intense narrative absence. James foregrounds the reference to withheld material and thereby emphasizes narrative vacancy and technical construction, which in turn points to the role of the reader to collaborate, reconstruct, and reflect in response to strategic nonnarration.

Finally, the fragmented knowledge and reader’s response to limited information that *In the Cage* depicts inform the extreme fragmentation of modernist novels. James’s use of withheld presentation presages modernism’s incomplete narrative reports and often radically complex, difficult texts. While not an exploration into the evolution of modernist technique, the idea of James as precursor to this technical innovation has

remained in the background of this study. Due to such fragmentation and complexity, modernist texts typically become collaborative ventures between the text and the reader attempting to make sense of it. Henry James and strategic nonnarration similarly enable imaginative mutual productions, and this dissertation conceives of the James narrative and its withheld presentation as equipping the emerging modernist reader to face the even more abundant narrative gaps of the following modernist generation.

Chapter 1

Introduction to Strategic Nonnarration

In the preface to *The American*, Henry James calls attention to “the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never *can* directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit” (xvi). What James articulates in 1907 with this preface and with the preface to *The Wings of the Dove* two years later is an awareness of the interpretive space fostered by the withholding of direct presentation. In these prefaces, James reflects on his experimentation with regard to withholding pivotal information from the reader and not directly presenting events that would facilitate that reader’s navigation through the James narrative. This study defines strategic nonnarration as the conscious literary device of first withholding significant characters and events from a work’s entire narrated text and then calling attention through repeated acknowledgement to that withheld material. The aim of this study is to show how withheld presentation operates as a narrative strategy to prompt the reader to assimilate the very events that are not presented.

According to Gerald Prince, the narratable is “that which is worthy of being told; that which is susceptible of or calls for narration” (*Dictionary* 56). By this definition, every instance of strategic nonnarration this dissertation explores is narratable because each example constitutes something tellable and significant. Although each character and event warrants and is capable of being directly presented, many James texts withhold this presentation. This study explores several instances in the James oeuvre of integral

characters and events withheld from the text and presented to the reader only through indirect narrative reference following the gap in presentation.

Bruce Kavin states, “no silence discusses the ineffable” (211). However, through careful attention to James’s use of strategic nonnarration, this dissertation explains the specific methods by which texts can nonetheless incorporate withheld presentation. Conferring presence on elements otherwise excluded from the narrated text, this technique prompts increased participation on the reader’s part in texts punctuated by limited knowledge and withheld material. The concept of strategic nonnarration guides this exploration of selected James novels as both reflexively centered on withheld information and as the foremost examples of prototypical modernism that shed light on the evolution of the modernist reader facing proliferated gaps, absences, and incomplete presentation.

The aim of this exploration of withheld yet acknowledged characters and events is to understand the implications of a text’s sustained, foregrounded absences. The gaps in presentation that this study addresses are distinct vacancies at the heart of James narratives and they constitute a pattern of withholding that reader response and other schools of criticism have barely considered. Furthermore, this study suggests a rationale for the deployment of this conscious, withholding technique. Clearly, before, during, and after James, abundant blanks, gaps, lacunae, silences, and other assorted absences have characterized a great deal of literature; however, these vacancies typically are not excessively emphasized or beset by numerous references to the very material being withheld as they are in James. In examining James’s withheld presentation, this dissertation combines reader response criticism and narrative theory in order to center on

the reader and the evolution of collaborative texts while at the same time developing a vocabulary for understanding how this technique operates as a narrative tool. Combining narrative- and reader-centered approaches, this study focuses on both the withheld moments themselves and their effect on the reader.

“The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places,” Hemingway writes in *A Farewell to Arms*. When a text withholds presentation of an event that would inform the story, assist the reader, or develop a character, this strategic nonnarration is a broken place. This perforated presentation marks an interruption in the narrative, a broken place in what is shown to the reader; there is a rift between information expected and information provided about a text’s pivotal moments. These broken places, however, are strong, stronger than if such breaks did not exist, did not obscure events, or did not induce a more collaborative reading. These breaks in continuity instruct the reader encountering the interruption how to proceed; this imperfection, like scar tissue, becomes something tried, tested, worn, experienced, and survived. Although not intact, the presentation has forged its own improvised completeness. The texts in this study echo this creed about being “strong at the broken places.”

Strategic nonnarration distinguishes itself from Seymour Chatman’s notion of a text’s unmediated information, material that is in fact presented to the reader. Chatman coined the adjective “nonnarrated” to signify unfiltered, directly reported, or minimally mediated narrative.¹ While “nonnarration” is an accurate encapsulation of material not

¹ The essential difference between Chatman’s “nonnarrated” and this dissertation’s “nonnarration” is that Chatman’s material is still reported. In *Story and Discourse*, Chatman calls a story nonnarrated when its narrative statements are directly presented to the audience, the exact opposite of this study’s narrative concept. Such direct presentation posits a type of overhearing on the part of the reader as opposed to

directly presented to the reader, modification of Chatman's term with "strategic" differentiates this withholding of significant presentation from the *reported* information entailed in Chatman's concept and underscores the technique's role in producing a co-collaborative effect on the reader. Strategic nonnarration is a tool to discuss *withheld* information, not the unmediated or minimally mediated material entailed in Chatman's concept.² The "strategic" modifier also distinguishes the concept from the insignificant details a text does not present. For example, in *The Wings of the Dove*, when Kate Croy visits Merton Densher, her walk to his apartment is not presented to the reader and therefore could technically be nonnarration; however, this is not the withholding of significant information that comprises strategic nonnarration.

Strategic nonnarration by no means signifies that characters and events go unmentioned in the text. On the contrary, they are invoked by the narrator or other characters; that is, the reader learns that a gap in presented material exists from a subsequent textual acknowledgement of the withheld information. Such withheld characters (1) are not physically observable to the reader in that they never enter the narrated text, the narrated world directly presented to the reader, (2) have no direct discourse, (3) are verifiable entities, that is, there is never any doubt they exist, and (4)

mediated, diegetic narration. Chatman also substitutes "minimally narrated" for "nonnarrated," thus conceiving of the two as interchangeable. For Chatman, a nonnarrated story does not possess a narrative filter to mediate between that story and its presentation: "The negative pole of narrator-presence—the pole of 'pure mimesis'—is represented by narratives purporting to be untouched transcripts of characters' behavior" (166). Chatman cites "found texts" like letters and journals as the purest nonnarrated stories, because in the case of copied texts "the discourse pretends merely to transmit already written materials" (167). Chatman equates nonnarrated stories with literal or figurative acts of transcription, in which the narrator functions more as a collator, copying a character's letters or recording the "unmediated presentation of a character's speech" (178) as in a series of dialogue without narrative presence or tags.

Gerald Prince follows Chatman's term and defines a "nonnarrated narrative" as one "with an absent narrator; a narrative presenting situations and events with a minimum amount of narratorial mediation" (Dictionary 67).

² From this point on, this dissertation does not address Chatman's concept of transcriptable material, which is reported to the reader and unmediated by the text. As a result, when the "strategic" modifier is dropped, it is for the sake of greater ease and is not intended to evoke Chatman's adjectival "nonnarrated."

play a significant part in the story. Similarly, withheld events are significant, verifiable, textually acknowledged incidents that the text never directly presents to the reader. Without the text or characters invoking the withheld presentation, this material would not exist for the reader. Although Mrs. Newsome generates most of the plot of *The Ambassadors*, she is never directly presented to the reader; she exists rather because the narrator and several characters in *The Ambassadors* continually invoke her. The fact that Merton Densher's father is never mentioned in *The Wings of the Dove* does not constitute nonnarration, because the text's lack of reference never reveals this nonexistent element's bearing on the story. To constitute strategic nonnarration, this father would be discussed, suggested, acknowledged, or described, yet never appear in the text to be directly presented to the reader. When Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* enters a room without the text disclosing the color of her dress, this information, while not presented, is not strategic nonnarration because it is not significant for the story nor is it invoked by the text. Were Osmond and Madame Merle to share that they simply could not abide that color Isabel had chosen, without disclosing this color, this reference to undisclosed material would start to approach nonnarration based on the increased significance attributed to it and the foregrounded reference without direct presentation. In addition to insignificant topics, this study also excludes from strategic nonnarration monumental historical events, which may be vastly significant but lack any textual acknowledgement. For instance, it is not strategic nonnarration when James never treats the Haymarket riot, Dreyfuss case, or Spanish-American War.³

³ Citing Jane Austen's lack of treatment of the Napoleonic wars, D.A. Miller calls such absent topics "unincluded subjects of discourse" (4). In further explaining the difference between electively withheld material and such unincluded subjects, it is important to cite Miller's argument about establishing "the level at which the novelistic representation is pitched" (4). For example, if a text never aims to cover world

In contrast to other narrative lacunae or textual absences, strategic nonnarration sharply differs from gaps in presentation based on overt censorship; from absence due to narrative frames that exclude material beyond a story's opening and closing frames; from linguistic-based gaps; from narrative delays, which are temporary as opposed to nonnarration's permanent withholding; and from narrative omissions, in which the text draws no attention to withheld material but instead relies only on the reader's intuition that something has not been presented. First, overtly censored material does not constitute strategic nonnarration. The fact that Hemingway would have needed to slash paragraphs of his sexually explicit "Up in Michigan" in order to have the story published makes these gaps enforced and not electively withheld, which is a central criterion of strategic nonnarration.⁴ Second, strategic nonnarration does not cover absence based on narrative frames, that which takes place preceding the opening of the narrated text. Like withheld presentation, frame-based absence, for example, the slave mutiny that temporally precedes the opening frame of Melville's *Benito Cereno*, is both unobserved and extremely significant. In contrast, however, nonnarration signifies events that take place during the time span of a story's narrated text without being presented to the reader within that narrated text.⁵

Nonnarration does not necessarily reflect a linguistic incapacity; that is, the decision not to present a character or event does not stem directly or exclusively from

history, then the absence of actual historical events signifies the lack of inclusion instead of textual exclusion.

⁴ Miller calls such enforced blanks "forbidden topics" and distinguishes them from what this study calls elective withholding, topics such as the lack of presented sex lives for Jane Austen characters (4).

⁵ In addition to temporal narrative frames, it is also possible to distinguish elective withholding from the lack of narration due to physical narrative frames. For instance, when the patriarch of *Mansfield Park* travels to the Caribbean to quell problems on his plantation, although his activities are not directly presented to the reader, this is not the type of withheld presentation this dissertation explores. Austen's text represents principally one uniform geographic setting and, while one character strays outside, the text adheres to its physical narrative frame, its setting and primary characters.

language's inability to express them. This study does, however, acknowledge something linguistic at stake, that words in fact do, as T.S. Eliot states, "strain, crack and sometimes break, under the burden."⁶ In the James oeuvre alone there are many terms of ineffability: for example, in *The Golden Bowl* Maggie loves "in the most abysmal and unutterable way" (506); in *The Wings of the Dove* "something had happened to [Densher] too beautiful and too sacred to describe" (469); and in *The Ambassadors* "[a] thousand unuttered thoughts hummed for [Strether] in the air of these observations" (319). However, for purposes of examining nonnarration as an elective feature, this study emphasizes the difference between what is not presented due to the limits of language's expressive capacity and the deliberate withholding of significant moments in the text to achieve a desired effect.

Nonnarration also does not entail narrative delays, which might require the reader to wait hundreds of pages for presentation of an event that has already been invoked many times, much like plays that end with a fifth-act revelation scene or *Absalom, Absalom!*, which narrates the same event several times before revealing key pieces of information. (In the hands of other authors, Mrs. Newsome would likely appear in the last pages of *The Ambassadors* and thus eliminate any nonnarration.) The terms "gap" and "blank" do not automatically signify permanent vacancies since many often get filled in as the text progresses. Nonnarration of characters and events, however, means that their presentation is not delayed but rather permanently withheld. Finally, although narrative omissions resemble nonnarration, the reader however must intuit these figuratively excised moments since the narrative does not foreground them by calling

⁶ Quoted from "Burnt Norton" (1936). A prevailing post-structuralist view argues frontiers of human awareness are tantamount to linguistic boundaries.

attention to the gaps in presented information. In the story “Out of Season,” Hemingway omits the original ending, of a man hanging himself, without drawing the reader’s attention to this omitted material through any device such as allusion or foreshadowing.⁷

Cultural taboos and censorship have often prompted excluding certain moments or elements from a story, such as the early modern offstaging of God and evolving restrictions on sexual content. For purposes of this project, however, nonnarration is elective rather than enforced and it covers characters and events that social and technical convention do not prohibit. This material is withheld, instead, based on the behavior and practices of a particular posited, ideal reader, the ability of this reader to nonetheless assimilate unrepresented elements, and the interpretive space cultivated by the withholding of direct presentation. Nonnarration dovetails with the evolution of reader-centered texts and the changing roles and evolving responsibilities of a reader facing texts that require a great deal of co-collaboration, texts that rely on the reader’s interpretation and reconstruction to shape a more legible text. Didactic guidance may result from a text that withholds significant material, which trains the reader to hone the skill and energy to reconstruct what the does not directly present.⁸ Susan Glaspell’s *Trifles* does not present

⁷ This study’s concluding chapter also considers Hemingway’s brand of omission. Another example of omission could likely be the suicide of Henry Adams’ wife Marian that appears to be a vacancy, an absent-presence in *The Education of Henry Adams*. The following passage from the chapter “Twenty Years After,” written seven years after her suicide, resonates with Hemingway’s omissions. Adams writes of himself in the third person, “for reasons that had nothing to do with education, he was tired; his nervous energy ran low; and, like a horse that wears out, he quitted the race-course, left the stable, and sought pastures as far as possible from the old” (302).

Narrative omissions also raise the issue of textual editing. For instance, if a reader knows that during the final galley stage of *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald removed a scene in which Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, and Nick attend a baseball game before going to the Plaza, this scene becomes a type of narrative omission for that reader. These editing palimpsests potentially complicate the study of omission.

⁸ Notions of absence, presence, and the intertwining of both may evoke Plato to whom we can trace an overriding “preference for the absent.” The idea that there is another world of the Forms where the ideal is always offstage, always unobservable speaks to the lack of withheld presentation that constitutes strategic nonnarration. Robert Sokolowski, states, “It is in fact easier to talk about something, to describe it more thoroughly and to draw out its implications, when the object is not present. For Plato, to have the eidos, the

the play's crime, victim, and killer but instead foregrounds two women who carefully read signs at a murder scene, create a narrative establishing what happened, and solve the mystery. This discerning, hypothetical, and reconstructive reading, both figurative and literal, becomes routine with the gaps, absences, and fragmentation of modernist literature whose narrators no longer tell readers everything they need to know. An important technical precursor, James's strategic—and prototypically modernist—nonnarration underscores modernist representation as a gradual, cumulative project comprised of multiple perspectives and dependent on the reader's participation and will to discern and create meaning.⁹

This dissertation tests Jamesian prototypical modernism as acutely conscious of both an ideal reader and the text's ability to confer a narrative, experiential presence on withheld material. The assumption is that the emerging modernist reader is already equipped by the Jamesian narrative. By examining withheld characters and events in James narratives, this study links modernist and Jamesian readers and explores strategic nonnarration as both the deliberate withholding of significant material and the potential assimilation of these withheld elements into a text. Because several James texts perfectly

'look' of an object in speech, is far better than to have the object in perception" (28). Sokolowski adds, "When we do have an object present, we have it given in only some of its ways of being presentable. When we speak of it in its absence, we can collect into our discourse all its ways of being given, and our speech may be more adequate to the object than is our experience of it, even though what we say must always be brought back to experience for verification" (29).

⁹ In *The Uses of Obscurity: The Fictions of Early Modernism*, Allon White identifies James as one of the first early modernist authors. White aligns James with modernism based on the following elements: textual obscurities that "are productive of meaning at the same time as (apparently) concealing meaning" (16); a level of difficulty that "signifies in and by the very act of offering resistance . . . and [arises] from an oblique point of view or obscured vision" (16-17); and a sense of incompleteness of the texts, in which "communication . . . no longer endeavors to be just a transparent bearer of fact or feeling but imbricates the form with the narrative" (29). John Carlos Rowe argues that James's modernism stems from his novels that "indicate the limitations of language and the writer's need repeatedly to replace old terms with new signs" (*Modern* 231). Geoffrey Hartman states James's two primary common bonds with modernism are the ways in which "James experiences the horror of man's alienation . . . and uses [his works'] artifice to question the nature of all signification" (242). Peter Stowell and Sharon Spencer argue that James's multiple impressions of consciousness cemented his modernism (4).

illustrate this technique and its implications for the reader, James as the clearest case for understanding how strategic nonnarration informs the lacunae, non-linearity, inconclusiveness, and intricacy of modernist literature. While the number of reader-centered texts soars with modernism, this shift toward the reader had already intensified with James whose work prepares the reader for extensive deductive and interpretive collaboration with texts punctuated by gaps in presentation, vacancies that often lead to incomplete or contested visions of time, character, even plot.

Before James, the realist narrator would traditionally fill in gaps, not create them. James marks a refusal of this omniscience and a rejection of panoptic vision in favor of third-person-limited narration, which represents knowledge as fragmented and intentions as complex and unclear.¹⁰ “The knowledge possessed by the novelist no longer underlines the narrative,” George Steiner describes the James oeuvre: “In Henry James . . . we are meant to observe the strenuous tactics of exclusion. What is left out lies in ambush around the next corner” (107). In James, Chatman states, “certain vague questions are raised which can never be completely resolved. . . . A certain degree of the uncertainty may be cleared up in the broader context but never all of it” (*Style* 92).¹¹ “James obstacles himself,” Geoffrey Hartman states; “he refuses simply to know. Every mind tends to be viewed through another, and the desire to know positively . . . is always

¹⁰ James meticulously developed this form of narration to the extent that point of view was fully restricted to, or *inside*, a single consciousness. Tzvetan Todorov invokes this limited Jamesian perspective by claiming that, with James, one sees “only the vision” but “never the object of that vision” (*Poetics* 150).

¹¹ In *The Later Style of Henry James*, Chatman also invokes the discerning, collaborative James reader as an explanation at least in part for maintaining this degree of uncertainty: “It is as if James expects his reader to half-know what he means before he says it” (92).

Chatman also develops the idea of Jamesian ellipsis, which refers to “the withholding of any kind of information that would help explain things” (87). Chatman appropriates the demands of ellipsis—that “words and structures must be inferred from the context”—in order to articulate a broader relevance for Jamesian technique and its expectations of the James reader. That is, the incomplete construction implicit in ellipsis demands increased effort and attention from this James reader.

presented as a vampirish act” (70). Breaking with traditions of providing the reader sufficient explanation for characters’ actions and motivations, the James narrative is no longer automatically privy to a character’s consciousness but rather requires the reader to piece it together gradually. The opacity of withheld moments in James corresponds with this changing mode of representation. Strategic nonnarration also has a mimetic function in that it speaks to a common lack of sufficient information, lack of access to people, events, and unveiled truths necessary to clarify significant matters. In fact, James has praised novels in which “we wander scarcely less with our hand in no guiding grasp” (“New Novel” 196). Ultimately, however, use of the technique suggests that withholding direct presentation of central characters and events—suppressing, as James says in “The Art of Fiction,” “the very thing we are most curious about”—will prompt increased participation in the story to shape a more complete narrative out of incomplete information.¹²

This study derives its authority from Henry James, his prefaces and criticism, not from reader response or narrative theory critics. Textual evidence from James’s prefaces and ample criticism reveal the reader that James expects.¹³ Regarding “[t]he art of representation,” James asserts in the preface to *Roderick Hudson*, “whatever makes it arduous makes it, for our refreshment, infinite,” an assertion that privileges narrative

¹² A frequent criticism leveled at those who postulate a particular reader response asks why one assumes the reader would behave in certain ways. James Phelan clarifies that, because a great deal of narratology operates on an idealist basis, scholars must be aware of the distinction between postulated models and actual reading practices. For example, when Rimmon-Kenan assumes the reader will infer the implied author, she does not actually assert every reader will construct this textual structure but instead establishes a model by which to better understand the reader’s role in narrative communication. Likewise, this argument that strategic nonnarration may function in a similar fashion to narration is a model not intended as complete or universal. However, to argue that it is conjecture to assume a James reader would notice the missing pivotal events around which this study is built fails to consider the author’s clear and repeated articulation of a posited reader.

¹³ John Pearson argues that James, in his prefaces, constructs the modern reader (8). Stuart Culver argues, “The prefaces articulate an aesthetics of difficulty” (130).

complexity and a reader who diligently, deftly, perceptively navigates a complex text. The preface to *The Wings of the Dove* offers the clearest insight into James's belief in his ideal reader as well as his keen awareness of the interpretive richness narrative indirections can yield. In it James reveals his "instinct everywhere for the *indirect* presentation of his main image" and the appeal of "some merciful indirection" (50).¹⁴ This preface also declares that "we"—author and reader—should not have more access to or know more than protagonists themselves discern. Such a declaration clearly suggests the expectation that the reader actively engage with the text and its withheld material. Because the Jamesian reader does not have unrestricted access to characters' minds and motivations, it becomes incumbent on this reader to "piece together," as the *Wings* preface states, to shape something legible out of incomplete information and to reconstruct what the text withholds.¹⁵ This activity on the reader's part is implicit in James's emphasis in the preface to *The American* of "the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit."¹⁶ In "The New Novel," James states the reader is capable of learning at least as much from what is missed in a text as what is found; this essay also calls attention to a text's "silence we have not heeded" and speaks of texts that "admonish us of [notes] we miss" (202).

The Wings of the Dove's preface argues against narration that can "affect [the reader] as an abuse of privilege when not as an abuse of knowledge" (46), thus further

¹⁴ In addition to his meditations on indirection in the prefaces to *The Wings of the Dove* and *The American*, James also considers the concept in his letters, referring, for example, to "that magnificent and masterly indirectness" (*HJ Letters* qtd. in Todorov 150).

¹⁵ Umberto Eco would argue that James's texts are created with this ideal reader already structured into them. Citing *Ulysses* as an example, Eco posits the "process of interpretation" (of the "good *Ulysses* reader") "is a structural element of its generative process" (9).

¹⁶ Also in the preface to *The American*, James invokes circuitous paths to understanding again by referring to the "things we cannot possibly *not* know, sooner or later, one way or another" (xvi). Implicit in this sense of gaining knowledge one way or another is the idea of a reader's assimilation of the text's less accessible, perhaps veiled or absent, material.

marking James's predilection for providing the reader only limited information. Calling excess presentation "an abuse," James is cautious about texts that misuse their authority and freedom and is circumspect about imparting more knowledge than the minimum that will suffice. "A change has come over our general receptive sensibility" (185), James notes in "The New Novel," defining his preferred reader in contrast to the more current, prevalent reader he encountered toward the end of his career. James describes the latter as being drawn to texts "susceptible at once of being entirely known" (188), an assertion that highlights his predilection for texts unsusceptible to facile or sufficient explanation and complete presentation. "Reduction to exploitable knowledge," James writes, "is apt to mean for many a case of the human complexity reduction to comparative thinness" (188). Clearly and negatively, James marks broad and consistent access to knowledge as detrimental to the richness of both text and reader response.¹⁷ Beyond revealing James's warning about the misuse of privilege and knowledge, this study is guided by the supreme importance of James's prefaces in understanding the author's awareness and articulation of his ideal reader.

This dissertation shares the same assumptions about the ideal reader that James establishes in the *Wings* preface:

Attention to perusal, I thus confess by the way, is what I at every point, as well as here, absolutely invoke and take for granted. . . . The enjoyment of a work of art, the acceptance of an irresistible illusion, constituting, to my

¹⁷ Jonathan Culler identifies "enigmas, gaps, shifts [that] thus become a source of pleasure and value" (262). Amid Culler's (and Roland Barthes') exploration of how the text produces pleasure, the notion arises of a James reader who experiences pleasure from withheld information. The capacity to fashion the incomplete presentation of a James novel into more knowledge and understanding than the text directly provides may not be merely a matter of savvy or skill; rather, filling in, piecing together, and discerning most likely constitute a form of pleasure and enjoyment of the text for the James reader.

sense, our highest experience of 'luxury,' the luxury is not greatest, by my consequent measure, when the work asks for as little attention as possible. It is greatest, it is delightfully, divinely great, when we feel the surface, like the thick ice of the skater's pond, bear without cracking the strongest pressure we throw on it. (49)

The reader James posits exerts "the strongest pressure" in working strenuously to navigate a text. Clearly revealing his expectations for the reader's active, cerebral contribution to texts marked by limited knowledge, James also assures this reader that his dense, challenging texts welcome and sustain whatever interpretation, intrusion, participation, beliefs, or expectation the reader heaves at it.¹⁸

Ten years before this preface in "The Future of the Novel," James articulates different levels of a reader's performance and competence by calling attention to "the reader irreflective and uncritical" (183). James's awareness of both lower and higher caliber readers is evident when, in the preface to *The Turn of the Screw*, he calls the story "an *amulette* to catch those not easily caught (the fun of the capture of the merely witless being ever but small)" (xviii).¹⁹ Similarly, in "The New Novel," James continually uses adjectives like "attentive," "reflective," and "inquisitive" to describe his preferred reader: "Nothing could well interest us more than to see the exemplary value of attention,

¹⁸ Even in a very early essay, "The Novels of George Eliot" (1866), James is already thinking of a collaborative reader: "In every novel the work is divided between the writer and the reader; but the writer makes the reader very much as he makes his characters. . . . the reader would be doing but his share of the task; the grand point is to get him to make it."

¹⁹ Shoshana Felman claims *The Turn of the Screw*'s preface underscores "the distinction James is making between naïve and sophisticated readers" (102). White also asserts that James continually "forc[es] the level of discrimination and intellectual observation as high as possible" (147).

attention given by the author and asked of the reader” (203).²⁰ A large part of James’s criticism and reflection on his work centers on the relationship between text and reader, specifically the demands of the text and the quality of the reader’s performance and collaboration.

Roland Barthes’ distinction between writerly and readerly texts is crucial for understanding the changing role of the reader and evolving narrative techniques. Whereas the reader must absorb or “consume” the fixed, limited meaning of the readerly text, the writerly text, *le texte scriptible*, allows the reader to produce meaning, to “co-write” alongside the author.²¹ Similarly, Umberto Eco argues texts are “open” when they encourage a reader’s collaboration in producing meaning.²² Stanley Fish credits I.A. Richards in *Principles of Literary Criticism* for being one of the first to draw “attention away from the work as an object to the response it draws” (*Affective* 411). Primarily concerned with the reader’s responses to the text, Michael Riffaterre in *Semiotics of Poetry* argued that literary analysis must consider the reception by the reader and that competent readers needed to push beyond surface meanings. Emphasizing the reader’s role in producing meaning, reader response critics like Fish and Wolfgang Iser were among the first to assert that the reader’s experience of reading is a central feature of the literary process: Iser argues, “the message [of literary works] is transmitted in two ways,

²⁰ In this essay, James often refers to a “critical reader,” one who displays great effort, attention, and self-awareness. Regarding this critical reader, James privileges criticism that is “as aware of itself as possible” (181).

²¹ The quote from Barthes is “le texte scriptible c’est nous en train d’écrire” (*S/Z* 11). Peter Brooks calls the *texte scriptible* “that which allows and requires the greatest constructive effort by the reader” (20).

²² In essays for *The Role of the Reader* dating back to 1959, Eco conceives of certain texts as “cooperatively generated by the addressee” (3). Eco also objects to notions that a reader’s participation in the text’s meaning-making detracts from the text itself: “to postulate the cooperation of the reader does not mean to pollute the structural analysis with extratextual elements. The reader as an active principal of interpretation is a part of the picture of the generative process of the text” (4).

in that the reader ‘receives’ it by composing it” (*Act 21*).²³ Reader-response criticism represents a phenomenological approach concerned with the reader’s awareness and focuses on the reader’s experience of appropriating, or as Roman Ingarden stated, realizing or concretizing a work of art.²⁴ By emphasizing reading and the reader’s perception of the text, phenomenological approaches to literature examine the convergence of text and reader, a convergence, Iser states, “brings the literary work into existence” (*Reader 31*).

This study engages in depth with reader-response criticism, which assumes blanks in a text—the gaps between what is expected and what is provided—will incite a reader to supply what’s missing.²⁵ Beyond calling attention to the reader’s role in filling in narrative gaps, this criticism emphasizes the text’s incompleteness and the reader’s role to create meaning and reflect on narrative choices and techniques. Reader-response critics also consider the implications of different readers filling in these blanks and navigating unreported episodes in different ways. Iser’s claims that such blanks call on the reader to engage imaginatively with the text in order to fill these gaps, Iser’s assertion

²³ Iser believes the text emerges as an aesthetic object based on the reader’s acting upon it (*Interaction 119*). In *The Act of Reading*, Iser explains, “Meaning is the referential totality which is implied by the aspects contained in the text and which must be assembled in the course of reading. Significance is the reader’s absorption of the meaning into his own existence. . . . The constitution of meaning, therefore, gains its full significance when something *happens* to the reader” (151-152). This conception of a mutual production of text *happening* to a reader and a reader acting upon the text fundamentally informs strategic nonnarration’s dual structure of narrative gaps in presentation prompting the reader’s assimilation of the material withheld in those gaps.

²⁴ Iser explains the importance of phenomenological theory based on the equal attention it draws to the text and to “the actions involved in responding to that text” (*Act 21*). Susan Suleiman offers an expanded description of reader-response’s phenomenological approach as well as a thorough exploration of “six varieties of audience-oriented criticism” (cf. 5-33).

²⁵ Culler addresses the question of such expectation, that is, what is expected of a text in terms of provided information. According to Culler, “the basic convention governing the novel is the expectation that readers will, through their contact with the text, be able to recognize a world which it produces or to which it refers” (192). As such, not presenting pivotal characters, events, or other material may default on or subvert this “narrative contract” because it may detract from the “representational or mimetic orientation of fiction” (193).

being that a blank “induces and guides the reader’s constitutive activity” (*Interaction* 118).²⁶ It is this direct relationship between textual vacancy and the call to imaginative engagement that guides this study.

In *The Implied Reader*, Iser departs from Ingarden’s “spots of indeterminacy”—inherent linguistic, structural gaps—in order to treat these “spots” more as “blanks,” which result from conscious technique.²⁷ These blanks are necessary for a text, according to Iser, because they train a reader to supply what’s missing and engage with the text. Upon encountering blanks, Iser states, the reader “formulates something that is unformulated in the text” (*Reader* 287), an assertion that bears strongly on the assimilation of withheld material.²⁸ The first to discuss these gaps at length, Iser articulates the reader’s responsibility to connect what the gaps separate, “to create in his or her mind a poem or a novel or play that isn’t *in* the text but that the text incites” (*Indeterminacy* 24). As a result, Iser is also one of the first to draw attention to incomplete or, to use Iser’s term, “unformulated” texts.

This reader response is often self-conscious, as readers reflect on their own participation, projection, meaning-making, and inadequacy: “The ability to perceive oneself during the process of participation is an essential quality of the aesthetic experience; the observer finds himself in a strange, halfway position: he is involved, and he watches himself being involved” (*Act* 134). One of the most appealing features of

²⁶ Iser posits that blanks can “trigger off and simultaneously control the reader’s activity. . . . Blanks indicate that the different segments and patterns of the text are to be connected even though the text itself does not say so” (*Interaction* 112). In fact, Iser states, “Blanks refer to suspended connectability in the text (*Act* 198). In spite of or because of such missing links, according to Iser, “the blank organizes [the reader’s] participation” (*Interaction* 119).

²⁷ Iser in particular critiques Ingarden’s conception of a “one-way” relationship between the text—of meaning and message—and the reader; Iser, instead, posits a two-way relationship (cf. *Act* 173).

²⁸ Much earlier, in *The Implied Reader*, Iser establishes the role of conscious technique in the existence of these vacancies. Unlike Ingarden, Iser does not recognize the inherent nature of gaps; instead, Iser views them as “unformulated though nonetheless intended” (31).

Iser—and one that clearly links him to James’s conception of the reader—is the portrait he paints of a skilled, reflective reader and the teleological view of reading as potentially auto-didactical. “The new experience [of reading a text] emerges from the restructuring of the one we have stored,” Iser states, “and this restructuring is what gives the new experience its form” (132).²⁹ This fundamental conception of reading as governed by learning from experience is at the heart of this exploration of James and nonnarration, an author and a technique that rely on the active participation and discernment of a reader who learns from the previous gap in presentation and who notices subtle details along the way in order to fill in the next bit of withheld information.

The reader response shift from exclusive study of the text toward the text’s effect on the reader reaches its height with Fish. Barthes’ notions of writerly texts and meaning-making readers were instrumental for Fish who conceives of “language as an experience rather than as a repository of meaning” (*Affective* 426).³⁰ Fish claims that the information an utterance provides is not automatically its meaning, but rather the experience of an utterance is its meaning: the “place where sense is made or not made is the reader’s mind rather than the printed page or the space between the covers of a book” (397).³¹ As a result, by examining an indeterminate element in literature as “an *event*,

²⁹ Part of this restructuring is due to what Iser calls “colliding images,” an excellent and appropriable term to capture what may actually happen to a reader during the narrative opacity of withheld presentation: “The shifting blank is responsible for a sequence of colliding images, which condition each other in the time flow of reading” (*Interaction* 119).

³⁰ Fish’s perspective of “affective stylistics” focuses on the reading experience at the sentence level and emphasizes how readers, while reading a text, adjust their expectations along the way, particularly in relation to word usage and syntax of sentences. With the reader’s expectations of meaning and information continually adjusting as the text proceeds, Fish’s assertion bears on strategic nonnarration, which also often requires these adjusting expectations in response to limited knowledge and withheld pivotal moments.

³¹ Fish is often criticized for assuming his own reading experience to be the norm and for overlooking the difference (or eliding the potential disparity) between a reader’s experience of the text and an understanding of that experience. Eco counters Fish’s notions of the text’s nearly infinite available interpretations: “You cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it. An open text, however ‘open’ it be, cannot afford whatever interpretation” (9).

something that *happens* to, and with the participation of, the reader” (386), Fish’s reader-response criticism marks a shift in considering “what a sentence means” to “what a sentence does.”³² Applying Fish to the withheld presentation of significant material is just one way in which this study explores this withheld material’s impact on the reader beyond simply the possible meaning of the withheld events or characters themselves.

While this dissertation focuses more on the effect of these vacancies than on if or how they are filled in, key reader-response questions still pertain: how much freedom does a reader have in filling in a text’s indeterminacies? How much stems from the interpretation a reader brings to bear on a gap and how much is programmed by the text? The Iserian dichotomy posits that while the text is realized by the reader it also directs the reader’s interpretation.³³ Because Iser implies that the amount of “realizable” interpretations is limited for a given text, he has been criticized for not addressing the amount of freedom the reader has in realizing a text. On one hand, Iser claims, literary texts allow the reader freedom to interpret according to one’s own views, stating, “the text is constructed in such a way that it provokes the reader constantly to supplement what he is reading” (*Indeterminacy* 32-33). On the other hand, Iser argues “the reader’s activity must be controlled in some way by the text” (*Act* 167) and suggests that the text programs the reader’s filling in of a text’s blanks in order “to bring about an intensified participation which will compel the reader to be that much more aware of the intention of

³² See 386-393 for Fish’s reader-centered substitution of what the text means for what the text does to the reader’s experience of it. This study’s second chapter contains an application of this Fishian substitution as it relates to withheld presentation in James.

³³ In exploring this dichotomy, Suleiman identifies “unresolved tensions” with the phenomenological approach to reading (26). Suleiman explains the dichotomy at the center of Iser’s theories: “On the one hand, Iser asserts the primacy of the reader’s creative role in realizing the text, thus allowing for a high degree of ‘free’ variations; on the other hand, he suggests that it is ultimately the text itself which directs the reader’s realization of it” (23). Since the 1970s, reader-response critics have explored whether the reader Iser posits is a freely judging reader or a reader guided by the text’s intentions and instructions.

the text” (*Indeterminacy* 32-33). As a result, Iser argues the various patterns the reader creates for the text are intended by the author: “meaning is conditioned by the text itself, but only in a form that allows the reader himself to bring it out” (43). What Iser so often suggests is, while the reader has faith in his or her own interpretive freedom, the “correct” interpretive filling-in is that which coincides with the author’s wishes for how they ought to be filled in. Iser’s dichotomy brings prevailing reader-response issues to bear on this project but it also establishes the ways in which James’s use of strategic nonnarration diverges from some of Iser’s assertions. James intends no such “control by the text” or “intention of the text” but instead, by withholding presentation of key moments, fosters greater interpretive freedom and richness.

While Iser has shaped reader-response criticism and contributed extensively to evolving conceptions of the co-collaborative reader, James serves as a counterpoint to Iser’s claim that it is incumbent on the reader to deduce internal consistency for a text’s blanks, to normalize or naturalize them.³⁴ It is overly important to Iser, who privileges coherence at the price of interpretive richness, to resolve tension by establishing consistency out of complexity. The objective of James’s withheld presentation is precisely the opposite: nonnarration allows, even cultivates, more interpretive possibility. Privileging consistency of interpretation, Iser argues that “apprehension of the text is dependent on gestalt groupings” (*Act* 120).³⁵ That which does not cohere with this consistency-building—which Iser calls “the indispensable basis for all acts of

³⁴ A fundamental basis for Iser’s claim is his assertion that a blank “as an empty space between segments [of the text] enables them to be joined together” (*Interaction* 113-114).

³⁵ By Iser’s definition, “a gestalt can only be closed if one possibility is selected and the rest excluded,” selection of which is intersubjective (123). These excluded interpretive possibilities do not disappear but rather become ambiguities (129). Although Iser’s emphasis on the gestalt stems from a linguistic, sentence-level approach governed by correlates and signs, this philosophy spreads to broader reader response and interpretation. Iser argues that it is through forming these gestalts that a reader becomes aware of the inadequacy of the selections and consistencies he or she has built (134).

comprehension”—Iser considers discrepancies (125, 130-131). This consistency-building lies in direct opposition to the interpretive potential fostered by withholding presentation of significant characters and events. By citing the reader’s responsibility to make “signs consistent” and to “identify the connection between signs” to avoid creating arbitrary meaning (120-123), Iser actually calls attention to this expansive interpretive freedom, which nonnarration instills and which Iser’s notions of naturalization and consistency may stymie.³⁶ Instead, by calling for a reader to naturalize a text’s blanks, to deduce an internal consistency for them, Iser appears to posit a uniform rationale for all of these blanks and perhaps even a hierarchy of explanation or interpretation.

What is likely at the heart of Iser’s naturalization of blanks is a desire to make those blanks readable, a move Shoshana Felman equates with reduction in meaning and reader response. Bringing her deconstructionist sensibility to bear on the reader and on unreadable elements in the text, Felman advocates reading indeterminate elements as indeterminate: “to actually *read* the unreadable, to impose a *meaning* on it, is precisely *not* to read the unreadable *as unreadable*, but to reduce it to the readable, to interpret it as if it were of the same order as the readable” (142). While this study’s next chapter on *The Portrait of a Lady* attempts to “read” the withholding of nearly four years of significant events in a way that illuminates the literary device behind this nonnarration, it also maintains these withheld years’ unreadability without reducing or translating this withheld presentation into something akin to readable, printed pages simply missing from the book. These withheld years are read as mourning, grief, recovery, depression, loneliness, sorrow, and many other possible ways while the undecideability of this

³⁶ While this study rejects consistency-building as an interpretive goal, Gerald Prince similarly claims that naturalization “reduces [the] strangeness of a narrative” (*Dictionary* 67). Iser himself is aware that “reduction of significance is a risk of filling in indeterminacies” (*Act* 176).

withheld presentation is preserved. It is material that does not actually exist, that possesses multiple interpretive and experiential possibilities, none of which may appear internally consistent if juxtaposed in an Iserian manner. “Our task [as readers],” Felman states, “would perhaps then become not so much to read the unreadable as a variant of the readable, but . . . to rethink the readable itself, and hence, to attempt to read it as a variant of the unreadable” (143). Nonnarration lends itself to deconstruction and pluralist interpretation because the existence of withheld presentation *always already* has meaning but does not require a commitment to any particular one. The opacity and silence of characters and events not presented to the reader cultivate an open space in the text for interpretation and experience, a space of opaque, silent interruption in presentation that welcomes and prompts multiple readings and meanings. Nonnarration for James is one of the most effective devices by which to limit the reader’s knowledge and, by doing so, to encourage broader participation in the text, whether prompting the reader to reflect on the text’s construction or leaving that reader temporarily suspended in the gap in presentation.

Like Prince and Felman, Jonathan Culler similarly warns readers and critics who answer the “big” questions a text poses: “we commit ourselves to naturalizing the text and to ignoring or reducing the strangeness of its gaps and silences” (232). Committing to a consistency-building reading of a text’s withheld material will detract from the multiple possible meanings of this nonnarration and cut short the interpretive potential of its consciously structured vacancies and silences. It is possible to maintain the vacancy of those gaps by generating multiple readings. In contrast, by calling on the reader to “concretize” the cues that constitute a text, Iser argues, “Balance can only be attained if

the gaps are filled, and so the constitutive blank is continually bombarded with projections” (*Act* 167).³⁷ For Iser, a blank, a maintained vacancy, is not an option although it may well be a reality, since the reader often does not know how to fill in the blank or has many options or ideas. The reader might choose to preserve the blank in order to accommodate several interpretive possibilities. A vacancy left unfilled, a blank left unresolved, does not indicate an unengaged, unimaginative, enervated reader. On the contrary, uncertainty, emptiness, or unresolved matters might be the interpretation and experience a reader elects; the reader, faced with several interpretations, may elect to maintain these interpretive options without a hierarchy.

Timothy Walsh combines reader response criticism with deconstruction in an effort to privilege the *structured* absences of this uncertainty, emptiness, and unresolved nature from structural absences of a linguistic nature. Walsh argues neither Ingarden nor Iser adequately distinguish structural absences from these structured absences, which are intentional vacancies created by conscious literary technique (107). These gaps in a text, Walsh argues, are “directly implicated by the text itself” and must remain open (108). These specifically implicated absences are singled out by the text and are “also a primary means of conveying a sense of the purposely incomplete or pregnantly unfinished state of work that can potentially amplify readerly dynamics a hundredfold” (112).³⁸ Walsh’s notion of structured absences parallels strategic nonnarration in several ways, particularly by building on Iser’s work with gaps stemming from conscious literary technique and by emphasizing the text’s reflexive strategy of referring to the moments not presented in the

³⁷ Iser’s consistency-building notions stem in part of his awareness of the reader’s tendency to project onto a text (cf. 127-128).

³⁸ Fish has also argued against the enforced completeness of the text: “the objectivity of the text is a dangerous illusion, one of self-sufficiency and completeness” (400).

text. Both strategic nonnarration and Walsh's structured absences mark "the intentional use of language to call attention to something missing in a specific or recognized way" (108).

Beyond Walsh, however, reader-response critics have done little to differentiate among various types of absences, and no one considers either the permanent absence of withheld material or the possibility of assimilating these withheld elements. In addition, reader-response critics have not investigated the relationship between withheld presentation and repeated reference within the text to that withheld material. When these critics or narrative theorists consider absence in texts it is most often in terms of hypothetical or conjectural situations, from Godot to the ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw*. Few critics consider topics pertaining to withheld presentation of significant material, which, if presented, would impart valuable information to the reader. In *Story and Discourse*, Chatman's paragraph-length section "Reports of what characters did not think or say" addresses material that narrators speculate *could* have transpired but in fact never did. Chatman asserts these reports stress the narrator's increased prominence, because "the mention of possible but unconsummated events calls attention more clearly still to the artifice of the narrative process itself" (225). Prince coins the term "disnarrated" to describe events that do not happen but are hypothetically reported nonetheless. Prince's disnarrated functions in a hypothetical mode and reports unrealized fantasies, incorrect assumptions, and conjectured hopes and desires. As a result, Prince argues, this device can slow narrative speed, contribute to characterization, define a narrator, or develop a theme.

Chatman and Prince address narratives that include or foreground a language of hypothesis and alternative as a means of reporting events or behaviors that do not actually take place. These alternative motivations and actions, these conjectured expectations and fantasies exist in a world of absence, possibility, and suggestion. Helping to define a world beyond the directly presented, Chatman and Prince foster important common ground with strategic nonnarration and situate it in a critical context. However, this study departs from Chatman and Prince due to the equal need to explore events that transpire without being presented to the reader—the primary difference being that their notions are based on information that is in fact presented. By exploring things that do not happen but are reported nonetheless, Chatman and Prince offer a mirror image to strategic nonnarration and thus inform this study of things that *do* happen but are not presented. This dissertation learns from these critics in order to better understand how actual, not hypothetical, withheld information functions in a text. While nonnarration still welcomes this same speculative energy, the conjecture implicit in nonnarration recreates important plot segments that have not been presented. The reader’s conjectural vigor contributes to fleshing out or interpretively playing with actual events: not ghosts or dreams, but rather birth, death, and work. By moving beyond the purely hypothetical into the verifiable, this study asks what is at stake for the text itself and for the reader’s experience of encountering nonnarration.

This experiential encounter is a fundamental element of strategic nonnarration; when a pivotal event is withheld, a reader can still experience what has not been presented. Gérard Genette’s concept of a text’s “pseudo-time” (77-78) underscores the link between strategic nonnarration and a reader’s experiential encounter with a text. For

instance, the following chapter argues that, because of the withheld presentation in *The Portrait of a Lady*, the reader has less experiential history with Isabel; the reader does not, for instance, see Isabel mourn her child. Genette argues, “[narrative’s] realization depends on its being gone through in sequence and succession, and that it thus metonymically ‘borrows’ a temporality from the time of its reading” (77-78; Brooks 20). The time it takes a reader to recognize and process the nonnarration contributes to this pseudo-time. By pointing to a reader “enlarging” his or her experience through reading, James underscores this experiential encounter with a text: “The success of a work of art, to my mind, may be measured by the degree to which it produces a certain illusion; that illusion makes it appear to us for the time that we have lived another life—that we have had a miraculous enlargement of experience” (*Alphonse Daudet* 227-8). James emphasizes both the technical, constructed nature of a text and the way in which this technique, this artifice, broadens the understanding and simulates the passage of time for the reader. According to Iser, “involvement, or entanglement, is what places us in the ‘presentness’ of the text and what makes the text into a presence for us”; whereas Genette proposes pseudo-time and James experiential enlargement and technical illusion, Iser emphasizes a reader’s involvement as the key to maintaining the text’s presence (131).³⁹

A brief survey of additional narrative theoretical terms and concepts related to nonnarration and its impact on the reader will better situate the concept in a critical context. Earlier this chapter addresses Prince’s notions of the disnarrated and the narratable.⁴⁰ D.A. Miller conceives of the narratable as the production of narrative,

³⁹ Iser also discusses the matter of the reader’s projection: it is in “react[ing] to what we ourselves have produced...[that] enables us to experience the text as an actual event” (*Act* 128-129).

⁴⁰ Prince also explains several narrative concepts that bear on nonnarration and that will be discussed in the following chapters. For example, Prince discusses the idea of narrator intrusiveness, which, on the one

which “is possible only within a logic of insufficiency, disequilibrium, and deferral” (265).⁴¹ Exploring how narrative insufficiencies prevent resolution, Miller argues that narrative is about lack—about the absent and deferred—that is continually seeking presentation, trying to be reported, pushing toward narration. Because he believes narrative is driven by disharmony and inadequacy, Miller argues that narrative tries to solve a gap and come to a conclusion while at the same time it struggles to avoid concluding the narrative: “To designate the presence of what is sought or prized is to signal the termination of the narrative” (3). Miller develops this idea of resisting closure by articulating that “the narratable inherently lacks finality. . . . It can never properly be brought to term . . . since the tendency of a narrative would therefore be to keep going” (xi). While absence of explanation produces narrative, filling-in entails an end to the narrative. In this light, withholding presentation of pivotal moments is a manifestation of Miller’s conception of the narratable. That is, strategic nonnarration maintains an incompleteness at the heart of a text and embodies the same energy of narrative: to resist completion, to lack finality. By withholding, the text preserves a part of its own unfinished state.

Similarly, Tzvetan Todorov states, “the absence of knowledge provokes the presence of narrative”⁴² and asserts the James narrative rests on “the existence of an

hand, might increase in light of nonnarration being perceived as a deliberate strategy to keep a reader from “seeing” an important figure or occurrence while drawing attention to a narrating self. On the other hand, nonnarration might mark less intrusiveness because it clears part of the narrative space of evaluative and interpretive suggestions. Another example of a popular narrative theory topic is narrative distance, introduced by Prince as the distance between narration and the narrated world, a concept that prompts us to consider whether nonnarration distances the reader from the narrated world.

⁴¹ In *Narrative and Its Discontents*, Miller expands on Barthes’ assertion in *S/Z* that “an unrealized otherwise” arises with each ending; Miller focuses on the more-there-is-to-tell once closure takes place and threatens any definitive meaning. Like Todorov, Miller asserts that absence produces the narrative.

⁴² Regarding *The Turn of the Screw*, Felman makes a similar argument about what enables a story to exist in the first place: “It is precisely *because* the letters [in *The Turn of the Screw*] *fail* to narrate, to construct a

essential secret, of something not named, of an absent and superpowerful force which sets the whole present machinery of narrative in motion” (*Poetics* 145).⁴³ Arguing “the Jamesian narrative is always based on *the quest for an absolute and absent cause*,” Todorov clarifies that this “cause” on which James’s texts are founded is “not only absent but for the most part unknown” (145).⁴⁴ Further linking his criticism to James’s criticism and technique, Todorov’s phrase “indirect vision” nearly replicates James’s call for indirection in the preface to *The Wings of the Dove*; Todorov argues the James narrative is governed by the following rule: “Never to show in broad daylight the object of perception” (150). By identifying “indirect vision” as a central feature of the James narrative, Todorov articulates a fundamental element of nonnarration as well, that withholding presentation will maintain the vacancies that encourage the reader’s participation in a text.

The “nonnarratable” is not the same kind of prompt for reader participation.

Miller explains the nonnarratable can be told but is incapable of generating a story: “The

coherent, transparent story, that there is a story at all: there is a story *because* there is an unreadable, an unconscious. Narrative, paradoxically, becomes possible to the precise extent that a story becomes *impossible*—that a story, precisely, ‘won’t tell’ ” [from *Turn*] (143).

⁴³ Barthes similarly is more concerned with keeping a problem or mystery open, “to *arrest* the enigma, to keep it open” (*SSZ* 82). Culler also states, “Only when a problem is maintained does it become a significant structuring force, making the reader organize the text in relation to it and read sequences in the light of the question which he is attempting to answer” (212). Barthes’ and Culler’s emphasis on the ways in which enigmas can structure a text suggest another dimension for strategic nonnarration as a structuring force, that is, as a means to organize the reading process (for example, around the central withheld events of a text). Reading these open moments or enigmas as a structuring force also recalls Genette’s notion of pseudo-time by which the text maintains a sense of temporality.

⁴⁴ Whereas Todorov conceives of this absent cause as the essential prompt for the reader, Barthes states in “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative” that what most animates readers is “*la passion du sens*” (27), which Brooks translates “as both the passion *for* meaning and the passion *of* meaning” (19). Brooks states, “the active quest of the reader [is] for those shaping ends that, terminating the dynamic process of reading, promise to bestow meaning and significance on the beginning and the middle” (19). This “passion for meaning” underlines most of this dissertation’s inquiry into a reader’s awareness of and response to withheld presentation.

All of these secrets and unknown causes generate curiosity in the posited reader whose attempt to penetrate these secrets, Todorov argues, must “unfold as a construction” (*Essentials* 259). It is through referential sentences—those that evoke an event—that the text prompts a reader “to construct an imaginary world” (259).

nonnarratable elements of a text . . . serve to supply the specified narrative lack” (5).

Unlike the elective withholding of strategic nonnarration, “the nonnarratable is not the unspeakable” (5); it can be mentioned or a text can designate it.⁴⁵ Regarding what cannot be told, however, some critics mistakenly use “unnarrated” interchangeably with “nonnarratable,” even though the unnarrated applies most often to narratives that make no attempt to call attention to themselves as being told.⁴⁶ That is, not drawing attention to a reporting presence makes a story unnarrated. In contrast, strategic nonnarration foregrounds the gap in presented material, which in turn calls attention to the constructedness of a text and its technical manipulation.

Another similar term that contrasts nonnarration and appears deceptively related to both the unnarrated and the nonnarratable is the “unnarratable,” of which Prince identifies three categories:

that which, according to a given narrative, cannot be narrated or is not worth narrating either because it transgresses a law (social, authorial, generic, formal) or because it defies the powers of a particular narrator (or those of any narrator) or because it falls below the so-called threshold of narratability (it is not sufficiently unusual or problematic). (*Disnarrated*

1)

⁴⁵ Taking Miller’s narratable and nonnarratable as starting points, Peter Brooks focuses on plot in attempting to discover what lies behind the nonnarratable. In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks defines plot as “an interpretive structuring operation” (19) in a way that resonates with Barthes’ and Culler’s notions of how other features structure a text. Brooks conceives of “plot as the logic of narrative” and judges it a foremost explanation for excluded and included material (21). Because withheld presentation centers on the elements of plot that the reader does not directly observe, Brooks’ work on recovering the importance of plot in governing a text is relevant.

⁴⁶ Miller also warns against confusing the unnarrated with the nonnarratable (cf. 4).

Like Prince, Robyn Warhol initially conceived of the unnarratable as a broadly inclusive term, which tries to navigate the intricacies of what cannot be told and what is not told.⁴⁷

Warhol simplifies Prince's definition of the unnarratable to signify

that which cannot be narrated because it is too tedious or too obvious to say; that which is taboo, in terms of social convention, literary convention, or both; and that which purportedly cannot be put into words because it exceeds or transcends the expressive capacities of language. This last category prompts what Prince has called 'unnarration,' where a narrator marks the absence of the unnarratable incident with phrases such as 'I cannot put into words the emotion she felt when she beheld him.'

(*Victorian 4*)

Warhol, Prince, and the unnarratable provide a model against which to distinguish strategic nonnarration as a concept outside the domain of tedium, transparency, taboo, or convention. Nor does strategic nonnarration necessarily occur on the fringes of linguistic capacity. In contrast to strategic nonnarration, which is capable of being presented but electively is not, the unnarratable *cannot* be presented. Miller is the only critic who addresses narrative reference with regard to what is not capable of being told. Miller explores an "other world" that the narrative cannot encompass but which it can still refer to; however, Miller considers narrative reference to the nonnarratable exclusively in

⁴⁷ In April 2005, Warhol expanded her conception of the unnarratable into additional categories: the "needn't be told" of the subnarratable, the "can't be told" of the supranarratable, the "wouldn't be told" of the paranarratable, and the "shouldn't be told" of the antinarratable (*Odious Subjects 1*). Warhol has just begun to conceive of these subcategories, but their very existence speaks to the complex, rich field for exploring what is not and cannot be presented and the narrative techniques that govern what the text does not directly present.

support of his theories on the impossibility of closure and does not consider the implications of foregrounded reference that this study does.⁴⁸

Furthermore regarding the unnarratable, Pierre Macherey in *A Theory of Literary Production* introduces the distinction between what the text *will not* and *cannot* say: what the work “does not and could not say” (77), a distinction that informs this elective withholding of presentation. A work “circles about the absence of that which it cannot say” (80), Macherey argues in his overall endeavor to explain how incompleteness shapes a text, a project easily co-opted for James criticism, which often charts territory in and around what is unsaid or unreported. Although Macherey’s theories stem from Marxist views regarding systems of literary production and the economic structures at play in the process of composition, the “cannot/will not” distinction is useful for exploring those withheld pivotal characters and events never presented to the reader. Allon White uses the same *cannot say* model: “The work shows in its form what it cannot say, and it is the silence of the unsaid that gives it existence” (28). White links the information a text withholds to the formal techniques the text adopts, one form of which is strategic nonnarration.⁴⁹

Regarding Henry James specifically, White cites vulgarity as “a central organizing category in James” and argues that avoiding it may account for a portion of

⁴⁸ Russell Reising adopts Miller’s “other world” of the nonnarratable to signify texts’ “embeddedness within the sociohistorical worlds of their own genesis” (11). Although Reising does not expand on his or Miller’s conception of reference to the nonnarratable, Reising argues that the untellable in texts exists because the sociohistorical elements engulfing them are inexpressible. Reising states, “for Miller both the emergence of narrative and its impulsion throughout the narrative space function to keep the nonnarrative world forever beyond the possibility of narrative imagining” (11).

⁴⁹ Like Macherey and White, Chatman draws attention to the fact that “narratives may be said to select” (*Story* 29) and tries to distinguish between what a narrative does and does not include. Although he does not elaborate on this concept or its implications, Chatman defines “selection” as the discursive narrative feature that chooses which events to state and which to imply. Chatman also addresses “narrative filling-in” and warns that “to neglect it is a critical mistake,” because this filling-in is not “a mere reflex action of the reading mind” (31).

James's ambiguity (133-134). Building on Stephen Spender's claim in 1935 that vulgarity is a central element in James, one rooted in James's "attitude toward the body and the sexual act" (32), White instead explores vulgarity in the context of disclosure and presentation to a reader: "in the later fiction, James extends the term so that anything which announces itself directly and immediately appears somehow 'vulgar' " (134).⁵⁰ White is among the first to link what goes unsaid or unseen in James directly to conscious technique and an awareness of a particular type of discerning reader. In light of this reader and regarding this fusion of withheld presentation with narrative taste and technique, White senses a "contradiction between the desire to 'know' the intimate scene and the fear that this will appear an indelicate, even obscene interest"; this contradiction "increases the pressure to blur the central narrative focus" (143). James and his articulated, posited reader share this fear of direct presentation being perhaps common or aesthetically inferior: "in James *any* direct, unmediated presentation is flagrant. So much is never allowed simply to appear. . . . [A]ny immediacy appears as shockingly precipitant, and . . . direct representation appears ostentatious and 'showy' " (138).⁵¹ This is a fundamental element of James's conception of his reader, craft, and technique. James's privileging of narrative features that prevent anything facile, automatic, direct, flagrant, baseless, premature, or abrupt is a central assumption of this study.

This study's assumptions about the James reader are also informed by the concept of literary competence. Barthes and Culler both develop the notion of literary

⁵⁰ Felman calls attention to Douglas's line in the opening of *The Turn of the Screw*—that "the story *won't* tell"—as a similar avoidance of the vulgarity of texts that are too forthright and unable to be silent (118).

⁵¹ White comments on the difficulty of James texts in the same manner: "The obscurity connotes a rare and elevated discourse, and in terms of the Jamesian narrative economy, creates value by making the reader's purchase of significance difficult and costly. . . . He can generate discursive value by avoiding 'giving away' anything to the reader which is common, blatant, or cheap" (147).

competence, which Culler defines as “a set of conventions for reading literary texts” (118), and which Barthes defines as one’s “training as a reader of narrative,” the skill that represents “the possibility of following a narrative and making sense of it” (*Introduction* 19). For Culler, literary competence is an “internalization” of the “ ‘grammar’ of literature which would permit [the reader] to convert linguistic sequences into literary structures and meaning,” the ability to read a text *as* literature (114). This reader must bring to a text “an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse” and familiarity with “the conventions by which fictions are read” (114). A critical concept to keep in mind when positing a James reader of above-average discernment, literary competence is linked to expectations about navigating a text’s levels, “implicitly recognizing elements of a particular level and interpreting them accordingly” (192). These levels are related to Barthes’ work with codes, the various functions of a text such as plot, language, or symbolism. Barthes argues the reader must “identify various levels” in order to understand a text: “to read a narrative is not only to pass from one word to another, it is also to pass from one level to another” (*Introduction* 5).⁵² Positing this level-navigating capacity implies a certain amount of experience and savvy on the reader’s part. Strategic nonnarration is one of the levels a James reader is expected to pass through; the ability to work with limited knowledge and incomplete presentation of significant material is one of these expected navigational capacities.

Each of the following three chapters explores a different manifestation of strategic nonnarration and the methods by which texts incorporate withheld material. The second chapter, “Withheld Parenting,” focuses on the multi-year nonnarration in *The Portrait of*

⁵² Culler provides examples of such levels, such as the level of trivial detail or of narrative speech act, and explains that the ability to pass from one level to another is crucial to perform any adequate analysis (192).

a Lady that covers the pivotal events of marriage, motherhood, and a two-year recovery after the death of Isabel Archer's child. Exploring the first proposed strategy of incorporating withheld presentation, this chapter asks why James does not let the reader see Isabel suffer and grieve—a central question that exposes the author's deployment of nonnarration and the ways in which a pattern of significant withheld presentation informs the James narrative and conception of the reader. *The Portrait of a Lady* illustrates the mimetic function of nonnarration, which offers a representational strategy to assimilate silence, mourning, and the passage of time into the text. By not presenting Isabel's mourning, James finds a way to incorporate at least a portion of this pain and recovery by establishing Isabel's silence on this matter as a narrative equivalent of mourning for the two years following her child's death. *Portrait's* gap in presentation is one of the most effective and compelling representations of coping with loss and processing grief, and this chapter argues that the withheld material functions as a narrative form of absence, silence, and vacancy.

The third chapter, "Dying and Reading in *The Wings of the Dove*," explores both the novel's nonnarration, which centers on Milly Theale's death and dying, as well as the strategy of assimilating this withheld presentation through a pattern of doubling character with reader. The nonnarration in *The Wings of the Dove* self-reflexively incites the level of reading achieved by the reader that the novel's preface assumes and didactically illustrates how to perform as such an ideal reader. This chapter explores several passages that illustrate the novel's narrative strategy of suggesting models for a reader facing incomplete, withheld information. James aligns the actual reader with Merton Densher, a character who often asserts that he and his deductive powers have "filled it out," who

understands without direct disclosure, who discerns “without touching it,” who works with incomplete data and “darkly pieces together” guesses and answers from the limited information that surrounds him. Extensive reflection in the novel’s preface, the chapter also shows, reveals both James’s ideal reader and technical narrative experimentation with constructing a text based largely on vacancy and withheld presentation.

The final chapter, “Working Offstage,” explores the strategic nonnarration of work in *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Lesson of the Master* to show how James finds ways to incorporate withheld work. Juxtaposing James with Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House*—works all centered on bound and unbound texts and metonymic substitution of work—this chapter considers how nonnarration manifests a resistance to completion, converts abstract physical reference into an experiential narrative presence, and incites increased participation on the reader’s part. This chapter explores withheld intellectual and artistic work in novels saturated with proliferated references to the materiality, physicality, or vocabulary of work and considers how these novels incorporate, without direct presentation, the process and experience of working. Occupying a portion of this final chapter, *The Professor’s House* previews the conclusion’s application of nonnarration beyond James. Continuing to bridge James with contemporaries and successors by way of nonnarration, this study’s conclusion models usage of the technique in order to establish nonnarration as a tool to understand a wide range of texts, their narrative indirection, construction, and vacancy.

The instances of nonnarration this dissertation assembles all come from American texts, a scope explained by turning again to Henry James and his profound understanding of something distinct, perhaps silent and incomplete, of American life and letters, of “the

absent things in American life,” as he called them in *Hawthorne*. In this biography, James states, “[Hawthorne] was silent, diffident, more inclined to hesitate, to watch and wait and meditate, than to produce himself, and fonder, on almost any occasion, of being absent than of being present. This quality betrays itself in all his writings” (42). Hawthorne’s tendencies and predilections as well as James’s recognition of them point to both authors’ preference to savor the undisclosed. By emphasizing Hawthorne’s silence and inclination “to hesitate,” James describes a literary aesthetic and technique of not revealing too much, of taking one’s time and, as a result, compelling the reader to meander. In this silence, hesitation, waiting, and watching, James discerns an affinity on Hawthorne’s part for vacancies of meaning, for delays or limitations of information, for the inscrutable material that challenges the reader and requires skilled deciphering.⁵³ By observing that Hawthorne was less fond of “being present,” James illustrates a literary style predisposed to defer or refuse presentation of significant material.⁵⁴ James extolled this withholding, meandering style in 1879, just a few years into James’s novelist career, while the author was further configuring his style and technique—and awareness of their effects—and further developing a sense of the constructed nature of his art.

Like James and Hawthorne, Whitman participates in building expectations of high levels of reader engagement. *Democratic Vistas* asserts that the text need not be “the complete thing,” since the reader exists to sketch in the incomplete areas, to fashion one’s own understanding out of hints that the text provides: “the reader is to do something for himself, must be on the alert, must himself or herself construct indeed the poem,

⁵³ Yvor Winters states Hawthorne uses a “formula of alternative possibilities” to create an aura of uncertainty around characters and events such as, in *The Scarlet Letter*, the townspeople’s different reports and various reactions to what Dimmesdale reveals on his chest (170).

⁵⁴ James himself was “fascinated by the human need to suppress and conceal” (Yeazell 32).

argument, history, metaphorical essay—the text furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or frame-work. Not the book needs so much to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book does.” According to Whitman, the text, with its hints, clues, and frame-work, operates as an incomplete structure that the reader must “construct.” James enters a literary scene already aware of an evolving co-collaborative reader. By 1871, Whitman’s reader, who “is to do something for himself,” already marks a shift; while the text provides an armature of sorts, the reader is expected to fill in the gaps in presentation. Whitman discerns a sense of incompleteness that bridges Hawthorne’s absences, silences, and hesitations and James’s withheld presentation and interpretive possibility.

Furthermore, also in *Hawthorne*, James identifies a shallowness in American cultural and institutional life. Compared to the “great deal of history” and “complex social machinery” of Europe, James and Hawthorne note profound absences in America (*Hawthorne* 3).⁵⁵ Years before this biography, in 1867, a James letter reads, “[Americans] would always be ardent for completeness while the inevitable sense of incompleteness resulting from a life so deliberately pursued would have nothing traditional to fall back onto” (*Letters* qtd. in Hutchinson 38).⁵⁶ This early observation underscores James’s awareness of the absence of a central telling, explicating force, an awareness that would translate into literary technique as third-person-limited perspective,

⁵⁵ James was already aware of Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations about the totalizing impact of American democracy on America’s cultural, institutional, social, and familial landscapes. In *Democracy in America*, de Tocqueville argued American democracy would change literally everything in America, affecting anything from child-rearing and dress to language itself. James also knew American democracy was changing and would continue to change Americans’ thoughts and lives, with the strongest notions of freedom and individualism driving this transformation.

⁵⁶ The letter continues, “to be an American is to be a modern, exiled from traditional sureties, affronting uncertainty” (38). Early observations like this one prefigure many of James’s outsider protagonists who struggle to piece together understandings equipped with vastly limited knowledge. Similarly, in 1871, James wrote to Charles Eliot Norton, “the face of nature and civilization in this our country is to a certain point a very sufficient literary field. But it will yield its secrets only to a really *grasping* imagination” (*Letters*).

which vastly restricts the information a reader can access. This awareness of an inevitable incompleteness bears on a narrative pattern of withheld direct presentation; by not presenting significant events to the reader, the narrative resists completion and maintains an ongoing presence.⁵⁷ Through literary technique, James assuages his articulated anxiety about cultural, national, and institutional incompleteness by embracing, in narrative form, the very incompleteness and uncertainty generated by limiting knowledge and withheld direct presentation.

The texts this study explores assume a co-collaborative reader who engages with the permanent gaps in presented material in a way that allows a text to have a continuous presence, to borrow from Stein, always to be in-process. By understanding the pattern of withheld presentation in James it is possible to recognize the ways in which this gap-making technique informs and prefigures the following modernist generation whose work is often dominated by nonlinearity and defamiliarization. Like Stein's sense of continuous presence, modernist fiction draws attention to the work itself—and the creative activity on the reader's part—executed in current time. James is precursor to this emphasis on surface, this reflexivity of texts that call attention to their own creative processes, because the James reader is already experienced at navigating texts that withhold key presentation in an ongoing process of creation.

In *Lectures in America*, Stein states, “A name of anything is not interesting because once you know its name the enjoyment of naming it is over” (231).⁵⁸ This

⁵⁷ Joseph Conrad detects in James this sense of ongoing presence: “You remain with the sense of the life still going on; and even the subtle presence of the dead is felt in that silence that comes upon the artist-creation when the last word has been read” (18-19). Brooks seconds this observation, stating that James postpones or defers “the quiescence of the end” (262).

⁵⁸ In that same lecture, Stein also states, “Now that was a thing that I too felt in me. The need of making it be a thing that could be named without using its name. After all one had known its name anything's name for so long, and so the name was not new but the thing being alive was always new” (236-7). This

pleasure and satisfaction in naming something, in exploring it and knowing it, mirrors the participation of the reader in reconstructing a withheld event or conceiving of a withheld character. Once an event or character is presented, interpretive freedom is truncated and the enjoyment of the participation reduced. In fact, interpretive space is curtailed in proportion to the amount of information imparted to the reader. Like the compositional secret central to James's *The Figure in the Carpet*, had it been named, it would no longer exist.⁵⁹ Stein's "naming" is akin to presenting the details, scenes, and information that, when withheld, most encourage a reader's creative investment in a text. The limited knowledge, the resistance to naming and presenting, that characterizes many James texts is precisely what most fosters a reader's interpretive potential.

The narrator of *The Figure in the Carpet*, while talking to the famous writer Vereker, learns that a "little point," a "particular thing" governs all of the great author's work—it is what Vereker has "written [his] books most *for*" (141). This central idea that "stretches . . . from book to book," Vereker tells the narrator, is "stuck into every volume," "governs every line, it chooses every word, it dots every i, it places every comma" (144); this idea strikes Vereker "even as the thing for the critic to find" (142). By refusing to disclose this idea-thing, Vereker underscores the expectation that a collaborative reader would discern undisclosed material for oneself. During this conversation, the narrator, frantic with excitement, is "on the point of exclaiming 'Ah yes, don't tell me; for my honour, for that of the craft, don't!' " (141). That "don't tell

possibility of understanding without presentation resonates both with nonnarration that is able to function as a form of narration and with the ability of a reader to experience material without direct presentation of those events or characters.

⁵⁹ See Todorov 175. Regarding *The Figure in the Carpet*, Todorov says, "The secret is by definition inviolable, for it consists in its own existence. The quest for the secret must never be ended, for it constitutes the secret itself" (175). Todorov asserts that, as James readers, "we know that this meaning [of his oeuvre] is nothing other than the quest itself" (177).

me” recalls James’s protection against the vulgarity of the facile and explicit as well as hearkens back to James’s “The Art of Fiction” recognition of the need to suppress the very thing we are most curious about. The narrator’s wish is not to save merely himself as a reader from the disclosure of the pivotal information but to spare the craft itself. The work would be diminished, as well as the reader’s powers of discernment and discrimination, by revealing too much. *The Figure in the Carpet* embodies James’s conception of his posited reader. By revealing not the secret but the existence of a secret, Vereker places the narrator in a position that mirrors the conditions of the James reader who also copes with knowing the very thing he or she is most curious about will not be presented.⁶⁰

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Sutpen says, “they deliberately withheld from [him] the one fact” he most needed to know. While plot-wise, this “deliberately withheld” knowledge refers to a portion of non-white blood, more broadly, Sutpen underscores a central technique of the text: the elective withholding of information. *Absalom, Absalom!*, while foregrounding the matter of textual difficulty, teaches the reader to perfect one’s reading, noticing, and reconstructive skills. In fact, the text cites “missing points” as a threat to careful reading and effective reconstruction of events. *Absalom*’s excessive information is presented to the reader in such a saturated way that both disclosed and withheld information begin to resemble each other. The majority of James texts prefigure the extreme difficulty of writers like Faulkner and other modernists. By radically complicating his syntax and obscuring events and intentions, James deliberately

⁶⁰ Todorov equates limited knowledge with the indirect vision James provides for the narrative and the reader. Claiming this indirect vision is James’s figure in the carpet, Todorov argues that the James narrative allows both James’s characters and readers alike “to see only the vision of someone and never the object of that vision directly” (*Poetics* 150).

makes reading more difficult. Myriad times, this strategy is evident on the sentence level, one example of which comes from *The Wings of the Dove*: “[Densher] took it out of its sacred corner and its soft wrappings; he undid them one by one, handling them, handling *it*, as a father, baffled and tender, might handle a maimed child” (502-3). This “it,” “[t]his something was only a thought” (502). This elusive “it”—that demands several rereadings from even the most careful reader—is simply one of Densher’s thoughts. This is actually presentation. James directly presents to the reader Densher’s experience of thinking. But the “it” play challenges the presentation and makes the reader struggle to understand what is being presented in the first place—so much so that James experiments with the ways in which presented information starts to morph into withheld information based on increasing levels of narrative difficulty.

In *The Ambassadors*, “There were sequences [Strether] had missed and great gaps in the procession” (62). Like James’s reader who encounters deliberately limited knowledge, Strether realizes the purpose of his mission: “he was there to reconstruct” (66). Both James’s reader and Strether find ways to assimilate the pivotal events and information not directly presented to them. This exploration of strategic nonnarration attempts to learn how such experience and understanding are conveyed and acquired in the face of sustained vacancy and withheld presentation. While nonnarration occupies no measurable space on the page, this withheld material may signify far more, require more time and effort to process, and offer greater interpretive richness. The aim of this study is assess the impact of this withheld presentation on the reading process and to offer new ways of conceiving of James’s prototypical modernism as relevant to the changing roles and responsibilities of an evolving reader. It is a period and an oeuvre that withhold

presentation often when such direct report would most facilitate a reader's grasp of the narrative, its temporal progression, characterization, and even basic plot. This study seeks to understand the emerging modernist reader already equipped by James, the narrative strategy of withheld presentation, and this technique's potential to facilitate assimilation of the temporal, experiential matter that lingers in the gaps in presentation.

Chapter 2

Withheld Parenting in *The Portrait of a Lady*

Many parents in Henry James are dead or somehow absentee. Most of James's protagonists have at least one deceased parent, and principal characters in several novels are orphans. Countless parents are inept, abusive, or drugged out. While presentation of these parents clearly is not withheld, their prevalence underscores a parental absence in terms of love and protection. Mrs. Miller, for example, though presented throughout *Daisy Miller*, is so inept at parenting that she allows her daughter to break several societal conventions, lets her sweet-toothed young son's teeth fall out, does not give this nine-year-old boy any schooling, and moves through the story often as a "hovering" and "wavering" ghost, drugged to alleviate her nervousness. In *What Maisie Knew*, nine-year-old Maisie's divorcing parents use her to injure one another in a feat of emotional selfishness and abuse that transforms their presence in the text into a painfully foregrounded absence of parental roles and responsibilities.

Although James appears drawn to narrating bad parenting, nonnarration of parenting occurs as well, exemplified by several parents living apart from their children, often at home in the States, and others simply never appearing within the narrative. Opening with a brief look at the nonnarration in *Daisy Miller* and *The Ambassadors*, this chapter explores the pivotal withheld parental material in *The Portrait of a Lady* and considers this nonpresentation as a narrative strategy, as a form of representation. Therefore, by focusing on the nonpresentation of parenting, this chapter attempts to understand the reader's experience of nonnarration and clarifies how this technique

operates—how it incorporates significant elements into a text without presenting them directly to the reader.

James is the fundamental author for understanding nonnarration because, by experimenting with nonpresentation of crucial moments in a text, James sheds light on the modernist literature of the following generation and its own experimentation with absence, nonlinearity, and undisclosed information.¹ *The Portrait of a Lady* in particular, with its nearly four-year narrative gap, emphasizes James's prototypical modernism. Nonnarration in James is a forerunner of the modernist proliferation of gaps, fragmented or withheld information, and the extensive participation required on the reader's part both to furnish a more complete vision of an incomplete narrative and to clarify temporal progression and characters' intentions or actions. In addition to inciting the reader's reconstructive collaboration, the extensive withheld presentation in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Ambassadors* is a representational narrative device to incorporate into the text otherwise withheld figures and events.

One way to explore the incorporation of withheld elements rests with reader-response criticism and Stanley Fish who poses the archetypal reader-response substitution of "What does this sentence mean?" with "What does this sentence do?"² It is exemplary of reader-response criticism not to ask how the mechanics of a sentence function or how language, grammar, and syntax operate *in* the text but rather what does this sentence do

¹ In the 1930s, James's modernist traits were already proposed by Joseph Warren Beach, Ford Madox Ford, and others. In a description that echoes the withholding of direct presentation of events, Ford described James as a writer who "builds suggestions of happenings on suggestions of happenings" (qtd. in Stowell 5).

² Fish makes this distinction in "Literature and the Reader: Affective Stylistics," in which he explores reader responses that are in fact acts of perception and conceives of language as an experience rather than as "a repository of extractable meaning" (426).

outside of the text, how does it affect the reader's encounter with the text.³ For Fish, the meaning of any utterance does not derive from the information it conveys or the words on the page but rather from how the reader experiences the text. Drawing on Fish's means/does distinction and substituting nonnarration for sentence, the questions become, "what does this nonnarration mean?" as well as "what does this nonnarration *do*?" Continually assessing how this withheld material affects the reader's encounter with the text, this chapter suggests a rationale for the numerous references in James to characters who, though permanently absent from the narrated text, still direct or influence it.

James's earliest offstage parent appears three years earlier than *The Portrait of a Lady*. The father in *Daisy Miller* is at home in Schenectady, and already, in 1878, the reader begins to experience parenting through absence in James's narrative world. Years later, in his penultimate novel *The Ambassadors*, it is the mother Mrs. Newsome who remains unobserved in Massachusetts. Such parental absences may speak to the typical Jamesian international theme contrasting European and American customs, behavior, and tastes. Because many of James's stories depict Americans in Europe who travel extensively or who lead expatriate lives, there will be family members who remain at home in the US. In addition, the numerous absent parents in James suggest the increased mobility in the late nineteenth century when travel by the upper classes was prevalent; it became less notable that parents and children might be separated for long periods of time. This natural occurrence of travel—that it might separate parents and children—does not, however, diminish the importance of nonnarration. After all, James could have rendered Mrs. Newsome or Mr. Miller merely absent by not allowing the other characters any

³ Soshana Felman undertakes a similar approach to *The Turn of the Screw*, exploring *how* it means as opposed to *what* it means. Felman considers how "the meaning of the story . . . rhetorically take[s] place through permanent displacement [and] textually take[s] shape" (119).

reference to them. Instead, within the approximately fifty-page novella, Mr. Miller's family refers to him three times, and Mrs. Newsome is mentioned hundreds of times in *The Ambassadors*, thus foregrounding the lack of direct presentation.

Depicting a young, American, self-proclaimed flirt who travels through Europe with her mother and little brother, *Daisy Miller* introduces one of James's earliest offstage characters. The reader is unaware of how long the Millers have been traveling before they summer in Switzerland and therefore is unable to determine how long the family has been separated from Mr. Miller. Randolph is the first to mention his father: "My father ain't in Europe; my father's in a better place than Europe" (99), he tells fellow American Winterbourne who then assumes that Mr. Miller has passed away.⁴ But alas, Randolph immediately follows with, "My father's in Schenectady." At this, the reader then most likely assumes the father has stayed in the States to work, but this assumption goes unconfirmed and the father's activities back home are never mentioned. Second, Mrs. Miller announces that it was her husband's idea that they travel in the first place: "Mr. Miller wanted Daisy to see Europe for herself" (123). Third, when Daisy flouts convention by parading around Rome with an Italian man, Mrs. Miller asks Winterbourne, "I should want to write to Mr. Miller about it—shouldn't you?" (143). Everything is questionable about Mr. Miller because nothing is directly observable about him; this uncertainty is reflected in Mrs. Miller merging an interrogative with the mention of her husband. After Winterbourne emphatically concurs that Mr. Miller should be

⁴ Incidentally, there is a second case of nonnarration in *Daisy Miller*. Winterbourne's lover, offstage in Geneva, is mentioned twice: first, the reason he spent "so much time at Geneva was that he was extremely devoted to a lady who lived there—a foreign lady—a person older than himself. Very few...had ever seen this lady, about whom there were some singular stories" (94); second, *Daisy Miller* ends by commenting that Winterbourne had returned Geneva and was "'studying' hard—an intimation that he [was] much interested in a very clever foreign lady" (152).

contacted, the exchange immediately ends, but the text does not disclose whether Mr. Miller was ever notified of his daughter's damaging behavior, which he most likely never was, given Mrs. Miller's previous failures to comply with parental duties. When Daisy dies from malaria in Rome, there is also no mention of Mr. Miller or any indication he was even contacted about her grave condition.

In light of these references to Mr. Miller, what then, from a Fishean perspective, does this withheld character *do*? First, the reader already knows the Miller patriarch is far away at home before he or she grasps the level of Mrs. Miller's parental ineptitude. Consequently, this nonnarration may shape the reader's perception of Mrs. Miller who, as the only present parent, is solely responsible for her children's well-being. By withholding one parent, the text affects the reader's response to Mrs. Miller by drawing more attention to the presented parent and the idea of parental obligations, by accentuating the perceived parental absenteeism, and by prompting a judgment about parental behavior. Also in light of the nonnarration of Mr. Miller, the reader may perceive the isolation of these American Millers abroad. Because the American father and husband is offstage in the United States, the Miller clan has lost a cultural anchor, their mooring to familiar American customs. Nonnarration of Mr. Miller may therefore lead the reader to consider how America itself is offstage in the text.

Although the Grand Tour was common for the upper middle class, *Daisy Miller* nonetheless emphasizes that Mr. Miller "wanted Daisy to see Europe for herself." Placed offstage along with Mr. Miller, America is depicted in the form of mobile travelers abroad. The Millers become itinerant embodiments of their nationality, while the father is fixed in place in Schenectady, like Mrs. Newsome is in Massachusetts. In this sense,

the reader experiences the seed of James's international travel plot but is also aware that Mr. Miller helped to initiate the travel that guides *Daisy Miller*. The phrasing—that Mr. Miller wants Daisy to see Europe—calls attention to a visual capacity and a sense of ongoing presence that Mr. Miller cannot enjoy; instead, he is blind to what Daisy experiences and to everything that happens to his family abroad. The Millers are to Mr. Miller what he is to the reader: material to make sense of in absentia with only incomplete information.

Whereas Mr. Miller contributes to his story's plot, Mrs. Newsome is instrumental in directing, even mandating the plot of *The Ambassadors*. The characters in *The Ambassadors* continuously act either in accordance with or in opposition to Mrs. Newsome's wishes; she instructs, she commands, her will is palpable, and her presence is felt at every turn. Determined to retrieve her son Chad from Paris to run the family business in Massachusetts, she dispatches two ambassadors to Paris to fulfill this mission. She monitors the progress of first ambassador Lambert Strether, issues directives, and ultimately removes him from his assignment. Remarking on Mrs. Newsome's palpable presence, Strether considers it "the queerest of adventures...that in Paris itself, of all places, he should find this ghost of the lady of Woollett more importunate than any other presence" (238). This importunate ghost renders Mrs. Newsome as haunting and unrelenting and also confirms the conspicuous presence of this absent figure, more compelling "than any other presence." The reader, therefore, encounters a protagonist who asserts that an unobserved, faraway individual is capable of manifesting herself and directing the course of events.

By emphasizing Mrs. Newsome's palpable presence, *The Ambassadors*' saturated reference, which far exceeds *The Portrait of a Lady*'s restrained reference to its withheld material, foregrounds the text's expectation for the reader to discern material despite its absence. Strether's friend Maria Gostrey calls attention to the importance of absence, of withheld presentation, and reinforces its potential illuminating, didactic value when she tells Strether, "My absence has helped you. . . . And the thing . . . was for me not to be there" (231). *The Ambassadors* exemplifies Fish's "what the sentence does" as well as, in this case, what the nonnarration does; withholding a central character incites the reader to reckon with that textual vacancy. By engaging with Mrs. Newsome's permanent withholding, which the preface calls "the pulse" of the story, the reader is able to reflect on the novel's technical underpinnings that prompt a participatory reading.

Throughout the novel, Strether discerns Mrs. Newsome's will behind events, her language in others' mouths, and her presence from across the Atlantic: "it was in a manner as if Mrs. Newsome were thereby all the more, instead of the less, in the room" (307). One reason why Mrs. Newsome is all the more in the room stems from her written communication, although at no point does she have direct discourse in *The Ambassadors*. Throughout his stay in Paris, Strether is in steady communication with Mrs. Newsome. Four letters from Woollett—"none of them short"—already await him on only his second morning in Paris and they continue to arrive "at the rate of several a week" (56). While reading them, Strether "held [the letters] there, lost in thought, as if to prolong the presence of what they gave him" (56). The actual reader of *The Ambassadors* observes the protagonist, during a literal act of reading, conjure presence out of absence. The text repeatedly foregrounds Strether's reading by consistently presenting him as a reader of

Mrs. Newsome's written communication. In addition to Strether reading Mrs. Newsome's letters, several times the text indicates the topics he reports back to her, while other characters express what they want Strether to communicate to her with a "tell Mrs. Newsome that!" (180). Just over halfway into the novel and Strether's mission in Paris, Mrs. Newsome switches from letters to telegrams, which indicates a greater degree of urgency; still, what are most likely very concise cabled messages are not reproduced in the text.

Instead, references to Mrs. Newsome's appearance, disposition, and hypothesized reactions to events punctuate the entire text. This frequent reference extends to her undisclosed written discourse. After one of her cables arrives, even the blue telegram paper containing her message is described from various vantage points as it rests on a table. The text draws attention only to the surface of "a scrap of blue paper folded and gummed," Strether's "scrap of paper compressed in his fist and further concealed by his folding his arms tight," and "the little blue paper [that] lay on the sill of the open window, smoothed out afresh and kept from blowing away by the superincumbent weight of his watch" (220-222). This prototypical modernist emphasis on the text's surface foregrounds its construction. In this case, emphasis on the textual surface calls attention to the work's technical narrative underpinnings.

After reading one of Mrs. Newsome's cables, Strether is left "standing still a long time where he had opened it and giving five minutes afterwards to the renewed study of it" (221). Mrs. Newsome's letters and cables are described only to the extent of their exterior or their placement on furniture in a way that tantalizes the reader with a physical depiction, which calls further attention to their undisclosed content. Only once receiving

a content overview of a Mrs. Newsome letter, even then the reader is still unable to hear her actual vocabulary, rhythm, tone, and diction:

[Mrs. Newsome] wrote admirably, and her tone was even more in her style than in her voice. . . . She abounded in news of the situation at home, proved to him how perfectly she was arranging for his absence, told him who would take up this and who take up that exactly where he had left it, gave him in fact chapter and verse for the moral that nothing would suffer. It filled for him, this tone of hers, all the air; (56-57)

Distinguishing between Mrs. Newsome's style and voice, the passage offers a distinction lost on the reader who is not privy to either. What the passage illustrates is the heightened degree of narrative mediation of Mrs. Newsome's communication. In this letter and at all points in *The Ambassadors*, Mrs. Newsome is rendered either through others' hypotheses or through filtered indirect discourse. The reader does not hear her express herself regarding any "chapter and verse" or hear her deliver the forecast of "the situation at home." Instead, the repeated "her tone" and "this tone of hers" again tantalizes the reader about Mrs. Newsome's direct discourse, which is mediated in a way that further extracts a sense of presence; this highly indirect discourse illustrates the narrative distance Mrs. Newsome is able to overcome to still be all the more in the room.

James was acutely aware of an absent character's ability to assume a palpable presence in a story, an idea articulated in the preface to *The Ambassadors*: "Mrs. Newsome, away off with her finger on the pulse of Massachusetts, should yet be no less intensely than circuitously present through the whole thing, should be no less felt as to be reckoned with than the most direct exhibition" (xl). Although Mrs. Newsome is

“circuitously present” for “the whole thing”—the entire novel, the preface conveys that her presence is not only pervasive but also must be grappled with. It is precisely nonnarration that contributes to this desired effect. The preface also emphasizes the importance of seeing in order to learn and to be changed by this learning: James states, “[Strether] at all events *sees*; so that the business of my tale and the march of my action, not to say the precious moral of everything, is just my demonstration of this process of vision” (xxx). Because Mrs. Newsome is not directly observable, Strether visualizes her out of this absence in order to gain insight into veiled intentions or complex circumstances. Beyond emphasizing an actual reader facing prominent withheld characters or events that impel the plot despite their nonpresentation, this “process of vision” also points to a didactic function of this nonpresentation.

Although Mrs. Newsome never appears in *The Ambassadors*, Strether periodically envisions her reactions to various things and describes her to Maria Gostrey. At one point Strether mentally stages a scene between Mrs. Newsome and her daughter and second ambassador Sarah Pocock—he even creates dialogue for them:

‘He says there’s no woman,’ he could hear Mrs. Newsome report, in capitals almost of newspaper size, to Mrs. Pocock; and he could focus in Mrs. Pocock the response of the reader of the journal. He could see in the younger lady’s face the earnestness of her attention and catch the full skepticism of her but slightly delayed ‘What is there then?’ Just so he could again as little miss the mother’s clear decision: ‘There’s plenty of disposition, no doubt, to pretend there isn’t.’ Strether had . . . the whole scene out. (117)

At no other point in the James oeuvre does a character so clearly enact the imaginative, perceptive, experiential benefits of absence and nonpresentation. Although the text withholds direct presentation of Mrs. Newsome, Strether demonstrates how the reader, upon encountering absence, can nonetheless experience these withheld people and events. Strether becomes the model of the actual reader who also literally cannot observe these characters. He can *see* and hear Mrs. Newsome and her daughter, hypothesize their next lines, and stage their movement and expression. In fact, Strether's conjuring evokes Prince's hypothetical realm of the disnarrated; Strether's speculative dialogue and detailed visualization illustrate this response to withheld presentation, its conjectural energy facilitating collaboration with a text that does not depict pivotal material.

Ultimately, *The Ambassadors* preface suggests the reader's role in discerning the palpable presence of withheld material. Facing highly limited access to characters' minds and motivations, the James reader must engage with lacunae, identify indispensable data, and connect relevant details to shape something legible out of incomplete information and to reconstruct the crucial data the text withholds. Like this actual reader making sense of fragmentary information, Strether discerns behavior and events not presented by the text. Able to have "the whole scene out," Strether's attempt to visualize Mrs. Newsome and Mrs. Pocock and to create dialogue for them is, to borrow from Barthes, a writerly endeavor; that is, Strether produces meaning as he appears to co-write alongside the author. For Strether, this improved writerly ability manifests itself as an experiential achievement; he is able to feel and visualize what he does not observe.⁵ He tells Maria Gostrey, "[Mrs. Newsome's] the same. She's more than ever the same.

⁵ Weinstein states, *The Ambassadors*, among all James works, best embodies "the fundamental relation between a character's imagination, the experience he seeks to interpret, and the experience he finally undergoes" (122), an assertion derived almost exclusively from exploring the figure of Strether.

But I do what I didn't before—I *see* her” (436). The text draws attention to Strether's capacity to experience withheld elements by rendering them in layout mode, as graphic, arranged objects “in capitals almost of newspaper size.” By translating nonnarration into palpable presence, Strether learns to envision and feel that which is not actually before him and, by figuratively seeing, thus discerns the withheld connective tissue of intentions and motivations, parts of the intricate spider-web of experience that James describes in “The Art of Fiction.” Recalling Fish's goal that literary criticism consider the reader's experience of a narrative feature beyond simply the mechanics of that feature, Strether experiences Mrs. Newsome both despite and because of her nonpresentation. Alongside Strether, the reader—incited by the text to engage with vacancies in presentation—may sense Mrs. Newsome's greater, observable, detailed, and compelling presence. *The Ambassadors* models a profound engagement with vacancy on the reader's part in addition to developing the extreme nonnarration found in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

The same imaginative engagement and didactic function are also essential for the withheld presentation in *Portrait*. Although the parents in *Portrait* do not constitute nonnarration, Isabel Archer's parents are deceased, Ralph Touchett's father dies early in the novel, and Pansy's mother is thought dead, since few know the secret of Madame Merle's maternity. Beyond a general parental absence or attenuation, however, in *Portrait* the reader encounters withheld parenting and child. This nonnarration stretches from just after Isabel's engagement through her wedding, six months of motherhood, her child's death, and a two-year recovery from the loss of that child. Several critics notice this glaring gap, but none has explored its implications or significance.⁶ This withheld

⁶ A few contemporary reviews make veiled allusions to the nonnarration of events, the clearest allusion appearing in an 1881 review in *Saturday Review*: “We cannot help remarking the care which the writer

child and parenting illustrate the implications of nonnarration and its impact on the reader; for instance, why does James not allow the reader to see this baby or to see Isabel mourn? At the end of *Portrait*, Isabel solemnly greets her aunt Mrs. Touchett who has just left her son Ralph's deathbed. "Go and thank God you've no child," Mrs. Touchett tells Isabel. Caspar Goodwood tells Isabel, "You've no children." "Her own children? Surely she has none," Ned Rosier states. It seems nearly everyone in *Portrait* either never knew or has forgotten that Isabel did have a baby boy who died at six months. Her aunt's careless comment may seem less callous upon considering the lengthy narrative gap that engulfs this baby's entire life span and Isabel's mourning. If her aunt has forgotten about the baby, then the years of withheld presentation suggest that those close to Isabel have been allowed to forget.

Portrait subtly prepares the reader for the extensive nonnarration with three earlier withheld events, the first being Gilbert Osmond's proposal to Isabel. Beforehand, Osmond announced that he was "absolutely in love with [Isabel]" before she departed for a year of travel, another instance of nonnarration. After Isabel returns, the proposal takes place sometime between, one, the text's single-sentence disclosure that she and Osmond had stayed in the same residence for three weeks, one year after Osmond's declaration of love and, two, the arrival of Isabel's former suitor Caspar Goodwood, enraged upon

takes not to go down . . . below the surface of his characters and of the situations in which he places them" (qtd. in Richmond 158). More recently, some critics note a time "shift," "break," or "lapse." Martha Collins calls it and Isabel's travel year the novel's "two great time shifts" (151) and states the extensive gap from engagement to two years after the baby's death "seems to bifurcate the novel" (151). Donatello Izzo claims, "what would have been crucial moments in other texts—dramatic turning points such as Isabel's departure from America, her wedding, the birth and death of her son—appear only in retrospective summaries; they are not dramatized and shown to the reader" ("Modern" 40). Philip Weinstein refers to the gap as "the more expected scenes of emotion and intimacy" (35). However, no one explores its significance beyond stating that it exists. For example, M.E. Grenander, et. al undertakes a complex charting of *Portrait*'s intricate, disputed time-scheme, trying to map the progression of events and date even to the day events like the Archer-Osmond wedding, the baby's birth, and Pansy's birthday. Ultimately Grenander attempts to reconstruct the gap's timeline without a mention of the gap's relevance.

receiving word of the intended union. It is only when this scorned suitor arrives in Italy that Isabel's engagement is confirmed. The reader learns during Isabel's and Goodwood's heated exchange that she had sent Goodwood a letter three weeks earlier announcing the engagement. Unlike Strether, Goodwood is denied any reading within the narrated text. Because the content of the letter is not presented, the reader does not hear Isabel's tone and language or observe how she breaks the news to her longtime admirer. The reader knows only that Isabel somehow told Goodwood about her plans to marry and her fiancé's nationality: "you said in your letter he was American" (380). The text also does not present Isabel informing her friend Madame Merle about the engagement, thus again preventing the reader from hearing Isabel's tone, language, and overall delivery about a central event in her life.

Isabel starts to tell Mrs. Touchett that she is engaged but is preempted: "Aunt Lydia, I've something to tell you." Finally, the reader will hear Isabel discuss this significant event; however, Mrs. Touchett forestalls her: "You needn't tell me; I know what it is" (384). The text prohibits Isabel from discussing significant moments and changes in her life such as engagement, marriage, motherhood, even the fortune she inherits unexpectedly from her uncle. These events exist for the reader only after-the-fact, once Isabel's friends or family mention these traditionally most talked about "big moments" in life and literature.

The extensive narrative gap is located between Chapters 35 and 36. Chapter 35, which contains the little information the reader receives about the engagement, closes with Isabel conversing with Osmond's sister, the Countess Gemini, who prattles about the intended union. The Countess soon realizes her indecorous monologue might not be

appropriate for her sixteen-year-old niece Pansy who sits quietly nearby. After the Countess bids her niece to leave the room, Isabel intervenes on her future stepdaughter's behalf: "Let her stay, please. I would rather hear nothing that Pansy may not" (407). While Isabel does not wish to exclude Pansy from information that may concern her, the chapter's closing line suggests the approaching nonnarration—the reality of significant denied information—and marks the beginning of the withheld presentation of years in Isabel's life. The following chapter will reveal that Isabel, now Isabel Osmond, lost a six-month-old son two years earlier without any presentation of Isabel as bride, newlywed, expectant mother, new mother, vigilant mother at her child's deathbed, or grieving, mourning, coping mother. On the last page of Chapter 35, Isabel meets for the first time with her future sister-in-law but then, with the reader's turn of a page, her baby has died, and the reader has never seen her mourn. The chapter's immediate closing with Isabel's wish not to hear anything Pansy cannot is a narrative signal of an impending absence for the reader who, like Pansy, is about to be sent out of the room.⁷ This closing line alludes to missing something important, much like the reader experiences by not having direct access to Isabel and her responses to significant events.

On the other hand, Isabel might want Pansy to stay in the room precisely in order to maintain, in a self-protective fashion, the withheld material. Not wishing to hear anything too intimate or inappropriate for Pansy, Isabel is keenly aware of how to prevent presentation of matters she hopes to keep suppressed; like Merton Densher in *The Wings of the Dove*, she may wish to keep her own lack of certain knowledge "intact and

⁷ While this is a veiled narrative signal, in practice it is likely that only a re-reader would be aware of the imminent extensive gap. In "The New Novel," James privileges both a careful re-reading and a text rich and complex enough to warrant one: "The bravest providers and designers show at this point something still in store which only the second rummage was appointed to draw forth" (202).

inviolable.” There are earlier indications in *Portrait* of Isabel finding enjoyment or comfort in limited or withheld knowledge. While traveling and talking extensively with Madame Merle, Isabel learns a great deal about her companion; however, “there was a corner of the curtain that never was lifted” (375). Embodying the dichotomous yearning for and shying away from disclosure, Isabel, “with all her love of knowledge . . . had a natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into unlighted corners. The love of knowledge coexisted in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance” (251). Isabel also savors some withheld knowledge and presentation, telling her sister nothing of Lord Warburton’s proposal or Osmond’s earlier intentions: “she had no better reason for her silence than that she didn’t wish to speak. It was more romantic to say nothing. . . . Isabel’s silence about Mr. Osmond, for instance, was in direct proportion to the frequency with which he occupied her thoughts” (372). Before its narrative gap, the text already marks Isabel’s duality as a curious, bold explorer who also embraces silence, deferral, and occasional suppressions of knowledge; and, in doing so, the text also suggests its ideal reader.

It is in Chapter 36 that this reader abruptly learns of *Portrait*’s extensive gap. Isabel’s child is first mentioned in this chapter, which opens with Ned Rosier, the young American in love with Pansy. After announcing Rosier’s arrival at the apartment of Madame Merle, the chapter immediately implies a temporal leap from Chapter 35 by reviewing where Rosier has wintered for the past few years. Once Rosier and Madame Merle have discussed the objects in her well-appointed room, the conversation shifts to the purpose of the visit: Rosier hopes Merle “might have influence” (410) with Pansy’s family and might help to ingratiate him with Osmond. The discussion of Pansy’s

glorious assets and preciousness continues for three pages before Rosier touches on the matter of a dowry. “I esteem a *dot* very much,” he tells Madame Merle. “I can do without it, but I esteem it” (412). She responds by telling him that Isabel—the one who brought money to the marriage—will most likely favor saving the money for her own children. Rosier reacts:

“Her own children? Surely she has none.”

“She may have yet. She had a poor little boy, who died two years ago, six months after his birth.” (412)

The reader is most likely stunned. After all, the previous chapter has just ended with Isabel assuming the role of a newly betrothed woman. The next few chapters might have disclosed more information about the engagement period or, at the very least, present a wedding. The reader has spent over 400 pages following this protagonist’s activities, observations, and emotions. Yet in one sentence, noticeably removed from Isabel by being delivered by her friend to an acquaintance, the reader learns that, in the turn of a page, not only has the wedding not been presented but this protagonist has become a mother and has lost a child.⁸

⁸ Incidentally, Jane Campion’s film version (1997) of *The Portrait of a Lady*, though typically faithful to the novel, elects to introduce a brief image (approximately five seconds) into this lengthy gap. Beforehand, the film faithfully depicts scenes dealing with Isabel’s engagement, and then text on a black screen indicates the passage of time, itself a visual representation of the narrative gap. When the action resumes, instead of returning immediately to Rosier visiting Madame Merle, the audience sees a close-up of woman’s hands holding the plaster cast of a small hand. The camera draws back to show Isabel from behind as she sits at her dressing table and handles this cast. Since her face is not shown, the audience might view her as thoughtful or meditative, but, without a facial expression of any kind, she does not appear saddened or grieving. Only after this brief scene does the film version enact Rosier’s visit to Madame Merle in Chapter 36. The film audience receives five seconds of a woman, in private, touching what will only later be revealed as a cast of her deceased child’s hand. This sole film version of the novel follows the plot very closely, yet at the point of the nonnarration of years of significant events concerning the protagonist, it strays from its characteristic fidelity. An inquiry involving film studies could explore the narrative implications of nonnarration for a film audience that perhaps is less likely to tolerate extensive nonpresentation of pivotal events. The film medium might require greater coherence because it typically prompts more passivity than reading.

The juxtaposition of Rosier and the time lapse suggests Rosier's embodiment of the reader.⁹ By learning about the baby's birth and death at the exact moment the reader does, Rosier is linked to this reader who similarly emerges, unaware, from the time lapse between Chapters 35 and 36. Surprised by this sudden development about Isabel, Rosier, like the reader, must assimilate this information promptly; after all, both he and the reader are in the middle of a conversation with Madame Merle. Furthermore, as Chapter 36 opens, a textual challenge to the reader accompanies Rosier's reintroduction into the text after a long absence: "The reader will perhaps not have forgotten that Mr. Rosier was an ornament of the American circle in Paris" (408). The text posits a reader, who, despite a lengthy gap in presentation, is expected to remember all pertinent information.

The reader's encounter with *Portrait's* lengthy narrative gap guides this exploration of reader responses to nonnarration, the ways in which the reader experiences this sudden, radically long withheld presentation between talk of engagement and elapsed, unobserved mourning of Isabel's child. While offering interpretations of this withheld presentation, this exploration ensures that navigating these possible meanings does not eclipse the ways in which the reader manages these abundant interpretations, which again hearkens back to what the text does instead of what it means. It is equally important to chart how a reader responds to the absence of authorial explanation, particularly when this nonnarration is a marked denial of traditionally presented material. One form of reader's response stems from the impact of nonnarration—as a narrative strategy—on *Portrait's* characterization of Isabel. The preface to *Portrait* explains that James's principal concern is Isabel's consciousness. The germ of the novel, the preface

⁹ Although Collins does not specifically link Rosier to the reader, she hints at this parallel, drawing attention to him as a "hitherto obscure character . . . relatively unfamiliar with the characters he observes" (152).

states, is “the sense of a single character. . . . a certain young woman affronting her destiny” (47). This announced focus on Isabel’s consciousness draws increased attention to the nonnarration of the significant events in her life. Recalling Genette’s notion of pseudo-time, the reader has less experiential history with Isabel. Although claiming not to be as concerned with plot, “not at all in any conceit of ‘plot’ ” (42), James is, however, indisputably centered on Isabel. Therefore, by not allowing the reader to observe Isabel during these monumental or traumatic events, *Portrait* intensifies the effect of this extensive withheld presentation. Placed between chapters, this narrative gap does not take place during the more conspicuous division between books. Instead, Chapter 36 opens in Madame Merle’s apartment with no indication that anywhere close to four years have elapsed. Instead of providing an overtly fractured narrative, James constructs a narrative with the appearance of intactness, of continuity, which leaves the reader unprepared for the gap—and in the same position as Rosier.

Rosier’s dowry-centered discussion with Madame Merle emphasizes societal custom and thereby calls further attention to the withheld period that swallows child, mother, death, and mourning. Whereas dowries and negotiated marital matches are required by society in *Portrait*’s world, another societal requirement is verbal acknowledgement of the death of a child; *Portrait*, however, depicts no such acknowledgement of this death to the child’s mother. While there are two removed, impersonal references in *Portrait* to this child that constitute his nonnarration, the fact that Isabel participates in neither reference further removes her from birth and motherhood.¹⁰ The reader does not hear Isabel talk even in the most succinct or fleeting

¹⁰ Beth Sharon Ash states that *Portrait* “obscur[es] the relation between mother and child” (123). Although Ash does not explore the time gap veiling Isabel’s baby and maternity, her article subtly suggests a relation

manner about her child let alone witness a depiction of her maternity. As a result, because she is denied the fundamental element of reference, Isabel is separated not only from the presentation of child and maternity but also from their nonnarration.

It is potentially paradoxical that by not presenting Isabel's mourning James finds a way to figuratively present her grief and recovery.¹¹ Nonetheless, nonnarration is the silence that does the speaking in *Portrait*. Therefore, it is inappropriate to label nonnarration a mere representational "opting out" instead of exploring it as a form of presentation that conveys information about significant elements affecting plot and characterization. James structures Isabel's mourning as a literal, narrative silence into the center of the text, allowing nonnarration to function as a narrative equivalent of mourning for the two years following her baby's death. The time gap in *Portrait* may be the most accurate representation of coping with this loss and processing pain. From this perspective, it is possible to conceive of nonnarration not as the absence of presentation but rather as the presentation of absence, silence, and profound emotion.¹²

to Isabel's barely mentioned mother and Isabel's barely mentioned motherhood. All the reader of *Portrait* knows about Isabel's mother is that she died when Isabel was a child and that she is Mrs. Touchett's sister. Mrs. Touchett's telegram informs her family that she has "taken sister's girl." In this highly Lacanian psychoanalytic reading, Ash states, "the feminist reader is compelled to ask what James has done with Isabel's mother and how this maternal absence shapes Isabel's dream of self-fashioning" (123).

¹¹ A contemporary *Academy* review of *Portrait* discerned this figurative presentation, praising the novel for "those impalpable radiations of character from which we apprehend it long before we have *data* that enables us to fully comprehend it" (qtd. in Richmond 158). By asserting the reader's ability to apprehend, to experience character and events without presentation, this review is the earliest sign in the novel's critical reception that assimilation of material is possible without direct presentation.

¹² While Timothy Walsh explores ineffability that stems from linguistic inadequacy, the *Portrait* gap resembles the type of lacuna, which Walsh examines, that derives from or represents the failure of words to approach genuine wordless states. Although Walsh never refers specifically to a James text, *Portrait's* nonnarration may function in a way that Walsh calls "deferrals to blankness" (68). Walsh asserts that, upon perceiving absence, a reader's mind becomes "more highly sensitized, more aware, observant, and expectant" (104).

Peter Stowell states, "James's silences are the moments when characters either perceive so much that language becomes incidental, or glimpse how little they know, what isolates they have become" (30).

When Goodwood sees Isabel for the first time following the time gap, he examines her, much like the reader might, to learn how the intervening years have left their mark. This admirer notes stark changes: “You’re somehow so still, so smooth, so hard,” he tells her. “You’re completely changed. You conceal everything; I haven’t really come near you” (558). Naturally Isabel conceals everything; marriage, motherhood, and mourning are literally held back, out of the text. In this light, Goodwood offers a metatextual observation of *Portrait*’s nonnarration. Like the reader, Goodwood has not witnessed the events and passage of time that have stilled, smoothed, and hardened Isabel. His description of her, however, helps the reader with his or her own reconstructive work of this unobserved period.

Through Goodwood’s description, James may also entertain criticism of Isabel, a smooth, hard protagonist removed from the intimacy of events by nonnarration. James may entertain this criticism by not depicting her tenderness or vulnerability during such an ordeal, by not providing the reader access to her during this devastating period.¹³ The reader may have various interpretations about why James does not present this lengthy period, in particular why James does not present Isabel’s grief and mourning—why we do not see Isabel in a vulnerable light. This time gap may mark a deliberate strategy to prevent the reader from observing Isabel grieve or to preserve her severity or reserve.¹⁴ The text does not allow the reader to witness Isabel experiencing arguably the most significant and difficult events of her life. Since mothering, for *Portrait*’s protagonist,

¹³ Elizabeth Sabiston states, “[Isabel] participates to a great degree in James’s fineness of perception and imaginative vision. . . . James has created a heroine endowed with the power of observation, curiosity, delicacy of perception, and comprehensiveness of vision” (36). Mrs. Touchett even states, “It may be that Isabel’s a genius” (*Portrait* 97). It is therefore doubly curious that the reader is prevented—for such a significant, extended period of time—from observing such an observant character.

¹⁴ This perceived coldness may be linked to other narrative choices. For instance, Collins states that the narrator of *Portrait* is in a detached position, “a perspective [that] separates the narrator from the characters’ minds” (149).

has been written out of the text, how then does the reader navigate this nonnarration? Does the reader envision those six months of motherhood? If so, is Isabel a tender mother or a reserved one? Withheld presentation of Isabel as a mother prompts such questions and incites the reader to bring his or her own ideas to bear upon mothering and grieving. By bringing these ideas about parenting or grief to bear on the protagonist, the reader may judge Isabel either according to personal tastes and beliefs or social norm and cultural standard,¹⁵ while the time gap may also foreground the reader's ethical or subjective engagement with the text.¹⁶ Such a response confirms nonnarration as a strategy that opens greater interpretive space for the reader (and, in Fishean terms, "does something"). Since the reader observes nothing about Isabel as mother, any response to her in this role is a potential projection enabled by the text's reference to withheld events. Nonnarration as a narrative strategy, therefore, follows the reader-response assertion that the reader must act upon the text in order to produce meaning.¹⁷

The reader's most useful tools are *Portrait's* two references to Isabel's deceased baby. The second and final reference is through the third-person-limited perspective of Isabel's cousin Ralph. The text suggests Ralph's thoughts and impressions about Isabel, whom he has not seen "for the greater part of two years," a temporal marker that does not clarify for the reader whether this last meeting took place before or after the baby's death:

¹⁵ Reader-response critics with a phenomenological approach, like Hans-Georg Gadamer, believe a reader's attempt to understand a text depends on that reader's cultural environment and the questions it prompts or allows.

¹⁶ David Bleich's *Subjective Criticism* comments on a shift from objective to subjective paradigms in critical theory. Bleich argues that readers' interpretations (1) reflect individuals' subjective, personal responses and (2) are informed by "urgent motivations...to understand [themselves]" (qtd. in Suleiman 27).

¹⁷ My approach strays from many reader-response critics over the belief that textual indeterminacies exist in order to be filled in. *Portrait's* narrative withholding and vacancies linger in the reader's mind as absence, silence, and interpretive space and possibility, a balance of both maintained and filled in gaps.

He would gladly have consented to pass for a goose in order to know Isabel's real situation. At present, however, she neither taunted him with his fallacies nor pretended that her own confidence was justified; if she wore a mask it completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity painted on it; this was not an expression, Ralph said – it was a representation, it was even an advertisement. She had lost her child; that was a sorrow, but it was a sorrow she scarcely spoke of; there was more to say about it than she could say to Ralph. It belonged to the past, moreover; it had occurred six months before and she had already laid aside the tokens of mourning. (443)

Beyond the unconventional mere six-month mourning period, the passage suggests other evidence of coldness on Isabel's part, narrative signals that may reflect how Isabel is perceived by the world around her. Her serenity is "mechanical," and she "scarcely" speaks of her loss. All the features of mourning from dress to custom are labeled "tokens," as if her grief were generic and perfunctory. Suggesting concealment, disguise, protection, or blankness, the mask that Ralph envisions covering Isabel's face also resonates with the reader's experience, for we literally cannot see her face during this withheld period.

The passage mentions "it" having occurred "six months before," which might further confuse the time sequence for the disconcerted reader who has just learned from Madame Merle's disclosure to Rosier three chapters earlier that Isabel's child had died two years earlier in current narrated time. The reader's first encounter with Ralph's thought might suggest that "six months before" indicates that the baby had died only six

months earlier in current narrated time; however, the reader already knows the baby died two years earlier. Therefore, Ralph's thought that "it"—the baby's death—"occurred six months before" reveals that "[Isabel] had already laid aside the tokens of mourning" six months after her baby's death. Inverted syntax and an unclear referent cause this ambiguity; reversing the two clauses would read, "She had laid aside the tokens of mourning when it [the baby's death] had occurred six months before." A text that withholds presentation of its protagonist's wedding, early motherhood, and child's death prompts the reader to grasp, just as Ralph does, at any shred of information following this long, abrupt gap in Isabel's life. The result of this grasping may be a muddled, disjointed explanation, one reflected in the complexity and awkwardness of Ralph's making sense of Isabel amid similar withheld presentation.

The passage's potentially unclear phrasing simulates the ambiguity arising from nonnarration. Had the reader observed these events, parsing the confusing sentence about "six months before" would not be necessary. Such a passage, in which Ralph attempts to gain even the slightest access to Isabel's interiority, would not have generated the interpretive complexity had the baby and the narrative gap engulfing him been presented. Years of events, conditions, and atmosphere in Isabel's life become muddled and their representation imprecise, not just for the reader but for Isabel's fellow characters as well. This passage confuses the reader's sense of temporal progression; but that is the point. The miasmatic nature of nonnarration obscures linear notions of time and disrupts the reader's frame of reference. A passage toward the end of *Portrait* underscores the impact of nonnarration on the text's time sequence and speaks to this miasmatic atmosphere it incites: "The past and future came and went at their will . . . in fitful images, which rose

and fell by a logic of their own” (606). The pivotal withheld events of Isabel’s life have left their mark on her fluid mind, which can no longer record images and moments in a strictly linear fashion, an experience James simulates for the reader by withholding a crucial multi-year period.

In an article attempting to date events in *Portrait*, M.E. Grenander argues that James “tells us outright that [Isabel] was idyllically happy during the first year [of marriage] and only started to suspect her incompatibility with Osmond after the death of her son” (135). First of all, that is a great deal of outright telling on the part of James, an author who refuses access to characters’ consciousness and retreats from narrative omniscience about their intentions and experiences. Second, any claim about Isabel, from engagement to two years following her child’s death, is questionable; there are no outright conclusions about the lengthy withheld period. Because these events are not presented, the reader cannot observe the first year of marriage or know how disillusioning or unhappy it was. The text withholds not merely one event like the wedding or the child’s death; it is not simply an elapsed week or month. Instead, the reader must piece together nearly four years. Numerous consecutive events are strung together in a way that makes the reader’s reconstruction all the more challenging and abstract. There is no narrative clue, no signal to help along the way in this multi-year period. Although the narrative is mostly linear, the nonnarration is miasmic; therefore, the reader does not know when Isabel sensed this incompatibility with her husband. Isabel does become extremely unhappy in the marriage; however, since the first years of her married life are not presented, it is difficult to determine this incompatibility in timeline fashion.

Although Philip Weinstein does not explore *Portrait*'s time gap, he is one of the few critics who at least briefly addresses this narrative feature. Weinstein conceives of the experience of *Portrait* as one

located primarily in the consciousness or imagination of Isabel rather than in a direct depiction of the intimate encounters themselves. By focusing on the imaginative or remembering mind, James increasingly refrains from a close description of *what* is being imagined or remembered, and he thus creates for himself an access to 'experience'—the unlimited amounts of it—without an actual intrusion into the passion and intimacy of others. . . . [This strategy] also may imply . . . a created representation of life that is oppressively cerebral, fastidious, and perhaps bloodless, a representation that either reconstructs human passion and intimacy through the prism of memory and imagination or does without them altogether. (35-36)

Weinstein reinforces the notion, which James articulates in the preface to *Portrait*, that the text's priority is (its protagonist's) consciousness and "not at all in any conceit of plot." Weinstein also suggests the reader does not require "direct depiction" to experience events but rather an "imaginative or remembering mind"—so important in James since "access to experience" is often recovered after a textual withholding or vacancy.¹⁸ If presentation of events is secondary in James and access to experience is paramount, then the ability of the reader to achieve this access is compromised by the fact that Isabel does not meditate on withheld events when this reader is located in her consciousness. Isabel never revives her child through thought, memory, or conversation. Although Weinstein

¹⁸ Weinstein states, "In James's work such scenes are either reflected through someone's memory of them or reconstructed through someone's imagination of them (either that of the characters or of the reader)" (35).

does not apply this theorized Jamesian process of reconstruction and access to experience to *Portrait*'s extensive nonnarration, this passage nonetheless offers interpretive advice about the James narrative, which regularly requires reconstructive engagement with limited information and places a premium on imagination and memory.¹⁹ Memory's relation to nonnarration recalls the people in Isabel's life who appear to have forgotten about her child. Aunt Lydia's forgetting, for example, may strike a cautionary note about carelessness and the difficulty of remembering important information.

Weinstein also broaches the topic of authorial anxiety with his observation about the possibility of acquiring access to experience without intruding on others' passion and intimacy. Meticulousness and artifice characterize Weinstein's description of Jamesian representations, which, he argues, evade direct intimate contact. In calling attention to potentially oppressive, fastidious, and bloodless representations, Weinstein points to the existence of material that a text cannot treat. Ralph's impression that "[t]here was more to say about [the loss of Isabel's child] than she could say" suggests there is more to express about a child's death than perhaps even a painstaking author like James might adequately represent. "More than *she* could say" might translate for the reader as "more than *the text* or *the author* could say," which resonates with Pierre Macherey's distinction between what the text *will not* and *cannot* say.

In an effort to explain how incompleteness shapes a text, Macherey argues that a work "circles about the absence of that which it cannot say" (80).²⁰ One way to apply

¹⁹ In his 1910 essay "Is There Life after Death?," James asserts, "immensities of perception and yearning" are readily captured or activated by "a mental relation" (491). In this essay, James also raises "fields of experience" as both the objective and the outcome of engagement with the text: "I like to think it open to me to establish speculative and imaginative connections" (491).

²⁰ My introductory chapter addresses Macherey's cannot/will not distinction from *A Theory of Literary Production* in the context of withheld presentation in James.

Macherey to *Portrait* is to consider whether its nonnarration is fully elective or at least partly compelled based on anxiety about what the text may not adequately represent. Ralph's observation that there was more to say about the baby's death than Isabel could say questions whether the "sorrow she scarcely spoke of" constitutes, in Macherey's terms, what Isabel does not say or what she cannot say. While she literally does not speak about her child, anxiety about mimetic representation may bear on whether Isabel *cannot* say—particularly in the case of a meticulous author like James who, in attempting to render a mother's grief over a deceased child, may exemplify "what the text cannot say."²¹ In this light, Macherey's claim that "it is the silence that is doing the speaking" (86) lends itself to the lengthy absence in *Portrait* that silences Isabel's experience and emotion and thus incites the reader to reconstruct these withheld events. Macherey's distinction, that authors elect nonnarration or succumb to a perceived inability to adequately represent, calls attention to possible authorial anxiety about achieving verisimilitude. However, limited knowledge and gaps in significant information are themselves potentially highly mimetic. In fact, it is James's customary, repeated fragmentation and withheld material that enable the reader to simulate a reality comprised of pieced together understandings based on incomplete data. The refusal to provide what the reader may expect is precisely what establishes verisimilitude for a narrative that requires the reader to interpret events and behavior while equipped with only limited information.

Without direct access to Isabel, the reader instead can observe the Roccanera, Osmond's prisonlike Roman palazzo. This house, which Rosier calls a "dungeon," is

²¹ Biographically informed criticism points to the fact that little in James's life would have enabled him to adequately present or give a voice to a mother who loses a child. However, James's representational abilities far exceed that to which his life had exposed him.

literally the black rock that encloses Isabel (and Pansy).²² While the text does not present the years of Isabel as mother or grieving, mourning mother, it does present an architectural barrenness. Despite this lack of direct access to Isabel, the reader is fully exposed to the cold, sterile, foreboding Roman fortress that contains her. Through the Roccanera, the reader is able to assimilate a portion of the connective narrative tissue lost in bridging the pre-gap Isabel and the “fixed and mechanical,” “so still, so smooth, so hard” Isabel afterward.

Most of the reader’s reconstructive work following the narrative gap takes place in *Portrait*’s Chapter 42—collectively agreed to be the closest to Isabel’s consciousness.²³ It is this chapter that indirectly reports the beginning of Isabel’s marital unhappiness.²⁴ The reader learns after the fact, seven chapters following the time gap, that “it was not till the first year of their life together, so admirably intimate at first, had closed that she had taken the alarm. Then the shadows had begun to gather” (474). Although the text reports that Isabel and Osmond were “admirably intimate at first,” there is no indication of what this admirable intimacy entails, what it looks like, how it was achieved, even what “at first” means exactly. This passage—the text’s only temporal marker for reconstructing even the semblance of a timeline—reveals an initial intimacy without ever allowing the reader to glimpse Isabel experiencing it. This passage reveals the oxymoronic tension of the nonnarration. First, Isabel’s and Osmond’s diffuse, vague

²² Sabiston states, “The loss of Isabel’s child in the first year of marriage reminds us of the barrenness of this union symbolized by the house” (40). Sabiston calls attention to the fact that the Roccanera has no garden but rather only a “damp court.”

²³ In *Portrait*’s preface, James claims this chapter is “obviously the best thing in the book” (55).

²⁴ Chapter 42 must perform many functions, according to Stuart Hutchinson: “It has to throw the action *backwards* to the early years of the marriage, restore to the reader his close relationship with Isabel, and thereby rescue the reader from the sense of dislocation he has felt since the end of Chapter 35 when he left Isabel on the verge of marriage. All readers, as they begin Chapter 36, will have been more prepared for some direct treatment of Isabel’s early married life than what they get” (35).

“first year” together does not correlate to the clearly defined marital intimacy. Second, while denoting privacy, this *admirable* intimacy implies an external observer only to foreground the unobserved nature of the extensive nonnarration. This oppositional resonance reveals a text trying to stretch the limits of technical convention and expectation.

The shadows that extinguish this inscrutable intimacy simulate the ominous, foreboding marital conditions Isabel endures, but they also reflect the opacity of *Portrait*'s nonnarration. They embody the narrative technique of withheld presentation, itself a shadow, casting events and behavior in narrative obscurity. These shadows persist and become darkness. Chapter 42's rare proximity to Isabel's consciousness exposes her “deep distrust of her husband . . . [that] darkened the world” (474) and her belief that Osmond “hated her” (475). The chapter also reveals Isabel's self-diminution, “mak[ing] herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was” (475).²⁵ Another reflection of narrative technique, this darkness and smallness underscore that narratively speaking there *is* less; just as Isabel tries to show less of her than there actually is, so does *Portrait* offer less presentation, less explanation, less of a guiding hand through a complex text. Like Isabel's “pretend” reduction, the time gap enacts a narrative self-diminution. While on the surface this diminution results in less presentation, it is, like Isabel's reduction, an illusion; instead, more depth, vigor, and intricacy exist than appear on the narrative surface. With its reconstructive aid illuminating the interpretive depth that nonnarration offers, Chapter 42 also reports what

²⁵ Related to this self-diminution, Collins argues, “Isabel's situation has forced her to think more about others, at the same time that it has made her less certain about them and less open about herself” (154). This idea of Isabel becoming less open about herself suggests a metatextual reaction to the years of nonnarration of her life that literally offer less information about Isabel.

Isabel believes to be the “first sign [Osmond] had given” of his hatred for her: “He said to her one day that she had too many ideas and that she must get rid of them” (477). Again, Isabel is ordered to make herself smaller with an excision of ideas that echoes the excision of presentation. Osmond wants to dispose of this abundance, to get rid of the multiplicity of meanings so potentially messy and complex. However, withholding presentation has the opposite effect in that it fosters even more potential meaning and cultivates more interpretive possibility.

While these details about Isabel’s married life help the reader piece together information, at no point does the text reconstruct the nonnarration into linear timeline form. Even the previous passage’s “one day” further reinforces the opacity and indeterminacy of this nonnarration. Seven chapters after the time gap, the reader learns that Isabel and Osmond “were strangely married, at all events, and it was a horrible life. Until that morning he had scarcely spoken to her for a week” (482). The reader observes no example of this “strangely married” union, no description of what this looks like, no depiction of this “horrible life,” no glimpse into a day-in-the-horrible-life that Isabel started enduring at some undetermined point following the other undetermined point when the admirable intimacy was eclipsed by shadows. While the final quarter of *Portrait* and Chapter 42 in particular supply some of the missing information about Isabel’s life, at no point is the miasmatic withheld period distilled into linear presentation like the rest of the novel.

Echoing Osmond’s hardly speaking to Isabel for a week, there is a brief, illuminating disclosure just two pages before Chapter 42 when Osmond tells her, “We’ve so little conversation in these days” (469). While at once an indirect representation of the

silence of the Osmond marriage, this comment is also an acknowledgement of the extensive nonnarration that literally prevents any conversation between these spouses. “So little conversation” may be an attempt at verisimilitude since there is likely very little said to be reported in the first place. Narrative vacancy, which figuratively presents Isabel’s mourning, may also depict her mute marriage.²⁶

The preface states that Chapter 42 “was designed to have all the vivacity of incident”; watching Isabel “motionlessly *seeing*” throughout this chapter’s vigil should be, according to James, “as ‘interesting’ as the surprise of a caravan or the identification of a pirate” (54). Silences, lack of reported conversation, Isabel’s marathon seeing and thinking, reconstructive assistance in recovering years of material—this is the purview of Chapter 42, which, James also states in the preface, “throws the action further forward than twenty ‘incidents’ might have done” (54).²⁷ Alongside the preface’s diminished importance and revelation of presented events, *Portrait*’s nonnarration and its Chapter 42 execute this experiment into sustained nonpresentation in order to illustrate how withheld material both maintains its “vivacity” and promises the same richness and interest for the reader encountering it.²⁸

²⁶ Hutchinson argues that James “does not present Isabel’s and Osmond’s first three years of marriage because he never believed in the marriage as a possible sustenance for Isabel” (35). Weinstein argues their marriage is not depicted due to Isabel’s aversion to marriage: “The idea of diminished liberty was particularly disagreeable to her,” someone whose “love of liberty” the text has already thoroughly described (36).

²⁷ This assertion in the novel’s preface shows an evolution on James’s part. In his notebooks, kept during the novel’s composition, James writes, “The weakness of the whole story is that it is too exclusively psychological—it depends too little on incident; but the complete unfolding of the situation that is established by Isabel’s marriage may nonetheless be quite sufficiently dramatic” (*HJ Notebooks*). These contemporary concerns stand in complete contrast to his reflections in the novel’s preface 27 years later.

²⁸ James, in the novel’s preface, may suggest another origin of this experiment when he reveals his “tendency to *overtreat* rather than *undertreat*” (55) in composing *Portrait*. While determined to avoid “thinness,” it appears James was equally determined to restrain this overtreatment tendency. One strategy for this restraint may have been the extensive nonnarration of his subject.

While Chapter 42 does not include a single reference to motherhood or the deceased child, it contains the novel's only use of the word "maternal," outside of the mention of "Mrs. Touchett's maternal kiss"—decidedly not a maternal figure. Curiously—and perversely—this term is used only in a financial and nuptial context, in reference to Isabel's first few months of marriage when she believed her inherited money would "launch [Osmond's] boat for him" (476):

And she had loved him, she had so anxiously and yet so ardently given herself—a good deal for what she found in him, but a good deal also for what she brought him and what might enrich the gift. As she looked back at the passion of those full weeks she perceived in it a kind of maternal strain—the happiness of a woman who felt that she was a contributor, that she came with charged hands. (476)

"The happiness of a woman" exists alongside "maternal strain" in a juxtaposition that draws attention to Isabel as woman, giver, and source. Beyond heightening the sense of Isabel's femaleness, the coupling of "maternal" with "strain" seems to taunt the reader in return for his or her expectations of presented maternity, enticing this reader with the text's rare, explicit birth image only to apply it to her money and her husband. It is remarkable that in a chapter devoted solely to rendering thought, not once during her reverie does Isabel even *think* of this child, a textual vacancy that also suggests a certain level of repression. While several moments in Chapter 42 offer reconstructive material for the extensive withheld period in *Portrait*, this passage emphasizes more the absence

of maternity in the novel, an absence all the more conspicuous when such “maternal strain” applies not to the giving of life but to the bestowing of money.²⁹

In addition to foregrounding the text’s withheld material, the appearance of “maternal strain” exemplifies the notion of narrative distance and recalls that the text never allows the reader to directly observe the baby or any grief over the baby. Gerald Prince develops this idea of the distance between narration and the narrated world (whether physical, temporal, emotional, intellectual, and moral distance), an idea that recalls Isabel’s exclusion from both of *Portrait*’s references to her baby. An important concept for investigating the effects of nonnarration on the reader’s relationship with the narrated world, narrative distance, in the case of Isabel, may well reinforce perceptions of her coldness and severity. The reader might experience increased emotional distance from a “fixed and mechanical” Isabel upon never observing her marry, think about raising children, become a mother, suffer the devastating loss of a child, mourn, find ways to recover following such a loss, or even simply mention or think of her child. On one hand, this emotional narrative distance from the child might exacerbate the space between the reader and Isabel. On the other hand, temporal narrative distance between reader and narrated world might decrease in light of the ongoing presence that attends a reconstructive, participatory reading—if the reader creates in the present tense a vision of Isabel experiencing all the events “she scarcely spoke of,” everything that occurred

²⁹ The novel’s only presented image of mother and baby is in the Uffizi. Isabel’s friend Henrietta Stackpole—another distinctly nonmaternal figure—holds a special affection for a famous Madonna and child painting: “she had after all her preferences and admirations. One of the latter was the little Correggio of the Tribune—the Virgin kneeling down before the sacred infant, who lies in a litter of straw, and clapping her hands to him while he delightedly laughs and crows. Henrietta had a special devotion to this intimate scene—she thought it the most beautiful picture in the world. On her way, at present, from New York to Rome, she was spending but three days in Florence, and yet reminded herself that they must not elapse without her paying another visit to her favourite work of art” (505). Again, this sole depiction of mother and child is far removed from Isabel; it is her friend’s museum experience with an artistic representation of maternity.

within the multi-year turn of a page between Chapters 35 and 36. By calling Isabel's grief "a sorrow she scarcely spoke of," the text signals that any reconstruction of this withheld period rests with the reader.

But what if such a participatory reading does not take place? What is the impact of this nonnarration if the reader is only minimally engaged or does not reflect on the narrative gap between Chapters 35 and 36? What if the reader does not consider what the text does not or cannot say about the withheld period from Isabel's engagement until two years following her child's death? What are the implications for a reader unaware of this narrative experimentation into finding figurative ways to convey material without direct presentation? If James expects the reader to discern and experience material without direct presentation, then how is this narrative information transmitted to a reader who has little to no intellectual or emotional reaction to the sudden revelation that four years pass upon turning the page to Chapter 36?

The simple answer is that such a reader is not what a Jamesian text posits; the text simply does not anticipate such an unaware, passive reader.³⁰ Such a reader would not, in the language of reception theory, be opening oneself to literature's transformative powers. Reader-response and reception theory critics, specifically Iser, emphasize the notion of an implied reader, an addressee intended by the text.³¹ Certain texts expect certain readers, and Iser would argue that James texts require a highly engaged reader, acutely aware of "blanks," gaps in the text to be filled in by the reader, using, for

³⁰ John Pearson argues that James creates the modern reader by "overtly and covertly instructing his readers how to appreciate and discriminate Jamesian literary art" (2). Pearson explores how the New York Edition's eighteen prefaces both configure the James reader and prepare this reader for the complex, demanding texts.

³¹ Weinstein has a clear conception of a Jamesian implied reader: "Through imagination it is possible to reconstruct events as they actually occurred. Or one may, at a distance and through refined intuitional and perceptual powers, come to grasp the latent and profound meaning of events" (34).

example, Chapter 42 to reconstruct even minimally the protagonist's married life. In Eco's terms, this engaged, perceptive reader is part of the generative process of the text.³² Since reception theory assumes every literary work has a code in which an implied reader exists, then a James implied reader would not only notice but would reflect on the nonnarration in *Portrait* and its impact on perceptions and characterizations of Isabel. Maintaining that texts contain cues that incite the reader to create meaning, Iser would call readers who do not respond to these cues inadequate—cues such as a lengthy, abrupt gap in a protagonist's life. Instead, the James narrative posits a discerning, observant, careful if not meticulous, refined, perceptive, and intuitive reader not only aware of latent meaning but energized to uncover it, amenable or even driven to reconstruct what is not presented.

The reader's ability to engage with and ultimately assimilate otherwise withheld material depends in large part on the "felt life" permeating the gaps in presentation; *Portrait's* preface asserts that a work's value derives most from this "felt life" (45).³³ Such felt life on the reader's part suggests an ability to experience characters and events, which, when juxtaposed with James's call in "The Art of Fiction" "to guess the seen from the unseen" underscores the ability of the reader to assimilate withheld material without direct presentation of it. Long before Strether imaginatively stages an unseen exchange between Mrs. Newsome and her daughter, Isabel, as a child, also embodies the posited, attentive James reader and this ability to experience material without direct presentation.

³² Eco argues that a text is created with a certain type of reader in mind. For instance, Eco states, it is possible to "extrapolate the profile of a 'good *Ulysses* reader' from the text itself" (19). This reader's "process of interpretation . . . is a structural element of [the text's] generative process" (19).

³³ The full quote from the preface reads, "There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connexion than that of the perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it" (45). Citing this passage, Sandra Djwa calls art's "felt life" "the reader's sense of its relation to truth and experience" (83).

A young Isabel avoided looking outside the covered window of her office refuge in Albany, “for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side [of the curtain]” (78). Invoking the importance of imaginative engagement, Isabel’s childhood routine privileges interpretive potential and imagination over direct presentation.³⁴ A great deal of material in *Portrait* exists in that unobserved place on the other side of the withheld presentation—that unseen narrative place that encourages interpretive richness and theories just like Isabel developed to imaginatively participate in the world around her.

James makes his protagonist a writerly gap-filler. For instance, when Isabel fills in the blank spots she encounters in the “dry account of Mr. Osmond’s career . . . her imagination supplied the human element which she was sure had not been wanting” (316). When Isabel enters the room and sees a standing Madame Merle and a seated Osmond, her figurative act of reading leads to an understanding that something exists beneath the surface between them: “their colloquy had of the moment converted itself into a sort of familiar silence, from which she instantly perceived that her entrance would startle them. . . . What struck Isabel first was that he was sitting while Madame Merle stood; there was an anomaly in this that arrested her. . . . Their relative positions, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected” (458). “Like a sudden flicker of light” (458), Isabel notices and grasps something for the first time, discerning a level of familiarity between Madame Merle and Osmond.³⁵ Performing as the reader a James text

³⁴ Isabel’s preference and behavior recall Culler’s and Barthes’ assertions about pleasure-producing gaps and enigmas. Fashioning imaginative, improvised explanations, Isabel performs precisely as the reader who, Culler and Barthes posit, derives pleasure from withheld information.

³⁵ Stowell states that this moment in Chapter 40 illustrates Isabel’s ability to “absorb a multiplicity of fleeting impressions” and to grasp pivotal moments that are “accidental and silent” (182). *Portrait*, however, demonstrates through Isabel a readership trajectory in order to arrive at this point. Earlier on, Isabel is less careful, savvy, or perceptive when she misreads societal signs, misperceives Madame Merle

posits, at the end of Chapter 42's vigil, Isabel revisits this "text" in order to continue interpreting it and assessing its meaning. This more involved, re-thought meditation and re-reading portrays Isabel not as infallible but as a careful, curious reader figure who returns for further investigation of a complex, significant text.

By creating a protagonist who creatively participates in the world and its incomplete information that surround her, James encourages participation on the reader's part, even though this encouragement comes with a cautionary note. Isabel is not just an active participant, but rather the text calls her imagination "ridiculously active" (86), and she does commit errors of judgment and perception. On the other hand, the mistakes of an active, participatory protagonist are not necessarily pejorative but rather reflect the reader's situation, itself characterized by incomplete information that will inevitably prompt some mistakes. The text refers to pivotal moments in Isabel's life without presenting them in order to reinforce the reader's challenge to perceive the relevant details and piece together an understanding while equipped with only limited knowledge.

The reader is not the only one missing presentation of important moments; *Portrait* also draws attention to episodes that Isabel herself does not witness. Martha Collins argues that *Portrait* self-consciously introduces significant scenes that exclude Isabel in order to set up a "hypothetical eavesdropping" (154), that is, what Isabel would have heard "had she been concealed behind one of the valuable curtains" (*Portrait* 566). Collins offers this apt image of eavesdropping to illustrate how *Portrait* figures Isabel as literally excluded from moments and information that concern her; the text describes her

as well as Osmond, and assumes Merle is French when she drops a French phrase. According to Stowell, these misperceptions stem from Isabel placing "far too great an importance on first impressions" (181). For instance, Isabel, upon meeting Madame Merle, "had not yet divested herself of a young faith that each new acquaintance would exert some momentous influence in her life" (*Portrait* 225). Although this ends up being true, early on Isabel tends to force new information to fit her already formed conceptions.

as “concealed behind curtains,” eavesdropping, listening closely in order to discern meaning from each intercepted word. Withholding pivotal information from Isabel and making her strain for every word implicates the reader in the act of eavesdropping as the text draws attention to unobserved, withheld material.

Whether figuratively eavesdropping or struggling to learn what has transpired during withheld events and exchanges, “James demonstrates how the imaginative mind responds richly to absences” (Auchard 67). Just before the second and final reference to Isabel’s child, Ralph illustrates this response to absence as he meditates that he “would gladly have consented to pass for a goose in order to know Isabel’s real situation.” Craving insight into the “real situation” of what Isabel’s life is like, he ponders Isabel’s “confidence,” her “mask,” her face, the “serenity painted” on her face. Then, only after he considers how she lives, what her lifestyle entails, and how she represents herself to the world around her, do Ralph’s thoughts lead to the baby: “She had lost her child.” The progression of Ralph’s thoughts suggests more initial concern for (and richer response to) Isabel’s condition and routines. The fact that he thinks first about her “real situation” does not imply diminished importance of the child mentioned only afterward but rather recalls the difficulty of keeping the child in mind amid this nonnarration. Awareness of the child comes to him second, after thoughts of Isabel, regardless of motherhood or lack thereof. The reader is likely asking Ralph’s same questions: what is Isabel like now after all this time, how have her life, mind, perspective, character changed, what is her real situation? Ralph does precisely what James articulates in the preface to *The Wings of the Dove*; he “pieces together” what he can in a way that underscores the narrative strategy of withholding key information in an effort to prompt greater reconstructive involvement.

Like Ralph, the reader attempts to discern Isabel's "real situation" after being abruptly informed of this child's existence and death. Withheld for Ralph and reader alike, Ralph registers the impact of this nonnarration by drawing attention to what have the past withheld years and their momentous events done to Isabel, the protagonist the reader has followed for 400 pages and the woman Ralph has likely thought of every day for several years. Ralph in fact experiences a simulated version of the nonnarration the reader encounters. Meditating and musing on Isabel's current state, behavior, and emotional life, Ralph doubles with the actual reader who also must make sense of unobserved material that has a profound impact on a crucial figure and a pivotal time period. By recalling Isabel's child only after all of these other considerations, Ralph acknowledges a narrative strategy that challenges the reader to remember and engage with material despite narrative distance and withholding that affect his or her very perception and memory of the protagonist.

Beyond reader-based parallels, there are other metatextual implications of *Portrait's* extended nonnarration. When Mrs. Touchett tells Isabel to thank God she has no child, has her aunt forgotten about the deceased baby because she only rarely sees Isabel (we do not know for certain, since so much takes place offstage) and because Isabel has mourned so reservedly, or does Mrs. Touchett actually draw attention to the textual absence? Mrs. Touchett's "slip" may invoke *Portrait's* narrative strategies. In what initially appears to be a callous remark, Mrs. Touchett may comment on nonnarration as a device that affects not only her familial relations but also the relationship between the reader and the narrated world.

The fact that even Mrs. Touchett forgets suggests James's awareness of the risks inherent in withheld presentation. Through Mrs. Touchett's forgetting (or through Isabel's persistent misreading of the relationship between Osmond and Madame Merle), *Portrait* acknowledges that even the ideal, highly attuned reader might miss subtle details and not always experience the felt life or assimilate withheld material. James's prefaces shed light on the author's concerns about having misjudged certain intended effects in his works. While clearly drawn to withheld material and vacancies structured into his texts, James may have privileged the assimilatable quality of these gaps and miscalculated both their force as well as the reader's experience of noticing and engaging with these gaps. While likely not the case with most posited James readers, a significant portion of the readership may have perceived simply an emptiness of presentation upon encountering *Portrait's* nonnarration instead of the intended intensity of the narrative vacancy. Beginning with *Portrait* and culminating with his late phase novels (*The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*), James explores the degree of withheld presentation that a text can sustain, the whole time aware that pitfalls exist for even the most careful reader.

James reflects on his narrative methods and early technical experimentation in "The Art of Fiction," published three years after *Portrait*: "The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out, is a limitation of that freedom and a suppression of the very thing that we are most curious about." Some of these very things we are most curious about, which *Portrait's* extensive time gap suppresses, are Isabel's wedding, newlywed life, that first year of admirable intimacy, those gathering shadows, her child, the death of her child, and her mourning and recovery for two years

afterward. This withheld presentation limits information in order not to limit the reader's engagement and interpretative participation. Furthermore, regarding "The Art of Fiction" passage, "[t]he tracing of a line," given James's departure from a strictly linear notion of chronology, resonates with James's prototypical modernism. Instead of tracing or easily connecting one event to another, clear intention to clear outcome, *Portrait's* nonnarration tosses events into a narrative miasma that challenges chronology. By not clearly tracing narrative lines, nonnarration displays the limitations of linearity and dissuades the reader from relying on linear presentation to understand a text, its plot, its characters, and their intentions and motivations.

Resonating with what "we are most curious about," also in "The Art of Fiction," James states, "The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel . . . is that it be interesting." Often the best way to ensure a novel complies with such an obligation is through what James calls the "suppression" of the most pivotal features of a text. Equating this suppression with nonpresentation of key material, the James narrative conceives of withheld material as an avenue for creating something "interesting." Many James texts, *Portrait* in particular, realize this belief in the interest potential of not directly presenting pivotal events. In the case of *Portrait*, the thing we are most curious about—the radically long nonnarration that prohibits the reader from directly observing Isabel's first marital years, her child, and her grief—is "interesting" because it requires sufficient attention and curiosity to deliver sustained engagement with the text and its fractured presentation.

While the reader does not witness the events and atmosphere of this multi-year period, nonetheless, portions of the time gap may be recovered and experienced by the

reader. The fundamental question centers on the actual ways in which readers go about filling in what they never directly observe; is this recovery achieved through impressions, intuition, projection, narcissism, conjecture, pattern, repetition, symbol, setting, experiment, scattered details, or many other ways? Challenging and miasmic, *Portrait's* Chapter 42 exemplifies post-nonnarration recovery and retroactive experience. Details in this chapter, such as Osmond's request for his wife's reduction of ideas and the sole use of the term "maternal" applied to nuptial finances, encourage and enable the reader to assimilate withheld material despite the inability to witness these events within the narrated text. Although the first years of her marriage and maternity are not presented, *Portrait's* reconstructive aid, like Chapter 42's descriptions and disclosures, prompts the reader to recover and experience portions of this extensive gap. This is the narrative strategy on which the following chapter on *The Wings of the Dove* expands in order to assert that the James narrative prompts the reader to experience withheld material and models this assimilation in response to nonpresentation. The origins of this assimilation can be traced back to the assertion of *felt life* in *Portrait's* preface, the idea that events, atmosphere, and character can be ineffably experienced without direct observation or explanation.

Nonnarration serves different functions. While in *The Ambassadors* it intensifies a presence and makes an absent figure practically tangible, in *Portrait* it is a representational strategy to incorporate silence, mourning, and the passage of time into the text. Just before finishing *Portrait*, James wrote in his notebook, "The whole of anything is never told" ("Notebook" 487). This assertion not only acknowledges the text's incomplete presentation but also reveals an acceptance of this particular fractured

narrative while presaging the pervasive fragmented narratives of the following modernist generation. By affirming there are elements of a story that are never told, James appears both reconciled to and compelled by storytelling that refuses omniscience, leaves questions unanswered, hints instead of explains, and incites the reader to shape an understanding out of imperfect, limited knowledge.

Chapter 3

“Filling it out”: Dying and Reading in *The Wings of the Dove*

“[*The Wings of the Dove*] will always presuppose a certain effort of attention on the part of the reader.”
– *Times Literary Supplement*. 1902

William James wrote his brother about *The Wings of the Dove*, “You’ve reversed every traditional canon of storytelling (especially the fundamental one of *telling* the story, which you carefully avoid).”¹ *The Wings of the Dove* is Henry James’s foremost examination of precisely how much withheld material a novel can sustain, how many significant moments can go without direct presentation before the novel’s potency dissolves. The James narrative is often based on limited knowledge, and *The Wings of the Dove* tests the effects of providing the reader with less presentation without diminishing the text’s vitality. By not directly presenting key events to the reader, the novel unlocks greater interpretive space and encourages a co-collaborative encounter between text and reader. *The Wings of the Dove* repeatedly calls attention to the withholding of direct presentation, precisely when it is most desired and needed to understand events.

In order to illuminate the reader’s response to withheld material, this chapter explores the nonnarration in *The Wings of the Dove*, those significant events not presented to the reader, in conjunction with the text’s strategy of doubling character with reader in order to encourage assimilation of the very material the text withholds. In addition to exploring the novel’s withheld events, this chapter also considers the extensive authorial reflection in the novel’s preface that reveals the novel’s posited reader

¹ The James brothers’ correspondence is collected in *The Correspondence of William James: William and Henry, 1897-1910*, edited by Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley. For this letter, see 305.

and an awareness of unconventional, innovative use of absence and withheld presentation. Nonnarration in *The Wings of the Dove* acts as a didactic tool to demonstrate and elicit the performance of the reader James posits in his prefaces. Furthermore, Merton Densher serves as a doubled figure of the reader, a model by which James teaches his reader to navigate the text. *The Wings of the Dove* suggests models for a reader facing incomplete, withheld information, models based primarily on doubling the actual reader with Densher who often asserts that his deductive powers have “filled it out,” who understands without direct disclosure, discerns “without touching it,” works with incomplete data, and “darkly pieces together” guesses or answers from the limited information around him. Although Kate Croy is a reader figure as well, the reader actually witnesses Densher assimilate withheld material, and the text at times privileges Densher’s struggle, amid abundant withheld information, to “read” people and situations—to get it right—over Kate’s greater perceptive, deductive ease.

Nonnarration in James functions also as a form of presentation, because, paradoxically, material not presented to the reader still finds a way to be incorporated into the text. John Auchard states “the ‘keeping up’ of silences [in *The Wings of the Dove*] . . . transforms . . . into an aspect of communication” (91). This transformation and these silences underscore the novel’s pattern of withholding and the ways in which the novel confers presence on material it does not directly present, much like Densher’s experience when “he had on several recent occasions taken with Kate an out-of-the-way walk that was each time to define itself as more remarkable for what they didn’t say than for what they did” (*Wings* 499).

This withheld presentation does not, however, inevitably lead to its own incorporation, because an unaware reader does not incorporate any material, even with the prompts that a James text provides. This dissertation, however, conceives of quite a different reader, a conception borne out by James's reflections on his texts. In the preface to *The Wings of the Dove*, James assumes a co-collaborative reader and asserts, "Heaven forbid we should know anything more than what Densher darkly pieces together," which suggests James's expectation that his reader actively engage with the text and its withheld material. The reader must not know anything Densher does not in order to keep these two figures aligned and equally challenged. Densher not only pieces together scraps of data into coherent explanations, he does this "darkly," simulating the opacity of withheld information. With little to no assistance, Densher feels his way through the obscurity at the center of *The Wings of the Dove*. This darkness is the lack of knowledge that Densher tries to manage. While not an omniscient author figure nor a Sherlock Holmes double whose prodigious observational skills are showcased to captivate an audience, Densher instead stands for the actual, posited reader the James text and James preface assume, the reader who, facing limited knowledge, fashions an understanding darkly, with little assistance, piecing together sense and coherence when significant material is not directly presented.²

Densher and Kate both model postulated Jamesian reading practices. Toward the end of the novel, when Kate learns Densher has received letters from dying heiress Milly Theale, the text offers a visual representation of the novel's pervasive withheld material: "Kate's attention . . . rested on the back and shoulders [Densher] thus familiarly

² John Pearson similarly argues that James's "decision to create a readership rather than to appease the present one" is evident in his prefaces (3). Pearson also states that James "create[s] through instruction and his own example the ideal reader of his work" (69).

presented – rested as with a view of their expression, a reference to things unimparted, links still missing and that she must ever miss, try to make them out as she would” (488). Densher’s turned back, which Allon White calls “a visual equivalent of ellipsis” (160), stands for the narrative opacity resulting from withheld presentation.³ In fact, like the unimparted meaning and absent link of his turned back, Densher enacts this suppressed knowledge, this opaque, inscrutable substance that Kate attempts to “make out” as diligently as she can. Densher becomes momentarily for Kate the very blank spots in presentation that govern a large portion of the novel.

Absence is the central governing feature of *The Wings of the Dove*, which William Stowe calls “a radically elusive text that entices the reader into an unendable process of supplementation and (over-)reading” (189).⁴ Many of the text’s pivotal moments are not presented, most importantly Densher’s final meeting with Milly, Milly’s death, and her letter to Densher. “How we’re talking about her!” (285), Kate exclaims about Milly. Like Kate and Densher who are left to imagine a tangible reality for Milly and events surrounding her, the reader of *The Wings of the Dove* similarly is left to recreate and re-imagine pivotal events and information *about* her. Kate and Densher, like the novel itself, saturate Milly with their reference, conjecture, and reconstruction—a

³ “The very act of collecting evidence,” White states, “is visually obscured by the fortuitously turned back” (White 160). White uses this image to illustrate the “obscuring processes” in *The Wings of the Dove* (160).

⁴ Upon its reception in 1902, *The Wings of the Dove* was widely labeled a devastatingly difficult book. The *Times Literary Supplement* review stated, “This is, we repeat, an extraordinarily interesting performance, but it is not an easy book to read. It will not do for short railway journeys or for drowsy hammocks.... [*The Wings of the Dove*] will always presuppose a certain effort of attention on the part of the reader; who must, indeed, be prepared to forego many of his customary titillations and bribes” (Anon.). W.D. Howells stated, “[James] gives you a sense of a tremendous lot going on...of things undeniably, though not unmistakably, happening” (qtd. in Stowe 187). William James wrote his brother, “I read with interest to the end (many pages, and innumerable sentences twice over to see what the dickens they could possibly mean)” (Skrupskelis 304). More recently, White has stated, “Those last few chapters of *The Wings of the Dove* are as oblique and elliptical as anything which James ever wrote, and it is very difficult indeed for a reader to fathom exactly what is taking place” (20-21). Ruth Yeazell has stated that it is tempting for readers “to approach the late James as if his language were a beautiful and mysterious screen between us and the moral facts of the novels” (13-14).

clear consequence engendered by nonnarration. While critics have discussed the significant moments and exchanges that exist between chapters as well as Milly's absence from the final hundred pages of the novel, this chapter explores withheld presentation from a broader perspective, which links withheld material to the James reader and assumes, as does this dissertation as a whole, that this reader is better equipped to be a modernist reader.⁵ The pattern of withheld presentation in *The Wings of the Dove* functions reflexively to instruct the reader articulated in the novel's preface how to manage complex texts and interpretations with only limited knowledge.

"I oughtn't to seem to trouble you to piece together what I can't piece myself," Densher tells Milly's friend and companion Susan Stringham; "Only I 'guess' . . . I can piece it" (434). At this point late in the novel, Densher impatiently awaits contact with Milly to ensure the security of his and secret fiancée Kate's design on a portion of the inheritance. After a week without access to Milly, however, significant developments that vitally concern Densher and this secret plan are taking place elsewhere, and knowledge of where he stands with her is slipping through his hands, thus leaving Densher to piece together a picture of what is happening in the figurative offstage. A perceptive, discerning character, Densher pieces together his own understanding solely from the details he catches, the nuances he notices along the way. Noting Densher's sensibility to shape an understanding of withheld events, Susan responds, "I dare say I can piece it too."

⁵ It is William Stowe who states Densher's "most important interviews with [Kate and Milly] take place between chapters" (188). Joseph Warren Beach in 1918 denounces *Wings* largely in part because of James's omission of significant events: "The account we get of [Densher's] final visit at the palace is too roundabout to appease our legitimate appetite for explanations. It may appeal more to our imagination, with its mastery so maintained, but our intelligence remains unsatisfied" (263). Regarding the vacancies in *Wings*, FR Leavis states, "a vivid, particularly realized Milly might for [James] stand in the midst of his indirections, but what for his reader these skirt round is too much like emptiness" (183).

Later, assuming Densher knows Milly is still alive, Kate asks, “Don’t you *know*?” To which Densher responds, “How should I [know], my dear – in the absence of everything?” (452). This brief exchange encapsulates the conundrum that both Densher and the reader face: to make sense of events, people, and worlds while not being supplied with enough material to do so. Withheld presentation in *The Wings of the Dove* prompts the reader’s reconstruction of events and suggests ways for recovering what has not been presented.⁶ Densher is the clearest depiction of this process and capacity; like the reader, he links the nonnarration and the possibility of assimilating withheld material.

A great deal of the novel’s withheld presentation takes place in Venice. Before Milly’s illness overcomes her, for five weeks Densher develops a routine with her, once Kate, along with her Aunt Maud, has returned to London, leaving Densher alone with their financial target.⁷ At one point Densher remembers, “it was time to go to the palace,” thus establishing the regularity and familiarity of his visits, although these meetings are not presented. There was a standard arrival time for his daily visits to be “in Milly’s presence, each day” (401). Ten days pass in this way, with Densher “remaining near her” and “Mrs. Stringham’s leaving them alone” (402). Then another three weeks pass, punctuated by Densher’s daily “walk to the palace for dinner” (411). Then, after another twenty days pass, it appears that “going to the palace at tea-time” has also been added to Densher’s schedule (411).

There is, however, an abrupt change in this routine after five weeks of intimacy and regularity. Upon arriving for tea-time, Densher is told that “the signorina padrona

⁶ Wayne Booth claims the creative reading experience is at the heart of *The Wings of the Dove*: “once one has been tuned to vibrate on James’s inimitable wavelength, the effect can be an enormous stimulation of the imagination” (120).

⁷ Densher tells Milly he has stayed in Venice to write a book, an explanation that hearkens back to the preface’s emphasis on author/readership and the construction of fiction.

was not ‘receiving’ ” (412). Thus begins a torturous waiting game for Densher, a grueling, protracted wait the text charts one day at a time. After all, the text states, “periods of waiting are supposed in general to keep the time slow” (502), a declaration that resonates not only with Densher but with the reader of many a James text as well. As Densher awaits access to Milly in her Venetian Palazzo Leporelli, the text emphasizes the difficulty of timeline reconstruction. Densher’s waiting—which “stretched to three days” (419)—lingers along, until on “his third day” (421) Susan appears at his rooms, updates him on Milly’s state, and reveals that Lord Mark has told Milly of Densher’s and Kate’s engagement (another pivotal moment the text does not present). The reader then learns it is on “the near Thursday” (437) that Densher meets Milly’s doctor Sir Luke Strett at the train station. This peculiarly concrete temporal marker is disconcerting because it is the first of its kind in fifty pages of the abstractly reported temporal progression of Densher’s Venetian stay. “Thursday” would clarify the passage of time only if the text had provided an earlier and equally concrete marker by which to measure. Reconstructing the timeline is further complicated by the text’s next temporal marker; for “three or four days . . . [until] Saturday morning” Densher waits yet again for word from or of Milly. Since the span between Thursday and Saturday morning accounts for only two days at the most, the three *or* four days—the purportedly concrete marker is itself blurred and indeterminate—must refer to the day of his conversation with Susan. The text then indicates that once Densher, in “deeper ignorance, . . . had been living with [this waiting] for a week” (445), Sir Luke brings him word that Milly will see Densher at last.

The indeterminate “near Thursday” and “Saturday morning” as well as the “ten days,” “three weeks,” and “twenty days” that somehow comprise five weeks are all

reported in an obfuscating way. Translating these temporal markers into 10+21+20 days would total over seven weeks, but the text indicates afterward that Densher's routine at the palazzo lasts only five. Therefore, one might assume the "ten days" is subsumed in the "three weeks" and that the "twenty days" of tea-time overlap with "three weeks" of daily dinners. Such play with this passage of time is not intended to confer undue importance on the exact anatomy of these five weeks but rather to illustrate the blurred, nonlinear nature of withheld events, which are difficult to navigate and which locate the reader, very much like Densher, in a grueling wait, seizing on any concrete markers and making educated guesses—much like the "divinations," "theories," and "interpretations" of *In the Cage's* telegraphist (239)—in order to fashion coherent explanations.⁸

The previous chapter on *The Portrait of a Lady* raises the implications of nonnarration on a text's temporal progression. By not directly presenting information to the reader, nonnarration easily obscures the order and duration of events. This obscured order is both actual and experiential in that the reader does not witness, experience, or sometimes even learn about events in a linear fashion. As a result, James's withheld presentation contributes to the reader's faculty of navigating a miasmic, nonlinear world of events often characterized by unclear temporal progression and duration. The modernist reader who routinely faces such nonlinear narrative worlds is, if already an experienced Jamesian reader, better equipped to assimilate withheld material.⁹

Diane Elam argues that characters in *The Wings of the Dove* "develop a consciousness of temporality through waiting. The narrative James unfolds in this way

⁸ *In the Cage* several times calls attention to the telegraphist "noticing" a great many things in a manner that prefigures the extensive figurative reading of *Wings*. Like Densher and Kate, the telegraphist "guess[es] all sorts of impossible things" (234) and "pieces together all sorts of mysteries" (233).

⁹ William Stowe calls *The Wings of the Dove* in particular "a direct progenitor of literary modernism" (188).

lends waiting a certain coherence and meaning that does not also force a completely linear understanding of temporality” (32). According to Elam, most of the characters’ action in *The Wings of the Dove* is the act of waiting—extensive waiting that “makes us question the very possibility of temporal or spatial coherence and approach the unaccountable that is in excess of narrative” (32-3). Elam explores how James narrates this waiting in a way that illustrates the attention it demands; in James, Elam sees “an insistence that a quality of attention can be developed through waiting” (33). It is this quality of attention, this burden of managing for oneself what is “in excess of narrative,” that resonates with the reader a James text posits. While in Venice alone, waiting to gain access to Milly, Densher’s situation and circumstances recreate the experience of the actual reader. Like the reader (especially of a lengthy, complex James novel) who often waits for that next hint or next bit of useful information, Densher is in the same position: “the taste of life itself was the taste of suspense. That he *was* waiting was in short at the bottom of everything” (*Wings* 467). In general in the case of James but with withheld presentation in particular, the reader is required to wait for information, a reality confirmed by the text, which often calls attention to Densher’s strategies “to pass the time of waiting” (466).

It takes Densher three weeks—one week of traveling (“he had come up slowly” from Venice) and two weeks of waiting back in London to contact Kate—to assimilate what happened during the novel’s most significant nonnarration, the palazzo meeting with Milly that takes place in the blank spot between Books Ninth and Tenth (of ten). In these three weeks, Densher adopts the same readerly stillness he embraced during his extensive Venetian waiting; he tries “to keep superlatively still, and [tries] it largely in

solitude and silence” (444). Densher appears to follow James’s observation in “The New Novel” about lingering impressions: “The experience, we feel, is ever something to conclude upon, while the impression is content to wait” (197). During this wait, Densher resists conclusions and instead meditates on events and possibilities.

Densher had finally been invited by Milly at the last moment preceding this withheld palazzo scene, this last meeting with Milly. In the final moment of Book Ninth, Sir Luke informs Densher of Milly’s wish to see him by an invitation that signals an approaching absence and the withholding of information. The few paragraphs preceding the nonnarration are filled only with she’s and her’s, a string of filtered pronominal references that saturates reference to Milly while distancing the reader from her through abstraction: “I’m commissioned to ask you from her to go and see her”; “*She* asks me?”; “She told me she’d like it”; “She’s not to move. She’s to stay. I come to her,” etc. (446-447). The narrative distancing is already underway as Milly slips out of a distinct identity into pronominal reference.

It is in recovering the withheld palazzo scene—likely the most awaited, enticing moment of the novel—that Kate embodies the actual reader, since Densher is privy to details withheld from all characters and readers. Kate tries to learn what happened during this unreported meeting, which Densher confirms but reveals in the most minimalist terms: “She sent for me, I went to her, and that night I left Venice” (*Wings* 457). After Densher returns to London, Kate learns the six items he ultimately reports to fill in the gap. The primary topic and area of concern centers on Lord Mark who, Densher tells Kate, has revealed to Milly their engagement. Shocked, Kate then asks,

‘Wouldn’t it have been possible then to deny the truth of the information?’

I mean of Lord Mark’s.’

Densher wondered. ‘Possible for whom?’

‘Why for you.’

‘To tell her he lied?’

‘To tell her he’s mistaken.’ (455)

Kate’s differentiation between (and active adjustment of) lie and mistake calls attention to the role of a careful James reader who often must distinguish between such intertwined realities. Kate’s linguistic manipulation also suggests the complexity of presentation and the susceptibility of material both directly and indirectly presented. Kate demands to know whether Lord Mark’s exposure of the engagement was raised during Densher’s meeting with Milly. In response to Kate’s queries about “correcting” Lord Mark’s statement, Densher tells Kate he “hadn’t even a chance” (456) and did not refute Lord Mark because “[w]hat did it signify either? She was dying” (457).

The second item Kate and the reader learn is the twenty-minute duration of the meeting, a noteworthy detail amid the intense interest and ignorance surrounding this encounter. To this point, the text has offered only temporal uncertainty, never temporal precision. This detailed notation poses a duality of time as both an impressionistic register and as a narrative tool to record experience and navigate a complex text. “Twenty minutes” creates the illusion of certainty as it appears to fix the Densher-Milly encounter to reality. This temporal placeholder functions as a concrete verification that the meeting took place; as a result, reference to this meeting’s duration appears to give the encounter a tangibility that removes any mystical quality from this final exchange.

Although these twenty minutes are not verified, even their mention may quench a bit of Kate's and the reader's thirst for minimal mapping of the withheld scene. This temporal notation nonetheless orders time, at least nominally, out of a nonlinear miasma much like the random, isolated "Thursday" and "Saturday" markers that surface during Densher's Venetian wait. Even though this precision or verifiability may be illusory, by fixing on this detail, Kate calls attention to a narrative world in which so much information is withheld that any clear, concrete, neutrally reported data, such as a meeting's questionable duration, is welcomed. The text repeats this "twenty minutes" in an attempt to mark time in a way that highlights the difficulty of presenting and experiencing the passage of time in *The Wings of the Dove*.

The third item Kate and the reader learn is Densher's affirmation that, even if he had wished to deny Lord Mark, Milly never broached the revealed engagement. Fourth, Densher reports, Milly "had nothing to ask of [him] – nothing, that is, but not to stay any longer" (458). Densher then conveys Milly's wish that he leave Venice: "If it was somehow for *her* I was staying, she wished that to end, she wished me to know how little there was need of it" (458-9). Finally, Densher presents the meeting's setting. Possessing enough content to fill barely one of the twenty minutes, the reader then gains sparse data regarding the scene's staging: Milly "received [Densher] just as usual: in that glorious great *salone*, in the dress she always wears, from her inveterate corner of her sofa" (459). Beyond tantalizing Kate and the reader with concrete details peripheral to the most significant, coveted information, the setting's description evokes the meeting's lack of direct presentation and functions more as portraiture than narrative. Since the text has never presented any of the meetings between Densher and Milly, the routine nature

simulated by the passage—where Milly sat “as usual” and “the dress she always wears”—clearly marks this information as the indirect presentation that follows significant withheld material.

After reporting these elements of the withheld event, Densher can go no further. He begins his report by telling Kate, “I don’t think . . . I *can* quite tell you what it was, what it is, for me” (452) and ends by reiterating, “I don’t think I can attempt to say now what it was” (460). Soon afterward, alone in his apartment, Densher’s thoughts echo what he has previously told Kate: “The essence was that something had happened to him too beautiful and too sacred to describe. He had been, to his recovered sense, forgiven, dedicated, blessed; but this he couldn’t coherently express” (469). Aware of the difficulty of adequately conveying an event, Densher seems to experience his own brand of representational anxiety. This *recovery* further suggests Densher’s role as a reader double, a reader figure particularly in a text dominated by withheld material. Suggesting an initially missing but later acquired item, “recovered” echoes the same process of assimilation enacted throughout *The Wings of the Dove*. Densher also acknowledges feeling “dedicated,” as if following this encounter with Milly he is devoted to her memory, designed solely for the particular function of reflecting on her. The text, however, provides no clue to how specific, open, inscrutable, or suggestive Milly may have been during those twenty minutes. Although likely referring to Milly’s words or actions, the exact cause of the blessing Densher meditates on and the source of this forgiveness are unclear. Does Densher refer specifically to something gained, said, regretted, or experienced during the meeting with Milly? During those twenty palazzo minutes, does a literal, figurative, or imagined blessing occur? Is Densher forgiven or

does he feel forgiven?¹⁰ This passage illustrates a pattern in James nonnarration of intricately crafted descriptive markers that purport to flesh out material without first providing the armature of presentation.

Following pivotal withheld events like this palazzo scene, the reader speculates about both the content of and the rationale for such withheld presentation.¹¹ The reader may seize on Densher's blessing and forgiveness as possible ways to probe the nonnarration. Being "forgiven" and "blessed" suggests confession, an apt symbol of withheld presentation in light of its private, concealed, intimate, unreported nature. James's assertion in *The American's* preface about "the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit" may underscore this nonnarration if the reader imagines Densher painfully admitting guilt and seeking forgiveness. It is crucial, however, to keep in mind Densher's predilection for maintaining withheld presentation. He both highly restricts Kate's informational access to this palazzo meeting and, later when he laments Kate's decision to break the seal of the letter that establishes the inheritance Milly has bequeathed, he desires to keep his own lack of knowledge "intact and inviolate" (504). In these instances, Densher preserves the suppressed knowledge in a way that appears to seek purity and maintain a confessional space.

It is important to consider the reader's reaction to the withholding of the novel's central event. Whether dumbstruck, cheated, demoralized, enticed, captivated, or grateful, the reader's reflection on and conjectural vigor for "the suppressed thing we are

¹⁰ Regarding this central withheld presentation, Auchard states, "What transpires between Milly and Densher—forceful as wordlessness or as unreported words—provides one of the major structural silences of the novel" (85).

¹¹ When things happen offstage, Chatman accounts for them by calling them "withdrawals from narrative authority." Withdrawals, Chatman argues, "insist . . . on the irrational in human decisions, the unclarity of human motivation" (213). This emphasis on linking what goes unreported to human choices and motivations can readily be applied to *The Wings of the Dove*, a novel that centers on navigating complex moral, ethical, economic decisions.

most curious about” can foster a collaborative experience with such textual vacancies. Direct presentation often clarifies matters, whereas withholding it periodically tends to have the opposite effect; it may cloud or confuse but at the same time stimulate a more imaginative, multilayered encounter. Engaging with withheld presentation may also result in a palimpsestic reading. For instance, when Book Tenth opens inside Densher’s mind and his London apartment, a page-turn away from a surrogate invitation to visit Milly, the reader is likely in part still imagining an abstract meeting inside palazzo walls, trying to concretize this missed event, and coping with this withheld presentation while simultaneously trying to pay close attention to the narration of Densher’s thoughts, locate oneself in the narrative, and glean knowledge of the withheld exchange.¹²

Such assumptions about this highly engaged, diligent, perceptive reader stem from the preface to *The Wings of the Dove*.¹³ In addition to illuminating James’s use of withheld presentation in the novel, this preface, published in 1909, seven years after the novel’s publication, offers the clearest insight into James’s expectations of his reader on whom it is incumbent, like Densher, to “darkly piece together,” to engage with the text’s withheld information, and to reconstruct what the text does not present.¹⁴ Revealing

¹² Several critics have proposed answers—none particularly convincing or illuminating—to complete the palazzo scene, to fill in this gap in presentation. Leon Edel imagines the absent scene starting with Densher’s gondola ride to the palazzo to Milly’s sofa-placement, her words, and her reception of Densher’s explanation. Edel, in the first place, assumes Densher would provide an explanation. Robert McLean argues Milly’s emotional instability leads to her suicide within this gap in presentation. Judith Gustafson fills this gap with sex, asserting Densher and Milly consummate their relationship. McLean and Gustafson illustrate the exact opposite of the assimilatable quality of withheld presentation, which must to some minimal degree derive from evidence or clues in text.

¹³ John Pearson affirms that James uses his prefaces in general to illustrate “the author-turned-ideal-reader” and James’s “idealized readings” of his novels (3).

James’s prefaces in general, Paul Armstrong states, “provide the reader with a hermeneutic education that simulates modes of understanding appropriate for construing his fiction” (7).

¹⁴ Booth affirms the novel’s preface emphasizes “[James’s] notion of the ideal author, the genius of form, but also his picture of the ideal reader: a reader who, like the imagined critic who could teach other authors how to do it, finds that to ‘read-with’ requires critical attention to the pleasures of compositional subtlety” (112-113).

James's interest in precisely how much can go unsaid or unexplained and still be communicated, understood, or intuited, this preface in particular establishes avoiding authorial "abuse of privilege" and "abuse of knowledge" as one of James's priorities in conceiving of and executing a novel that does not supply the reader with enough information to gain a complete understanding of events.¹⁵

In the preface, James expresses his concern that the novel and its foundation are based largely on his perceived "failure to keep the appointed halves of [his] whole equal" (47). Throughout the preface, James seems anxious about the repercussions of not balancing the novel's weight evenly between Milly—her illness, death, pervasive presence and absence—and Kate and Densher. In the preface, James calls the second half of *The Wings of the Dove*—the half dominated by Milly despite her frequent absence from it—"the false and deformed half" and indicates that the "whole corner of the picture bristles with 'dodges' . . . for disguising the reduced scale of the exhibition, for foreshortening at any cost, for imparting to patches the value of presences, for dressing objects in an *air* as of the dimensions they can't possibly have" (47). Even when Milly is literally out of the picture, James still wants to maintain her dramatic force while testing the limits of just how far he can "dress" Milly, how much he can embellish her absence while not presenting anything about her, without providing the reader those "dimensions" he or she might expect. James is aware that he has created a vacancy at the center of his novel; with terms like "disguising," "scale," "exhibition," "foreshortening," "patches," "dressing," and "dimensions," James clearly reflects on the constructedness of his

¹⁵ The introductory chapter of this dissertation has already established the significance of James's meticulous care in avoiding these abuses.

techniques and evaluates his formal experimentation.¹⁶ After crafting a novel on the premise of absence, James in this preface explores how much pressure a vacancy can withstand and probes the force of that emptiness. His reflections on technique reveal a craftsman discussing the tricks of his trade, the constructive choices of a working artist.¹⁷ As a result, the preface underscores *The Wings of the Dove* as a formal and stylistic testing ground in which James showcases the construction of his art.

By centering the novel on Milly as a profound vacancy, James infuses *The Wings of the Dove* with a nearly mystical energy but is unsure how far he can push it. By identifying “dodges” in the text,¹⁸ the preface acknowledges that James does not necessarily address the weighty topics— a dramatic deathbed scene, for example, or a climatic exchange in Venice between protagonists—that novelists would typically present and even embellish. By acknowledging these dodges, James invokes the text’s nonnarration. With the Dickensian resonance of the Artful Dodger, James calls attention to the potential of his own craft to be equally evasive. James imagines the figure of a critic examining the novel’s purportedly flawed second half and “pointing out what a tangled web we weave when . . . we have to produce the illusion of mass without the

¹⁶ Booth claims, “The beauty [James] probes [in *The Wings of the Dove*] is the beauty of a well-constructed story” (110).

¹⁷ Five years after the *Wings* preface, “The New Novel,” James still reflects, in nearly exact language, on the centrality of formal technique in developing both the story and its expression. In this essay James states, “The arts, the devices, the graces, the subtle secrets applicable to such an end what presumptuous critic shall pretend to draw the list? Let him for the moment content himself with saying that many of the most effective are mysteries, precisely, of method, or that even when they are not most essentially and directly so it takes method, blest method, to extract their soul and to determine their action” (202).

In addition, the preface to *The Turn of the Screw* similarly underscores the sense of constructedness evident in the *Wings* preface. In it James calls the novella “a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation” (xviii). James in fact has already drawn attention to this term “trick” in *The Figure in the Carpet* (1896). While talking to the famous writer Vereker, the narrator learns that the great author has a “little point,” a “particular thing [he has] written [his] most *for* . . . [that] stretches . . . from book to book”; Vereker calls it “this little trick of mine.”

¹⁸ James uses the term “dodge” in the novel when, through Densher’s third-person-limited perspective, the text calls Kate’s rigor—her resoluteness in pursuing their financial objectives—“a mask, a stop-gap and a ‘dodge’ ” (398).

illusion of extent” (47). This reflection on his own representational methods offers the clearest view of the author questioning his experimentation with withheld material and interrogating whether this novel, his most extensive test of nonnarration, has in fact succeeded in assimilating what it withholds. Regarding this technical experimentation, James admits he has been tricking critic and reader alike; the novel is all technique, “an illusion of mass” comprised of constructed smoke and technical mirrors. This magician’s illusion of mass, however, produces an “illusion of extent.”¹⁹ While the text’s dramatic force is founded on absence, vacancy, and gaps in presentation, the uncertainty driving many of James’s prefatory reflections stems from the possibility of this vacancy-based vitality beginning to empty out, being sustained no longer by form alone. This technical experimentation might begin to waste away like Milly who withers away offstage. The novel underscores this focus on *making absence* with a conspicuous phrase about Kate’s ability to meet secretly with Densher; in a manner that calls attention to the construction of absence, Kate is able to “make absences” (500). Kate builds gaps into her figurative text just as the novel containing her structures itself on absence.

The Wings of the Dove exemplifies James’s awareness of the consuming, palpable nature of absence and, what Nicola Bradbury calls, “the emptiness of presence” (95). Book Ninth opens after the sexual encounter (not directly presented, of course) between Densher and Kate, after which Kate leaves Densher in Venice to meditate on her lingering presence in his rented rooms, to feel her in the walls, hovering in the air and over furniture:

¹⁹ My first chapter includes James’s assertion that “illusion” enables the reader to have “a miraculous enlargement of experience.” Moreover, this passage continues with James’s further assertion that “the greater the art the greater the miracle” (“Alphonse Daudet” 228).

It was after they had gone that he truly felt the difference, which was most to be felt moreover in his faded rooms. . . . What had come to pass within his walls lingered there as an obsession importunate to all his senses; it lived again. . . . It remained, in a word, a conscious watchful presence, active on its side, for ever to be reckoned with. . . . [W]hat survived of her, what reminded and insisted, was something he couldn't have banished if he had wished. . . . Wasn't it perhaps even rather the value that possessed *him*, kept him thinking of it and waiting on it, turning round and round it and making sure of it again from this side and that? (399-400)

Only once Kate has left does Densher grasp that absence is significantly more compelling than presence, a reality Bradbury underlines by invoking what she calls “the paradox of absence” (87).²⁰ The offstage sexual event has been transformed into “a conscious watchful presence,” equipped with agency as it “possesses” Densher. This description that opens Book Ninth encapsulates the novel’s principal theme of the supreme power of the unobserved, undisclosed, and unrepresented, a theme underscored by the text’s reference to that which is “made present . . . only by the intensity with which it mutely expressed its absence” (498). This potential of withheld material to foster greater presence or immediacy arises earlier in the novel when the suppressed subjects that Kate and Milly “were keeping back [were] most in the air” (339). Like absent Kate permeating the air of Densher’s Venetian rooms, *The Wings of the Dove* emphasizes how suppressed material acquires a palpable presence.

²⁰ Bradbury applies this concept rather to Milly and explains, “Milly (and all she stands for) is more powerful, pure and true, than in mere presence” (87). In *Washington Square*, James illustrates this idea in the figure of Dr. Sloper whose power and influence fade once he becomes a routine, visible presence no longer offstage.

After the conversion of Kate's absence into a conscious watchful presence, the text further ascribes great potency to the vacancy she creates by leaving Densher alone "[w]herever he looked or sat or stood, to whatever aspect he gave for the instant the advantage, it was in view as nothing of the moment, nothing begotten of time or of chance could be" (400). Seeing Kate and their intimacy in everything his eyes fall on, Densher shuts out the world and shields his continuously replaying images from the sullyng gazes of others. He imagines "a third person . . . [who] would have interrupted him, would have profaned his secret or perhaps have guessed it; would at any rate have broken the spell of what he conceived himself – in the absence of anything 'to show' " (400). By diminishing the importance of showing, the text links direct presentation to little more than a transcript. Instead, the passage privileges the spell and the conception; experiencing the material becomes more important than presenting it. Through "the absence of anything to show," James suggests, through Densher's impassioned guarding of images and the spell of his thoughts, the possibility of a reader's assimilation of withheld events. Similarly, when Densher recalls an unattractive scenario that Susan Stringham suggests, the text again emphasizes having nothing to show: it was "not to be presented. The presentation, heaven knew, was not what he desired" (442). On a basic level, this passage simply refers to something distasteful to Densher, but the yearning for withheld presentation also operates metatextually. By calling attention to presentation as something extraneous and unappealing, the text emphasizes the individual's ability to grasp meaning and consequence from withheld material.

Even though *The Wings of the Dove* incorporates an extraordinary degree of absence, the novel's preface speaks to James's reservations about the text's structure and

his apprehensiveness about withholding presentation to such an unprecedented degree.²¹ The preface's phrasing—"when we have to produce the illusion of mass"—suggests obligation, as if the author were somehow compelled to undertake this technical experimentation with absence and vacancy.²² Any perceived obligation to test the degree of withholding that a text can sustain likely centers on the genre of the novel.²³ The fact that James repeatedly calls attention to the "two halves" of *The Wings of the Dove* points to a work and genre of greater length. Constantly aware of the novel as a genre, James assesses whether *The Wings of the Dove* can sustain the absences and indeterminacies of a novella like *The Turn of the Screw*, which, only four years earlier, was able to maintain its vitality throughout its under hundred-page duration.

The preface illuminates James's technique, the author's reflections on his methods, and his response to a text he clearly acknowledges as founded largely on vacancy and withholding. The following passage illustrates James's acute awareness of

²¹ Later evidence of this apprehension is James's reaction in "The New Novel" to his friend HG Wells' novel *Marriage* (published in 1912). Wells does not present material concerning an important event that James deems to be an "interesting function of the whole passage, on the performance of which what follows is to hang" (195). James disagrees with Wells' decision not to present material leading up to an action by the novel's protagonist: "if the participants have *not* been shown us as on the way to it, nor the question of it made beautifully to tremble for us in the air, its happiest connexions fail and we but stare at it mystified" (195). This assertion informs James's apprehension about his own technical experimentation with withholding presentation, a technique, James believes, should be executed while still retaining a degree of presence for the reader. With James "winc[ing] at a certain quite peculiarly gratuitous sacrifice to the casual in *Marriage*" (194), it seems clear that not all withholding is created equal; what's missing in a text is not tantamount to nonnarration. The latter is methodically structured into the text, while the former represents a lack or inadequacy.

²² James told Ford Madox Ford that *The Wings of the Dove* was "composed in a certain way, in order to come into being at all, and the lines of composition, so to speak, determined and controlled its parts and accounted for what is and isn't there" (qtd. in Auchard 86-87). According to this admission, the prevailing absences arose as a function of James's writing, almost as if compelled into being. This sense of inevitability is expressed in James's letter to his brother following the latter's reaction to *Wings*: "One writes as one *can*—and also as one sees, judges, feels, thinks. . . . At any rate my stuff, such as it is, is inevitable for me" (Skrupskelis 306).

²³ In his response to his brother's observations on *Wings*, James writes, "I feel and think so much on the ignoble state to which in this age of every cheapness, I see the novel as a form, reduced" (ibid).

narrative methods of indirection and the ability of absent features and events to ultimately attain a stronger immediacy and potency:

The whole actual centre of the work . . . [brings] home to me, on re-perusal, what I find striking, charming and curious, the author's instinct everywhere for the *indirect* presentation of his main image. I note how, again and again, I go but a little way with the direct – that is with the straight exhibition of Milly; it resorts for relief, this process, whenever it can, to some kinder, some merciful indirection: all as if to approach her circuitously, deal with her at second hand, as an unspotted princess is ever dealt with. (50)

First, “on re-perusal” establishes the preface’s perspective, that is, James reflecting on his own technique from a vantage point seven years after the poor reception of *The Wings of the Dove*. Acknowledging this reality, James, in the preface, has already drawn attention to the “public penance for it already performed” (47). The preface gives James the opportunity to evaluate his own experimentation with narrative indirections.

It is James’s “main image,” the most significant feature of the text, that warrants or compels the “*indirect* presentation” James finds so “charming and curious.” The articulated importance of indirectly presenting a pivotal figure underscores James’s technical experimentation and highlights the author’s prefiguring of modernist techniques like nonlinearity and Hemingway’s iceberg and omission theories. James’s revelation about “go[ing] but a little way with the direct” suggests the restrictive nature of “straight

exhibition,” which yields only brief, shallow, or unstimulating treatment.²⁴ Moreover, going but a little way with the direct reveals an author and reader discouraged and enervated by the blatant or transparent telling implicit in straight exhibition. Any such straight or direct “process,” according to the preface, “resorts for relief” to indirection, gravitates to or even yearns for it. “Don’t tell me that . . . there are not abysses,” Milly pleads as she likewise resorts for relief through indeterminacy and suppression. “I want abysses” (174).

Echoing the mercy of Milly’s abysses, “kinder” and “merciful” are the adjectives the preface applies to James’s conception of narrative indirection. Aware that withholding direct presentation will likely impact the reader’s experience of Milly, James asserts that “some kinder, some merciful indirection” offers this “relief,” thereby implying liberation or support on the part of this narrative technique. Such liberation or support may derive not only from the process of indirect presentation itself but also from its outcome, from the consequences or byproducts of this technique. By describing methods of indirection as “kinder” and “merciful,” the preface calls attention to the results of this technique, to the reading experience and interpretive depth this representational strategy yields.²⁵ For instance, during Milly’s visit to Sir Luke’s office, the text renders a doctor’s examination of an ill woman in terms of an arctic expedition: “they might have struck themselves, or may at least strike us, as coming back from an undeterred but useless voyage to the North Pole” (211). This desolate, uninviting,

²⁴ White argues, “In James *any* direct, unmediated presentation is flagrant. So much is never allowed simply to appear. . . . [A]ny immediacy appears as shockingly precipitant and . . . direct representation appears ostentatious and ‘showy’ ” (138).

²⁵ *The Sacred Fount*, published a year before *Wings*, contains even more transparent commentary on representational technique: “I didn’t describe to you the purpose of it . . . at all, I described to you . . . the effect of it—which is a very different thing” (57).

arduous exploration emphasizes the challenge of delicately handling sickness and mortality as well as the difficulty of navigating this novel. While this passage does not directly reveal anything about Milly's condition, it addresses withheld presentation in explorative terms and suggests that lack of knowledge leads doctor, patient, and the narrative "us" to expedition. Opting for indirect presentation over straight exhibition may be kind and merciful to the author as well as the reader, and, therefore, these adjectives may also characterize the experience of creating such a narrative—a creative process the James reader simulates upon encountering nonnarration.

By approaching Milly "circuitously," James's awareness of his representational technique reflects his concern about those "dodges" bristling in his "picture." Through these terms, James acknowledges that he does not directly present the main features of *The Wings of the Dove* but instead uses dodges and circuitousness to structure the narrative. These dodges and circuitous approach emphasize the potential of nonnarration to function as a form of presentation instead of the "straight exhibition" that the preface rejects. The preface to *The American* also emphasizes indirection and circuitousness in constructing a text; in it James draws attention to all that "we never *can* directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit" (xvi). "Beautiful" now accompanies "kinder" and "merciful" to comprise James's conception of a circuitous approach to significant topics—"main images"—and the pivotal information that may facilitate an understanding of complex texts.

James's reflection on "approach[ing Milly] circuitously" emphasizes the figure of the author and his technique, whereas referring to the decision to "deal with her at second hand" shifts the emphasis to story, character, and reader. The fact that the reader must

not know, the preface claims, anything Densher does not, clarifies James's conception both of the reader and of "second hand" presentation as neither providing or benefiting from direct, automatic information. While questioning the very idea of required information and by invoking his second-hand treatment of Milly, the text's primary source of interest, James makes the reader explicit in his consideration of withheld presentation. This reader receives filtered observations through the consciousness and gazes of characters similarly trying to make sense of the very "picture" the actual reader navigates.

This reflection on indirection and merciful circuitousness extends into the novel itself. Once fully established as a reflector²⁶ of Densher's consciousness, the text seems to contemplate its restrained presentation of Milly and its second-hand treatment of her illness in much the same tone as the novel's preface:

[Densher] hadn't only never been near the facts of her condition—which counted so as a blessing for him; he hadn't only, with all the world, hovered outside an impenetrable ring fence, within which there reigned a kind of expensive vagueness made up of smiles and silences and beautiful fictions and priceless arrangements, all strained to breaking; but he had also, with every one else, as he now felt, actively fostered suppressions which were in the direct interest of every one's good manner, every one's pity, every one's really quite generous idea. It was a conspiracy of silence, as the *cliché* went, to which no one had made an exception, the great smudge of mortality across the picture, the shadow of pain and

²⁶ James developed the concept of the "reflector" to signify those "peripheral intelligences" employed to mirror a story's central action and to present it from many angles, from "so many distinct lamps" (Preface to *The Awkward Age*).

horror, finding in no quarter a surface of spirit or of speech that consented to reflect it. (440)

James's endorsement in "The Art of Fiction" of the "suppression of the very thing that we are most curious about" suggests that withholding significant material prompts increased participation on the part of the reader to shape a more complete narrative out of incomplete information. Echoing this essay's assertion, the "actively fostered suppressions" of *The Wings of the Dove* illustrate this belief that withholding material is "in the direct interest" of everyone. Aware that important subject matter is withheld from him, Densher perceives the implications of having "never been near the facts," a reality cast in terms of proximity in order to reflect the narrative distance generated by withheld presentation.

The "reign" of "expensive vagueness" in the passage evokes a sense of cultivated abstraction and ambiguity and also emphasizes the narrative indirection the preface explores. Expensive because it costs a great deal, maintaining this vagueness requires much effort—it demands restraint, perhaps collusion, codes of behavior, and negotiated terms of the discussable and non-discussable. Invoking exchange and value, even resonating with hand-craftedness, its expensive quality suggests the need for precision on the part of both author and reader. This vagueness is comprised of "silences" and "beautiful fictions," quasi-accords that draw attention to either an improvisational or internal structure of the unspoken. The metatextual implications of these silences and fictions highlight an aesthetic that privileges indirection and withholding. Fragile and requiring steady care, these fictions and arrangements—which are "all strained to

breaking”—foster this “reign” of vagueness in *The Wings of the Dove*, a text constructed on the basis of never being “near the facts.”²⁷

Actively fostered suppressions, reign of vagueness, authorial instinct for the indirect, circuitousness, and kind, merciful indirection—all of these techniques promote greater interpretive freedom and richness. The novel’s gaps in presentation enable the reader to participate in the creative process while they also emphasize “the unknowability of the text in that the absences give rise to a plurality of readings” (Walton 136). By applying feminist methodology to the multiplicity of response that the novel encourages, Priscilla Walton argues *The Wings of the Dove* celebrates interpretive plurality and uses “absence to invoke presence” (33).²⁸ According to Walton, the novel cultivates a feminine space that “gives birth to creation,” disrupts masculine referentiality, and derives meaning from absence and lack of knowledge (127).²⁹ Asserting that the novel privileges feminine absence and multiplicity of meanings, Walton observes Densher learning from Milly’s and Kate’s handling of absent meaning and information.³⁰

The clearest example of metatextual advice to the reader comes from Kate who, in rallying Densher in Venice for his final push to win Milly and realize their financial design, tells him, “Don’t think, however, I’ll do *all* the work for you” (394). Kate’s warning echoes the novel’s preface, in which James posits a reader who will throw “the

²⁷ These “fictions” and “arrangements” are “all strained to breaking” in a way that prefigures, and again echoes, TS Eliot’s straining, cracking, and sometimes breaking words of “Burnt Norton” and the representational anxiety and linguistic limits this passage suggests.

²⁸ It is a novel, Walton argues, that “revolves around writing and reading texts” (124). Before Walton, however, Leavis calls attention to the text’s Feminine composition: “it is largely dependent upon absence standing for presence—what is written is dependent upon the unwritten—and presence is thereby decentered” (123).

²⁹ Walton builds on Irigaray’s theory of the feminine as the source of plurality and Kristeva’s notion of the feminine play of signification in opposition to Masculine coherence.

³⁰ *The Wings of the Dove*, through Kate in particular, suggests gender distinctions as well. Early in the novel, Kate tells Densher, “ ‘There are refinements! . . . I mean of consciousness, of sensation, of appreciation. . . . No,’ she sadly insisted – ‘men *don’t* know’ ” (120).

strongest pressure” on a text (49), a passage that reveals James’s expectations for his reader and his belief in this reader’s active, cerebral contribution to interpreting a text.³¹ In articulating his wish for a reader who throws the strongest pressure on the “thick ice” of the text, James assures his reader that his dense, challenging text welcomes and can sustain any interpretation, intrusion, participation, beliefs, or expectation. Similarly, Lee Clark Mitchell claims that Kate’s declaration about Densher’s required collaboration in realizing the couple’s plan echoes James’s assertion in his notebooks that he expected the reader “to do fully half the work” (*HJ Notebooks* qtd. in 214).

It is the withheld presentation, which in *The Wings of the Dove* centers on Milly, that exacts this increased interpretive participation on the reader’s part. Long before the “expensive vagueness” and “beautiful fictions” guarding Milly’s condition, the text emphasizes a cultivated, “kept up” vagueness when Milly visits Sir Luke whose diagnosis is never disclosed or even hinted: “much interrogation, auscultation, exploration, much noting of his own sequences and neglecting of hers, had duly kept up the vagueness” (211).³² While not disclosing the outcome of his examination, the novel does depict Sir Luke’s scrutiny and interpretation as he explores Milly, carefully probing and observing his figurative text. Well before the novel’s nonnarration, this episode already privileges the pursuit of knowledge over knowledge itself. Sir Luke’s exploration to make sense of Milly is presented, while his verdict and the juicy details are withheld. These details, the novel’s preface announces, “will be foreshortened at any cost” (47). Dominating most of the novel, Milly’s illness is fodder for rumination and

³¹ Chapman argues Jamesian ellipsis, the grammatical feature most closely aligned with James’s pattern of withheld information, “exact[s] additional effort from the reader” (*Style* 87).

³² Regarding the vagueness of James’s style, Chatman states, “I admire James’s ability to make us feel the vagueness of the inchoate state: I think the form suits the content” (*Style* 100).

conversation; it becomes the inspiration for the novel's central scheme and represents pivotal information that will never be directly presented.³³

Beyond withholding her direct discourse from the final fifth (over one hundred pages) of the novel, the text ceases to present and simulate her consciousness for the final third.³⁴ Her withdrawal from the text infuses a portion of the novel's nonnarration with notions of death; Milly's physical body is breaking down just as presentation of her is also breaking down. She therefore becomes physically and narratively absent simultaneously.³⁵ Milly's consistent, stoic front—"the front so presented that had been, in Milly, heroic" (468)—is both the text's withholding and representation of her: "Milly had held with passion to her dream of the future, and she was separated from it, not shrieking indeed, but grimly, awfully silent" (468). Once literal and metatextual silence merge, Milly slips out of the text long before she has died.³⁶

³³ The preface opens with James's reflection that the novel's focus is on a sick and dying character: "the poet essentially *can't* be concerned with the act of dying. Let him deal with the sickest of the sick, it is still by the act of living that they appeal to him" (36).

³⁴ J. Hillis Miller carefully examines this absence in *The Wings of the Dove* and the way it represents Milly in order to argue that the novel is less about a dying woman and more about her resistance to death that "can only be represented...[by way of] indirect presentation" (17). In an attempt to answer why James does not narrate Milly toward the end of her life, Miller states, "James indicates that even the act of living in defiance of death can only be represented directly up to a certain point. Beyond that point it must be presented indirectly, by way of one or more reflectors of that act of living/dying" (17). Miller argues that the instinct toward indirection that James articulates manifests itself as the "nonpresentation of Milly's thoughts and feelings toward the end of her life" (17). Although he does not explore the novel's preface, Miller applies this term nonpresentation to James's assertion of his instinct for the indirect and claims that not only does James opt for the circuitous but also, at times, decides against any presentation at all.

³⁵ Miller similarly states, once Milly's consciousness is no longer presented for the final third of the novel, "the presiding consciousness becomes Densher's [once i]n a sense, Milly is already dead, for the reader at least, since her consciousness has vanished once and for all from intimate representation" (17).

³⁶ Milly's silence opens interpretive space and recalls Gerald Prince's concept of the disnarrated, which describes events the text addresses although they did not happen. Though entirely different from nonnarration—disnarration reports inaccurate, unrealized, or conjectured information—the novel's two quasi-disnarrated examples illustrate the text's self-consciousness regarding the amount of material that goes unobserved for the characters and the reader. At one point Densher's emotions and thoughts are "a mixture that might have been rage" (473), and similarly, "The life Milly clung to [was] a view of the 'might have been' before which [Maud] was hushed anew to tears. She had had her own vision of these possibilities" (467-8). This language of might-have-been hypothesis and unrealized potential further saturates the absence-laden text.

It is possible to consider Milly as already dead once Book Tenth begins without her and never again directly presents her; however, “she *is* dying” (453), present tense, in Venice, as Densher, Kate, and Aunt Maud await word. The nonnarration actualizes Kate’s apt prediction that Milly “won’t smell, as it were, of drugs. She won’t taste, as it were, of medicine. No one will know” (284). And no one does witness the sight, smell, taste, or sound of sickness. This withholding of direct presentation both inside and outside the text complies precisely with Milly’s wishes; nonnarration grants her the freedom of never smelling of drugs or tasting of medicine. This news—that she is in the offstage process of dying—comes on Christmas day, “a few days” after Densher’s visit at Lancaster Gate, Aunt Maud’s home where Kate resides, and three and a half weeks after his departure from Venice. While Milly’s death is the second of two central withheld events, it is not merely the offstage nature of this death that makes for *The Wings of the Dove*’s significant nonnarration, since it is just as common for texts to present death scenes as it is not to present them.³⁷ Word of Milly’s death, however, is reported in a manner that even further distances the reader from the presentation of her death. Beyond being removed both temporally (approximately one month without seeing Milly) and physically (Venice versus London) from the text’s presentation of Milly, Densher learns of her death from Aunt Maud who barely edges out Sir Luke’s butler to bear the news: “I’ll tell Mr. Densher” (477). This is the first sign that there is in fact something to tell.

Maud’s second report of Milly’s death is equally ambiguous: “He [Sir Luke] arrives, traveling straight, to-morrow early” (477). Maud believes this represents a clear communication in light of the knowledge that Sir Luke would stay with Milly to the end,

³⁷ James demonstrates a keen ability to depict deathbed scenes, something he does twice in *The Portrait of a Lady* when Isabel Archer sits first with her dying uncle and then with her cousin.

a belief confirmed by her next question to Densher, “So you *have* your message?” (477). This is the level of clarity the reader of *The Wings of the Dove* has come to accept: Maud believes Densher must know Milly is dead because, after all, she has told him the doctor is returning to London. For purposes of the text’s presentation, Sir Luke’s return equals “Milly has died,” an equation that underlines the temporal, physical, emotional (told by either his lover’s aunt or nearly told by his acquaintance’s butler), circuitous, and substitutive distance that *The Wings of the Dove* tests. Finally, Maud reports the news to Densher in a fourth way, a confirmation through metaphor that “[o]ur dove . . . has folded her wonderful wings” (477). The fact that the text, through Maud, reports Milly’s death outside of a doctor’s office, on a London street, using no term, beyond metaphorical, to signify death, not even using a pronoun to refer to Milly, illustrates James’s experimentation regarding the degree of narrative distance an event’s indirect presentation can sustain. Through this probing, James charts new territory in introducing narrative vacancies into the very heart of a text, those moments for which the reader typically most expects direct presentation.

Mirroring the abundant withholding and indirection confronting him, Densher later calls Milly’s death “the event”: “ [Maud] had had her telegram from Mrs. Stringham; late last night. But to me the poor lady hasn’t wired. The event,’ [Densher] added, ‘will have taken place yesterday’ ” (484). While not nonnarration, this linguistic displacement of Milly’s death contributes to the atmosphere of withheld presentation. The future perfect usage even further, clumsily, distances the reader from Milly’s death and thereby destabilizes and dematerializes it. Although typically a reserved, stoic way to discuss mortality and the funereal, “the event” reference fosters an environment of

code and silence.³⁸ This linguistic displacement underscores the vacancy constructed around Milly and recalls how the novel's preface clearly establishes the potency of Milly's absence particularly as a vacancy that draws the most attention from author, critic, and reader.

In response to nonnarration and this vital character who disappears from the novel's presentation, James employs a strategy to equip the reader facing this notoriously challenging novel: positioning Densher as the didactic model for the type of reader that nonnarration and such a challenging text demand—discerning, perceptive, careful. Like Densher, the James reader can shape an understanding out of incomplete information.³⁹ Imagery and language that evoke actual reading often describe Densher, figuring him literally as a reader. At one point, for instance, Densher imagines Kate as “a ‘new book’, an uncut volume of the highest, the rarest quality”; watching her face and listening to her alternate between speech and silence, “his emotion . . . was again and again like the thrill of turning the page” (392). Absorbing the grandeur of Lancaster Gate for the first time, Densher “read[s] more vividly, more critically, as has been hinted, the appearances about him” (105). At another point, Densher “read[s] back into the probabilities” (403) veiled in an earlier statement. Several times Densher is described as reading into things, once, following a revealing statement by Kate: “going back to [this statement], he was to read into this speech” (395).

Later that Christmas day when Kate comes to Densher's apartment, Milly's letter to Densher is already there; it is already extant in the text without any presentation of its

³⁸ Auchard refers to “a rarified silence [that] develops as the dominant atmosphere of a novel where, when the heroine disappears, she transforms into a more vital figure” (86).

³⁹ Booth calls the novel's “suppression, silence, deliberate omission from the narration of crucial events in the raw chronology...[a]nother requirement on our creative powers” (119).

arrival or Densher's reaction upon receiving it. When Kate asks whether he has received any telegram or letter notifying him of Milly's death, Densher responds, "Not from Mrs. Stringham – no" (484). The reader learns through indirect terms three pages later that the "communication," as Densher later calls it, is a letter from Milly. This letter is never read by anyone, it is never presented to the reader.⁴⁰ When Kate asks Densher when he received Milly's final letter, he responds, "Coming in from Fleet Street . . . I found it with some other letters on my table. But my eyes went straight to it, in an extraordinary way, from the door. I recognised it, knew what it was, without touching it" (488). Highly conspicuous and almost magnetic, Milly's letter commands Densher's immediate attention. The text's withholding of significant information is similarly conspicuous. Densher's identification of something "without touching it" mirrors nonnarration and suggests a reader's capacity to perceive and deduce without complete information, without an "abuse of privilege," without touching it. Densher's assertion of "without touching it" operates metaphorically in terms of a character's grasp, the possibility of understanding events and motivations without literally getting one's hands on blueprints of reason or intention.

When Densher refuses to open this letter, Kate at first is puzzled but then understands his decision: "You have your instinct. You don't need to read. It's the proof" (495). Kate and Densher know from experience and intuition that Milly would have made Densher wealthy by leaving him even a very small portion of her extraordinary fortune. Without negating the meticulous, diligent reading of the James reader, this passage underscores that reader's encounter with withheld material. Facing

⁴⁰ In light of its undisclosed content and its permanent seal, White calls Milly's letter "a perfect index of the way in which communication as such operates in the novel" (21).

ambiguity and confusion stemming from this withholding, the reader's instincts for managing withheld presentation—similar to “the author's instinct . . . for the *indirect* presentation of his main image”—are a valuable part of careful reading and interpretation. Kate and Densher are fully aware that disclosure on the part of the author, Milly in this case (or James), is not an indispensable element for comprehension. Densher does not need to read Milly's words because he has been reading her all along for months, absorbing even the subtlest indicators of her behavior and her choices. An instinctually good reader, however, is not overly valued in *The Wings of the Dove* or in its preface, both of which place a premium on training a reader to be more discerning and observant, even if this reader might not have an instinct to do so.⁴¹ Kate's praise of Densher's instincts is less an extolment of natural or inherited skills and more a self-conscious link to the “instinct” articulated in the novel's preface, all of which suggests James's awareness of the pervasive role of absence and withholding in *The Wings of the Dove*.

When Densher urges Kate to break the letter's seal if she wishes to know its content, Kate also declines: “I know without” (496). Like Densher, Kate does not need literally to read in order to comprehend the content of Milly's letter since she also has carefully “read” Milly for nearly a year, and her powers of perception enable her to discern this otherwise withheld material of Milly's letter: “You see in everything,” Densher tells Kate, “and you always did” (492). Kate, in fact, has already asserted that Densher has been “successful” in their plan regarding Milly's money: “We've succeeded. . . . She won't have loved you for nothing” (462). By opting not to read the letter, Kate

⁴¹ In “The New Novel,” James clearly does not privilege instinct when he refers to “some flat reversion to instinct alone” stymieing “the great flood of awareness” of which readers and critics are capable (182).

and Densher underscore the ability of withheld material to be understood as clearly as what the text reports outright. Kate and Densher share what Mitchell calls the “exquisite sense of silent communication” (195):⁴² “as between himself and Kate, things were understood without saying, so that he could catch in her, as she but too freely could in him, innumerable signs of it, the whole soft breath of consciousness meeting and promoting consciousness” (*Wings* 364). The possibility exists that a fuller awareness stems from the undisclosed. Based on this resulting awareness, this “promot[ed] consciousness,” *The Wings of the Dove* privileges those who hone the skill of discerning the motivations and intentions of others while equipped only with their own perception and imagination. What can be conveyed and understood “without saying,” without literal communication is the essence of *The Wings of the Dove* and its characters whose consciousness is fostered by withheld material.

Densher and Kate articulate their decision not to read Milly’s letter in nearly exact terms. Both take place in the same conversation, refer to the same text, and emphasize understanding in the face of missing explanations. Kate’s and Densher’s “knowing without” illustrates a reader who fashions an understanding of events without direct presentation while not dismissing or mitigating the supreme importance of a careful reader who applies the strongest pressure on a text.⁴³ Upon beholding the letter, Densher

⁴² Mitchell also argues that Densher “seeks shelter in silence” and “appreciates the value of leaving meanings suspended” (195). By describing Densher as one who often avoids direct references, Mitchell explores how the motivations, habits, and fears behind leaving things unnamed can inform a text’s withheld information.

⁴³ The trajectory, the telos, of reading in the James narrative is the pursuit of knowledge, clearly emphasized in *In the Cage* when each time the elusive, unknown subject of the telegraphist’s *reading* “handed in a telegram it was an addition to her knowledge” (253). Shoshana Felman models this trajectory using *The Turn of the Screw*, which mirrors many of the same elements in *Wings*. Felman explains *The Turn of the Screw* begins with a lack of knowledge, a cryptic letter, and an unfamiliar ghost. From this starting point, the trajectory Felman traces models the same pursuit of knowledge practiced both inside and outside of *Wings*: “The elimination of uncertainty and doubt, the acquisition of *certainty* and *clearness*

tells Kate he “knew what it was, without touching it.” Eight pages later, in the reader’s time, Kate announces she will not break the letter’s seal and tells Densher, “I know without.” Since Densher will not touch it and Kate will not break its seal, both signal the physical act of getting one’s hands on a text, a physicality that points to the actual reader who holds the novel in his or her hands. Kate’s and Densher’s nearly exact wording—“I . . . knew . . . without” compared to “I know without”—speaks to the clarity of James’s vision of his posited reader. Both Densher and Kate face the same withheld material and both intuit, discern, and work to assimilate that material without the facile bequeathing of meaning or information.

Kate’s announcement echoes Densher’s assertion and changes its verb tense from past to present. Instability arises between these two tenses—what Densher knows from his time in Venice and what Kate knows in the present without Densher’s Venetian experience. Densher asserts he knows without based on knowledge gained from the climactic withheld meeting in Venice; therefore, it is stated in the past tense because it is tied directly to Milly. However, Kate asserts she knows without in the present tense because in this instance she is tied directly to the reader, for whom the meeting in Venice also is withheld. Like Kate, the reader experiences *The Wings of the Dove* in the present tense; it is in this current process of reading that the reader James posits will be one “on whom nothing is lost.” Both Densher and Kate draw attention to what Stowe calls “the text’s [*The Wings of the Dove*] demand that the active reader become a writer, not so much filling in the text’s blanks as elaborating on their patterns and exploring their

about the meaning of what had nonetheless appeared at first to be ambiguous and obscure—the successful culmination, in other words, of the reading process—is time and again formulated in the text as an epistemological assertion, as a cognitive achievement, as a claim to *knowledge*” (155). Densher’s and Kate’s assertions of “knowing without” at least partially reflect the governess’s “I know. I know. I know.”

possibilities” (195). By not disclosing the letter’s contents, James maintains interpretive freedom for the reader, space Densher fills by exploring the letter’s possibilities even after it has been destroyed, burned by Kate in Densher’s fire.⁴⁴

Kate does not tell Densher simply to never open Milly’s letter but instead burns it to achieve permanence. Words turned to ash will never be able to speak unlike words tucked away in a chest of drawers might someday be. When she burns the letter, the text emphasizes this letter’s “undisclosed” content: Kate and Densher “stood together watching the destruction . . . of the undisclosed work of [Milly’s] hand” (498). Kate destroys something that in effect never existed but which can still be incorporated into the text through a reader’s reflection and meditation on the withheld material. Milly’s direct discourse burns in the fire, an act that may signify, for instance, Kate’s and Densher’s awareness of the insufficiency of spoken, reportable language that so easily crumbles and vanishes;⁴⁵ the redundancy of reviewing content that one has already discerned; the shame, sadness, or regret that Milly’s message might instill.⁴⁶ Ruth Yeazell interprets this burned letter as Milly enabling others to maintain their innocence: “Those who talk

⁴⁴ White offers a distinct reading than Stowe and this chapter do. While this chapter conceives of the interpretive potential opened or maintained by the withholding of direct presentation, White’s argument focuses on Densher’s wish to keep the letter closed, which, White claims, “perfectly illustrates a wider narrative linkage in James’s later works between desire, obscurity and knowledge” (21). According to White, Densher desires closed communication in order to avoid degrading or defiling himself and not to elaborate on patterns or explore possibilities of meaning as Stowe argues.

⁴⁵ An earlier passage—“something had happened to [Densher] too beautiful and too sacred to describe” (469)—suggests a metatextual representational anxiety. In this case, nonnarration appears linked to linguistic inadequacy. In this instance, Densher’s experience mirrors Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* assertion: “There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. . . . What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”

⁴⁶ According to Bradbury, burning the letter signifies that Kate and Densher “are left without the means to validate their interpretation of experience” (88). Walton argues, because Milly’s letter impedes masculine coherence, the act of burning finalizes its absence (137). Felman again looks to the letters in *The Turn of the Screw* and considers them “nonknowledge” (145). They convey only silence, she argues, examining the governess’s letter to the master that Miles intercepts. Questioning the little boy about what he found in this letter, the governess cries, “And you found *nothing!*” “Nothing,” Miles answers. “Nothing, nothing!” the governess continues to declare. “Nothing, nothing,” Miles echoes. Another Jamesian vacancy and withheld knowledge are cast in textual terms. In addition, the novella’s master/uncle refuses to read letters and receive information, “a *refusal of information*” (145) that Felman calls mastery.

with [Milly]—Susan Stringham and Densher in particular—often come dangerously near direct reference, but Milly always ‘saves’ them or ‘lets them off’ by pretending not to understand” (86). Knowledge can be a disturbing, relentless, shaming thing, something Milly would want to save loved ones from. Burning her words may therefore release Densher from shame, guilt, or regret.

Densher’s reflection on the burned letter emphasizes the imaginative and interpretive depth that nonnarration offers. The undisclosed work of Milly’s hand, which calls attention to actual unreported text, prompts Densher to meditate at length, slowly and carefully, about withheld material:

He should never, never know what had been in Milly’s letter. The intention announced in it he should but too probably know; only that would have been, but for the depths of his spirit, the least part of it. The part of it missed for ever was the turn she would have given her act. This turn had possibilities that, somehow, by wondering about them, his imagination had extraordinarily filled out and refined. It had made of them a revelation the loss of which was like the sight of a priceless pearl cast before his eyes. (503)

This is the quintessential depiction in James of a response to unreported information—it is not elided, forgotten, or nonchalantly ignored but instead is empathetically, imaginatively considered and assimilated into one’s experience and consciousness. Densher’s response to nonnarration illustrates the possibility of improvement: the reader’s potential to improve upon presented material in the form of engaged,

imaginative re-creation of withheld material.⁴⁷ Densher's imagination has "filled" in the gaps that text—letter and novel—creates and has "refined" it, he has polished, distinguished, and transformed it into something more meaningful and substantial than it might have been were it presented. It is this possibility of improvement that appeals to the James reader.⁴⁸ What Densher "misses" in the letter he then creates; that "turn she would have given" he imagines for himself "by wondering" about its possibilities.⁴⁹ Within the repetition of the term "turn" lies an interpretive commitment to the gaps in presentation—the first "turn" identifying an absent rendering and the second returning for further contemplation.

In order to improve upon the withheld material, Densher, like the telegraphist of *In the Cage*, recognizes "the very quantity of imagination that it demanded" (*Cage* 237). Despite the demands, both Densher and the telegraphist exemplify the production of meaning by filling out and refining gaps in direct presentation. Through such engagement, James limns a reader figure who experiences pleasure from withheld information, which invokes Culler's and Barthes's notion of gaps as a source of pleasure and value. Like Densher, the telegraphist is aware of "how much she had missed in the gaps and blanks and absent answers" (287). Instead of casting these missed connections in a negative light, *In the Cage* predates *The Wings of the Dove* in developing them as

⁴⁷ Iser similarly articulates a teleological view of reading ability. Regarding the reader's interpretive contribution, Iser states, "The new experience emerges from the restructuring of the one we have stored, and this restructuring is what gives the new experience its form" (*Act* 132).

⁴⁸ White offers a similar theory about Densher's refusal to read Milly's letter and the relevance of this refusal to the Jamesian text and reader. It represents James's rejection throughout *The Wings of the Dove* of "narrative certainty, with its concomitant public affirmations—the novel begins to exclude the type of reader who expects and demands these things in his reading: the refusal to open communication is fundamental to the narrative and authorial positions inscribed within it" (21).

⁴⁹ Walton states, "the text [Densher] creates about Milly is evocative because it is limitless. It does not function as a means of possession but becomes an open-ended creative process" (138).

precisely this source of pleasure, which stems from “filling out some of the gaps [and] supplying the missing answers” (258).

The Wings of the Dove is founded on these same assumptions about pleasure-producing gaps, vacancies, and suppressions. Densher enacts this gap filling and supplying throughout the novel, sometimes quietly and subtly simply watching Kate: “she gave [Densher] the impression of a contact so multitudinous as only the superficial can be” (502). Like the temporal notation of a twenty-minute meeting with a sofa-bound interlocutor, Kate’s contact is a superficial gesture that also promises an interpretive, experiential possibility. Densher translates the superficial into the multitudinous and thereby enacts the assimilation of withheld presentation that nonnarration encourages. The translation of a superficial gesture—whether interpersonal or textual—into multitudinous meaning underscores this process and possibility of assimilating withheld material, which itself exists as an unelaborated reference on the text’s surface. By withholding direct presentation, *The Wings of the Dove* maintains the equivalent of its own superficial gesture, its acknowledgement of central events, while leaving their details, explanations, and meaning to the reader. Encouraged to be a collaborative participant, this reader attempts to translate the reference to an unobserved significant event into a multifaceted, layered interpretation, thus seeing—like Densher—multitudinous meaning in the contact with withheld presentation’s trace on the textual surface.

Another instance of pivotal nonnarration is the second letter Densher refuses to read: the lawyer’s letter from New York. This “long envelope, substantially filled” (504) would most likely disclose a considerable monetary amount if Densher chose to read it.

It is, however, necessary to consider why the reader assumes this silent, unopened envelope contains anything of note, why it is so obvious that Milly has made Densher rich given the lack of information presented to the reader. Does the reader believe Kate's confident assertion that Milly would bequeath this money? Does this the reader assume this inheritance based on data accumulated throughout the novel? Is it the adjectival "substantially" that describes the extent to which the envelope is filled? Is it Densher's refusal to open the letter? Kate views Densher's refusal to read the lawyer's letter as an illustration of his desire to maintain the limited knowledge that fosters greater openness and interpretive possibility. This awareness is evident when Kate asks Densher, "If cognisance *has* been taken . . . it spoils the beauty?" (505).⁵⁰ White argues the desire to maintain one's purity from certain disclosures, which could leave one fallen and shamed, drives the decision to keep communication closed, a claim easily applied to a remorseful Densher who bequeaths to Kate whatever the lawyer's letter indicates.⁵¹ Referring to the New York law office as "the authors of our communication," Densher evokes the textual, constructed nature of (non)presented information, his inclination toward withheld meaning, and his wish to keep the inheritance-announcing letter "intact and inviolate" (504). By calling attention to authorship and the desire to maintain a text's mystery, Densher marks a pattern in *The Wings of the Dove* of privileging withheld presentation and limited knowledge.

⁵⁰ Kate's decision to open the lawyer's letter, on the other hand, spoils "the plurality of absence" (Walton 139).

⁵¹ White argues that James associates "the idea of obscurity of information with purity: that if meanings are so elliptical that they remain 'intact and inviolate', then this containment of desire guarantees the integrity and 'virginity' of the receiver. Overt representation becomes a source of moral danger, and it is only by staying as far outside communication as possible, by remaining outside the letter, that one might 'get off' " (21).

This pattern begins immediately in *The Wings of the Dove* with the first nonnarration the reader encounters centering on Kate's father Lionel Croy. In fact, the novel's opening line establishes his absence as "Kate Croy waited" . . . for her father. The reader soon learns that Kate's Aunt Maud attempts to extend the absence implied in this opening sentence. Lionel tells Kate of her aunt's offer—a deal that would make him an offstage presence: "The condition Aunt Maud makes is that I shall have absolutely nothing to do with you; never see you, nor speak nor write to you, never go near you nor make you a sign, nor hold any sort of communication with you. What she requires is that you shall simply cease to exist for me" (64). While Lionel does not begin as nonnarration, he becomes the withheld material that other characters repeatedly invoke and dissect. Densher asks Kate, "What was it that Mr. Croy had originally done?" Kate maintains she does not know, only that he "has done something wicked" (98). Near the end of the novel Densher still resists—" 'What *has* he done?' "—the withheld knowledge that Kate ferociously protects: " 'If you love me – now – don't ask me about my father' " (495).

This withholding of information affects Densher's reality: "What has he done, if no one can name it?" (99). Though likely an outlet for Densher's frustration, this question underscores the implications of (not) naming—revealing or maintaining secrets, providing or withholding information, presenting or not presenting events.⁵² Naming is presentation of something in a graspable form; therefore, when both text and Kate deny Densher this naming, he struggles to assimilate it, to grasp its unreported meaning. Lionel exists just as Kate's sister describes—as a silence, "the silence that surrounds him,

⁵² Auchard states, Lionel's offense "is more potent because it is unnamed" (90). In addition, recalling Gertrude Stein, "A name of anything is not interesting because once you know its name the enjoyment of naming it is over" (231).

the silence that, for the world has washed him out” (99). Lionel becomes “a perpetual sound in [Kate’s] ears” (101) in a way that resembles Milly’s continuous presence for Densher.

Milly “trembles in the air” (a phrase James will later use in “The New Novel”) for Densher in a way that becomes oppressive. As a result, while still waiting in London for word about Milly’s death, Densher temporarily enacts another possible reaction to withheld information; he tries to forget what is taking place elsewhere:

the last thing he wished was to be unconscious of her – what he wished to ignore was her own consciousness, tortured, for all he knew, crucified by its pain. Knowingly to hang about in London while the pain went on – what would that do but make his days impossible. (466)

This reaction is yet another spot on the continuum of the Jamesian learning curve. By trying to ignore the painful reality underway in the Palazzo Leporelli, Densher displays a typical human response of avoiding pain and distancing oneself from death, subject matter human beings similarly try to ignore. More important, however, is the passage’s distinction between ignoring and being unconscious of something, a difference founded largely in terms of activity and awareness. For a time, Densher tries to ignore Milly’s existence in faraway Venice, a lesser offense because of its intentionality, its deliberateness to temporarily shut down an awareness that may be quite keen. Being unconscious of Milly, on the other hand, suggests dullness, torpidity, or obliviousness.

In light of Densher’s wish not to be unconscious of Milly, a direct link arises between withheld information and level of awareness. When excluded from significant information about Milly, Densher reflects on the degree his consciousness is fixed on her,

the extent it is stimulated and saturated by her. By incorporating Milly into his life as he waits, by conferring a presence on her, Densher models a response to withheld information. Densher momentarily falters, yearns for oblivion, tries to ignore a disturbing matter, and, in this moment, ceases to be one on whom nothing is lost. He, however, only toys with this course of action and rejects it. Densher's location in London, far away from Milly, casts him in a situation similar to that of the actual reader, turning Milly's death and dying into an offstage event for both character and reader. He decides mentally to preempt her death, however, by "tak[ing] with himself on leaving Venice the resolution to regard Milly as already dead to him – that being for his spirit the only thinkable way to pass the time of waiting" (466). Unable to resist the powerful appeal of presentation, even Densher finds a figurative way to preemptively report the event.

Densher is fallible and is often not an ideal reader. Instead of darkly piecing together and building or "promoting" consciousness, this passage finds Densher trying to forget or ignore a painful reality that takes place elsewhere. In their final exchange about Milly and Sir Luke, Susan is surprised Densher has not formed a more solid interpretation of the doctor by that point: "I should think, with all the time you spent with him, you'd know it" (428). Susan also critiques Densher's reading skills and, in doing so, recalls the preface's articulated expectations of a careful James reader. Although Densher applies "the strongest pressure" to a text, understands often without presentation, and pieces things together, he is nonetheless an actual reader who makes mistakes and learns from those errors. However, Ruth Yeazell's claim can easily be appropriated to

defend Densher's impatience: "In all of late James the pressure of the unspoken can become almost unbearably intense" (82-3).

This extreme difficulty notwithstanding, Densher still tries to get it right; he accepts critiques of his reading skills and powers of perception and he applies his own correctives: "It was in the spirit of seeking a chance to feel again adequately whatever it was he had missed" (*Wings* 438).⁵³ Densher learns from his experience and others' critiques. For his next interpretive challenge, he takes his time and embraces "his slow journey, his waits, his delay" between leaving Venice and contacting Kate once back in London; he waits two weeks to do so, "gathering everything up, everything he should tell her. That took time" (450). Densher has internalized James's lesson to the reader to take one's time, meandering through the text and wading through information, in order to catch relevant details and impressions. An improved Jamesian reader, Densher now welcomes this slowness because he understands it will enable him to detect more and miss less.

While Densher—the reader James structures into his fiction and overtly posits in his criticism and prefaces—is the actual flesh and blood reader who struggles to be one on whom nothing is lost, Kate is a nearly infallible ideal reader who readily deciphers every code and processes every cue without assistance. Susan realizes that Kate's ability to hypothesize is based on her apt powers of observation and perception: "I should say she's a person who guesses" (314). And Kate's hypotheses are correct time and time again. For instance, Kate "mak[es] it out in a fashion for herself" to explain why Milly

⁵³ In "The Ethics of Forms," Booth argues the central task of *Wings* is "to *get the craft of it right*, to keep the ideal of the highest excellence constantly before one as a demand to *do it better* than what at first seemed merely good" (121). When the aesthetic task becomes ethical, as Booth argues the textual construction of *Wings* does, this ethical plea to get it right then spreads to the reader.

has postponed her departure from London (284). In fact, when it comes to Milly in Venice, Kate's knowledge more closely resembles that of the actual reader who also, unlike Densher, has not experienced those twenty palazzo minutes. Mitchell states Kate has "a due respect for silence" (198), and Yeazell asserts Kate is comfortable with ambiguity (79), two essential qualities of a James reader in light of the pervasive limited knowledge and suppression of the things we are most curious about. Such an ideal recipient of a text may very well serve as the author double to Densher's reader double.⁵⁴ Kate is at her most Jamesian, her most authorial with her warning to Densher that she never intends to "do *all* the work for [him]."

"You don't quite see" (393), Kate repeatedly critiques Densher's reading skills: "I marvel at your seeing your way so little" (392). She is the better reader who understands instantly and discerns from the minutest of clues. However, because of her affection for Densher and her financial interest in cultivating his powers of perception, Kate is invested in the education of this skilled yet still inferior reader and observer.⁵⁵ Densher is after all a journalist who writes "with deplorable ease" (96) and observes for a living but at times he still causes Kate to turn "her head away as if she really at last almost tired of his density" (392). Between Kate's critiques, however, Densher struggles to get it right, clarifying what he still doesn't grasp, by showering Kate with questions, often not

⁵⁴ Walton argues the female characters in *Wings* assume authorial functions because the Feminine proves to be "the source of artistic creation" (126). The Feminine aspects of these female *Wings* characters center on absence and engender gaps that they themselves fill in. Kate suggests women's perception is quite distinct from men's: "There are refinements . . . I mean of consciousness, of sensation, of appreciation. . . . No . . . men *don't* know" (*Wings* 120). Similarly, Milly is the one who later pleads for abysses, for maintained plurality of possibility. Walton argues the text's description of Milly's life in Venice reveals her to be an active author—instead of a passive reader—who creates the text of her Venetian stay (133). According to Walton, Milly illustrates how absences in *Wings* "allow the characters to create their own texts" (135).

⁵⁵ She and Densher are both financially vested in reading Milly, unlike the typical reader. John Carlos Rowe argues that distance and emptiness are products of the social and economic reality that the characters of *Wings*, particularly Kate and Densher, face and the ethical choices they make in coping with these realities (*Other* 176).

understanding but always trying: “Why should she? . . . How can it please me? . . . Time for what?” (392-3).

Later when Densher and Susan discuss matters Milly will never disclose or clarify to anyone, Densher asks over forty questions in an inquisitive tour de force that illustrates his conscientious attempt to understand withheld information. At one point, while navigating the incomplete data about Lord Mark’s disclosure to Milly, Densher’s question merges with Susan’s answer:

“She’ll never tell?”

“She’ll never tell.” (425)

The echo of Densher’s question in Susan’s reply that “[Milly]’ll never tell” depicts two people, in a text that refuses overt “telling,” trying to make sense of events and behavior while equipped only with limited knowledge. This echo recalls Densher’s and Kate’s merged assertion about *knowing without* disclosure—both repeated utterances that underscore the ability to assimilate and experience withheld material. *The Wings of the Dove* values the diligence and perception Densher displays when, during this exchange with Susan, Densher, emphasizing his powers observation, tells her, “I’ve filled it out” (432).

Kate also underscores the text’s privileging of withheld presentation: “Only Kate at all events knew—what Kate did know, and she was also the last person interested to tell it” (500). Like the James narrative, Kate protects against the overt, facile, and blatant. James’s experimentation with limited knowledge is a fundamental feature of his oeuvre, and the preface to *The Wings of the Dove* reveals James’s belief in the supreme importance of providing less than the reader needs to fashion a complete, tidy

understanding. When the preface states, “Milly’s situation ceases at a given moment to be ‘renderable’ in terms closer than those supplied by Kate’s intelligence” (46), it reveals that Milly will be presented to the reader only as coherently or helpfully as she is to Kate—someone often over a thousand miles away. Because Kate’s vision is limited, therefore so must the reader’s be. Heaven forbid, as James affirms, we should know anymore of Milly than the two protagonists.

While the previous chapter explored the narrative function of nonnarration in *The Portrait of a Lady* and its ability to present silence, mourning, and emotional recovery, the strategy of *The Wings of the Dove* to prompt assimilation of withheld material relies on Densher as a central interpreting reader figure. “I’ve filled it out”—Densher has pieced together motives and intentions that profoundly affect his life, his engagement to Kate, and the money that could secure their future. He is the reader the preface posits when it calls excessive or overt information an “attestation at once too gross and too bloodless, likely to affect us as an abuse of privilege when not as an abuse of knowledge” (46). Primarily through withholding direct presentation, *The Wings of the Dove* does not violate the reader’s interpretive task. Both despite and because of struggles, the James reader ultimately performs deductive, intuitive, interpretive feats to apply “the strongest pressure” to the text and to fashion more complete, multilayered explanations out of withheld material.

Chapter 4

Working Offstage: Nonnarration of Creative and Intellectual Work in *The Princess Casamassima*, *The Lesson of the Master*, and Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*

In *The Lesson of the Master*, “big bundles of proofs” and “fat rolls of paper” abound in writer Henry St. George’s study. Sheets, wrappers, notes, and books and the furniture bearing the weight of these many stacks—the physical markers of past, current, and future work—supplant the presentation of any actual executed, experienced work. *The Lesson of the Master* alternates between addressing finished, bound books that invoke completed work and the loose papers, proofs, and notebooks that embody an underway endeavor. Hyacinth Robinson, the skilled bookbinder of *The Princess Casamassima*, never actually binds books—at least not within the text. His craft is barely presented in the novel in a way that suggests resistance to work’s completion. In a strategy Willa Cather later replicates with Professor St. Peter in *The Professor's House*, James removes the process and the experience from work but maintains abundant reference to it as an abstract activity. The reader never observes this bookbinder protagonist in his workshop, that withheld place from which loose papers reemerge as beautifully bound artistic work: the invisible bindings of *The Princess Casamassima*’s bookbinder that resonate with St. George’s and St. Peter’s bundles and piles of papers. These texts furnish the reader with repeated signs of work instead of directly presenting the process itself; they rely on a metonymic incorporation of the experience of work through a saturation of adjacent physical markers of past and current work.

This chapter explores the absence of directly presented work in *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Lesson of the Master* in order to illustrate the incorporation of such withheld work into the text. Later, by juxtaposing James with Cather's *The Professor's House*, three works centered on bound and unbound texts, this chapter considers how these works manifest a resistance to completion, indirectly present through adjacent physical reference, and implicate the reader in increased participation. While it is certainly common for fiction not to depict actual labor or to truly capture the experience of artistic, intellectual, or manual work, this chapter questions less this work's nonpresentation and much more the saturation of reference, the extreme abundance of token signs and physical markers of work amid this withheld presentation.

By the 1880s, William Dean Howells was criticizing a more traditional school of literary thought that believed literature needed to celebrate beauty and provide the reader with an idealized fictional world instead of ugly quotidian life. Conceiving of realism as a "corrective to faulty vision,"¹ Howells pleaded for literature to be faithful to actual life and never falsify daily experience.² Many of the preceding generation's authors and critics believed that falsifying daily experience could show readers lofty aims and inspire them with beauty. For this school of thought, extended descriptions of people at work were not conducive to literature's purported goal of lifting readers out of their own personal or communal mire. Howells, however, demanded close scrutiny of actual lived experience, which included work. Howells' belief in literature's "fidelity to the

¹ See Howells' essays in *Criticism and Realism* (1891) in which he articulates his realist vision, offers an important defense of realism, and argues for fiction to "portray men and women as they are."

² In *The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation* (1966), Larzer Ziff offers an in-depth contrast between Howells and the more conservative literary thought, which proclaimed the purpose of literature was to lift readers out of the commonplace and to introduce ideals of beauty, duty, and heroism into fiction.

expression of life” and not its idealization of the human condition was instrumental for American realist literature of the late nineteenth century (Ziff 47).

In *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), Howells provides detailed descriptions of an arts journal’s formation and daily operation, and, as a result, demonstrates the ability of at least one American literary realist to represent the work experience. Although not to the extent of the famous cataloguing of the Marches’ New York apartment search, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* directly presents the journal’s editing, staffing, circulation, investment, management, and publicity. Howells depicts an editor contemplating that “the management of *Every Other Week* involves tastes and not convictions” (195) and a businessman concerned about “getting forward the first number of *Every Other Week*” (87). *A Hazard of New Fortunes* also presents artists at work; one works “in a fury till the light failed him...[and then] he execrated the dying day” (105) and then the next day he sculpts “with an eye fixed as simultaneously as possible” on both clay and model (104). Finally, Howells describes in detail the periodical: its design, size, content, paper, and the ratio of illustration to text: “a volume a little above the size of the ordinary duodecimo book; its ivory-white pebbled paper cover was prettily illustrated with a watercolor design irregularly washed over the greater part of the surface, quite across the page at top and narrowing from right to left as it descended” (120). This description of the first number’s dummy is characteristic of the detailed representation of the product and process of work throughout a great deal of *A Hazard of New Fortunes*.

The level of detail that attends the fictional *Every Other Week* is far exceeded by James’s meticulous representation both of London in *The Princess Casamassima* and of the experiences of the novel’s protagonist in the city’s pubs, streets, and residences—only

not in its workshops.³ Timothy Walsh states, “A gap can be perceived as an absence only if a reader has a previous bias toward having such information supplied” (89). This idea that an absence, or a blank, exists only when a reader perceives that something is missing recalls Howells’s campaign against authors and critics who did not wish to represent the commonplace and ugly of daily life. By mid-nineteenth century, the reality of working class life and the need to work was shaping the genre of the novel, a shift that furthermore poses the question: would non-upper class readers welcome the perhaps dull, quotidian subjects that at least reflected their own weeks/days, or were such matters just that—dull, unappealing reminders of an uninspiring working experience? While some late nineteenth-century readers may not have expected direct presentation of a bookbinder’s craft and a writer’s composition or have noted such textual vacancies, other readers may have perceived that this bookbinder was in fact never presented at work in his shop. A James reader in 1886 would have been accustomed to learning not only the various details of a protagonist’s life but also the elaborate, multifaceted Jamesian portrait that characterized his texts for over a decade by the time of this novel’s appearance.⁴ This chapter posits that most readers would have “a previous bias” for having work-related information furnished as part of the Jamesian portrait, particularly given the excessive textual reference to this withheld activity. Although many James characters do not work, some do, like the mesmerist protagonist of *The Bostonians*—published the same year as *The Princess Casamassima*—whose work is indeed directly

³ Mark Seltzer first and foremost considers *Princess* a novel about London: the novel, Seltzer argues, is “about the mysteries of London” (4) and about James’s vision of the “sinister anarchic underworld” of London (*Princess* preface 47).

⁴ James asserted the goal of the literary endeavor was to provide a detailed verbal depiction of his protagonist. Charles Caramello states, “James had shifted his critical attention in [his biography] *Hawthorne* and in the 1880s [the publication of *Princess* taking place in 1886] toward theorizing the proper novel as portraiture — especially in the critical portraits of Trollope, Stevenson, Eliot, Emerson, and others that he collected with “The Art of Fiction” (1884) to form *Partial Portraits* late in the decade” (25).

presented. In the same year, James presents work for this protagonist while withholding it for another.

The tags, signs, markers of work proliferate on the novel's surface. *The Princess Casamassima* repeatedly refers to Hyacinth Robinson as "the little bookbinder" and occasionally as "the young artisan" or "artist" but does not fully incorporate his work; the text does not depict its process or capture the experience of performing this craft, the "felt life" (to recall *Portrait's* preface) of his artistic work. Nonetheless, this text is widely considered James' most realistic work based mainly on its social involvement, which centers on the radical politics mainly of workers in London.⁵ No critic, however, has explored the lapse of this realism in relation to the nonnarration of Hyacinth at work.⁶ Given the strong social engagement of *The Princess Casamassima* and its rigorously detailed realist mode of depiction, including the dress and dialogue of workers in

⁵ *The Princess Casamassima* centers on the lower class, revolutionary politics, secret societies, and a potential assassination of a political figure. Regarding the novel's realism, Richard Broadhead identifies *Princess* as the text most conscious of its relationship to the realism of Balzac, Dickens, and Zola (144). Lyall Power claims that by the mid 1880s, James had "made his peace" with the naturalists; "he had by this time come close to sharing fully the aesthetic persuasions of the realist-naturalist group" (41). While *Princess* is generally regarded as James's primary venture into a realistic or even naturalistic mode, Seltzer, however, disagrees. While Seltzer believes the novel's central focus is in foregrounding the city, Seltzer's Foucauldian reading emphasizes that *Princess* is "about spies and secret societies, and it is also a novel about spectatorship, about seeing and being seen" (4).

⁶ Mike Fischer is one of the few critics even to mention Hyacinth's work. Fischer discusses Hyacinth's artisanship in an effort to establish Hyacinth's trade and this workplace "as vestiges of a pre-capitalist era—tolerated by industrial capitalism, the mass production techniques of which could not hope to match the quality of their goods—in the form of cottage industries" (92). Fischer does acknowledge that "James provides us with only a few glimpses of Hyacinth's work-place, but these confirm the differences between the arrangement of such an establishment and the mass-production techniques of a factory; each piece of work at Crookenden's [shop] is done individually by one man . . . to maintain pride in the illusion that they are true artists" (92). Fischer seizes on Hyacinth's trade as support for his Marxist argument about the absence of workers' connections with the means of production: "For a bookbinder only embellishes (covers, 'hides') the material conditions and the forces of production that allow for the existence of the book in the first place. Hyacinth repeats the classic mistake of other artisans of his time, attempting to preserve the meaning of his work and an outdated sense of the economic and aesthetic significance of his individual performance at the risk of forgetting the communal aspect of both" (92). Although Fischer does not explore the nonnarration of Hyacinth's work or its formal or reader-based implications, Fischer's argument is valuable in framing this Jamesian protagonist's craft on a broader theoretical stage along with expanded social implications including "the false consciousness that informs . . . artisans' relationship to their work" (92).

London,⁷ the question arises why the text does not directly present Hyacinth's work alongside the text's realist treatment of workers.

The only passage in this 600-page text that describes Hyacinth applying his craft does so with atypical Jamesian brevity. This abbreviated passage describes private instead of workshop activity. As Hyacinth binds Tennyson poems in his bedroom, "with the tools he kept there for private use, and a morsel of delicate, blue-tinted Russia leather . . . he devoted himself to the task of binding the book as perfectly as he knew how. He worked with passion, with religion, and produced a masterpiece of firmness and finish" (254). While these two sentences indeed depict Hyacinth in the process of bookbinding, this sole, cursory presentation points to only one of his materials and generates merely an abstract sense of this work.⁸ Instead of providing insight into the working experience of bookbinding, this sole example only suggests more concrete questions for the reader about Hyacinth's craft. According to this passage, the work of a skilled, artistic bookbinder simply entails producing "a masterpiece of firmness and finish." Aside from an abstract understanding that the book is well done, the text gives no indication of what constitutes "a masterpiece," "firmness," or "finish." Specifically how does the excessively labeled "little bookbinder" approach his craft? Well, "with passion." What considerations prevail in the bookbinder's mind, what concerns, guidelines, sensibility,

⁷ Leon Edel notes James's effort to carefully record the behavior, dress, and conversation of these workers he observed in London around the time of the novel's composition (179-80).

⁸ In order to account for what he calls withdrawals from narrative authority, Seymour Chatman considers the narrative technique of summary, which typically is a register of the passage of time. Whereas with ellipsis, the passage of time occurs without comment, "summary implies that someone has felt a 'problem of transition' . . . and presupposes a desire to account for the passage of time" (*Story* 223). Chatman emphasizes this temporal summary over other kinds of summary but he does raise descriptive/quality summary as a narrative technique that "epitomizes the quality of an existent or events . . . and encapsulates a character or setting in a word or brief phrase" (225). In Chatman's terms, this passage from *The Princess Casamassima* may function as one of the novel's few descriptive summaries, which encapsulate Hyacinth's work and talent.

and inspiration? The narrative evades fully presenting this work by asserting that any talented bookbinder, and perhaps any craftsman worth his weight in a Jamesian world, would attend his craft “with religion.” Such token descriptive markers without any elaboration are rarities for James who, by his own artistic doctrine in “The Art of Fiction,” asserts that any human experience “is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spiderweb of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every airborne particle in its tissue.” While in this same essay, James demands readers upon whom nothing is lost, *The Princess Casamassima* then defers delving into the artistic labor of this “little bookbinder,” the “experience” and “sensibility” that constitute a major part of his life and certainly his week. Instead, James punctuates nearly every other page with the craft-related referent “the/our/little bookbinder,” as if the narrative attempts to limn the craftsman’s mind, physicality, and sensibility solely through saturated reference. While bookbinding may not constitute Hyacinth’s very essence, the text clearly establishes and repeatedly reinforces his aesthetic taste, gaze, and sensibility; whereas bookbinding may be simply labor, Hyacinth’s discriminating, artistic nature and eye makes this labor his personal artistic production.

Another particularly noteworthy element of the brief bookbinding passage is that Hyacinth’s sole bit of presented work is “for private use.” The only time the reader observes Hyacinth working to any extent is not in his workshop but rather in his own room, using his trade to make a gift, not to earn wages. This brief narrative moment, centered on a private activity, marks a withdrawal of Hyacinth’s trade from this public sphere. When Hyacinth transfers his skill from the workshop to his room at home, he

foregrounds the nonnarration of that public craft by moving it to an unobserved private space. This work is then withheld both for the reader and the fictional world, its absence more conspicuous because Hyacinth's trade is a public event. Hyacinth at work in his room, with one tool, some Russian leather, and with passion and religion, calls the reader's attention to the fact that this instance of craft-related presentation does not take place in the shop, and thus is not a public event like his wage-earning work. Instead, by transferring this one brief depiction of craft from public to private spheres, James may question the implications of removing a trade from an observable public forum to represent it as private artistic activity. In this light, the passage stands as a self-conscious statement about the ways in which practicing a craft becomes a different type of work when it ceases to be a public event. Although still a skill that serves public consumption, when produced privately, this craft is then shielded from public observation and scrutiny. That is, the process and experience are shielded, but the product is not.

The technical narrative underpinnings of the passage—the decision to present, albeit briefly, Hyacinth's craft in his room rather than as part of his daily working capacity—may illuminate this narrative moment as a meditation on authorship. This brief, abstract depiction of Hyacinth's craft implies the mechanics of the craft of authorship, which entails a similar private working process to generate a product of public consumption. Reading the passage in this way sheds light on the conspicuous, abrupt description that informs the reader that Hyacinth worked “with passion, with religion” while making the gift in his room. In addition to conceiving of labor as site-specific, the text acknowledges that Hyacinth's application of his skills in this sphere constitutes a different type and atmosphere of work; it is private, personal, and capable of

being romanticized (“passion,” “religion”) in a way that work performed in the shop is not, at least not in *The Princess Casamassima*. Hyacinth’s “work” in the public sphere becomes “craft” when he performs it in private. It is this privately generated work that is presented briefly for the reader. In fact, Hyacinth even has two sets of tools; one set stays at the shop, and the other he keeps at home “for private use.” These two sets underscore the distinction between public and private work and emphasize that the reader is privy to only one.

This book Hyacinth binds in his room—the reader’s glimpse of Hyacinth’s craft and the only artifact of this process of binding—eventually falls out of the text. When the princess is not at home to receive this gift, Hyacinth keeps it—for approximately the one year he goes without seeing her—and perceives it as a textual bond connecting him to her, “a sort of material link between the Princess and himself” (254). In this case, Hyacinth’s work creates a perceived connection between the giver and the recipient. Moreover, after three months, Hyacinth, in a figurative reversal of work, imagines the book to be a gift from the princess. This privately made product, this vessel of connection and craft, has in effect absorbed its intended recipient. In fact, the work that created this book has in effect been lost. In its place, the nonnarration figuratively allows Hyacinth to forget his own work in light of this textual vacancy, an echo of the several characters in *The Portrait of a Lady* who appear to have forgotten about Isabel’s narratively withheld dead child.

This gift-book surfaces nearly a year later when, while visiting the princess, Hyacinth mentions the gift he brought her the previous year. However, this time he cites it as proof of his qualifications to be her personal bookbinder. The book then transforms

again from a gift into a credential. The princess asks Hyacinth not to return to his bookbinding shop: “Let me, then, give you wages. You will work for me” (322). After receiving this unexpected offer, Hyacinth feels compelled to prove he deserves it. He justifies the offer by telling the princess, “I shall do it well; at least it shall be better than anyone else can do. . . . I have brought you a book—so you can see” (323). However, he does not at that moment have with him the gift-turned-credential, and, although the princess tells Hyacinth she would look at the book the next day, it is never mentioned again. Once the book becomes a work sample, it disappears from the text. The princess’s inspection would likely have highlighted concrete features of Hyacinth’s craft. Instead, because this assessment is either withheld or never takes place at all, the reader learns nothing about this book. In fact, the reader never receives any information about Hyacinth’s finished products, nothing about their actual appearance aside from the fact that they are lovely. Nonnarration of both the process and product of his work allows this single item to disappear from the text without any scrutiny or appreciation. Any lasting image of Hyacinth’s work, therefore, is a product of the reader’s imagination and reconstruction.

What the reader has to work with is “trade,” “tools,” “work,” “wages,” and “craft.” Without direct presentation of Hyacinth’s work, this recurring work-related terminology, particularly the definitional category of “bookbinder,” reinforces the notion that Hyacinth’s craft exists for the reader only through what appears to be compulsive, excessive reference to labor and artisanship. On the one hand, abstract work is a presence in the text; Hyacinth once acknowledges the possibility of being “out of work,” and another character perfunctorily mentions Hyacinth’s work: “Oh, of course you have

got your work, and that sort of thing” (274). On the other hand, at one point when Hyacinth encounters books on an acquaintance’s shelf, the text cites “his discriminating professional gaze” (302). This phrase implies a qualitative judgment about the bookbinder’s sensibility without elaborating on this gaze, its “discriminating” nature or its “professional” cultivation. Beyond mentioning once that he is due at the shop by noon, the most Hyacinth expresses about his work is either the occasional “I am very fond of my trade” (243) and “I like my work” (252) or his dread of returning to it—“the terrible grind” (395)—following his vacation. In effect, the text removes the product, process, and experience from work while keeping the references intact. As a result, this withheld work nonetheless converts into a form of presentation through recurring reference to the generic trappings of work and the markers of an artistic nature and promise.

This withheld work is incorporated into *The Princess Casamassima* through the reader who, saturated by reference, translates recurring mentions, markers, labels, and abstractions into another form of presentation. This reader is implied in James’s preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, particularly in his acknowledgement of areas of attenuated or missing development or portraiture, that is, in response to his “reflexions on the full license for sketchiness and vagueness and dimness taken indeed by [his] picture” (48). The preface identifies incomplete areas in this portrait, the concept James used throughout his career. The passage at the preface’s conclusion continues:

Shouldn’t I find [my ‘artistic position’] in the happy contention that the value I wished most to render and the effect I wished most to produce were precisely those of our not knowing, of society’s not knowing, but

only guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore, what ‘goes on’
irreconcilably, subversively, beneath the vast smug surface? (48)

Although the preface does not address the issue of work or its absence in *The Princess Casamassima*, it offers a veiled rationale for this nonnarration. Even the preposition “beneath” speaks to the veiled nature of the Jamesian fictional world, which requires a diligent reader to probe below the complacent, “smug surface.” Earlier the preface, by citing “an abyss of ambiguities” (37) that the writer encounters in constructing a text, draws attention to the interpretive depths that lie beneath the surface. James’s variations in this passage on the theme of incomplete information—“not knowing,” “guessing,” “suspecting”—speak to these ambiguities and to the deliberately limited knowledge that incites increased participation on the reader’s part.

This passage illustrates James’s awareness of reader-based concerns and, by aligning them with his own “artistic position,” emphasizes the relationship between author and reader. In addition, this reflection on technique later intertwines with Hyacinth’s work. His meditation on both binding and writing books further emphasizes this link between the acts of bookbinding and authorship. Once he has completed “the exquisite work which he was to do during the coming year for the Princess. . . . he proposed to himself to write something. . . . That was to be his transition—into literature; to bind the book, charming as the process might be, was after all much less fundamental than to write it” (403). This transition from binding to writing juxtaposes these two acts and suggests that binding is inherently limiting; that is, while binding is an act of finishing a text, writing is an act of ongoing creation. By juxtaposing both activities, this

passage underscores the reflexive nature of a text that refuses to present the binding, the completion, of texts.

This passage also discloses that Hyacinth considers progressing from one artistic form to another. At one point the text states that Hyacinth has “the conscience of an artist” (232).⁹ Beyond this labeling, however, no narrative moment develops either the actual experience of Hyacinth’s work or this artist’s sensibility. While an artisan is generally a skilled, manual craftsman, this designation tends to distinguish itself from “artist” based primarily on the manual nature of the craft as well as some qualitative measure of one’s creative or imaginative abilities. *The Princess Casamassima* calls Hyacinth both a “London artisan” and “a genuine artist.” Hyacinth conceives of his craft as “an exquisite art,” and the text at several points treats his bookbinding as an artistic endeavor attended to with an artist’s skill and sensibility.¹⁰ Despite this recurrent reference to Hyacinth’s artistic talent, a degree of shallowness attends the novel’s realism with respect to the radically attenuated portrait of Hyacinth’s craft. The fact that the reader catches only fleeting glimpses of a bookbinder’s tool or a craftsman’s gaze prompts speculation about the rationale for this nonnarration of a fundamental component of this bookbinder’s life: work itself. Although James’s self-proclaimed project in the 1880s was to focus on portraiture, such a portrait of Hyacinth is not fleshed out in *The Princess Casamassima* in exchange perhaps for experimenting with a text characterized

⁹ Fischer would agree that Hyacinth’s conscience is that of an artist. In fact, he argues that Hyacinth aestheticizes the politics around him and “conflates the ‘artistic’ value of his actions with the events to which they are meant to refer” (95). Fischer confirms Hyacinth’s artistic conscience in a way that illustrates the possible consequences of excessive aestheticization, which can lead to “a false conception of mimesis” (95).

¹⁰ DJ Gordon and John Stokes argue that Hyacinth “is really a lower-class James” (303). Nicolas Tingle argues, “what a work like *Princess* most ‘represents’ through Hyacinth is the workings of the artistic mind” (64).

by strong social engagement, in which Hyacinth's talent, craft, and actual work might be sacrificed in favor of depicting a cog in the revolutionary machine.

One of the reader's fleeting glimpses into Hyacinth's gaze and sensibility pertains to his access to the princess's study: "he had ravaged the collection, taken down almost every book, wishing he could keep it a week, and put it back quietly, as his eye caught the next, which appeared even more desirable" (303). This bookbinder, if given the means, would gorge himself on bound volumes and review them with a collector's eye. The passage continues by reporting how Hyacinth "discovered many rare bindings, and gathered several ideas from an inspection of them—ideas which he felt himself perfectly capable of reproducing" (303). (These bindings are indeed "rare" in a metatextual sense, since very few referenced books in this text are in fact bound.) Hyacinth clearly has a high opinion of his own bookbinding talents, but this passage speaks to his artist's eye that scans the landscape for inspiration and technical guidance. This glimpse inside Hyacinth's view of books illustrates how compelled he is by the volumes he encounters, how he rapidly consumes as many details about them as possible and memorizes the techniques and ideas he cultivates from them. These details, techniques, and ideas, however, are not disclosed, and *The Princess Casamassima* offers nothing beyond this single fleeting look at the protagonist absorbing a bibliolandscape.

The text also draws the reader's attention to the nonnarration of Hyacinth's work when he vacations in Europe. Hyacinth recalls, upon writing to the princess, that "she had said . . . she didn't wish vague phrases, protestations or compliments; she wanted the realities of his life, the smallest, most personal details" (384). This passage is almost humorous when read alongside the absence of those small, personal details that make up

the reality of Hyacinth's working life. While the princess demands realism in Hyacinth's letters, the reader of *The Princess Casamassima* does not receive anywhere near the realistic description of Hyacinth at work that the princess receives of Hyacinth on vacation.

At one point the text suggests that absent work-related trappings lead to incomplete characterization; this is observed when a stranger's "eyes seemed to Hyacinth to search for the small neat bundle he ought to have had under his arm, and without which he was incomplete" (241). This "small neat bundle," the sign of a tradesman, is missing yet still almost discernible. Although he does not carry it, this bundle still exists as both a felt presence and part of the text itself. A "stranger"—an observer, even a reader figure—is able to incorporate an element or image despite its lack of direct presentation. When Hyacinth visits the princess, and this stranger, the prince, sees him for the first time, the text implies that, despite never seeing Hyacinth before, something palpable rests in Hyacinth's face, carriage, or posture (most likely something beyond simply his dress) that marks him as a craftsman. The explanation for this instant awareness of Hyacinth's craft, however, is not disclosed but passes silently through the prince's mind as he makes this summary observation. Without the markers of Hyacinth's trade, the passage suggests that he is somehow incomplete, whether in terms of his physical appearance, his societal function, or even his characterization in the text. This passage is a subtle metatextual acknowledgement of Hyacinth's withheld craft. He doesn't have the expected bundle under his arm and thus does not fulfill either the prince's expectations of a tradesman's portrait or the reader's possible expectations of work-related presentation. The noted absent bundle speaks to the missing information

the reader may expect from a realist text, which not only calls its protagonist a bookbinder nearly as often as it calls him Hyacinth but which also informs the reader that this bookbinder approaches his craft “with passion, with religion” without any elaboration with regard to what such passion and religion entail.¹¹

While *The Princess Casamassima* is a realist text, its nonnarration of work leads to this attenuated realism. Supplying the reader with only the signs of work and reference to a craft instead of probing the experience itself might serve another purpose: to illustrate the undervalued status of manual work. In marking Hyacinth as a tradesman, primarily by referring to his tools, schedule, and wages, the absence of directly presented work may offer a social critique of the devaluation of this type of labor. It is not only Hyacinth’s work that is not presented in *The Princess Casamassima*; Paul Muniment’s frequently cited chemist work is presented only through his black fingernails, and Vetch the fiddler is never observed playing his instrument. Another explanation for this nonnarration stems again from issues of audience, which may view bookbinding or other manual labor as just a necessary evil, something Hyacinth does to earn a buck. This claim appears baseless, however, when juxtaposed with textual evidence such as Hyacinth’s “conscience of an artist.” James does not attribute artistic, “discriminating gazes” to his characters if the reader is intended to discount these aesthetic sensibilities.

¹¹ Fischer acknowledges the text’s literary realism and suggests why it strays from this tradition, an explanation that, although it doesn’t refer specifically to Hyacinth’s work, has bearing on this subject: “Perhaps one of the reasons James turns away from literary realism after writing *The Princess Casamassima* is that the opposition between this form of representation and the difficulties inherent in documenting the increasingly complex external realities it proposes to explore renders the author(itarianism) implicit in any writing more readily apparent. Realism’s techniques compromise and circumscribe the complicated story he is trying to tell, while that story’s examination of the use and abuse of power questions the assumptions of the methodology in which he has invested his authority” (102).

James’s realism, however, is typically intact and in service of an adequate presentation of interiority and consciousness. Therefore, the “turn away” from an external realism in some respect in this novel may signal a turn toward greater internal realism. “The Art of Fiction” just two years earlier had asserted the importance of “catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life.”

Why then does *The Princess Casamassima* note this bookbinder's discriminating gaze and artistic conscience if the reader is never to observe a concrete application of them? How does understanding the nonnarration inform a text that draws an outline around the working experience—the craftsman's talents, sensibility, and tools—but does not fill it in? The nonnarration of work speaks to more collaborative, reader-oriented texts, since repeated reference to work suggests the reader's freedom and responsibility to envision, for example, Hyacinth's craftsmanship based only on narrative prompts or markers instead of direct presentation. This withheld work fosters greater interpretive space for the reader "to realize," to borrow Iser's term, what constitutes Hyacinth's artistry and talent, to imagine the quality of his pieces, the inspiration and intensity of his gaze and sensibility. The text, however, may also withhold direct presentation of Hyacinth's work in order not to demystify his artistry, to maintain an air of mystery about craft and technique in a way that again suggests a resonance with literary craft, narrative technique, and text construction.

Although the reader cannot actually observe one of Hyacinth's finished pieces, at three points in *The Princess Casamassima* others look at or comment on his bound books. In addition to praising his work, these moments are significant also for theorizing about the reader's response to withheld work. The first instance is rather mediated; the reader is told Hyacinth's "skill was of a very high order," which, the next sentence implies, has resulted in "Old Crookenden . . . raising the rates at which he was paid" (473). Immediately following this information about increased wages, Hyacinth discovers some of his books have been "exhibited to the members of the Crookenden circle who came to tea on Sundays" (473). Second, when Hyacinth finally shows the

princess one of his volumes, her response is “to shake her head over it with a kind, sad smile. ‘It’s beautiful, I am sure’ ” (475). The third instance takes place when Vetch examines the “exquisite specimens” Hyacinth has bound, the few volumes Hyacinth keeps at home; the fiddler states, “I recognise your work when I see it; there are always certain little finer touches. You have a manner, like a master” (561). The abstract detail the reader receives is glaring; the unelaborated “finer touches” and “a manner, like a master” echo the “passion” and “religion” with which Hyacinth worked privately in his room. Again, the reader knows Hyacinth’s work is beautiful without a single illustration of why. Absent is the abundant realist and typical Jamesian detail the reader receives throughout the text; for example, at one point Hyacinth observes people at a London market “staring at the striated sides of bacon, at the golden cubes and triangles of cheese, at the graceful festoons of sausage” (106). The reader receives detailed descriptions of products at market but never of the protagonist’s art and trade.

What is at stake in repeated assertions of a protagonist’s superb products and skilled artistic practices, which the reader is not privy to through direct presentation? It’s exquisite, dear reader, but you will never get to see it, not process nor product. The text emphasizes the beauty of Hyacinth’s bound volumes without articulating this beauty in concrete terms, thus leaving this artistic work outside the realm of Jamesian portraiture. As a result, the reader’s only recourse is either to trust that these volumes are in fact exquisite specimens with no further thought, or to envision what specifically constitutes this exquisiteness. The second option launches the reader inside Iser’s territory of the reader’s creative role in realizing a text. Although my introductory chapter has disputed Iser’s claim that it is incumbent on the reader to deduce an internal consistency for the

gaps in a text, it is, nonetheless, notable that the presentation and detail left to the reader's interpretive discretion consistently stems from issues of work.

Finally, it is important not to overlook that the withheld product at the center of *The Princess Casamassima* is bound books. This conspicuous nonpresentation of bound, finished books embodies the essence of the reader-centered approach: the reader's collaboration in the production of meaning. Texts are not complete, not figuratively bound, until they are read. By not elaborating in the least on the appearance of any finished books, specifically by not presenting the binding process, all of the paper and undisclosed text (with the exception of unnamed Tennyson poetry in the book Hyacinth makes for the princess) that the reader encounters in *The Princess Casamassima* remain loose and in a sense liberated. By not being bound, by continuing to exist in the form of potentially re-arrangeable paper, these texts and their nonnarration suggest a reluctance to signal completion. Reader-centered criticism, which posits that the meaning of a text is not complete without a reader, could easily seize on *The Princess Casamassima* and its central image of blank or abstractly described books generated in a withheld process of binding. This image speaks to a reflexive exchange with the reader. That is, traditionally, binding a text signifies its completion and its formulated meaning. Reader-centered criticism, however, asserts that the meaning of the text is not self-formulated, but rather that a potential proliferation of meaning rests with the reader encountering a similarly, albeit figuratively, unbound text. Therefore, by not presenting finished books, *The Princess Casamassima* emphasizes the reader's interpretive task in reflecting on this work and engaging with the gaps in limited, incomplete knowledge.¹²

¹² See introductory chapter for more information on narrative gaps. Roman Ingarden was the first to formulate the notion of "gaps of indeterminacy," and Iser developed the notion of indeterminacy to make it

This reluctance to present complete, bound products resonates with James's meticulous rereading and revising, which are borne out by his involved prefaces and New York edition.¹³ In a final example from the preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, James imagines a reader warning a novelist, "don't, we beseech you, give us too much intelligence" (37). Don't tell too much, don't provide too much information—this plea illustrates the reader of whom James most likely conceived: one who prefers and expects to slowly, diligently piece together an understanding of characters and events. When the preface's same imagined reader seeks "plenty of bewilderment" (37), James unveils his ideal reader as one who welcomes expanded interpretive obligations, discerning reading, and greater participation in texts that require "patching together" meaning (43). It is this reader that will most likely penetrate the layers of significance in these unbound books.

The resistance to acknowledging completion also speaks to authorship and the reluctance to stamp finality on an aesthetic project by sending something to press. With the New York Edition, James for a time repeals this finality by revising his long completed works; according to the preface to *Roderick Hudson*, the author "takes, under this backward view, his whole unfolding, his process of composition" (1). In addition to "light[ing] not a little . . . the veiled muse" and "placing [the composition's] circumstances on record" (1), the Edition's prefaces foreground a hitherto withheld "private history" and practices of and reflections on literary work. These prefaces in fact present detailed, intimate glimpses into the creative work experience that the texts in this

more reader-centered: "in seeking to fill in the textual gaps . . . the reader realizes the work." These fundamental reader-response concepts apply easily to a text that so markedly foregrounds blankness in the form of figuratively blank, unfinished books.

¹³ The New York Edition signifies James's 1907 to 1909 revision of as well as addition of prefaces to most of his works. John Pearson states, "The prefaces commit the narrative to yoked states of perpetual creation" (162). Similarly, Stuart Culver argues, "[The] prefaces necessarily recast our sense of the text's closure and self-sufficiency. . . . The very fact that something remains to be said reminds us that the fictional representation is by no means definitive" (132).

chapter withhold. The novels' revisions and prefaces stamp finality anew while serving as a stark reminder of the impulse to revisit, reinvent, and rework creative artistic pursuits.

Metatextual resonance is never far from Hyacinth as someone who binds texts; in packaging and adorning texts he literally finishes them. Being a bookbinder equates to being a book-completer. By resisting the depiction of finished books, nonpresentation of both Hyacinth's craft and the binding process reflects a reluctance to negotiate completed work. Instead, nonpresentation leaves this work unbound and unfinished. By not depicting completed work, *The Princess Casamassima* in effect demands further contemplation of it; nonnarration of these books and of the process of their creation encourages the reader to keep thinking about them in a way that minimal to full depiction would not prompt. Behind this claim is the suggestion of diminished accountability in not showing a finished product; in the case of a book, one must not answer for this bound work if it is never presented in its finished state. It is this notion of completion that *The Princess Casamassima* as well as *The Lesson of the Master* probe. Loose paper also fills the life and study of famous author St. George in *The Lesson of the Master*. Those "big bundles of proofs" and "fat roll of papers" (1003-4) comprise a great deal of the presentation of his craft. Beyond St. George's fierce campaign to encourage the narrator Paul Overt to pursue a writing career, *The Lesson of the Master* does not directly present St. George at work but rather presents only the signs of work—bundles, sheets, proofs, all resting on tables in St. George's study.

Detailed presentation of this site of work, this study, replaces any depiction of the experience of actual work. "What good things I should do," Paul Overt exclaims, "if I

had such a charming place as this to do them!” (1005). This hypothetical phrasing underscores that no one actually does anything—no observable writing or creation—in the narrated text. Instead, the text emphasizes the site of work and thus subverts those theoretical “good things” Paul *would* do in favor of maintaining enthusiasm over the place of creativity and craft. St. George’s study is appropriately called a “rich, protecting square” (1005): it is lavish and it shields its inhabitant from as much distraction as possible. Such protection speaks to the author’s techniques, routines, idiosyncrasies, trials, and the general messiness of his craft, all sheltered from outside, observing eyes.

Here in this windowless square, St. George is “walled in to [his] trade” (1003). “[T]he room is a fine lesson in concentration” (1003), St. George tells Paul, personifying the study in a way that further emphasizes its centrality to the role of authorship and the creative endeavor. The room concentrates, not the writer. This personification prompts the reader to equate the site of work with the concentration required to produce literary work. If St. George’s work were directly presented, such creative measures—personification, hypothetical constructions—to fabricate its process would not be necessary.¹⁴ While the room itself muses and deliberates, the text mentions the “special requirements” this site of work demands—not the author, creator, agent of work. Paul views St. George’s study as “an apartment thrown out, in the rear of the habitation, for the special requirements, as he guessed, of a busy many of letters” (1003). These vague necessities are a placeholder for an actual exploration of creative, literary pursuit—the discipline, challenges, perseverance, inspiration, and the tricks and secrets when no

¹⁴ David Seed’s work may serve to explain this lack of presentation, this superficial presence of St. George’s work in *Lesson*: “There have already been suggestions that St. George’s latest works are superficial,” something the author himself admits in the text (9). St. George calls himself a “charlatan,” says he has become a devotee of the “mercenary muse,” dismisses his work as “carton-pierre” (a soft paste used for decorative moldings), and considers himself a commercial sell-out (*Princess* qtd. in Seed 10).

inspiration exists. The text again does not specifically link these special requirements to St. George the writer but rather fuses them to the site of work itself. Both *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Lesson of the Master* appear more concerned with presenting either the site or product of work in place of its process and experience.

To clarify, Paul *supposes* that St. George's work demands special requirements. Everything about this author's work is conjectural. While Paul "guesses" there must be certain necessities, the text never illuminates what they might be. Paul, "in his mind's eye," envisions St George "pac[ing] to and fro during his hours of composition" (1003) but never actually witnesses the author's composition process, which exists purely as the subject of imagination for narrator and reader. It is as if the text, through Paul, tries to concretize the creative work experience by focusing on objects in St. George's room. For instance, Paul fixates on the jacket St George's servant gives him, sensing in this borrowed jacket "an air of experience . . . and promised confidences"; this jacket, Paul muses, had seen several "pathetic literary elbows" (1003). While both Paul and text focus on grasping the concrete reality of this craft, such an understanding seems possible only through objects adjacent to this craft. Elbows, jackets, furnishings, the room itself—*The Lesson of the Master* incorporates St. George's metonymically.

It is not only St George's work that the text does not directly present. When Paul spends two years in Europe writing his own novel, the closest the text comes to presentation of his work is, "The autumn was fine, the lake was blue, and his book took form and direction" (1015). The text discloses only that Paul first works near Chillon on Lake Geneva and then crosses the Alps to work in Italy. Instead of any glimpse into

Paul's mind, his process of literary creation, or his two-year experience of writing, the reader receives only a list of passing seasons to mark the continuous composition.

As stark pre- and post-James contrasts to this withheld presentation of literary work, Melville and Hemingway, for example, demonstrate literature's ability to capture the writing experience. While James only minimally presents manual, artistic, or literary work, predecessors and followers prove that sustained, direct presentation—which actively, ardently accesses the creative experience and the life of the mind—is quite possible. *Pierre* penetrates the grueling experience of actual artistic, literary production:

From eight o'clock in the morning till half-past four in the evening, Pierre sits there in his room—eight hours and a half! From throbbing neck-bands, and swinging belly-bands of gay-hearted horses, the sleigh-bells chimingly jingle;—but Pierre sits there in his room; Thanksgiving comes, with its glad thanks, and crisp turkeys;—but Pierre sits there in his room; soft through the snows, on tinted Indian moccasin, Merry Christmas comes stealing;—but Pierre sits there in his room; it is New Year's, and like a great flagon, the vast city overbrims at all curbstones, wharves, and piers, with bubbling jubilations;—but Pierre sits there in his room; . . . Nor Bell, Thank, Christ, Year;—none of these are for Pierre. In the midst of the merriments of the mutations of Time, Pierre hath ringed himself in with the grief of Eternity. Pierre is a peak inflexible in the heart of Time, as the isle-peak, Piko, stands unassailable in the midst of waves. (303-304)¹⁵

¹⁵ *Pierre's* grueling tour de force continues by moving deeper into the writer's mental experience: That which now absorbs the time and the life of Pierre, is not the book, but the primitive elementalizing of the strange stuff, which in the act of attempting that book, has upheaved and upgushed in his soul. Two books are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that

A Moveable Feast is similarly filled with sustained, detailed direct presentation of the writer's mind and captures the process of creation and composition, including attempts at inspiration; artistic credos; the daily, hourly struggle to concentrate and persevere; and both the foundational planning for and reflection on one's work:

When I was starting a new story and I could not get it going, I would sit in front of the fire and squeeze the peel of the little oranges into the edge of the flame and watch the sputter of blue that they made. I would stand and look out over the roofs of Paris and think, "Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know." So finally I would write one true sentence, and then go from there. It was easy then because there was always one true sentence that I knew or had seen or had heard someone say. If I started to write elaborately, or like someone introducing or presenting something, I found that I could cut that scrollwork or ornament out and throw it away and start with the first true simple declarative sentence I had written. Up in that room I decided that I would write one story about each thing that I knew about. I was trying to do this all the time I was writing, and it was good and severe discipline. (12-13)¹⁶

the bungled one. The larger book, and the infinitely better, is for Pierre's own private self. That it is, whose unfathomable cravings drink his blood; the other only demands his ink. But circumstances have so decreed, that the one can not be composed on the paper, but only as the other is writ down in his soul. And the one of the soul is elephantinely sluggish, and will not budge at a breath. This Pierre is fastened on by two leeches; (304)

¹⁶ Hemingway continues, "I learned not to think about anything that I was writing from the time I stopped writing until I started again the next day. That way my subconscious would be working on it and at the same time I would be listening to other people and noticing everything, I hoped; learning, I hoped; and I would read so that I would not think about my work and make myself impotent to it" (13). Hemingway

In utter contrast, instead of presenting the interior struggle, discipline, and reward of the literary mind at work, what *The Lesson of the Master* does thoroughly depict is merely the face of this literary mind. Text and narrator fixate on St. George's face, thereby restricting the direct presentation to the surface of this literary figure. This superficial emphasis—on “the countenance of the illustrious novelist” (973)—echoes the minimal treatment of literary, creative work. Gazing at St. George's face, Paul “liked it the better for its not telling its whole story in the first three minutes. That story came out as one read, in little installments” (973).¹⁷ Like a James text, St. George's face carefully weighs its disclosures, leaves lingering impressions, and avoids simple solutions or overt clues. James's prefaces and criticism assume a reader who finds such texts appealing, who welcomes the care, meandering, and engagement they require.¹⁸ As Paul speaks of literally reading St. George's face, the passage foregrounds the reader: Paul notes, “the text [of St. George's face] was a style considerably involved – a language not easy to translate at sight” (973). This description of St. George's face, the detail of which far exceeds that of his craft, foregrounds textual difficulty and the necessity of a reader's persistence and attentiveness. Upon his readerly reception of the text of St. George's face, Paul fixates on publication-based thoughts; he thinks in terms of “installments,” and his “mental comparisons [are] somewhat professional” (973). This passage reflexively emphasizes textual parallels in a way that in turn foregrounds narrative technique and construction.

also takes the reader inside a writer's habits, tricks, and creative resources: “I would walk along the quais when I had finished work or when I was trying to figure something out. It was easier to think if I was walking and doing something or seeing people doing something that they understood” (43).

¹⁷ This passage also recalls James's reflection in his notebooks that “The whole of anything is never told.”

¹⁸ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues that *Lesson* above all else is about reading and interpretation. A discerning James reader is central to this text; it is up to this reader to decide, for instance, if St. George tricks Paul or if he saves him, if he is “a lech or a benefactor” (79-80).

In place of any depiction of literary craft, St. George's face becomes a quasi-site of work. Like the study itself assumes agency and vitality, so does the author's face; as a result, the reader encounters a directly presented face and office metonymically replacing the actual experience of work. The concrete description of the workplace becomes the presentation of the workplace experience in both *The Lesson of the Master* and *The Princess Casamassima*. This is the same strategy that incorporates Hyacinth's work into the text:

the old familiar, shabby shop, . . . the uncovered flame of the gas, burning often from the morning on, lighted up the ugliness amid which the hand of practice endeavoured to disengage a little beauty – the ugliness of a dingy, belittered interior, of battered, disappeared walls, of work-tables stained and hacked, . . . the sordid waistcoat backs, the smeared aprons, the personal odour, the patient, obstinate, irritating shoulders and vulgar, narrow, inevitable faces, of his fellow labourers (271)

The text's setting-based articulation of artisanship reveals a metonymic strategy to incorporate Hyacinth's work into the text without direct presentation. It is, however, a form of presentation governed by proximity. Any "felt life" of this work experience is conveyed through the adjacent site of work, its various things and details.

The experience of intellectual work is incorporated metonymically in *The Professor's House* as well. Nearly all of the abundant paper in Professor Godfrey St. Peter's study is loose; the only bound item that the text references but does not present is St. Peter's eight-volume historical treatise *Spanish Adventurers in North America*. Whereas with Hyacinth's craft, it is easy to observe when work is finished—books have

front and back covers, St. Peter's work is different; publication—binding—does not automatically indicate the termination of intellectual investigation. *The Professor's House* situates well alongside *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Lesson of the Master*, because all three explore notions of bindable and nonbindable work and resist completion of intellectual or artistic work.¹⁹ Suggesting the anxiety of stopping—while not necessarily finishing—work, the mountains of loose paper that remain in piles in St. Peter's study align with the nonnarration of Hyacinth in his workshop and of both writers in *The Lesson of the Master*. *The Professor's House* provides both a variation on the withholding and reincorporation of work in *The Princess Casamassima* and an extended exploration of the withheld creative or scholarly work and metonymic reincorporation briefly established in *The Lesson of the Master*.

Cather acknowledged James's influence on her work: "I began by imitating Henry James. He was the most interesting American who was writing at the time, and I strove laboriously to pattern after him. . . . He was the perfect writer, the foremost mind that ever applied itself to literature in America" (qtd. in O'Brien 297). She told an interviewer that emulating James's "best style" was a "perfectly right form of education," for James was "as correct, as classical, as calm and as subtle as the music of Mozart" (*Kingdom* 361). This subtlety and calmness suggest an author at ease with absence and content to meander and to withhold information as well as an admirer who recognizes the value and appropriateness of such narrative technique. In "On the Art of Fiction," an

¹⁹ Cather and James shared an affinity for the theater, and this obsession plays a pivotal role in considering the reluctance to represent in literature the completion of artistic and intellectual work. A play is never complete in the way a written, published text is; it is always in process, always never finished, always reenacted and reinterpreted with different inflections and nuances with every performance. James and Cather may have been deeply drawn to theater because it offered an artistic, literary means of finishing a work while avoiding finality.

essay that pays homage to James's "The Art of Fiction," Cather asserts the goal of art is simplification, to find "what conventions of form and what detail one can do without" (102). As a result, Cather argues, "all that one has suppressed and cut away is there to the reader's consciousness as much as if it were in type on the page" (102). Beyond evoking James's assertions about the "felt life" emanating from a well rendered narrative, Cather's statement is a resounding echo of this study's assumption about the potential of the reader to assimilate withheld material.

While the withheld work in *The Princess Casamassima* is manual and artistic, and creative and literary in *The Lesson of the Master*, it is scholarship that is withheld in *The Professor's House*. Artistic and intellectual work may share this reluctance toward completed projects based on the common recognition that an artist or intellectual does not complete but rather stops one's work.²⁰ The reluctance implicit in *The Professor's House*, *The Princess Casamassima*, and *The Lesson of the Master* to present finished products suggests that these objects do not necessarily signify an end of the working experience. By not directly presenting St. Peter's Spanish adventurers, this refusal also serves as a window into authorial meditation on the direct relationship between incompleteness and increased contemplation of intellectual and artistic objects and pursuits. The unbound, re-arrangeable paper in these texts strongly suggests a participatory even collaborative role for the reader. By not depicting an artist or intellectual at work, or their finished products, this artistic and intellectual activity is

²⁰ Fritz Oehlschlaeger applies Gabriel Marcel's phenomenological work to *The Professor's House* in order to argue, "Finishing a work presents a special problem for the artist, . . . for a completed work no longer belongs to the artist in the way that it has during creation" (81). Oehlschlaeger also argues that St. Peter's "completion of his work reduces him to immobility" (84).

prolonged and therefore able to maintain, to borrow from Gertrude Stein, a continuous presence.

In her essay “The Novel Demueble,” Cather ruminates about “the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it” (41). Cather’s conception of an *unfurnished* narrative and of palpable absent presence echoes this and previous chapters’ assertions about nonpresentation, expanded interpretive richness, and the possibility of assimilating withheld material. *The Professor’s House* in particular, nearly a generation after James, exemplifies the withheld presentation and indirect incorporation found so often in James and it seamlessly connects James to the following generation’s increased narrative experimentation. There is a profound sense of vacancy in *The Professor’s House* that resonates with the withheld presentation and interpretive openness of many James narratives.

In *The Professor’s House*, St. Peter’s eight-volume treatise exists for the reader only as heaps of papers and old notebooks, the scattered ephemera Cather provides to represent both the process and product of intellectual work. The professor’s “piles of note-books and bundles of manuscript tied up in square packages” (13) and “old walnut table, with one leaf up, holding piles of papers” (7) are themselves the representation of St. Peter’s work. As a result, direct presentation of St. Peter’s intellectual pursuit is withheld as the text continuously refers to his scholarly endeavor without presenting his intellectual consciousness or published work. Not one passage from his treatise is reproduced, as if those notebooks and manuscript bundles were never bound. The acutely cerebral St. Peter has spent his adult life becoming “an authority on certain phases of Spanish history” (4). On one hand, *Spanish Adventurers in North America* is

not withheld material because the fifteen years St. Peter spent writing this historical study precede the narrative text. On the other hand, the text mentions the mountainous piles of papers, records, notebooks, and manuscripts so often that St. Peter's intellectual work becomes hyper-referenced without any direct presentation of the scholarly mind and experience.

Nonnarration of St. Peter's scholarly activity may reflect the passage of time since the publication of his historical tract; in the meantime, the professor sits in his study for hours—throughout the book's narrated text—without “doing” intellectual work. But what constitutes intellectual work? Most scholars would disagree that an intellectual endeavor consists only of writing, reading, and research. A great deal of contemplative time often attends the scholarly project, as one conceives of a topic, configures an approach or methodology, considers primary examples or cases, formulates questions, and theorizes answers or at least suggestions. Most of this work is mental, silent, and often invisible to an observer.²¹ In fact, many scholars accomplish a great deal of “composition” while—like St. Peter—staring out the window. Is a professor who has labored tirelessly on a project for fifteen years no longer intellectually active because he sits in a study littered with paper and stares off into space? Probably not, and by not depicting St. Peter's mind, *The Professor's House* suggests the difficulty of depicting intellectual work based on its acutely private, internal, and complex nature.

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Edward Said acknowledges the difficulty of adequately representing such intellectual activity. Said approaches this subject with a central example from Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, in which the intellectual Bazarov

²¹ In fact, there may be no observers. Margaret Doane argues that the life of a Cather intellectual is necessarily one of solitude, reserve bordering on aloofness, detachment, and inner lives “somewhat independent of their actions in their environments” (61).

appears then disappears, both with little or no explanation, from a traditional Russian community: “Turgenev himself actually says nothing of this at all . . . as if to say that the intellectual is not only a being set apart from his parents and children, but that his modes of life, his procedures of engaging with it are necessarily allusive, and can only be represented realistically as a series of discontinuous performances” (56). Said suggests that any mimetic undertaking to depict, along with any insight into, the intellectual life and mind is unavoidably fragmented and fleeting. Although Said provides no American literary example, applying Said’s claim to *The Professor’s House* is helpful in exploring the text as a self-conscious confirmation of the difficulty or impossibility of accurately representing the intellectual mind and activity. *The Professor’s House* approaches St. Peter as scholar in a way that conforms to Said’s assertion that “discontinuous performances” are the only viable representation of the intellectual. For instance, the reader has a passing glimpse of St. Peter’s teaching performance: “If there was one eager eye, one doubting, critical mind, one lively curiosity in a whole lecture-room full of commonplace boys and girls, he was its servant. That ardor could command him” (19). This isolated reference to the lecturing professor offers fleeting insight in an attempt to render at least part of the academic life.

Another brief, simple yet compelling presentation of the intellectual project appears early in *The Professor’s House* but then is never replicated. The text simply notes that St. Peter, while writing and reading, got tired; the text then offers the reader a moment that may serve as one of Said’s “discontinuous performances”; “he was tired and dull, when the white pages before him remained blank or were full of scratched-out sentences” (20). This concise attempt to directly present St. Peter’s experience flashes an

indelible image—of all output as either blank or bad—for nearly every writer or scholar. Although these edited sentences are not part of the current narrated text, they are vestiges of St. Peter’s work nonetheless. This physical evidence of past work offers the reader a concrete trace of the writing process that pervaded St. Peter’s life for over fifteen years.

The norm, however, in *The Professor’s House* is unelaborated reference, markers of work instead of the work itself: the attic study “was the place where he worked” (8). St. Peter repeatedly talks about going to the study to work: “I’m going to write on here for a while” (11) or, “Now I must be off to my desk” (36). Fearing his long stretches of time in the attic, Augusta would tell St. Peter, “A gust of wind might blow [the gas heater] out at any moment, and if you were at work you’d never notice” (80). This comment—that if the professor *were* ever in fact working—foregrounds that the text does not depict work; both text and reader wait to see *if* he will work. Any reference to the study or St. Peter’s projects is about work that either is about to take place or already has taken place. For instance, St. Peter’s “notes and the records and the ideas always came back to [his study where] they were digested and sorted, and woven into their proper place” (16). The reader glimpses St. Peter’s affection for engaged students while in the classroom but does not have access to these intellectual ideas to understand what a scholar’s “digestion” entails. Part of it most likely requires a good deal of sitting, thinking, and staring out the window in his study. This passage illustrates the book’s fragmented presentation of the experience of St. Peter’s work as well as Said’s assertion that irregularity necessarily attends any intellectual representation.

Is nonnarration of work is necessarily always elective or does a degree of ineffability attends this intellectual work? While authors may elect not to depict

commonplace physical labor for purposes of maintaining the reader's attention, on the other hand, the attenuated representation of intellectual work prompts further exploration into whether this absence speaks to Macherey's idea of what cannot be expressed, what language and narrative cannot capture. Can literature adequately represent intellectual consciousness?²² If not, then why does *The Professor's House* not penetrate the scholarly mind and offer insight into the processes of mental labor? The text, however, does deploy strategies to incorporate the intellectual experience. Cather's principal method is a metonymic strategy that relies on objects and spaces in close proximity to St. Peter to convey the scholarly mind and pursuit. The text uses adjacent physical evidence of St. Peter's past work to develop this strategy based on reference over presentation, one that uses concretization to embody the experience of abstract mental, academic work. *The Professor's House* indirectly presents the intellectual mind through the signs and proximity of work instead of its process. In fact, the text so closely aligns physical traces of work that the abundant paper starts to replace actual work: St. Peter states, "I'm not moving yet – don't want to disturb all my papers" (11). Because metonymy is governed by adjacency, the text attempts to present St. Peter's intellectual consciousness by cataloguing his environment. *The Professor's House*, therefore, substitutes correlative material objects for more abstract, contemplative work and experience. By using materiality to articulate abstraction, Cather acknowledges both the representational

²² Julien Benda in *The Treason of the Intellectuals* identifies "real intellectuals" as "those whose activity is essentially not the pursuit of practical aims, all those who seek their joy in the practice of an art or a science or metaphysical speculation, in short in the possession of non-material advantages; and hence in a certain manner say: 'my kingdom is not of this world' " (43 qtd. in Said 5). Benda often refers to intellectuals as "a clerisy" or "a clerical minority." Juxtaposing St. Peter's cerebral work with the degree of sacredness Benda attributes to intellectual activity supports the potential difficulty of adequate depiction.

challenge imposed by the intellectual experience and the capacity of metonymy to incorporate nonetheless an intellectual consciousness.

St. Peter's stacks of papers, notebooks, and manuscripts are everywhere, visual reminders to both protagonist and reader alike of a past project and an enduring intellectual consciousness. St. Peter won't even file these loose papers: "he had always meant to put [in] the filing-cabinets. . . . They would have held all his notes and pamphlets, and the spasmodic rough drafts of passages far ahead" (22). Even filing all his loose paper would signify completion. Instead, the myriad unbound papers filling the study resist completion; everywhere St. Peter's eyes fall, while sitting in his study, they find a physical, textual marker, which implies the consuming, pervasive nature of the intellectual endeavor. *The Professor's House* metonymically presents St. Peter's intellectual life, mind, and activity by way of the "piles of note-books" and "bundles of manuscript," these material, tangible signs. The paper, text, and vestiges are excessive, an excess that suggests representation by way of narrative referential saturation. The centerpiece of St. Peter's study, the "old walnut table, with one leaf up, holding piles of papers" (7), by metonymic proximity and association, figures the professor in concrete, physical, furnitural terms as an aged object buttressing textual mountains. This old manuscript-bearing table reinforces that intellectual work does not end with the publication of eight volumes of Spanish adventurer history. Instead, the table continues to stand under the weight of the papers, retaining the textual traces of extensive intellectual activity. In her essay "On *The Professor's House*," Cather states, "I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things...until one got stifled" (25). While these "new things" are not specifically the piles, papers,

notebooks, and manuscript bundles, this observation underscores Cather's awareness of the *thingness* both in St. Peter's study and in her narrative as well as the palpable presence of this abundance of material things, the important role they play in the text in terms of setting, mood, atmosphere, and characterization.

The temporal distance that separates the publication of St. Peter's historical treatise from the current narrated text may have an impact on this depiction of intellectual work. Had the novel's narrative frame included the professor's actual composition process, this intellectual activity might have been incorporated more into the text. Although St. Peter has completed his life's work, *The Professor's House* suggests that a scholar never really finishes a fifteen-year project; he does not cease thinking about it. The reader doesn't even know the location of this life's work, the eight volumes of *Spanish Adventurers in North America*, though they are most likely in the new house with the rest of the family.²³ Instead, the text repeatedly points to the piles of papers, notebooks, and manuscripts, everything that contributed to the finished volume but that now lies scattered on the floors and furniture of St. Peter's study. St. Peter loves, really loves, being in this study, so much so that he persuades his wife to keep the old house so he can still sit there all day long.²⁴ To be in the study is to be inside the intellectual

²³ John Randall is the only critic to acknowledge that *The Professor's House* does not present St. Peter's life work: "Nowhere in the novel does Willa Cather tell us what this historical landmark is supposed to be like" (209).

²⁴ Margaret Doane explores St. Peter's much needed solitude and contemplative time, which is spent in his study: "the one place in the house where he could get isolation, insulation from the engaging drama of domestic life" (*PH* 16 qtd. in Doane 63).

A good deal of Cather criticism emphasizes a gender reversal with regard to separate space. In *The Song of the Lark*, for instance, "the acquisition of [Thea Kronborg's own] room was the beginning of a new era in Thea's life. It was one of the most important things that ever happened to her.... The room retained her thoughts during the day, she liked to imagine, and when she returned to it at night...she found them awaiting her" (73). Doris Grumbach draws attention to this parallel in *The Song of the Lark* (328) and also raises a biographical parallel. For years Cather lived in her friend Isabelle McClung's Pittsburgh house and worked in "a small room at the back of the house on the third floor, a sewing room which Isabelle converted into a study for her" (329). The parallels between this arrangement and St. Peter's are obvious.

process. Although it's not currently underway, St. Peter still imbibes the intellectual activity that survives in the vestiges littering his study. Being in his study means observing and breathing the traces—in bundled, stacked, re-arrangeable form—of his cerebral project.

Another object in St. Peter's study speaks to Cather's strategy of employing physical markers to represent the intellectual: sewing forms. The St. Peter family's sewing-woman and maid Augusta had a space-sharing arrangement with the professor: she sewed during the day when St. Peter's study was vacant. Augusta routinely apologized that her torsos populated the professor's workspace; she considered them "unsuitable companions for one engaged in scholarly pursuits" (10). It is in relation to these blank forms that the text's rare mention of scholarly endeavors arises, and, as a result, St. Peter's intellectual work is at least minimally presented simply through Augusta's respect for whatever it is that must take place in that study, even though she, like the reader, never observes that work.

The very nature of these sewing forms is blankness, the original state of those mountains of paper spread throughout St. Peter's study. These forms have stood rigid, steadfast over two decades in the scholar's workplace with the same blankness that marked the start of *Spanish Adventures in North America*. The blankness of these forms is the novel's central correlative to interpretive potential and the creation of meaning.

The armless, headless forms may also acknowledge that neither manual nor cerebral

These third-floor sewing room/studies are both inhabited by 52-year-olds: St. Peter and Cather at the time of the novel's composition.

Dorothy McFarland argues, St. Peter's study is "the symbolic 'mind' of the house (73). Leon Edel holds a psychoanalytic view of the study; he calls the study St. Peter's "insulation" (227). A Freudian analysis of St. Peter's attachment to the study leads Edel to call this room "a surrogate womb" (qtd. in Maxfield 74): "In this attic room, tiny and snug as a womb . . . safe from any contact with the world outside, Professor St. Peter can feel taken care of and as undisturbed as an embryo" (226).

work has been fully incorporated into *The Professor's House*. From these immutable sewing forms, which “presented the most unsympathetic surface imaginable” (9), derived numerous ever-changing designs and compositions. Therefore, by juxtaposing these sewing forms with the professor, by literally placing them beside his desk, the text suggests a degree of unavoidable blankness inherent in representing the intellectual experience, as if acknowledging that the materiality of notebook piles, bundled manuscripts, and scratched-out sentences is the only avenue for incorporating the most abstract work—the work of the mind.²⁵

These sewing forms are also the subject of St. Peter's own use of the term “metonymy.” The form

which Augusta called “the bust” stood in the darkest corner of the room, upon a high wooden chest in which blankets and winter wraps were yearly stored. It was a headless, armless female torso, covered with strong black cotton, and so richly developed in the part for which it was named that the Professor once explained to Augusta how, in calling it so, she followed a natural law of language, termed, for convenience, metonymy. (9)

By foregrounding metonymy, the text very early on calls attention to one thing standing for another. The professor explains this substitutive arrangement as one of convenience, which emphasizes the proximity between St. Peter and all the loose-papered, manuscript-bundled evidence of past work. This convenience further underscores the

²⁵ In a stark contrast to this chapter's reading of Augusta's sewing forms, when critics cite these sewing forms it is often in support of St. Peter's misogyny. For instance, Grumbach supports her claim of the professor's misogyny by citing “the certain disappointments” and “cruel biological necessities” St. Peter believes these forms stand for (qtd. in 323). Extending the hard, cruel, disappointing modifiers to St. Peter's family members, many critics read misogyny in these forms—which literally represent, one, the professor's wife and, the other, the professor's two daughters.

improvisational quality of the text's narrative strategy of incorporating St. Peter's work without directly presenting it.

The culmination of Cather's metonymic articulation of the intellectual and scholarly is the actual professor's house. The novel opens with a description of the St. Peter family's old house, which has recently been vacated—with the exception of St. Peter's study—in a move to a new residence:

the front porch just too narrow for comfort, with a slanting floor and sagging steps. As he walked slowly about the empty, echoing rooms on that bright September morning, the Professor regarded thoughtfully the needless inconveniences he had put up with for so long; the stairs that were too steep, the halls that were too cramped. . . . Certain wobbly stair treads, certain creaky boards in the upstairs hall, had made him wince many times a day for twenty-odd years—and they still creaked and wobbled. (3)

The steps sag and wobble, the floor slants and creaks. Inconvenience and narrowness abound in the house where St. Peter and his Spanish adventurers have lived for two decades. In limning the old house, Cather sets the stage to depict St. Peter and his scholarly pursuit. The St. Peter family vacates the house when it is in the same condition in which this scholarly project most likely began: the argument's foundation might have been “wobbly,” the methodology striking but unsteady like a “slanting floor,” the research “inconvenient,” the parameters vacillating between “too narrow for comfort” and “empty, echoing.” But now it is St. Peter's creative vitality and his scholarly energy that may be creaking, sagging, and wobbling. Following this opening passage and

throughout the text, St. Peter's love for this house lingers, despite its nuisances. Finding it very difficult to leave, he spends far more time in the vacated house than in the new one. Several points in the text find St. Peter contemplating some feature of his house, particularly his study. In the absence of presenting the scholarly mind, Cather finds a metonymic way into this consciousness nonetheless, whether it is through the house itself, Augusta's sewing forms, or the series of compositional trappings piled in corners and scattered on tables around the study.

The Professor's House undertakes two other strategies in an attempt to simulate St. Peter's intellectual experience: the suggested vicarious intellectual activity and the repeated description of the professor's silence and staring out of the study's window. The great deal of time St. Peter spends sitting, thinking, and staring in his study redefines or at least suggests new parameters for what constitutes intellectual work. St. Peter is often focused on Tom Outland, the friend, former student, and figurative son who years earlier had spent a summer on the Blue Mesa in a long abandoned Native American Cliff City.²⁶ The text suggests that it is intellectual work when St. Peter thinks for days on end about Tom and his story of the summer on the mesa. In particular, it is vicarious intellectual activity in the absence of his project, which now rests, bound, on an undisclosed shelf. St. Peter lives vicariously through the details, images, and observations of Tom's ethnographic project. All of St. Peter's time spent daydreaming about Tom reconnects

²⁶ Patrick Sullivan calls Tom "St. Peter's surrogate," one who restores for the professor a sense of beauty and aesthetic value (32). Richard Dillman describes Tom as an Emersonian "Man Thinking." He argues that Tom's intellectual nature is what most compels St. Peter and it also contrasts the atmosphere of Hamilton College, which, Dillman states, is "fast becoming a compartmentalized trade school" instead of the liberal arts institution best embodied in St. Peter (383). In this sense, Tom becomes an entry into academic life, but his work in the Cliff City also recalls, for St. Peter, the inception of his own project on the Spanish adventures that also was conceived in an Emersonian flash of natural inspiration. James Maxfield argues, "Tom was the living embodiment of the spirit of professor St. Peter's great imaginative work" (78).

him with an intellectual endeavor; it gives him a cerebral pursuit again now that his work has transmogrified into bound volumes. St. Peter's sitting, staring, and thinking about Tom is the text's attempt to penetrate the intellectual consciousness and to probe its cerebral and emotional needs. St. Peter compulsively revisits Tom's summer in an effort to recreate the process of intellectual work and to reclaim that sense of continuous presence attending an intellectual pursuit.

St. Peter ostensibly *is* working—at least his summer project is to edit, annotate, and write the introduction for Tom's journal for publication. The text continually draws attention to St. Peter's procrastination and appears to remind him to get to work: "He realized he ought to be getting to work. The garden, in which he sat all day, was no longer a valid excuse to keep him from his study. But the task that awaited him up there was difficult" (150). The reader at least assumes St. Peter is reading or pondering parts of the journal during all of the time spent in the study or in procrastination. It is quite possible, however, that St. Peter's thorough review of the journal takes place simultaneously as the reader progresses through this journal itself. That is, the triptych structure of *The Professor's House* allows Tom's journal and consciousness to consume the middle section. While the reader reads this middle section, that time may precisely be when the professor is working. If so, then the reader reads alongside St. Peter, perhaps even reading for him. St. Peter may very well be working, only the reader cannot observe this activity while busy reading a version of the account the professor is also reviewing.

While no critic accounts for this unobserved work, for this attenuated intellectual representation, Robert Miller describes *The Professor's House* as a representation of

academic life: “it remains a novel with a small-minded dean, a faculty divided about the nature and value of scholarship, three professors caught up in personal conflict, a brilliant student, a classroom visitation, and a school operating under the supervision of a state legislature that confuses education with training” (40). In fact, Miller states that in *The Professor’s House* “Cather engages most fully with the subject of the life of the mind” (37). It is, however, not necessarily the life the mind but rather the life of navigating an academic structure. The inner workings of Hamilton College, its philosophy, and its History Department’s internal tension supports Miller’s conception of *The Professor’s House* as “an academic novel”²⁷ but not automatically one that engages with the life of the mind. Cather does present academic life, particularly St. Peter’s experience in academia, complete with such details as the professor’s unwillingness “to take the trouble to learn the names of several hundred new students” (*PH* 247). St. Peter discusses this “new crop” with another Hamilton professor: “they’re a common sort” (42). This professor, Langtry, is the type of popular figure but the example of a poor teacher and scholar that St. Peter fears, someone whose “lax methods” (43) he presages will alter the course of education “within an academy transforming itself into a client-driven industry in which genuine scholarship is of little consequence” (Miller 39). Although academic and intellectual experience do not automatically equate, *The Professor’s House* develops this depiction of academia and fully incorporates it. This presentation of the academic world suggests another explanation for the attenuation of St. Peter’s intellectual

²⁷ This is H.L. Mencken’s phrase. Mencken, in his essay “Our National Letters,” critiques American higher education and an American culture that “evades the genuinely serious problems of life and art” (18). According to Mencken, American fiction fostered intellectual and artistic apathy. Miller identifies Mencken as a significant figure for Cather studies, particularly for *The Professor’s House*. There are many grounds for detecting Mencken’s influence: the call in “Our National Letters” (which Cather read and responded to) for more multiculturalism and less “correctness of thought” (82) and “hostility to ideas” (39). Miller believes Mencken can illuminate *The Professor’s House* as “grounded in the culture wars of the early twenties” (37).

experience; Cather may opt not to directly present the intellectual mind and pursuit in order to reflect St. Peter's foreboding vision of the future of academia and the fate of such intellectual minds and pursuits. Consequently, it is important to consider the effect on the reader who encounters a text that directly presents academia while not incorporating nearly to the same extent the work of the mind, the intellectual impulse and endeavor.

In her essay "Light on Adobe Walls," Cather explores the detachment she believed often followed an artistic life.²⁸ Given the inextricable link between this artistic life and St. Peter's cerebral work, Cather's reflections on craft bear equally on a life of scholarship as well. In the essay, Cather theorizes that an artist may outgrow one's art and end up "wrangling with abstractions and creeds" (125-6). Considering Cather's reflections in the context of nonnarration reveals the interpretive latitude this narrative strategy generates for the reader encountering a similar series of abstractions, of suggested, indirectly presented cerebral work and scholarly pursuit. Cather's view of potential detachment following an artistic life speaks to the text's indirect presentation of the intellectual consciousness and also resonates with the resistance to document bound or complete work.²⁹ The text manifests this detachment with its shift to the passive voice when St. Peter reflects on his career: "his career . . . [was part of] a chain of events which had happened to him" (240); "the design of his book unfolded in the air" (106); "He accepted it as inevitable, had never meddled with it" (106).

²⁸ Sharon O'Brien sees a self-referential quality of Cather's artistic practices in St. Peter's academic projects. According to O'Brien, *The Professor's House* is equally reflective of both Cather's and the professor's creative approaches and endeavors (409).

²⁹ This sense of detachment may inform criticism that argues St. Peter suffers from depression. For instance, Grumbach and Maxfield assert his depression, the latter likening it to post-partum depression: "surely the post-partum depression of artists and writers upon the completion of a major project is also now known to be a common enough occurrence" (73).

In “Light on Adobe Walls,” Cather also reflects on the trajectory of an artistic life, stating that artists sometimes, after a lifetime of craft, give up “a game of make-believe, of reproduction” (126). In bringing Cather’s reflections to bear on St. Peter, it is plausible to interpret this scholar—who at 52 is questioning his energy and will for future projects—as similarly considering relinquishing the game of reproduction, perhaps no longer to create facsimile *Spanish Adventures in North America* out of the actual Spanish adventures or other subjects. As a result, the reader is left with a presented academy that embodies teaching, politics, and the names of the new crop of students instead of the make-believe and reproduction of Cather’s artist-intellectual.

“Intellectual representations are the *activity itself*,” Said states, “dependent on a kind of consciousness that is skeptical, engaged, unremittingly devoted to rational investigation and moral judgment” (20). The crucial term “consciousness” encompasses identity, awareness, and sensitivities, what one notices and fears, how one questions and answers. The idea of consciousness as the primary subject of an intellectual representation suggests that the task of *The Professor’s House* is not simply to depict an aging professor but rather to develop this depiction of St. Peter’s intellectual consciousness. The working/writing process may be absent, and published texts may not be cited or their composition described, but the text attempts to articulate its protagonist’s intellectual consciousness through physical markers and metonymic characterization, both of which reflect St. Peter’s mental universe and substitute for his abstract work.

Consciousness is the focal point of the conclusion of *The Professor’s House*. Augusta had warned St. Peter repeatedly of the dangers of the gas heater he kept in his study; she feared one day he would accidentally asphyxiate himself. At the book’s close,

after a dangerous amount of gas has filled the study, Augusta drags an unconscious professor from his study. After waking up, St. Peter notes “his temporary release from consciousness” (258).³⁰ To be in his study has always equated to being inside the intellectual process, whether it is currently underway or whether he only imbibes it through material reminders, those physical placeholders for the abstract and intellectual. Therefore, by setting St. Peter’s literal loss of consciousness in the study, the text emphasizes this link between study and intellectual consciousness. This brief “release from consciousness” temporarily cuts St. Peter’s tie to his study. However, while unconscious, St. Peter still dreams he is awake in the study, thereby suggesting the difficulty of ceasing intellectual work and the impossibility of shedding one’s intellectual consciousness.

From the very beginning through its conclusion, *The Professor’s House* metonymically incorporates intellectual work through nearby material objects: the notebooks, the papers, the manuscript explicitly bundled and not bound, the study, the sewing forms, and the house. This series of saturated material reference is the text’s dominant narrative strategy to represent the intellectual mind in relation to the space in which it moves and resides, the walls that enclose it, and the tangible traces it leaves. Effectively incorporating this work of the mind into the text, this metonymic strategy encourages the reader to engage with this intellectual activity and consciousness, which remain figuratively open and unbound, simulating and taking advantage of the loose paper pervading Hyacinth’s public and private rooms, St. George’s windowless room, and St. Peter’s paper- and vestige-littered study.

³⁰ E.K. Brown interprets St. Peter’s withdrawal into his study “as a gradual preparation for death” (778). The end of the novel’s passage is that this “temporary release from consciousness seemed to have been beneficial”; it appears to be something St. Peter welcomes.

What St. Peter most admires in Tom's account of the Blue Mesa echoes not only Cather's thoughts in "The Novel Demueble" but also the narrative vacancies governing all of the attenuated work this chapter considers: "This plain account was almost beautiful, because of the stupidities it avoided and the things it did not say" (238). Cather's identification of the force of the unnamed thing underscores the potency of withheld direct presentation. In light of her dictum that "a modern novelist writes by suggestion rather than by enumeration" (*Demueble* 40), Cather serves as the quintessential bridge between James and the modernist texts that also disavow direct disclosure and omniscient narration. Her exploration of that which is felt on the page but not named there resonates with the incorporation of elements that are otherwise never directly presented. *The Professor's House*, *The Princess Casamassima*, and *The Lesson of the Master* foreground material reference and develop metonymic strategies to depict the experience of work and to grapple with notions of completion of artistic or creative endeavors, a challenge that is further complicated by technical experimentation with narrative presentation.

While *The Professor's House* combines *The Princess Casamassima's* saturated reference to markers of work and the thematic link of withheld presentation of written, creative work in *The Lesson of the Master*, what remains uncertain is the level of "felt life" missing as a result of the nonpresentation of work. Whereas the reader that James posits would feel, for instance, the absence of Isabel Archer's baby and mourning, it is impossible to report the frequency or pervasiveness of perceived vacancy resulting from the withheld bookbinding or literary composition. What is possible are assumptions about the James reader based on the vision of this reader as conveyed by James's

criticism and prefaces. In response to Hyacinth's professed high quality of work, the Princess's "I am sure" may dismiss its importance and suggest its peripheral place in the text. On the other hand, the aim of this chapter has been to explore the foregrounded reference to work in order to juxtapose James's assumptions about his "attentive," "reflective," and "inquisitive" reader with the sustained, noticeable withheld presentation of protagonists' work. While James may not have intended the reader to perceive the absence of Hyacinth's, Overt's, and St. George's work experience as starkly or viscerally as the extreme absence of Isabel's baby or the withheld climaxes of *The Wings of the Dove*, this chapter probes the degree of perceptions of vacancy with respect to withheld presentation. *The Professor's House* provides a counterpoint of withheld work more central to the novel than in the James texts, in which matters of work share the stage with a love story of sorts in *The Lesson of the Master* and with societal relations and revolutionary politics in *The Princess Casamassima*. Despite ample competing themes and material, *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Lesson of the Master* replace direct presentation of the process of work by furnishing the reader with repeated signs of work. *The Professor's House* reinforces the textual and metatextual parallels of unbound work in James as well as the metonymic incorporation of the experience of work through the adjacent physical markers of the sites, products, and traces of work.

Conclusion

Modeling Strategic Nonnarration beyond Henry James

Strategic Nonnarration in Henry James is an attempt to discuss heterogeneous vacancies, gaps, and absences in a more uniform way and to understand them inclusively as the withholding of direct presentation. The narrative vacancies this study explores are radically different thematically, compositionally, and historically but nonetheless share many traits. As a tool to understand these shared narrative and reader-based elements, nonnarration is also a way to articulate an encompassing experience of elective withheld presentation. In addition to the ample, essential instances and development of the technique in his oeuvre, Henry James provides fertile ground for exploring nonnarration also because of the crystal clear vision and expectations of his reader as well as the author's consistent reflection on narrative methods, construction, and experimentation.

Just as the *felt life* intended to permeate narrative gaps may vary from reader to reader and case by case, James was aware of the risks of withheld presentation so dependent on the reader's response, engagement, and will to assimilate an experiential presence out of narrative gaps. From the preface to *The Wings of the Dove* (1909) to his reflections on HG Wells (1912), James publicly aired his doubts about the ability of even the most technically sound, perfectly executed novels to sustain the vitality and force of their narrative gaps. Could these narrative vacancies, and their potentially varied and oscillating intensity of withheld presentation, retain potency and presence for the reader? The central question this study asks is the same one implicit in James's prefaces and essays: when is withheld presentation an assimilatable presence and when is it simply an

emptiness, devoid of intensity, which fails to prompt engagement and imaginative experience on the reader's part. Based on these prefaces and essays, this study emphasizes James's self-conscious experimentation with creating vacancy at the center of several texts and with testing how much pressure such vacancy can withstand, the whole time assessing whether the intended effects have been achieved or miscalculated.

While James's texts crystallize strategic nonnarration as a critical tool, additional models establish the concept's applicability beyond James into the twentieth century. The aim of this study has been to develop this critical tool to explore a given set of texts and narrative features in a way that fuses technical and reader-based concerns. This conclusion therefore extends the concept's application to a wide range of texts and their various vacancies, gaps, and absences. These models of nonnarration from James's contemporaries and modernist successors illustrate the concept's significance and utility for understanding withheld direct presentation.

Hemingway's "strong at the broken places" expression encapsulates notions of textual absence and the ways in which these ruptures affect the act of reading.¹ Hemingway is crucial for understanding withheld presentation's effect on the reader, particularly because his own reader compensates for missing, excised, or denied parts of a text.² James prefigures this focus on the act of reading and this reflection on the impact of literary techniques on the reader's participation in the text. James and Hemingway

¹ Robert Gajdusek also sees metatextual implications in the "broken places" of *A Farewell to Arms*, figuring the passage as an evocative, vital sentence "pruned" of various elements (13).

² Gajdusek argues, "The uninformed reader simultaneously creates his imaginative reconstitution of the omitted or cast off part" (16-17). In addition, Gajdusek establishes the important connection between the act of omission or excision and its effect on the act of reading: "The way a reader creates a whole story out of partial information, recreating what has been deliberately omitted or excised, is the way a character makes a whole integral self where amputations have been suffered. Feeling must be restored to the unfeeling part. The reader has a part he depends on cast away, and thereafter, forced to imaginatively compensate for it, he becomes stronger at the broken place" (16).

both prompt the reader to fill in gaps in knowledge and presentation and to fashion a more complete narrative. In doing so, both foster a more diligent, co-collaborative, attentive reader.

In Hemingway's case, this incitement stems primarily from omission, a concept that governs much of the author's withheld presentation. While distinct from nonnarration, omission is similar enough to consider both its common bonds and implications. Hemingway first articulated his theory of withheld information and its effect on the reader in *Death in the Afternoon*:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have the feeling of those things as though the writer had stated them. . . . A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing. (132)

This notion of the reader *feeling* material that the text does not directly present reflects one of this study's central arguments about strategic nonnarration: it is a tool by which events not directly presented can nonetheless be assimilated by the reader. These "hollow places" are lazy, meaningless vacancies and they stand in sharp contrast to the strong broken places of *A Farewell to Arms*. They are the opposite of Hawthorne's silent, hesitating meditation. While Hemingway emphasizes that which the writer does not state, and nonnarration foregrounds that which is not directly presented, both probe the same idea: "feeling" or assimilation stems from a well executed technique.

About twenty-five years later, by the late 1950s, during composition and revision of *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway articulated anew this connection between withheld

presentation and the reader: “I had omitted the real end of [a short story] which was that the old man hanged himself. This was omitted on my new theory that you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood” (75). Like the *Death in the Afternoon* passage, this assertion emphasizes and privileges a reader “feeling” what has not been presented. In addition, this “real end” of the story reveals Hemingway’s clear conception of withheld material; what is not presented becomes a riddle for an intuitive, ideal reader to decipher. The objective to “make people feel” speaks to Hemingway’s conception of the reader as a conduit of meaning and experience and directly recalls the belief articulated in *Death in the Afternoon* many years earlier that the reader be able to feel the things a writer has not stated. Both the act of withholding presentation and the withheld presentation itself are central to Hemingway’s notions of storytelling and the ability of the reader to incorporate withheld elements into the experience of the text. While several writers have reflected on gaps in their texts, Hemingway is acutely aware of the impact of withheld presentation on the reader’s experience.

Hemingway’s iceberg theory also harkens back to James.³ Keeping many of the most complex, significant matters below the narrative surface, such iceberging in several ways mirrors the preface to *The Wings of the Dove*, in which James affirms “the author’s instinct everywhere for the *indirect* presentation.” Both assertions embody the belief in the ability of narrative to provide an adequate representation through indirect means, through techniques that often privilege absence and vacancy, and through the piecing together of scraps of information. While not employing strategic nonnarration,

³ “The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water” (*Death in the Afternoon* 132).

Hemingway deploys this similar strategy with respect to a pattern of withheld material; whether through omission or iceberg, Hemingway texts tend to center on what is not presented at least as much as what is.

The closest Hemingway comes to strategic nonnarration is *The Sun Also Rises*, in which Jake's war injury is continually referred to, suggested, and evoked. "Never mention that," Bill tells Jake. "That's the sort of thing that can't be spoken of" (120).⁴ It seems this wound should not be discussed but rather be cultivated into ambiguity and inscrutability. Or it is laughed off. "Of all the ways to be wounded," Jake thinks, "I suppose it was funny" (38). Jake also tells Brett, "What happened to me is supposed to be funny. I never think about it," to which Brett responds, "A friend of my brother's came home that way from Mons. It seemed like a hell of a joke" (34). Regarding the ever-present yet abstractly referenced injury, Jake ponders it in language akin to a reader, researcher, or attorney: "I had probably considered it from most of its various angles" (35). The use of "probably" undercuts the statement's authority and diminishes the determined tone of a sharp analytical mind approaching a subject from the professed various angles. Beyond introducing a sense of indeterminacy into the treatment of a subject that is never addressed concretely, Jake's "probably" also confirms the abstract quality of the passages following two "it" references. Brett's "Well, let's shut up about

⁴ Gajdusek conceives of Hemingway's texts as being purgative, citing as evidence a central passage from Hemingway's story "Fathers and Sons": "If he wrote it he could get rid of it. He had gotten rid of many things by writing them" (qtd. in Gajdusek 12). Like Gajdusek and most critics who treat omission and deferrals, this study also considers how omitted and withheld material is incorporated, at least in part, into a text. Gajdusek, for example, argues that the missing phallus in *The Sun Also Rises* functions as "the ritual act of excision itself, a purgation, . . . rites [that] are often practiced as cleansings, as psychic denials or renunciations, or as therapeutic reconstitutions of the self" (12). The absence at the center of *The Sun Also Rises*, the missing phallus and its presentation, are nonetheless part of the text in the form of rite, ritual, and purgation, the act of ridding oneself of spoiling material. On the other hand, according to this logic, by not presenting material, one is not purging, not getting rid of painful, distasteful elements. As a result, these elements, by not presenting them, remain in the text for a reader to discern and possibly experience.

it” (34) encapsulates the wound’s role in the text: to be silent yet palpable, to hover unnamed during conversations, to be discussed and pondered but still deliberately held in obscurity and never presented, always “shut up about.” This call to shut up about a subject simulates nonnarration’s overriding textual silence and interruption.

In stark contrast to this shutting up stands Gertrude Stein, whose notion of making something either disappear or become transparent through repetition bears directly on the foregrounded reference to withheld material that constitutes nonnarration. Beyond bridging James and modernism, Stein’s experimentation with radical repetition may be both the obverse and the culmination of the saturated reference to that which exists through precisely that very reference as well as in the opacity of gaps in presentation. The continuous presence Stein achieved through repetition, James achieved through foregrounded reference to withheld material.

In addition, Stein’s Melanctha and notion of *remembering right* bear directly on nonnarration. As if feeling the effects of four years of withheld presentation, *Portrait’s* Mrs. Touchett demonstrates the impediments to remembering right about Isabel’s baby. Nonnarration challenges readers and listeners both inside and outside of the narrative worlds to navigate often opaque, miasmatic periods of time and to recall details, timelines, and various key data. Clearly such withholding of pivotal presentation may likely affect the memory and experience of reader and character alike. In *Three Lives*, Jeff Campbell warns, “you ain’t ever got any way to remember right what you been doing. . . . You certainly Melanctha, never can remember right, when it comes what you have done and what you think happens to you”—to which Melanctha clarifies, “to remember right just when it happens to you” (151). Withheld presentation similarly extracts a degree of

presence and immediacy and challenges all involved to remember right amid the miasma of unobserved events, nuance, delivery, and sequence.

Detective fiction, another model of nonnarration, poses obstacles to gathering adequate knowledge amid the opacity of ample withheld presentation. With the appearance of Sherlock Holmes in 1887, readers encountered both text and character centered on the depiction of acute observational skills and surging energy in facing an inscrutable text. In detective fiction, key moments must be withheld in order for a narrative to ensue. Regarding this withheld presentation in detective fiction, Todorov's claim again arises that "the absence of knowledge provokes the presence of narrative." The story of the crime must be absent so the story of the investigation can be present: the present quest for the absent cause. This withheld crime is the absence that sets the narrative machinery in motion. Exploration of the conventions of detective fiction would therefore develop another facet of nonnarration. James's suppression of the very thing we are most curious about resonates with the evolution of detective fiction and its opaque narrative structures. Like strategic nonnarration and modernist texts, detective fiction is also driven by absence and withholding. The title sculpture in *The Maltese Falcon*, for example, is the central vacancy around which the narrative is organized, while all the pivotal events take place offstage and therefore leave the reader, like Sam Spade, to reconstruct events. *Farewell, My Lovely* provides both actual and aspiring amateur detectives, sporadic details that continually test a reader's observational powers, and an overall Jamesian sense of limited knowledge.⁵ It is a lack of knowledge that perpetuates these narratives, whether James, modernist, or detective.

⁵ *Farewell, My Lovely* also probes matters of presentation and withheld knowledge by disguising its central offstage mystery as a presented character. The missing Velma, the reader learns at the end of the text, is in

The limited knowledge that governs detective fiction exists in many texts that deliberately foreground the difficulty of accessing events, information, and intentions. *Beloved's* characters and narration impart knowledge selectively in order to condition and not "abuse" the reader in the same way the preface to *The Wings of the Dove* asserts the importance of avoiding abuses of authorial knowledge and privilege. In fact, when the text does reveal pivotal information about Sethe's actions, it does so in four stages, starting with the most alien (white/slaver third-person point of view), then with an old newspaper clipping, then a former slave, and then culminating with the most intimate: Sethe herself. While clearly not containing strategic nonnarration, *Beloved* models the concept's essence of limiting presentation and revealing information in ways that prompt the reader's engagement and participation in the slow unfolding of clues. Recalling Barthes's and Culler's conception of a reader deriving pleasure from gaps and withheld information, the novel suggests the same discerning reader experiencing "the downright pleasure of...not suspecting but *knowing* the things behind the things" (37), thus building a deeper understanding beyond surface realities. Careful readers and listeners navigating complex, veiled information are able to grasp connections, withheld material, and a sense of presence beyond the narrative surface of presentation. At the same time it privileges the discerning, empathetic reader, *Beloved* also suggests the untellability of certain subjects, again evoking representational anxiety and linguistic incapacity: "Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right off—she could never explain" (163).

fact Mrs. Grayle who has been a directly presented character throughout the text. By hiding a character in plain sight, *Farewell, My Lovely* experiments with disclosed and withheld knowledge and their effect on the reader who at any given point possesses only limited information.

Addie Bundren's assertion in *As I Lay Dying* that "words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at" is a Faulknerian precursor to Sethe, *Beloved*, and the acknowledgement of possibly ineffable topics, which no language or image may capture. Profound reader engagement, however, may defy ineffability. For *The Sound and the Fury*, nonnarration is the prompt for this engaged, interpretive activity on the reader's part. This application of the technique centers on the ways in which Benjy embodies nonnarration. Benjy is unable to grasp nonnarration in that he does not recognize the temporal or physical distance separating him from people and events. As a result, he is the modernist anti-reader unaware of gaps and unable to follow literary conventions. On the other hand, Benjy is the ideal reader encountering nonnarration in that he engages nonetheless with what is not directly presented and experiences the impact of something despite its absence. This fused representation of two divergent reader responses to withheld presentation offers both substantial metaphoric value and a concrete case by which to consider the implications of nonnarration. Within Benjy, these two competing reader responses illustrate how nonnarration functions and how the technique affects the reader encountering it.

A valuable connection exists between *The Sound and the Fury* and the previous chapter's discussion of the role of metonymy in *The Professor's House*. Caddy's omnipresence for Benjy derives from the same metonymic principle the chapter establishes with respect to *The Professor's House*. Only instead of the latter's piles of paper, bundles of manuscripts, and stacks of notebooks, Caddy exists as the smell of trees, as a white satin slipper, and as muddy underwear. Long after she has ceased being directly observable, Benjy continues mentally to recreate his sister forever as a child and

adolescent, to experience something despite its absence. Because Benjy experiences her as constantly observable, Caddy is not, nor has she ever been, withheld for Benjy despite her long absence from the Compson home. Like St. Peter's intellectual activity and the bound and unbound books in James, Caddy is incorporated into the text via material reference, by way of nearby objects. It is possible to process that metonymy in a way that allows the reader to assimilate a presence and a presentation that the text withholds.

Unlike Benjy's merged ideal/anti-reader, Quentin Compson, on the other hand, functions purely as an ideal reader of nonnarration due to his ability to experience what is not actually present. Quentin's reader response meticulously engages with that which is withheld. As opposed to the physical and temporal distance characterizing Benjy's experience, in the Quentin-narrated second chapter, Caddy is only physically removed from her brother and his narration, as Quentin sits in his Harvard dorm room, ruminates about his sister's marriage announcement, and then roams along the Charles River. Although Caddy is physically offstage for Quentin, his mind, prompted by this recent announcement, creates a temporal, figurative presence for her. These first two chapters constitute more than half of *The Sound and the Fury*, yet the reader hears Caddy speak only filtered through Benjy and Quentin, thus observing her in the narrated text as either physically or temporally removed from present narrated time.

It may be surprising to see Caddy—both a withheld parent and child—raised in the context of nonnarration when she is so acutely present in *The Sound and the Fury*; that is, the text reports events and information involving Caddy numerous times and from different perspectives. However, she is not directly presented for the four days of narrated text in which *The Sound and the Fury* takes place: June Second, 1910 and April

Sixth through Eighth, 1928. She is a pivotal, if not *the* pivotal character in the story, she is a verifiable figure, and she is unobserved—in present narrated time—by the reader. In the first three chapters—the first eighty percent of the text—Caddy has a great deal of direct discourse, something withheld characters do not have. However, Caddy's direct discourse does not take place within the narrated text. Instead, it is remembered, reconstructed, and inflected by her three brothers; her language flows and seeps from her brothers' minds. It is only in the final chapter, the text's sole third-person narration, that Caddy has no discourse. As a result, Caddy occupies a unique and potentially problematic position in terms of nonnarration; she is a withheld character with temporally and physically distanced direct discourse.

It is precisely through Caddy that Faulkner challenges the conventions of narrative frames. By building *The Sound and the Fury* around Caddy and making a withheld character the text's most palpable, commanding figure, Faulkner experiments with the very notion of what constitutes the period of narrated text. On one hand, it is just four days and, on the other hand, the hundreds of times the reader hears Caddy speak or experiences her as a memory in the mind of Benjy, Quentin, or Jason Compson, these moments either figuratively or literally expand the narrative frames. In addition to prompting the reader to consider memory and reconstruction in the context of narrative withholding, *The Sound and the Fury* asks whether an extended representation of the past constitutes its own narrative frame or whether it remains contingent to the present narrated text. In this sense, nonnarration may potentially stretch traditional narrative frame boundaries.

Beyond challenging narrative boundaries, actual formal disintegration may describe Cather's work, in particular *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, which opts for fusing various discourses and cataloguing discontinuous glimpses of setting over maintaining a clearly plotted narrative. Furthermore, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* offers a subtle but ideal illustration of withheld presentation, so brief it is often missed. What Cather does not directly present is as remarkable as the detailed setting descriptions that dominate the novel. Most of the big events, those noteworthy moments that might easily warrant their own chapter of direct presentation, are referred to only by a few words after they have taken place. For instance, after many years, the bishop's sole, intimate friend and colleague Father Vaillant departs the mission with no narrated report and then dies the same unreported way. Another example of noteworthy nonnarration that typically would make for the meatiest of chapters instead is presented in one small paragraph:

[Bishop Latour's] steamer was wrecked and sunk in the Galveston harbour, and he had lost all his worldly possessions except his books, which he saved at the risk of his life. He crossed Texas with a trader's caravan, and approaching San Antonio he was hurt in jumping from an overturning wagon, and had to lie for three months in the crowded house of a poor Irish family, waiting for his injured leg to get strong. (18-19)

The boat's sinking, the life-endangering biblio-rescue, the caravanned passage across Texas, the serious leg injury, and three months of convalescence while housed in an overrun Irish household—none of this is directly presented to the reader. These two sentences are all the reader receives; not a word following this paragraph addresses these

events. Only later does Cather indicate that this two-sentence paragraph constitutes one year—a year of dramatic, narratively rich material, the direct presentation of which is fully withheld from the reader.

Death Comes for the Archbishop seamlessly embeds this nonnarration the same way that Merton Densher writes in *The Wings of the Dove*, “with deplorable ease” (96). In addition to the nonnarration of Densher’s work, some additional examples, beyond the previous chapter’s cases of artistic and cerebral work, will further illustrate the substitution of processes, experiences, and products of work for their foregrounded reference. In *The Ambassadors*, Mrs. Newsome sends Strether to retrieve her expatriate son from Paris so he can run the family business, which is never named. The Newsome family business makes *something*, a product referred to several times but never disclosed. This unnamed product is the subject of a lengthy discussion between Strether and his friend Maria Gostrey:

[Maria] wonder[ed] if the article referred to were anything bad. . . .

“Unmentionable? Oh no, we constantly talk of it. . . . Only, as a small, trivial, rather ridiculous object of the commonest domestic use, it’s just wanting in—what shall I say? Well, dignity. . . . Sadly it’s vulgar.”

[S]he, however, still fascinated by the mystery of the production at Woollett, presently broke, “ ‘Rather ridiculous’? Clothes-pins? Saleratus? Shoe polish?”

It brought him around. “No—you don’t even ‘burn’. I don’t think, you know, you’ll guess it.” (41-42)

It appears that vulgarity is Strether's primary concern, and, recalling Allon White, avoiding vulgarity is a central driving force in James. But is it the idea of a vulgar product or rather the process of vulgar labor? At first, the passage suggests Strether's overriding distaste for the product; it is small, trivial, ridiculous, common, vulgar, and it lacks dignity. Maria counters Strether's blunt adjectival series with concrete guesses about the product; however, Strether affirms, it's so base that she certainly will not guess its identity. All of these adjectives have at some point also been used to describe literary realism, or in the case of Norris's commentary on Howells, to argue against realism. In fact, this series of adjectives describing the Newsome family product could be pulled directly from Norris's criticism of Howells and his teacup.⁶ The desire not to present the Newsome product may underscore James's impulse to withhold significant information and to experiment with his own process and product of work, its style, expression, and content.

While the discussion of the Newsome business ostensibly centers on the product itself, what Strether and Maria also tacitly consider is the nature of the work Chad would return to Massachusetts to oversee. Perhaps the Newsome business is the type of common, industrial work that was rarely presented at length to the reader based on its unappealing, unexciting nature. Whether this product remains undisclosed for the duration of the text due to its vulgarity or its insignificance, *The Ambassadors* does not even suggest factory life or provide a glimpse into what Chad's managerial responsibility would entail in overseeing the family business. While a large portion of *The*

⁶ In "A Plea for Romantic Fiction" (1901), Norris argues, "Realism stultifies itself. It notes only the surface of things . . . a mere outside. . . . Realism is minute, it is the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call." Norris speaks of the trivial, common nature of realism's subject matter—"the visit to my neighbor's house"—much in the same way Strether describes the Newsome product.

Ambassadors centers on bringing Chad back to “the business,” this return-home plea mirrors the Pentagon in Mailor’s *Armies of the Night*; it has no concrete reality, no center, no heart, no nervous system. Rather this business, this product, appears to be a baseless, nameless creature that cannot be disclosed for possible embarrassment. “The product” surfaces briefly at a few other points in *The Ambassadors* only to draw attention to its status as a veiled, undisclosed referent. No other moment in the text replicates the Strether-Gostrey exchange about its vulgarity or its possible identity; instead, the product and process of work continue to exist only as allusion and repeated reference. The Newsome product becomes an exercise in sustaining nonnarration for the duration of a lengthy text, while continually invoking this material without direct presentation results in foregrounding the narrative’s technical construction.

Direct presentation of Drouet’s entire sales career in *Sister Carrie* is similarly withheld; the reader never observes Drouet at work. Instead, Drouet returns home to report his “successful” sales trips to Carrie and to the reader. Like the unnamed Newsome family item, Drouet also sells an undisclosed product. The reader never knows what he sells, and, while Drouet obviously does not constitute nonnarration, Drouet’s sales work does. The product and career of this drummer are withheld in a way possibly even more pronounced than in *The Ambassadors*. After numerous sales trips and abundant big talk about his triumphs, the reader knows only that Drouet has “a neat business card, on which was engraved Bartlett, Caryoe & Company” (6). Because *Sister Carrie* does not present Drouet’s work, this other text—the business card—does. His work is subsumed in this one small textual object; his salesmanship exists in paper and text in a veiled metatextual acknowledgement of the nonnarration of Drouet’s work in

Sister Carrie. This business card, however, does not actually present Drouet's salesmanship, because his name is not on it. Instead, he flashes a textual credential of work that excludes him much like the novel excludes his labor. Although *Sister Carrie* at times does present Carrie's performative work and describe Hurstwood's tavern and one cold day of violence as a trolley strike scab, the text never follows Drouet on a single sales trip. Therefore, upon returning to Chicago, Drouet reports to Carrie his version of events, which, because they are not presented to the reader, remain unsubstantiated; the reader is unable to verify anything Drouet reports about his sales trips. As a result, this withholding allows the reader more interpretive potential to consider this character, the role of his work in the text, and the foregrounded narrative technique shielding his daily activity from the reader.

Norris's *McTeague* emphasizes the workplace and materials of work and does present manual work, largely reserving most detail for McTeague's dentistry, particularly the materials themselves: the composition and application of fillings, the "blocks," "mats," "broaches," and "cylinders." However, despite a naturalist commitment to describe daily life in minute detail, Norris does not elaborate on Trina McTeague's piecework at home where she makes thousands of Noah's ark sets of figurines. When amputated fingers cause Trina to discontinue her figurine work, she becomes a scrubwoman in a kindergarten. Although Norris expands on the school's neighborhood, he does not pay the same narrative attention to the experience of daily life as a lowly menial worker.

Although not shy about narrating cruelty, Norris does not present the killing of women. Several times in *McTeague*, Norris narrates McTeague beating his wife, yet the

presentation stops just as he begins to kill her. Throughout the text, the reader expects McTeague to explode, and, when he does, the presentation of his violence, which the reader has already witnessed several times, stops. *McTeague* thereby suggests a link between pivotal moments of violence and death withheld from the reader and the expectation that the reader will sufficiently fill in the gaps in presentation—or the faith in the reader’s ability to do so. In *McTeague*, a physically hulking, alcohol-fueled, brutal McTeague beats his wife:

He kept his small dull eyes upon her, and all at once sent his fist into the middle of her face with the suddenness of a relaxed spring.

Beside herself with terror, Trina turned and fought him back; fought for her miserable life with the exasperation and strength of a harassed cat; and with such energy and such wild, unnatural force, that even McTeague for the moment drew back from her. But her resistance was the one thing to drive him to the top of his fury. He came back at her again, his eyes drawn to two fine twinkling points, and his enormous fists, clenched till the knuckles whitened, raised in the air.

Then it became abominable.

In the schoolroom outside, behind the coal scuttle, the cat listened to the sounds of stamping and struggling and muffled noise of blows, wildly terrified, his eyes bulging like brass knobs. At last the sounds stopped on a sudden; he heard nothing more. Then McTeague came out, closing the door. (210)

“Then it became abominable” foregrounds the withholding of this climax. The pre-“abominable” presentation is so detailed and reports so extensively that it intensifies the contrast between the narration and the nonnarration. Norris prompts the reader to assimilate the final withheld presentation of this murder by way of figurative, quasi-narration; that is, the simile of the cat’s eyes, “bulging like brass knobs,” presents McTeague even while the text withholds direct presentation of him.

A second woman is killed offstage by her husband in *McTeague*. The nonnarration of Zerkow killing Maria may be less noteworthy since the text presents only a few scenes between these two characters. Nonetheless, it is notable that two husbands kill their wives three chapters apart. Financial matters fuel both killings; Zerkow kills for the treasure Maria doesn’t have and McTeague for the treasure Trina does have.⁷

Although Norris may have been careful not to exceed the audience’s tolerance of depicted violence, the presentation of only a portion of the text’s violence is also Norris’s commentary on the reader’s capacity to experience material and events with adequate prompting but without direct presentation. Norris trains the reader with over 200 pages that describe a man whose violent nature, at every moment, is culminating. When his rage erupts, the reader is equipped by the text to reconstruct savage, brutal events. The detailed naturalist eye of *McTeague* had already sufficiently trained the reader to fill in the gaps in presentation.

A final woman whose death offers a distinct application of nonnarration is *The Great Gatsby*’s Myrtle Wilson. The car accident that kills Myrtle is not technically

⁷ Other withheld presentation of women killed by men includes Crane’s Maggie killed by the jellyfish man and Joanna Burden killed by Joe Christmas whose violence is often presented in the text. *Light in August* presents Joanna’s nearly cut-off head—her mutilated body as evidence of the withheld event—but not the killing itself.

nonnarration because it is presented through a shop owner's fleeting glimpses. However, for the first time in the text, the reader does not have Nick's narration precisely when this crucial event takes place. As a result, the event is not presented in a way consistent with the rest of the text. In the case of *Gatsby*, nonnarration becomes a tool to account for an isolated deviation from the rest of a uniform presentation. Gatsby's car becomes "the death car" because, for this isolated time, Nick is not the focalizer of the narrative, and because that is what the bystanders—the reader's sole source of narrative report during this event—call it. While there is no such thing as temporary nonnarration, *Gatsby* illustrates the concept's utility as a tool for considering narrative decisions.

Aside from models of nonnarration, there are also texts symbolically linked to withheld presentation. The connection between nonnarration and *The Grapes of Wrath*, for instance, is figurative at best; however, this novel suggests future directions for exploring the technique. Ma Joad's literal inability to see her son toward the end of the novel enacts nonnarration by fusing the narrative vacancy of withheld presentation and the palpable, assimilatable withheld material itself. Hiding from authorities, Tom Joad excises himself from the family and disappears into an unobservable dark corner of a culvert. Still able to hear Tom, Ma registers his invisible presence as immediate and tangible. Tom's conversion into invisibility presages not only his imminent, permanent disappearance from the family but more broadly underscores the potency of unobserved, unreported material. While still audible and still registering his presence, Tom's presentation in the text slowly evaporates. Although not a model of withheld presentation, *The Grapes of Wrath* exemplifies an ideal response to absence—to experience the immediacy and intensity of something despite its withdrawal.

Beyond this range of applications of strategic nonnarration, future directions and inquiries exist for this topic. First, it is clear that mainly reader figures—Densher, Kate, Isabel, Strether, Ralph, Ned, Hyacinth, St. Peter, the telegraphist, etc.—populate nearly this entire study. Beyond a clear privileging of the act of reading and discerning, this aligning of withheld presentation and characters who have demonstrated their deciphering abilities and perceptive acumen may inform reader response and reception theory inquiries. In addition, nearly all the characters this study explores are enveloped in third-person-limited narration, a form that greatly enables withheld presentation by inherently limiting direct access to any consciousness, exposure, and information beyond that of the given narrator. The relationship between strategic nonnarration and the development of third-person-limited narration, with James being the prominent forerunning practitioner of both, provides fertile ground for further investigation.

Nonnarration may also bear on indirect discourse, through which, in James for instance, many conversations are presented to the reader. Therefore, while the theme, content, and even emotion stemming from these exchanges are presented, the conversations' precise diction, sequence, cadence, and intervals of exchange are not. Perhaps indirect discourse is barely an outermost edge of nonnarration; nevertheless, the explored relationship between indirect discourse and nonnarration may yield insight into narrative blanks and absences in general.

Finally, so many of this study's examples of nonnarration center on textual objects, traces that signal or emphasize withheld presentation: Hyacinth's bookbinding; St George's and St Peter's papers, notebooks, and bundles; Mrs. Newsome's letters and telegrams; the telegraphist's abundant outbound messages; a letter burned from beyond

the grave; a business card; not to mention a James figure whose papers are burned posthumously. In *Tender is the Night*, Dick Diver's permanently absent reverend father is presented solely via handwriting "that year by year became more indecipherable"—an exclusively textual presentation. From "The Customs House" and *Bartleby* through James into modernism, numerous instances exist of narrative presence derived exclusively through text and script. This pervasive textuality, which raises issues of immediacy, narrative construction, and readership, could easily constitute its own lengthy study.

Regardless of the technically perfect execution of a withheld moment, irrespective of the inspired, meticulous construction of vacancy into the heart of a text, the reader is the ultimate vehicle and register of nonnarration. Therefore, the last word of this study goes to the reader James so adamantly assumed and invoked in so many prefaces and essays from as early as 1866—this reader whose idealized discernment, engagement, savvy, insight, imagination, and resolve are captured in *Orlando*, in language and assessment that erase nearly a generation between James and his modernist successors:

. . . it is plain enough to those who have done a reader's part in making up from bare hints dropped here and there the whole boundary and circumference of a living person; can hear in what we only whisper a living voice; can see, often when we say nothing about it, exactly what he looked like, and know without a word to guide them precisely what he thought and felt and it is for readers such as these alone that we write.

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