The hidden life in "The Golden Bowl": An imagery of ambiguity

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THE HIDDEN LIFE IN THE GOLDEN BOWL:
AN IMAGERY OF AMBIGUITY

A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

In the late novels of Henry James, the unspoken word often conveys as much as, or more than, does the spoken. Characters often communicate by what James characterizes as "mute appeals" and felt insistences." The theme of unspoken communication is supported by a complementary pattern of imagery related to the unseen or hidden side of life. In The Golden Bowl images of the impenetrable are often used as metaphors for the unsaid. The most important of these images are the veil or covering and the hidden spring. Veils, curtains, lock-boxes, clouds, and impenetrable buildings underline the novel's insistence on the unsaid, the felt—rather than spoken—life, as the key to the evolution of character.

The concepts of the unsaid and the unseen come together in the image of the hidden spring, with its multiple connotations: a small lock-box or jewelry case, a leap or bound, and a source of life and vitality. The image of the spring recurs at critical points throughout the novel, expanding and building on itself until it becomes almost a metaphor for the unseen and the unsaid—the buried, hidden, silent life. There is a central ambiguity at the heart of the novel, revealed in the fact that all the characters, "good" and "bad," share in this hidden life.

The uniting of the themes and imagery of the unseen and the unsaid in the image of the hidden spring, with its expanding connotations, represents James at his finest, and at his most arcane. In essence, an entire novel is constructed around unspoken thoughts, hidden motives, and secret relationships, with the actual facts often left obscure. The imagery of concealment ultimately becomes an elaborate metaphor for human morality, with all of its inconsistency, weakness, and heroic striving.
In the late novels of Henry James, the unspoken word often conveys as much as, or more than, does the spoken. Characters often communicate by what James characterizes as "mute appeals" and "felt insistences." The theme of unspoken communication is supported by a complementary pattern of imagery related to the unseen or hidden side of life. As early as 1884, in "The Art of Fiction," James displays his interest in this aspect of human existence when he speaks of

the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implications of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it.1

In The Golden Bowl, James comes to rely increasingly on the power of the seen image to evoke the unseen idea; the spoken word to evoke the unsaid thought. In this late novel concrete images of the impenetrable are often used as metaphors for the unsaid. The most important of these images are the veil or covering, and the hidden spring. Veils, curtains, lock-boxes, clouds, and impenetrable buildings underline the novel's insistence on the unsaid, the felt—rather than spoken--life, as the key to the evolution of character.

The images of physical coverings are often used to suggest the essential moralities of the main characters. Thus morality, an essential element of character in all of James's novels, is here swathed in mystery and ambiguity. The characters in the novel have
been interpreted in many different ways by different readers, a fact which suggests the strength of this controlling ambiguity. Because the veiled object and the unspoken word are linked throughout the novel with character and morality, these patterns of imagery offer one way of reading the characters. This essay will examine the evolution of the imagery of the unsaid and the unseen in *The Golden Bowl* as these interrelated concepts yield insights into the novel's examination of virtue and integrity in the lives of the four main characters.

Several critics have commented on James's increasing use of the unsaid in his last three great novels, *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*. Sita Patricia Marks, in "The Sound and the Silence: Nonverbal Patterns in *The Wings of the Dove*," says that "Silence in the James novel is a form of verbalization; as an expression of the vital thought and emotive processes of the characters, silence becomes communication." In a later article, "A Silent Morality: Nonverbal Expression in *The Ambassadors*," Marks maintains that "For James, then, the psychic fluidity which characterizes valid communication is best maintained by expressive wordlessness." Ruth B. Yeazell, in "Talking in James," comments on the effect of this technique: "For whenever the characters in James's late novels talk, the 'awfully unutterable' makes itself insistently felt, a hidden pressure the reader feels so intensely just because it is so hidden."

In *The Golden Bowl* this tendency toward the nonverbal is perhaps carried to its farthest extreme. In order to conceal and overlook
the adultery of the Prince and Charlotte, all of the characters in
the novel communicate largely by means of implication and intuition,
and James himself relies almost exclusively on his characteristic
method of indirect presentation to 'tell the story.' Silence is
the vital element in maintaining outward harmony and ordered rela­tions between Portland Place and Eaton Square. In summing up the
plot of the adulterous betrayal of Maggie and Adam Verver by their
respective sposi, the Prince and Charlotte, Dorothea Krook says,
"What 'happens' is merely that Maggie, her father, the Prince and
Charlotte maintain a total, unbroken silence about the drama in which
they are all involved." As a result of this silence, and its
manifestations and ramifications in the lives of the different
characters, there is often an apparent ambiguity as to what is
actually happening in the novel.

Throughout the novel's treatment of love and adultery in parti­cular, James often relies on unspoken communication, or the unsaid,
to create and maintain tension and intensity of emotion. Maggie
and Adam Verver are the characters most closely associated with
this unspoken discourse; they often indulge in "much mute communica­tion" with each other in order to maintain their emotional closeness
after the two marriages (I, 155). Adam is "addicted to silent
pleasures . . . as he was accessible to silent pains" (I, 143). He
is also endowed with a "characteristic mute wonderment," which suggests
an intrinsic innocence or naivete.

Maggie and Adam are not the only characters who communicate without words. When Charlotte is musing on an earlier conversation with
the Prince about the Ververs, the narrator says, "She was inwardly to dwell on the element of the unuttered that her tone had caused to play up into his irresistible eyes. . . ." (I, 289). When Charlotte comes to visit the Prince on the rainy day, much is accomplished in and by silence: "So for some moments, with their long look, they but treated the matter [of the incipient affair] in silence; with the effect indeed, by the end of the time, of having considerably brought it on" (I, 302). Later Charlotte makes a statement about how "beautiful" the whole affair is, "which she gave him time to agree about; and though he was silent it was rather remarkably as if he fell in" (I, 305). At the dinner party before the visit to Matcham, the Prince and Charlotte seem silently to plan an assignation. The Prince senses that he and Charlotte are in tacit agreement: "For her as well, in all his pulses, he felt the conveyed impression" (I, 325). Thus the adulterous affair is largely set underway by the couple's use of unspoken or intuitive communication. This works not only to convey mutual impressions, but to positively "bring on" the affair. The Prince and Charlotte's use of the unsaid can be described as immoral because it results not only in the breaking of marriage vows, but also in the deception and betrayal of their respective "friends" and benefactors, the Ververs. This "illicit" use of unspoken communication will later be contrasted with the use the Ververs make of it to save the marriage.

The importance of the unsaid in the novel is reinforced and expanded by a complementary emphasis on the unseen or hidden. The two ideas are often merged in a single image. All of the main
characters are variously connected with one or more images of the unseen. Veils, lock-boxes, and clouds suggest the secretive nature of communication in the novel, as well as the hidden aspects of character and morality. Early in "The Prince" section, when Maggie is speaking to Amerigo just before their wedding, she comments on her father's collection of expensive objets d'art:

"There are things . . . that father puts away . . . in warehouses, vaults, banks, safes, wonderful secret places. We've been like a pair of pirates . . . the sort who wink at each other and say 'Ha-ha!' when they come to where their treasure is buried" (I, 13).

This passage provides an early hint of one important aspect of Maggie's character. Though she is speaking here only of physical objects, the sense of eager complicity with her father in the hiding of things will be echoed later in the novel on a much deeper level. Almost immediately after Maggie's remark, the Prince offers an important gloss on her words when he says:

"I like the class . . . in which you place me! I shall be one of the little pieces that you unpack at the hotels, or at the worst in the hired houses, like this wonderful one, and put out with the family photographs and the new magazines. But it's something not to be so big that I have to be buried" (I, 14).

This passage ironically suggests the Prince's knowledge (and acceptance) of the peculiar collecting habits of the Ververs; it can also be seen as an ominous foreshadowing of the eventual fate of the other new 'piece,' Charlotte, who, partly because of her bigness or greatness, will have to be "buried" in the American midwest.

This pre-wedding nervousness of the Prince is clarified and partially explained by his thoughts about Fanny Assingham and her
relation to the Ververs. For the Prince, Fanny is both interpreter of and partial participant in the morality of the Ververs. Amerigo thinks:

The state of mind of his new friends, including Mrs. Assingham herself, had resemblances to a great white curtain. He had never known curtains but as purple even to blackness--but as providing where they hung a darkness intended and ominous. When they were so disposed as to shelter surprises, the surprises were apt to be shocks. (I, 22-23)

Later, in thinking of Fanny, Amerigo muses, "What should he do if he were to ask her frankly this afternoon what was, morally speaking, behind their veil?" (I, 24). For the Prince, then, the Ververs' morality is essentially veiled with a dazzling whiteness, and also vaguely threatening. These two passages combine the ideas of physical covering and the unuttered question; these ideas suggest the morality (apparently innocent because draped in white) of the Ververs. Later the Prince's fundamental separateness from the Ververs is emphasized in his continuing imaginings about the enigmatic quality of their innate character. He has been thinking of what he stands to gain from the marriage, and what "measure" they will expect from him in return: "That measure was the shrouded object, but he felt really ... a little nearer the shroud" (I, 24). "The shrouded object" here has a double connotation: both valuable works of art and dead bodies are traditionally covered with shrouds. The Prince's ambivalence towards both his marriage and his bride is perhaps hinted at here; his own earlier self-characterization as not big enough to be buried is also ironically recalled.

The "great white curtain" of the Ververs' state of mind is
echoed, and expanded, in the initial description of Adam Verver. During a house party at Fawns, while Adam is trying to avoid the advances of the indefatigable Mrs. Rance, he thinks longingly of solitude as "... the impersonal whiteness for which his vision sometimes ached" (I, 126). While the color white, traditionally symbolic of purity, is obviously meant to suggest the American "innocence" of Adam, it can also be seen as a non-color, or lack of color, perhaps evocative of amorality. In one sense, Adam and Maggie display a kind of amorality or even immorality in "collecting" the Prince and Charlotte as fine additions to their treasure trove. This suggestion of amorality in the Ververs emphasizes the ambiguity with which character is portrayed in the novel.

Later in the introduction of Adam, the narrator says, "Mr. Verver then... had been inscrutably monotonous behind an iridescent cloud" (I, 128). Thus Adam's character is essentially hidden or veiled from the world, as is the Ververs' morality from the Prince. The bland whiteness of the first passage is partially negated and enriched by the rainbow effect suggested by the "iridescent cloud" of the second. Adam's true self is not only veiled, but shimmering with colorful light. Yet because it is hidden behind a cloud, this self is esoteric, available only for the privileged few, and ultimately only for Maggie. The ambiguity suggested by the double connotation of the color white is complicated further by the fact that the cloud is an archetypal symbol for the divine. Throughout the novel, Adam Verver is connected with an Edenic innocence or goodness. These qualities work against the calculated amorality of Adam, and
contribute to the central ambiguity surrounding the novel's treatment of morality.

Later descriptions of Adam stress the hidden or unseen aspects of his character and continue the emphasis on moral ambiguity. Speaking of the way in which Adam views or 'tastes' life, the narrator says:

He put into his one little glass everything he raised to his lips, and it was as if he had always carried in his pocket, like a tool of his trade, this receptacle, a little glass cut with a fineness of which the art had long ago been lost, and kept in an old morocco case stamped in uneffaceable gilt with the arms of a deposed dynasty (I, 196).

Adam has earlier thought of Maggie as "some slight, slim draped 'antique' . . ." (I, 187). These suggestions of the winetaster and the connoisseur may point to a kind of moral dilettantism, but the cut-glass "receptacle" in its "old morocco case" and the "draped" figure are also significant in Adam's character as outward and visible signs of the inward, spiritual veils over thought and emotion which become more obvious and important as the novel progresses. The "draped antique" also recalls the Prince's thoughts of "the shrouded object;" the fact that Adam and the Prince share this mental imagery is yet another proof of the novel's ambiguity on matters of taste or aesthetics, which underlies its moral ambiguity. Adam's moral and spiritual musings are later characterized as "a labyrinth" (I, 207). This image of the maze is a perfect symbol for one manifestation of the unseen—the partial or obscured vision that often leads to moral confusion and uncertainty.8

The unseen is given a slightly different manifestation in the
passages preceding Adam's proposal to Charlotte, as well as in the prelude to the adulterous affair. Leading up to the proposal scene, the narrator emphasizes silence and concealment by an imagery of physical coverings. Before he proposes to Charlotte, Adam takes her with him to purchase some rare tiles. In the shop, there are "... precious things, extracted one by one from thrice-locked yet often vulgar drawers and soft satchels of old oriental silk..." and "... tiles, successively, and oh so tenderly, unmuffled and revealed..." (I, 214). These passages suggest a sensuous delight in covers, and an almost voluptuous regret and enjoyment in removing them, which presages Adam's final announcement of the 'word' of proposal. Adam sees his new life open out before him partly in the sheer "predominance of Charlotte's very person, in her being there exactly as she was, capable, as Mr. Gutermann-Seuss himself was capable, of the right felicity of silence..." (I, 215). Thus both bride and merchant appeal to Adam's innate sense of the unspoken.

Charlotte is connected with Adam in this matter of 'unwrapping' soon after the marriage. Before she begins the affair with the Prince, Charlotte is musing on the things (presumably about the Ververs) that Mrs. Assingham has "given her" to think about. She feels the obligation "... not to get rid of them without having well unwrapped them and turned them over" (I, 250). This can be seen as a muted echo of the unwrapping of the tiles just before the proposal; it thus links Charlotte's "unwrapping" of rich thoughts with Adam's unwrapping of expensive art objects. This link suggests an ironical comment on the reversal of the marital situations, as well
as a possible equation of art and thought (or creative, artful imaginings). Just before his proposal of legitimate—if cold and calculated—marriage, Adam unwraps beautiful art objects, suggesting that Charlotte herself is being added to his collection. Before the adulterous (illegitimate)—but passionate—affair, Charlotte "unwraps" and examines Mrs. Assingham's words about the Prince and the Ververs, perhaps revealing a more reflective, and even a moral side of Charlotte's character that tends to undercut the "uprightness" of Adam. This poring over thoughts also links Charlotte to the Prince, with his "appetite for explanation." The several connotations here are suggestive of the rich and multi-faceted nature of character as it is conceived in the novel.

The concepts of the unsaid and the unseen come together in the image of the hidden spring. In the Preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, James imagines "lurking springs at light pressure of which particular vistas would begin to recede." In *The Golden Bowl*, this image, conveying in one sense the idea of a small lock-box or jewelry case, is on one level evocative of the great wealth and collecting habits of the Ververs. Yet as the image is consistently used in connection with the unspoken, it takes on a deeper meaning. James employs the image at critical points in the novel to suggest the hidden realms of desire and imagination that lie buried beneath the character's surface appearances. Often a brief word from one character serves to "press the spring" of response in another, breaking through the outer shell of the social self into the inner world of the spirit. This openness lasts just long enough for the spring to pop back into
place, which suggests the inherent transience of emotional and spiritual 'uncoverings.'

James's richly evocative use of the hidden spring, with its multiple connotations of a small box, a leap or bound (see also "The Beast in the Jungle"), and a source of life and vitality (see The Sacred Pount), can be seen as a kind of expanding leit-motif in the novel. The several movements of the novel are orchestrated by the permutations and transformations of the unsaid and the unseen; the central leit-motif is the hidden spring, which when pressed, reveals the essence of character or of situation. In The Golden Bowl the concrete and outwardly mechanical image of the pressed spring is evocative of the deepest levels of human thought and feeling; it is thought objectified, object transfigured and poeticized. The image of the spring will recur at critical points throughout the novel, expanding and building on itself until it becomes almost a metaphor for the unseen and the unsaid—the buried, hidden, silent life.

The first mention of the spring occurs during the Prince and Charlotte's secret shopping expedition just before the Prince's wedding. After their visit to the curio shop, they go for a stroll in the park, and reach a crisis point in their renewed relationship when the Prince urges Charlotte to marry: "She took it [the suggestion] from him, but it determined in her the only words she was to have uttered, all the morning, that came out as if a spring had been pressed" (I, 121). The intensity of emotion present in the scene is conveyed in part by James's use of this curious image.
Though the spring can be seen as a mechanical and lifeless image, evoking perhaps a wire-worked doll or mannequin, James here and later uses it to convey a sense of the deep emotion that wells up from the very center of being. The dual connotation of the pressed button and the well-spring or fount of being is thus present from the very first use of the image.

The more obviously mechanical sense of the spring is used several times in the opening description of Adam Verver: "His lips somehow were closed—and by a spring connected moreover with the action of his eyes themselves" (I, 13). Thus both the unsaid and the unseen are connected, by a spring, with the lips and eyes of Adam Verver. (This could almost be seen as a parodic echo of the "see no evil, speak no evil" of the three monkeys; here the "innocent" is the American Adam, apparently still in the garden—and the monkey who covers its ears so as to "hear no evil" is Maggie.)

Near the end of this description, the spring is again evoked:

The very finest spring that ever responded to his touch was always there to press—the memory of his freedom as dawning upon him, like a sunrise all pink and silver, during a winter divided between Florence, Rome and Naples some three years after his wife's death (I, 150).

Here the mechanical aspect of the spring is expanded and enriched by the connection with memory. The touch of the spring yields all the wealth of life-affirming and enriching memory; the colors recall the rainbow hues suggested by the "iridescent cloud" described in the earlier passage.

At the close of Adam and Charlotte's proposal scene, the mechanical spring becomes associated in Adam's mind with Maggie and
with Charlotte. Thinking of Maggie's influence on his engagement to
Charlotte, Adam muses, "She [Maggie] united them, brought them
together as with the click of a silver spring . . ." (I, 240). Here
the "silver spring" is most obviously symbolic of the great wealth
and power to 'make things click' that Adam is making available to
Charlotte; it also suggests the American efficiency and exactitude of
a perfectly-adjusted machine, perhaps hinting at the lack of true
emotional involvement with which Adam is betrothing himself to
Charlotte. She is merely needed as the fourth wheel of the silver
carriage, important only insofar as she helps the other three to
click into place.

The image of the spring recurs at another key point in the novel,
where Charlotte has come to an important and momentous conclusion
about her marriage and what must now be done:

Her point was before her; it was sharp, bright, true;
above all it was her own . . . To make it now with
force for Fanny Assingham's benefit would see her
further, in the direction in which the light had dawned,
than any other spring she should doubtless yet
awhile be able to press (I, 255).

After Charlotte has made her point ("that Maggie thinks more on the
whole of fathers than of husbands"), Fanny is a bit unnerved: "Mrs.
Assingham, vaguely heaving, panting a little, but trying not to
show it, turned about from some inward spring, in her seat" (I, 257).

These two closely recurring evocations of the spring image recall
the click of the silver spring with which Adam has mentally charac-
terized his daughter's facilitation of his marriage; here the echoes
are ironically associated with his wife's adultery with his son-in-law.
Just before the Prince and Charlotte's first passionate embrace, Charlotte characterizes the Ververs to the Prince in such a way as to force him to recognize their own 'duty' as outsiders to 'comfort' each other:

She spoke indeed with a nobleness not the less effective for coming in so oddly, with a sincerity visible even through the complicated twist by which any effort to protect the father and daughter seemed necessarily conditioned for them. It moved him [the Prince], in any case, as if some spring of his own, a weaker one, had suddenly been broken by it (I, 309-310).

Here the sense of violation conveyed by the broken spring is strongly suggestive of a deeper moral outrage: Charlotte has violated the Prince's own inner sense of his marriage, and of his duties as husband and son-in-law. The passage thus reveals Charlotte as perhaps the real seducer in the affair, by virtue of the Prince's own 'weaker spring' or character.

Again, as a kind of final gloss on the beginning of the adulterous affair, the narrator invokes the spring. At Matcham, the Prince seems to misread Fanny Assingham's lack of vocal protest as a positive endorsement of the affair:

He had as well his view—or at least a partial one—of the inner spring of this present comparative humility, which was all consistent with the retraction he had practically seen her [Fanny] make after Mr. Verver's last dinner (I, 336).

Here the image of the spring is combined with the expression of the unseen that is suggested by the Prince's 'partial view' or obstructed vision. This partial view obliquely echoes the obstructed vision suggested by Adam's moral and spiritual "labyrinth," and maintains
the novel's tendency towards moral ambiguity. The inner spring also suggests a fount or source of being. But as the image has been variously employed throughout the novel, the echo here carries with it overtones of all the earlier connotations. The most recent mention of the spring was that of Charlotte 'breaking' the Prince's "own, a weaker one" by her stated attitude toward the Ververs. Thus the echo of that occasion carries ironic and even vaguely sinister overtones into the Prince's use of the image here.

Again, the multiple nature of the spring is emphasized almost immediately after the Prince's thoughts on Fanny, in a scene between the Prince and Charlotte. The two have agreed that their 'case' is unique, after which, in an apparent non sequitur, which suggests the Prince's awareness of Fanny's peculiarly awkward role in the affair, Amerigo adds:

"Poor Fanny!" But Charlotte had already with a start and a warning hand turned from a glance at the clock. She sailed away to dress, while he watched her reach the staircase. His eyes followed her till, with a simple swift look round at him, she vanished. Something in the sight however appeared to have renewed the spring of his last exclamation, which he breathed again upon the air. "Poor, poor Fanny!" (I, 343)

Again the image of the spring is reinforced and expanded by all the previous uses of it. The intensity of the repetition in these several scenes just before the affair begins creates a kind of counterpoint effect that reinforces Stephen Spender's characterization of the novel as "symphonic." Here, just before the close of the Prince's section of the novel, the spring has been mentioned several times in close succession. Its final appearance in Book First occurs,
appropriately, during a conversation between Fanny Assingham and her husband, when she is trying at once to justify the affair and admit to no knowledge of it. She finally breaks down, and admits that the Prince and Charlotte--

"May have stayed over at Matcham itself till tomorrow. May have wired home, each of them, since Maggie left me. May have done . . . God knows what!" She went on suddenly with more emotion--which, at the pressure of some spring of her inner vision, broke out in a wail of distress imperfectly smothered (I, 377).

This is the only time Fanny is seen to break down completely; again, the narrator has saved the spring for the climactic scene. The pressure of the spring here conveys the mechanical, reflexive sense, and also the suggestion of the well-spring of inner being, which maintains Fanny's credibility as a sensitive observer.

The fullest embodiment of the unsaid is of course in the character of Maggie Verver. In Book First, before she is actually present as a fully-realized character in the novel, she speaks to Fanny Assingham of her instinctive feeling that the Prince and Charlotte have known each other before, but draws back from full knowledge: "'I don't think I want even for myself to put names and times, to pull away any veil!'" (I, 184). As Tony Tanner notes, "The plight . . . of the innocent eye is not so much its horror at what it sees, but its bewilderment at what it only half sees."¹² In contrast with the distorted vision of other Jamesian innocents, notably Maisie Farange, Maggie's partial blindness here is largely a self-imposed bewilderment, which sets her just opposite her husband, with his "appetite for explanation," and continues the partial identification
in the novel of the said or known with the knowledge of evil.

In the opening paragraphs of "The Princess" section of the novel, Maggie's inner life is vividly evoked for the reader in terms that echo Adam's "small glass receptacle," but on a grander, more exotic scale. The narrator speaks of her "inward voice," evoking for her "... some strange, tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful, beautiful, but outlandish pagoda, a structure plated with hard bright porcelain ..." (II, 3). Inside all of these elaborate structures resides the knowledge of evil. Again, the Biblical Eden is suggested: "This situation had been occupying for months and months the very centre of the garden of her life" (II, 3). Here Maggie is still in the garden, and outside of the repositories of knowledge, but she soon appears to penetrate into a fuller awareness of Charlotte and the Prince's infidelity. Maggie's quiet persistence in working toward a reconciliation with her husband, and the eventual saving of both marriages, is expressed by "her total silence, which is the pivot of the strange situation."\(^{13}\)

Maggie's most important action in the novel occurs when she decides to wait at home for the Prince's arrival from Matcham, instead of remaining at Eaton Square with her father. James expresses Maggie's inability to properly classify this action for herself in these terms: "... she would have been at a loss to determine ... to which order, that of self-control or that of large expression, the step she had taken ... properly belonged" (II, 9). In actuality, it belongs to both, and is expressive of the dualistic nature of character and morality that is so prevalent in all of James's late
novels. This is the crux of the tension that informs *The Golden Bowl*: the pull between the two opposing forces of 'self-control' and 'large expression,' and the often illusory nature of the distinctions between them.

Maggie later slips back into her more comfortable, characteristic self: "She had but wanted to get nearer--nearer to something that she couldn't, that she wouldn't, even to herself, describe. . . ." (II, 10). The words 'couldn't' and 'wouldn't' emphasize that this attitude is a product of inborn character or inherent incapacity, and also of will. When the Prince finally arrives, neither he nor Maggie asks the question that is uppermost in each of their minds, but much is understood between them. The question on her husband's face begins to answer Maggie's suspicions; when Charlotte wears the same look the next morning, the suspicions are confirmed. Yet no words are spoken. These two looks, and Maggie's interpretations of them, provide the catalyst for the rest of her actions, which result in a moral and spiritual victory for Maggie: the reunion of the two couples.

Throughout the novel, Maggie excels in communicating by means of the unspoken word and in evoking this kind of mute exchange in others. Her sexual relationship with Amerigo (which is both 'redemptive' and threatening for Maggie) is largely based on his power to appeal to this silent side of Maggie's nature. Musing on her husband's erotic power over her, Maggie thinks "... how the act operated with him instead of the words he hadn't uttered--operated, in his view, as probably better than any words, as always better, in fact, at any time, than anything" (II, 28-29).
Another side of the unspoken communication between Maggie and the Prince is revealed when the Prince walks into Maggie's room just after Fanny Assingham has dashed the golden bowl to the floor. After Fanny has left, and Maggie and the Prince stand looking at the broken bowl, Maggie feels that further speech would be superfluous; the mere sight of the smashed bowl is enough of a statement. She thinks, "... there was nothing else to add—what it came to was that, merely by being with him there in silence, she felt within her, the sudden split between conviction and action" (II, 185-186). The rest of the scene is largely silent, a mute contest of wills. Its climax comes when the Prince does not name Charlotte or Adam, a kind of negative, because unspoken, climax. During the scene, which represents a moral turning point for Amerigo, the narrator says that "there occurred between them a kind of unprecedented moral exchange over which her superior lucidity presided" (II, 189). In "her superior lucidity," Maggie watches Amerigo's struggle not to speak either name, and by so doing, to betray both Adam and Charlotte: "Visibly, palpably, traceably, he stood off from this, moved back from it as from an open chasm now suddenly perceived . . . ." (II, 192). Again, the suggestions of the unsaid and the unseen are combined, this time in the image of the "chasm," which suggests a place of eternal, irrevocable concealment. Here begins Amerigo's embracing of the unsaid on Maggie's terms, which will eventually reconcile him to his wife. The use of the chasm, with its suggestions of vast emptiness, chaos, and loss, is perhaps indicative of Amerigo's inner turmoil at this critical juncture in his life. When he follows Maggie's example
of silence and does not tell Charlotte what Maggie knows, he moves even closer to his wife, and to moral salvation in the Ververs' world. In questioning why Maggie's total silence should so thoroughly win back Amerigo's love, Dorothea Krook posits an intriguing characterization of this silence: "For, simultaneously with its being an exercise of the worldly intelligence, it happens also to satisfy completely the touchstone of taste itself--"14. Thus the Prince, who has been connected with "taste" throughout the novel, finds his highest aesthetic standard satisfied, in his wife's total and unmitigated silence about his adultery. This appeal to Amerigo's taste brings him closer to Maggie's standard of morality. Following the standard of silence that both have set in this climactic scene, Maggie will later maintain a high pitch of silence in her "high" fight with Amerigo, in which nothing is actually said, but all is revealed by nuance and implication of attitude and bearing.

Imagery of concealment and coverings is often used in conjunction with Maggie's unspoken communication. When Maggie at last confronts Fanny Assingham with her suspicions about the Prince and Charlotte, even though she does finally voice her fears, there is in the scene a constantly shifting interplay between the said and the unsaid. Maggie's astuteness surprises Fanny, revealing as it does a side of Maggie of which Fanny has never even suspected the existence. Fanny says that she thinks Maggie has been hiding her true character "Somewhere under . . . ,--like that little silver cross you once showed me, blest by the Holy Father, that you always wear, out of sight, next to your skin" (II, 112). This perhaps too obvious likening of
Maggie's character to a silver cross is indicative not only of innocent purity and sacrifice, but also of the wealth of Maggie's own earthly father. Even though Maggie does speak out to Fanny, in violation of the novel's tacit code of silence, she maintains her identification with the unsaid by her cryptic repetition of "For love," and stops short of revealing all.

Modified images of the veil or covering are introduced in Maggie's vision of Charlotte's new deference to her after the beginning of the affair as "throwing over their intercourse a kind of silver tissue of decorum" (II, 38). This passage is later echoed in Maggie's description of Charlotte's deception of Mr. Verver: "... the fine tissue of reassurance woven by this lady's hands and flung over her companion as a light, muffling veil, formed precisely a wrought transparency through which she felt her father's eyes rest continually on herself" (II, 138). The word 'muffling' conveys the sense of the unsaid or smothered, as well as that of the unseen. As Charlotte uses the veils to conceal betrayal and deceit, her coverings have become transparent— in essence, false and ineffective.

A different aspect of the imagery of concealment is revealed in Maggie's silent communication with her father. During their renewed closeness after the beginning of the adulterous affair, Maggie and Adam experience a delicious, silent intimacy, in part because of the very trouble which they both refuse to name: "... this very fact of their seeming to have nothing 'inward' really to talk about wrapped him up for her in a kind of sweetness that was wanting, as a consecration, even in her yearning for her husband" (II, 73). In this
passage, cover is seen as a positive 'sweetness' or affectionate protection, in contrast to Charlotte's coverings of deceit and betrayal.

The central image of the hidden spring is developed more fully in "The Princess" section of the novel than in "The Prince" section. A rather threatening manifestation of the unsaid is inherent in the description of the Prince's sexual power over Maggie, and is often expressed in terms of the spring. The couple's passionate reunion after the Matcham visit is brought about with a minimum of words. At this critical point in the marriage, the evocation of the spring suggests the wealth of Maggie's hidden character and the 'weakness' of her passionate love for her husband:

He hadn't in any way challenged her, it was true, and, after those instants during which she now believed him to have been harbouring the impression of something unusually prepared and pointed in her attitude and array, he had advanced upon her smiling and smiling, and thus, without hesitation at the last, had taken her into his arms. The hesitation had been at the first, and she at present saw that he had surmounted it without her help. She had given him no help; for if on the one hand she couldn't speak for hesitation, so on the other--and especially as he didn't ask her--she couldn't explain why she was agitated. She had known it all the while down to her toes, known it in his presence with fresh intensity, and if he had uttered but a question it would have pressed in her the spring of recklessness (II, 16-17).

This 'recklessness' results in Maggie's loss of self-control, and in her eyes perhaps, a dissolution of self. As Maggie's thoughts continue, the evocation of "the spring of recklessness" is reinforced:
Her acceptance of it [Amerigo's passionate touch], her response to it, inevitable, foredoomed, came back to her later on as a virtual assent to the assumption he had thus made that there was really nothing such a demonstration didn't anticipate and didn't dispose of, and also that the spring acting within herself might well have been beyond any other the impulse legitimately to provoke it. (II, 29)

This second use of the image of the spring, coming so close after the first, characterizes it as an integral part of Maggie's emotional and spiritual make-up. She has twice in close succession intuitively characterized her silent assent to her husband's sexual control over her in terms of the spring, which is not only passively pressed, but may also be an active impulse to provoke his passion.

The image of the spring is also used in the dramatic scene between Fanny and Maggie, where the golden bowl is produced and broken. When Maggie sends for Fanny to come to her before a dinner party, Fanny intuitively senses a crisis: "She knew on the spot, poor Fanny, as she was afterwards to declare to the Colonel, that her feared crisis had popped up as at the touch of a spring, that her impossible hour was before her" (II, 151). By the narrator's use of the spring, the reader is also alerted that something critical is about to happen. When the Prince walks in on Maggie and Fanny, and sees the broken bowl, the image of the spring recurs with renewed force. Fanny has just said to Maggie, "Whatever you meant by it--and I don't want to know now--has ceased to exist," when the Prince suddenly appears and speaks: "'And what in the world, my dear, did you mean by it?' That clear vibration of the touched spring rang out as the first effect of Fanny's speech" (II, 179).
Because the image of the spring has been used in several different contexts earlier in the novel, its renewal here is fraught with multiple connotations. The clarity and sharpness of the image in this passage are synonymous with the high tension or pitch of the scene itself.

Maggie's policy of silence is given its fullest expression in the terrace scene where she and Charlotte finally confront each other face to face. In this scene, and in the bridge party which is going on both before and during the confrontation, the theme of unspoken communication, the imagery of concealment, and the image of the hidden spring are all brought together and intensified. The resultant tension and complexity of the scene create the context and atmosphere for Maggie's moral triumph of silence. In the scene, Charlotte is described as "a tiger," perhaps amoral in the highly civilized world of the Ververs. The terrifying tension of the scene is conveyed partly by the constant threat of a "spring" from Charlotte, and partly by the great amount of unspoken communication between the two. As F.O. Matthiessen notes, "the scenes between Maggie and Charlotte are as charged with the energy of the unspoken as any that James ever wrote." The energy implicit in the image of the tiger is also an expression of the sexual vitality with which Charlotte is often characterized. For Maggie, Charlotte is a tiger, and "[t]he cage was the deluded condition . . . ." (II, 229). Here Charlotte's lack of knowledge about what Maggie actually knows of the affair encloses her in a cage, a kind of perversion of the Ververs' stone and glass receptacles of knowledge, character, and wealth. The
negative side of hidden things is suggested in Maggie's preliminary fears, as she thinks of "... the horror of the thing hideously behind, behind so much trusted, so much pretended, nobleness, cleverness, tenderness." (II, 237).

Again, the scene is a critical one, and the image of the spring reappears, as Maggie is musing on the differences between appearance and reality, while the others sit so quietly playing bridge:

They might in short have represented any mystery they would; the point being predominantly that the key to the mystery, the key that could wind and unwind it without a snap of the spring, was there in her pocket—or rather, no doubt, clasped at this crisis in her hand and pressed, as she walked back and forth, to her breast (II, 235).

Watching the quiet scene, Maggie thinks of the horrors she could evoke by speaking out:

Spacious and splendid, like a stage again awaiting a drama, it was a scene she might people, by the press of her spring, either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins. . . . (II, 236)

Maggie here holds the key to the entire situation; her great care is that the spring must not snap. In the emphasis on the need for silence ("without a snap of the spring"), there is also the hint at the possibility of a mental snap or nervous breakdown; the phrase "wind and unwind" suggests the image of a broken doll or clock with its coils sprung and hanging loose.

During the terrace scene, Maggie feels bound by the need to "... satisfy Charlotte as to the reference, in her mocking spirit, of so much of the unuttered and unutterable of the constantly and unmistakeably implied. . . ." (II, 240). Here the different aspects
of the unsaid are multiplied almost to incoherence. The resultant tension informs the entire scene, as Charlotte threatens to force Maggie to betray her code of the unsaid. (This sense of coercion also echoes Charlotte's earlier violation of the Prince's "weaker spring.") Charlotte's rejection of the proffered shawl is taken by Maggie as " . . . a sign that they hadn't closed in for idle words . . . " (II, 243). And indeed, covers are here no longer viable as symbols of positive relations between people; the cover of the shawl is not symbolic of a care to keep the other lovingly in the dark. The two have not closed in for words at all. Much of the scene occurs in silence; the two walk, Charlotte "points out" the others at the card table, and the false kiss is bestowed. Ultimately, by refusing to admit her suspicions to Charlotte, Maggie moves closer to Amerigo. Following Maggie's initial lead, he has now, in turn, set her an example of silence: "He had given her something to conform to. . . . They were together thus, he and she, close, close together. . . ." (II, 250). The authorial gloss on the scene is provided later when no one in the party mentions the witnessed kiss: " . . . it had taken on perceptibly the special shades of consecration conferred by the unanimities of silence." (II, 276). The laudatory attitude toward silence that is expressed in this passage provides a statement that can be applied to the entire novel: a mutually agreed-upon silence is an almost holy state of being.

After the terrace scene, when Maggie and her father meet, his remark that he has been jealous provokes in Maggie a telling look: "And it [Adam's remark] said more to her, he had occasion next to
perceive, than he was intending; for it made her, as by the pressure of a spring, give him a look that seemed to tell of things she couldn't speak" (II, 264). Here the spring is a part of Adam's conscious thought processes; it conveys at once the suggestion of a mechanical stimulus, and also the sense of the deep recesses of being, the silent realms of the spirit. During this conversation, Maggie and Adam finally come to terms with the adulterous situation by means of their own special morality, "... by their having, in their acceptance of the unsaid, or at least their reference to it, practically given up pretending..." (II, 265). This passage confirms the Ververs' acceptance of the unsaid as a valid way of dealing with life, in all its beauty and shabbiness. Later the narrator says that "they were decent and competent together" (II, 275). The very "Americanness" of these qualities, as well as the characteristic Jamesian use of words with their fullest possible intensity of meaning and nuance, express the quintessence of the Ververs' joint character and morality. In one sense, in terms of their final actions in the novel, they are embodiments of a certain quiet decency and competence: the marriages are "saved," and there is no public scandal.

After the climactic terrace scene and its aftermath, the tension lessens perceptibly as the novel winds slowly to a close. Charlotte's spiritual and financial poverty in the Ververs' world is newly recognized in Maggie's vision of how Charlotte must be dealing with the situation. She sees Charlotte as burdened with "... things, these, that she carried about with her done up in the napkin of her lover's accepted rebuke, while she vainly hunted for some corner where she
might put them safely down" (II, 284). Later Maggie imagines Charlotte

. . . pleading for some benefit that might be carried away into exile like the last saved object of price of the émigré, the jewel wrapped in a piece of old silk and negotiable some day in the market of misery (II, 287).

This vision of Charlotte as a poor refugee with flimsy receptacles of cloth is in marked contrast to the earlier descriptions of the wealthy Ververs, with their lock-boxes, glass show-cases, and spiritual pagodas.

Nearer the end of the novel, and the reconciliation of Maggie and the Prince, the image of the spring recurs with renewed intensity. Maggie thinks with satisfaction of how well the Prince has carried himself through the last weeks:

His secret was of course that at Fawns he all the while winced, was all the while in presences in respect to which he had thrown himself back with a hard pressure on whatever mysteries of pride, whatever inward springs familiar to the man of the world, he could keep from snapping (II, 294).

Almost immediately after these thoughts, Maggie thinks also of Charlotte in terms of a spring, which reinforces the connection between Charlotte and the Prince. When Maggie sees Charlotte leave the house one hot afternoon, she decides to follow her "and had thereupon felt her impulse determined with the same sharpness that had made the spring of her companion's three weeks before" (II, 296). Here, the reader's memory of the terrace scene supplies the tiger image that is obliquely suggested by "the spring." During this second "confrontation" between Charlotte and Maggie, the imagery of concealment and the spring is intensified as a part of Charlotte's
unseen self is exposed for the first time:

... and even after Maggie's approach if Charlotte had presented an innocent front it was still not to be mistaken that she bristled with the signs of her extremity. It wasn't to be said for them either that they were draped at this hour in any of her usual graces; unveiled and all but unashamed, they were tragic to the Princess in spite of the dissimulation that with the return of comparative confidence was so promptly to operate. How tragic in essence the very change made vivid, the instant stiffening of the spring of pride--this for possible defense if not for possible aggression (II, 312).

The language of unveiling and undraping here emphasizes the lapse in Charlotte from the novel's standard of hiddenness and mystery. Covers have failed her here, as they became transparent for her earlier. Also, for Charlotte, the inner spring of being becomes "the spring of pride" and hatred. This central image is thus modified to convey, with peculiar exactitude, the essences of the different characters as they move through different situations and crises.

As a prelude to the final reconciliation with his wife, the Prince has had to undergo a fundamental transformation of morality and character. Because his standards have changed, Amerigo appreciates Maggie's gracious offer of a private leave-taking with Charlotte, but does not know quite what to make of it: "Taste in him as a touchstone was now all at sea. . . ." (II, 345). In moving toward the silent, decent, competent morality of the American Ververs, the Prince has come to participate in their slightly ruthless pragmatism as well. In his highly practical break with Charlotte, the Prince embraces the Ververs' own peculiar brand of practical morality in embracing Maggie. Just before Adam and Charlotte arrive, a brief
question from Maggie evokes Amerigo's tenderness and passion:
"... it had pressed again in him the fine spring of the unspeakable" (II, 350). Here passion, the unsaid, and the image of the spring are conjoined with the fact of moral and spiritual reconciliation. The 'fineness' of the spring suggests the new perfection of the union.

Throughout the novel, the love between Maggie and her father, between Maggie and the Prince, and between the Prince and Charlotte, has been indissolubly bound up with the importance of the unspoken, but intensely felt, word. The "fine spring of the unspeakable" seems to be a key to true relations between people, which often include disharmony and hatred as well as love and beauty. As Joseph Warren Beach, in an early study, The Method of Henry James, says of the novel, "The peculiar strength of this book lies in the long strain almost to agony of a struggle largely beneath the surface and all the more terrible for the suppression of word and gesture." Yet there is great beauty in the terror, and high passion in the struggle. Whether the unsaid is but a necessary prelude to human closeness, or an intrinsic aspect of the very nature of intimacy itself, it seems to be in this novel a kind of sacred mantle thrown over 'things too deep for words,' and in that sense, and in that sense only, can and must be positively embraced.

Yet there is a central ambiguity at the heart of the novel, conveyed largely by the fact that all of the characters use veils or covers (whether metaphorical or real), all communicate by means of the unsaid, and all are described at moments of high crisis in terms
of a hidden spring. Even at the end, the reader is not sure just how he is to view the adultery of the Prince and Charlotte, or Maggie's artful machinations. Ultimately, who are the truly "good" characters in the novel, and of what does their virtue consist? Does real virtue actually exist at all in the world of the novel? J.A. Ward, in The Imagination of Disaster, notes this increasing tendency toward greater ambiguity in James's mature treatment of morality: "Moral conflict, however, becomes no less significant in the later works, but James's ambiguity, complexity, and detachment prohibit critical liberalism and moralism." This ambiguity is perhaps expressive of James's final conclusions about human nature in general. As Krook cogently argues, "The ambiguity is perhaps best defined as a huge, elaborate metaphor for James's experience of the unavoidable, unalterable mixed motive of all human action, and the consequent dual ('ambiguous') character of all human endeavour." Thus the complex of imagery and meaning surrounding James's distinctive combination and treatment of the unseen and the unsaid in The Golden Bowl remains ultimately as artistically ambiguous as does the 'moral' which this complicated fable is intended to point.

In essence, an entire novel is constructed around what is not seen and what is not said, with the actual facts often left obscure. The uniting of the unseen and the unsaid in the image of the hidden spring, with its expanding connotations, represents James at his finest, and at his most arcane. Austin Warren, in Rage for Order, says that in the late James, "recollected images become metaphors." He also characterizes James's use of a central image or metaphor as
"an emblematic perception, a symbolized intuition."

In The Golden Bowl, the imagery of silence and concealment becomes an almost baroque metaphor for human morality, with all of its inconsistency, weakness, and heroic striving. The hidden spring is James's "emblematic perception" of the multi-faceted soul and all its workings. James's conception of morality is quintessentially expressed in this "symbolized intuition" with its multiple meanings and interpretations: an inner source of life and vitality, the unthinking instinctive response to a stimulus, and the sudden leap of a caged beast. James's "intuition" is that human nature, and life itself, is always and ever, essentially protean. All of the characters, from the sometime "innocents" Maggie and Adam, to the possibly "avaricious and sensual" Prince and Charlotte, are possessed of the inner spring of deep emotion and passionate intensity, and all are highly sensitive to every nuance of unspoken communication. More space is given over to thought and imagined conversation than in perhaps any other of James's major novels. The reader often becomes lost in verbal mazes of redundant explanation, imagination, and rationalization that appear to lead to no truly satisfactory moral conclusions or solutions in the world of the novel.

F.R. Leavis, in The Great Tradition, charges that in The Golden Bowl James has been guilty of "a partial inattention—an inadvertence. It is as if . . . he had lost his full sense of life and let his moral taste slip into abeyance." Perhaps there are certain artistic weaknesses and moral ambiguities in the novel, but they appear to result from an excess of concentrated moral attention rather than from
"a partial inattention." In *The Golden Bowl* "moral taste" is displayed at its most refined. After all, what is more supremely morally refined in the human realm than friendship, love, betrayal, and reunion among beautiful and civilized people? The intensity of James's interest in the ramifications of deceit and betrayal, passion and loyalty, and love and duty can be seen on almost every page. As Yvor Winters notes of the late James:

> His defects arise from the effort on the part of the novelist and of his characters to understand ethical problems in a pure state, and to understand them absolutely, to examine the marginal, the semi-obscure, the fine and definite boundary of experience. . . .

In *The Golden Bowl*, James takes great pains to suggest the moral questions raised by love--filial, affectionate, and erotic--and by the duties that love entails. Though the questions are repeatedly raised in different forms throughout the novel, no conclusive answers are ever given. The beautiful and charming characters appear to move forever in a world of aristocratic privilege and elegant amorality. Though the atmosphere and language of the novel are perhaps unduly rarefied, the controlling ambiguity of the unanswered questions lends the necessary tempering and humanizing element. The very absence of absolute and clearly-defined authorial "judgment" actually moves the novel away from the ideal, and toward the real. During an interview late in his life, James was asked "about his 'moral purpose' in ending stories with everything up in the air. 'Ah, is not that the trick that life plays?' James rejoined. 'Life itself leaves you with a question--it asks you questions.'" And in terms of moral absolutes, is that not just where *The Golden Bowl* leads: through the labyrinthine
halls of art and back to unanswered—and unanswerable—life?
NOTES

All quoted passages from The Golden Bowl are taken from the revised edition, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907). Page references are given in parentheses.


6 Krook, p. 260.

7 See Krook, pp. 310-311.


Stephen Spender, in *The Destructive Element* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1935), comments on the novel's resemblance to music: "It is impossible to understand what seems the unnecessary complexity, the specialized characterization, the forced intellectual interest, of a book like *The Golden Bowl*, unless one realizes that the nature of this art is symphonic; that it most nearly resembles music" (p. 53).


Tanner, p. 274.

Krook, p. 270.

Ibid.

16 For a discussion of the Prince as "Aesthetic Man," see Krook pp. 267-270.


24 Edel, p. 242.
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