

# Henry James: To Love is to Double

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For serious readers of English literature, the early and mid-career novels of Henry James (*Roderick Hudson*, *The American*, *The Portrait of a Lady*) are not enough. The ultimate challenge is the later ones (*The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Golden Bowl*), which are longer, more ornately written and less action-driven. Indeed, for hundreds and hundreds of pages, nothing seems to happen in them and by the end we seem to be back where we started. Of course, we are already used to this from mid-period James. In *The American* (1877), the Boston millionaire Charles Newman decides not to reveal the de Bellegarde's incriminating family secret, despite them thwarting his marriage to their daughter Claire. In *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), Isabel Archer gives up the eligible Caspar Goodwood and inexplicably decides to return to her loveless marriage to the effete and pretentious Gilbert Osmonde and his daughter Pansy. In *The Aspern Papers* (1880), our nameless narrator decides not to marry the niece of the poet Jeffrey Aspern's recently deceased former lover, even though this would allow him access to his long sought-after papers. And in the three great late novels, to adopt a kind of Jamesian locution, nothing also seems to happen, only more so. In *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), the impoverished writer Merton Densher not only fails to accept heiress Milly Theale's generous bequest

given to him so that he might marry the beautiful Kate Croy, but Kate arguably refuses him for not doing so. In *The Ambassadors* (1903), the middle-aged Lambert Strether sent over to France by the wealthy widow Mrs Newman to fetch her wayward son Chad not only fails to bring him home but also to marry the eligible Madame de Vionnet. Finally, in *The Golden Bowl* (1904), the two appropriate couples either fail to get married or fail in getting married, then fail to split up and carry on unhappily, with one couple (Maggie Verver and Prince Amerigo) remaining in Europe and the other (Charlotte Stant and Maggie's father, Adam) returning to America.

This is James' famous "late style", which has been the subject of so much scholarly attention and, as we suggest, is currently experiencing something of a revival, at least in "advanced" theoretical circles. After all, it is not the obvious *Portrait of a Lady* that Slavoj Žižek decided to write about when he wanted to think the ethical "act" in James, but the almost 20-year later *Wings of the Dove*. What, however, is really going on in these late-period productions? Needless to say, there are any number of explanations. For Seymour Chatman, coming out of English literature and writing in the early 1970s, it is a matter of a particular textual style. As he puts it in *The Late Style of Henry James*: "The effect of abstractness probably cannot be dissociated from others that arise in the reading of James, in particular a distinctive kind of vague allusiveness, usually the product of extensive and radical ellipsis".<sup>1</sup> This "formalist" consensus, we might say, reigned for some three decades. It has perhaps been surpassed only recently by the American aesthetic philosopher Robert Pippin, who coming out of a post-Cavellian enquiry into philosophical scepticism argues that what is at stake in late James is the status of moral and ethical conventions in a time of rapidly increasing modernity. As he writes in *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*:

In exploring such a 'moral reaction', in trying to figure out its status, what makes it possible and effective, James wants to frame the problem in a self-consciously historical and social way.<sup>2</sup>

And this ethical line of questioning has been both continued and repositioned in the work of a number of Lacanians, who have come to James and sought to read his work along the lines of Lacan's theorisation of the ethical act, as laid out in his Seminar VII. There is first

of all Sigi Jottkandt, who in *Acting Beautifully: Henry James and Ethical Aesthetics* argues that in the late James “various characters perform an aesthetic feat that meets the conditions of the Lacanian ethical act”.<sup>3</sup> And this is followed by Žižek, who in the chapter ‘Kate’s Choice, or, The Materialism of Henry James’ in *Parallax View* begins by disagreeing with Jöttkandt, contending instead that “Kate’s ‘No’ at the novel’s end is the properly Kierkegaardian moment in which the ethical itself is the temptation”.<sup>4</sup>

We do not simply disagree with these readings here, but prefer rather to emphasise another aspect of the late James. It is something that is not often drawn attention to in contemporary readings of them, insofar as it is seen to be out of touch with their formal difficulty, narrative complexity and moral ambiguity. And this is the question of *love*. How is love figured there and what are its consequences? Needless to say, love is very much at stake in these late novels. In *Wings of the Dove*, there is the love between Kate and Densher, allowed and even encouraged by Milly, who also loved Densher. In *The Ambassadors*, there is the love between Strether and Maria Gostrey and Chad and Mme. de Vionnet, who also in a way loves Strether. In *The Golden Bowl*, there is the love between Charlotte and her ex-boyfriend Amerigo and between Maggie and her father and even between the two women. However, the real question is – given that too-obviously physical descriptions are prohibited and the relationships are often impossible or exist only in the minds of the characters – what could be meant by love? Or, to put this more specifically and to begin a certain taxonomy of love, what is the relationship between the one who loves and the one who is loved? Is love necessarily doomed to a lack of fulfilment, arguably like the sexual relationship? How might we describe a “successful” as opposed to an unsuccessful love relationship? And can we even say that we have a series of “successful” love relationships in James, despite the appearance of nothing happening in them and against the consensus of the critics, who by and large argue that they are unsuccessful when they do not simply ignore them?

To answer these questions, we might begin – like nearly all critics on James – by thinking the meaning of a particular feature of his writerly style. It is one that, to our knowledge, has not previously been

commented upon – at least, specifically – by critics.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it is one that is virtually ubiquitous throughout his work, and especially in the later novels. Indeed, we might even suggest that it is something like this feature that constitutes the peculiar feeling of at once everything and nothing happening in the later James, a sense that the novel could potentially go on forever without anything actually happening. In fact, it is something like this impossible equivalence between everything and nothing that not only constitutes the distinctive tone but makes up the actual “drama” of the novels. Take, for instance, what Kate’s sister says to Kate after she first meets Densher in *Wings of the Dove*: “I talk of him, just because you don’t”.<sup>6</sup> Or the conversation between Maria Gostrey and Strether towards the middle of *The Ambassadors* while both are waiting for Chad: “Well, I’m impossible. It’s impossible. Everything’s impossible”. “Everything’s possible”.<sup>7</sup> Or the following exchange between Maggie and her father towards the end of *The Golden Bowl* after Maggie discovers Charlotte’s restarting her affair with Amerigo: “Why, I sacrifice you, simply to everything and to everyone”. “What do you make, then, of what I wanted?” “I don’t make anything, any more than of what you’ve got. That’s exactly the point”.<sup>8</sup>

But it is an uncanny equivalence of or even substitutability between “everything” and “nothing” that must be understood very carefully. It is perhaps tempting to suggest that after all of the apparent events of the novels we end up exactly where we started with nothing changed, but that is not quite true. For, in a subtle way, everything is different and nothing is the same. If it is the same eventless and even loveless world with which we began, it is now only possible insofar as it has gone through these virtual or unrealised events. And something like this is the entire “method” of James’ narratives, which rather than working through any kind of gradual build-up of suspense or logical cause-and-effect operate through a series of *doublings*, each rising up a level and appearing as the retrospective explanation of everything that came before. We discover another reason for the way things are, which we did not realise before, that now serves as the true explanation for preceding events, even though it cannot exactly be made clear. We might just provide an example of this for each of the novels we treat here. In *Wings of the Dove*, Milly speculates with regard to a possible affair between

Kate and Densher: "It was fantastic of her to let it make a difference that she couldn't at the least have defined – and she was rather proud of being able to hide, on the spot, the difference it did make" (124). In *The Ambassadors*, Strether says of Mme. de Vionnet, meeting her again after discovering the nature of her relationship with Chad: "He felt what he had before with her, that there was always more behind what she showed, and more and more again behind that" (349). And in *The Golden Bowl*, Maggie admits to herself when coming upon evidence of her husband's infidelity with Charlotte: "From the instant she should be able to convict him of intending, every issue would be closed and her hypocrisy would have to redouble" (356).

All this might be expressed another way: not as the sudden revelation of another reason for the way things are as they are, but more as the hiding or holding back of this reason. It would be a character's realisation not of a different explanation even though nothing has actually happened, but rather of a different explanation that is revealed through the attempt to hide it or cover it over, which only draws attention to it all the more and before which we may not even say that it exists. We see this again in each of the novels where one character sees another attempt to hide something from them, or is able to understand another attempting to hide something from them, even though this other does not appear to be aware of them or of hiding something from them. In *Wings of the Dove*, Kate's Aunt Maud and Mrs Stringham are speculating about Densher's attraction to Milly, and when Densher denies it Aunt Maud replies: "Yet doesn't silence in such a case very often quite prove the depth of the impression?" (222) In *The Ambassadors*, Strether while talking to Chad's sister about Mme. de Vionnet and attempting to keep his feelings to himself realises: "What exposed him was just his poor old trick of quiet inwardness, what exposed him was his thinking such offense" (299). And in *The Golden Bowl*, Maggie explains to Amerigo how she first became aware of his infidelity: "Oh, the thing I've known best of all is that you never wanted, together, to offend us" (435). In each case here it is not anything that is actually done or able to be read in a particular way by the other, but it is *this* that reveals that the other has something to hide, that they are aware of being looked at and seek to hide something from this gaze. Their apparent indifference is not genuine

but rather only an attempt to cover something up. In fact, in many ways the two situations we have just outlined are the same. In both, the very absence of proof *is* proof. In the first, it is as though the world attempts to hide itself from a certain gaze; in the second, it is another character. But in both cases the character looking on is able to read what is as a response to them, not just obvious events (James barely deals with these), but the very *absence* of events.

We might ask, then, what produces the possibility of this plot by surmise or hypothesis, in which the events of the novel are not actually dramatised but imaginatively assumed, where nothing appears to take place and yet this nothing stands in for everything. A clue might be found in a well-known statement by James about the particular power of art. It is exactly about the ability of art to create those moments we have been speaking of, to make anything signify and be meaningful. James once wrote in a letter to H.G. Wells in 1915 in an attempt to explain his “method” (and we suggest that this applies not only to James’ novel-writing project as a whole but to the creation of specific incidents in his novels): “It is art that *makes* life, *makes* interest, *makes* imagination, for our consideration and application of these things”.<sup>9</sup> And throughout James’ novels, in what we might designate as something of a “mousetrap” effect, we have characters at the highest moments of drama, or realising that there now is a whole other explanation for the events they are experiencing, exclaiming that they feel like a character in a novel or on the stage. As Milly says to herself upon first being introduced to Kate in *Wings of the Dove*: “She placed this striking young person from the first in a story” (114). Or as Strether reflects immediately after coming upon Chad and Mme. de Vionnet together in *The Ambassadors*: “Nothing was, so far as surface and sound were involved, even in question; surface and sound all made for their common ridiculous good fortune, for the general *invraisemblance* of the occasion” (335). Or as Maggie says to Amerigo after buying for her father the same cracked golden bowl he and Charlotte had originally looked at in *The Golden Bowl*: “I agree with you that the coincidence is extraordinary – the sort of thing that happens mainly in novels and plays” (432). In each case here, we want to suggest that not only do the events not exist – obviously – until they have been narrated, but that they exist only *as* their narration.

Or, to put it another way, what is actually occurring in each of these situations, what we might say the characters suddenly realise, is their fall into the *symbolic order*. But, again, what is at that moment also realised, along the lines of what we have previously suggested, is that they have *always* been in the symbolic order, that what is possible from the beginning only because it stands in for another.

However, let us step back a little at this point and put the question otherwise. We might think another way when these moments in James arise. When is it that his characters suddenly realise that the world is full of meaning and responds to their gaze, whether by directly revealing itself to them or by seeking to hide itself from them? When does nothing the other does escape their notice, either by revealing hidden depths to be seen or by attempting to cover itself over? Again, allow us briefly to recount the three examples spoken of above. In *Wings of the Dove*, Milly has just been introduced to Kate. In *The Ambassadors*, Strether has just realised that Chad and Mme. de Vionnet are having an affair. In *The Golden Bowl*, Maggie has just found out that Charlotte and her husband have resumed their relationship. In each case, to pick up on the suggestion we made above, we would say it occurs when one of the characters is in *love* with another. It is exactly in the circumstances of love that the loved one is unable to be indifferent, either because they actually are not or because their indifference is able to be read as a response to the one who loves them. That is to say, when the lover looks at the loved one they can *always* see a response to them, an acknowledgement of their love. It will appear that the other is aware of them even in their indifference because this indifference can always be understood as an attempt to hide something from their gaze. But then it is possible that the loved one *does* in fact become aware of being looked at. How in that case should they react if they wish to reciprocate their love, if they love the one who loves them? As James' novels teach us, only by *looking back*. So that the loved one is not merely looking back at the lover, even in not looking back, but actively *returning the gaze*. With the result that the gaze is not merely one- but always two-way. And the lover can then in turn acknowledge *this*, see that the loved one is looking back at them. It is perhaps only this situation that we would properly call love. It is all that Robert Pippin means when he describes a certain

exchange of looks in James in his *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*:

In a conversation in a Henry James novel, a character A can see in the face of character B not only that B knows that A has revealed some confidence, but that B knows that A knows that B knows”.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, along the lines of previous critics on James, we would like to connect what we are saying here to Lacan, but not to Lacan’s Seminar VII on ethics but to his Seminar VIII, ostensibly on the subject of transference, but which features a long first section consisting of a detailed reading of Plato’s *Symposium*, entitled ‘The Mainspring of Love’. In a sense, that is, we would want to suggest that there is something of Plato’s *Symposium* about James’ later novels, which as we have observed feature not any actual love but rather a lot of talk about love. (Indeed, at one point in his Seminar, Lacan admits that “it is impossible not to immediately include the term ‘fiction’ in the function of transference”.<sup>11</sup>) Moreover, Lacan describes the setting or scenario of Plato’s original symposium in terms that recall James’ intimate dramas: “It is a ceremony, with rules, a sort of ritual, intimate contest among the elite, or parlour game” (20-1). He even goes on to describe the look and type of its participants in terms that are reminiscent of James: “It is always in sitting rooms, in other words, where people are not especially good-looking, at the homes of duchesses, in the course of the evening, that the most refined things are said” (41). But, beyond this, we might say that James operates, much like Socrates before him, as something of an *analyst* of love, which subject, as Lacan makes clear, lies “at the beginning of analytic practice” (4). It is an analysis, however, that does not offer any final truth of the phenomenon – or even definitively stands outside of the effects of love – but functions more as a momentary stopping point in the endless self-referral of the signifier, or as we might put it the endless exchange of looks between the two parties in the love relationship. As Lacan says in Seminar VIII, with “signifier” here standing in for those looks: “The existence of an unconscious signifying chain stems from the sole position of the term ‘subject’ qua determined as a subject by the fact that he props up the signifier” (169). But, then, as Lacan goes on to make clear, if in one way it is the “subject” that plays the role of the stopping point of the “infinite sliding” of the signifier – and thus occupies the place of the analyst – it is

also true that *anything* can play the role of this stopping point: “a circumstantial element, an aspect of activity, an element of the beyond or of the endpoint” (169). In a sense, that is, as we have seen, *anything* can function as that occasion around which a new hypothesis arises, as that for which all signifiers stand in or the secret explanation behind things. And furthermore, as Lacan goes on to make clear, this stopping point is only temporary. The unwinding of the signifying chain is no sooner stopped than it starts up again, or even we might say this stopping *is* to start up again. This is why, once more, the analyst represents no final truth of the signifier, but is merely the attempt to “grasp the moment at which a shift or reversal [in the effects of language on the subject] occurs” (34).

We might perhaps start again. Lacan in his reading of Plato’s *Symposium* makes a surprising point about love. Indeed, it is one he repeats many times throughout his Seminar. It is that love, in his words, comes “in the beginning” (4). Or, as he puts it a little later, it is a form of “creationism” (5). Or, as he adds almost immediately, it arises “ex nihilo” (5). By this he means that love does not come about as any gradual accumulation or building up of feeling, but as a sudden jump or change of state. It is not any kind of deduction or conclusion logically arrived at, but more a radical and unverifiable hypothesis that changes everything, and that once proposed cannot be denied. This is why, along with the idea of love arising “ex nihilo, it is always a matter of love existing in a “second power” (12). And this is why Lacan can speak of the “miracle” of love consisting in the fact that, “insofar as [the lover’s] hand extends”, a “hand [the beloved’s] appears on the other side” (52). That is to say, once the hypothesis of love has been made, the other *cannot but* be seen putting out their hand, which is also to say that in retrospect the lover is not seen putting out their hand *after* until the other responds. In a surprising sense, that is, love – authentic love – is never unreciprocated. Love is, as Lacan puts it, the “metaphor” or substitution of the lover (*erastés*) for the loved one (*erómenos*) (40). It is exactly as we see in James, in which anything the loved one does is able to be seen as evidence that they are responding to the lover. And this is why again for Lacan *anything* is able to become that turning point around which the hypothesis of love occurs. However, importantly, as he goes on to argue,

despite all of this love is a matter not of two becoming one, but rather of one becoming two.<sup>12</sup> By this Lacan means that, if the lover is able to project onto the loved one so that anything they do can be understood as a response to or reflection of their gaze upon them, in another way the loved one being looked at is able to take *this* into account and as it were return the gaze, so that anything the lover does can be seen to be a reflection of *them*. But, of course, the lover can then in turn take *this* into account, and so on. The real point is that the apparent indifference of the world and of the lovers within it is permanently split by the hypothesis of some secret explanation behind it, which belongs finally to no one and can never definitively be taken into account.

It is this that Pippin means by that cascading series of glances between A and B in his description, and why for him they are not reciprocal, with one reflecting the other, but instead each *doubles* the other, operates as its hidden explanation. In other words, that series of looks is not merely successive or progressive, with one following the other, but rather regressive or retrospective, with each casting itself as the cause or explanation of the one before. As Pippin writes in *After the Beautiful*:

He [the character in a fiction] does not see some evidence, on the basis of which he makes an inference... Whatever this form of intelligibility is, it is not inferential, is in some literal sense 'seen'.<sup>13</sup>

And it is for this reason that we say that it is not a matter of action in James, of any particular party acting on the basis of what they see. This is because by the time they see the other it is already too late. For it is possible that the other has already seen *them*, and they have not yet acted. In James, the time for action has already long passed, and all the various parties can do is plot behind their gaze while appearing not to. And again it is for this reason that for Lacan love is always a matter of two. The loved one is not simply a reflection of the lover, which is of course Imaginary. The one being looked at, if able to be read by the other as a reflection of their gaze, is also able to take this gaze into account. Their indifference, which can always be understood as put on for the other's gaze, and thus revealing itself to it, can also truly hide something on the part of the loved one. That is, they are not merely looked at by the lover but return their gaze, while appearing to be unaware of being

looked at. In other words, the loved one is not merely in an Imaginary relationship with the lover, but also stands outside of it, looking on at it from somewhere else, as the lover also attempts to do. And this of course would be love as a matter not of one but of two, taking place not in the Imaginary but in the Symbolic. And then, of course – and it is this we see in James – the *lover* can see that the loved one is looking back, not actually unaware but pretending to be unaware. It is this that opens up the possibility not only that the loved one is looking back but they have already looked back, that the lover's looking on at them is an effect of their looking at the lover, that the apparent power the lover has over the loved one is possible only *to the extent* that the loved one has power over the lover. And it is perhaps this final step that is love in the Real, which is each party attempting to step out of the Imaginary relationship between them and adopt a Symbolic distance, but then realising that this distance is itself already taken account of, and moreover arises as a result of being taken account of, by the other.

It is all of this that Lacan means when he speaks of the way that in love A becomes a, that the ultimate aim of love is to make the Big Other into a partial object: "The most shocking secret is unveiled before everyone; the ultimate mainspring of desire, which in love relations must always be more or less dissimulated, is revealed – its aim is the fall of the Other, A, into the other, a" (176). It is exactly that idea we spoke of before that each attempt to stand outside of the exchange of looks between the lover and the loved one, to be that A or Big Other that serves as its final explanation, is shown to be merely a momentary step within a larger game, that is, a small a or partial object, insofar as it needs be explained by another. It is not that there is no Big A, but that each successive big A is revealed to be merely a small a, not a unified subject but merely what stands in for the subject. And here again the simultaneity of the stopping and sliding of that chain of looks or signifiers that Lacan speaks of: "It is precisely inasmuch as something presents itself as enhancing this infinite sliding...that it takes on the value of a privileged object that puts a stop to the infinite sliding" (170). And it is perhaps in this way too that we might understand Lacan when he speaks of the way that, although love is never unreciprocated, and that "insofar as the lover's hand extends" a "hand appears on the other side", nevertheless the lover both gives to the

loved one “what they do not have” and the loved one reveals a “lack in the lover” (34, 121). The lover is able to give the loved one what they do not have insofar as they do not know how the loved one will respond in advance. It is not anything particular that the loved one need do to indicate that they are responding to the lover, but anything at all. It is in this sense that the lover gives them what they do not have because they do not have to know in advance the meaning of what they are doing. They appear to express – in an unconscious brought about by the lover’s transference on to them – what they did not know they knew. Equally, however, when the loved one looks back to return the lover’s gaze, the lover in a matching counter-transference is forced to admit that they do not know everything about the loved one, that there is something that the loved one is truly hiding from them and that they cannot guess. The lover realises that the very effect of being able to give the loved one what they do not have is that the loved one is able to reveal a certain lack in them.

It is all of this that we see in the famous scene at the end of *Wings of the Dove*, which is discussed by Žižek in his ‘Kate’s Choice’ and many others and is undoubtedly one of the great scenes of “love” in James and all of literature. To briefly recount the circumstances: Milly upon her death bequests money to Densher, notice of which arrives by lawyer’s letter to him while he is staying in London after Milly’s death, where he occasionally sees Kate, who is travelling throughout Europe. Of course, in this gesture it can be understood that Milly realised the real intention behind Densher’s desire to marry her while she was ill, which is that after her death he would inherit her money and he and Kate would then be free to marry unimpeded by the only thing stopping them, which is their lack of money. It is, of course, as though all along Milly knew of Densher’s and Kate’s intentions. That behind her apparent ignorance or naiveté she already knew everything. And it is undoubtedly supremely disillusioning for both Densher and Kate that their gaze upon Milly has been returned in this way. And that Milly wreaks her revenge – the only one possible within the love relationship – not by immediately reacting, protesting against their plans (which could always be understood as a form of love), but by looking back at them. Making clear to them that she realised what they were doing, that she was aware of their look upon her, all along. That in fact her apparent indifference was not revealing but hid

something truly “abysmal” (124). It had always been a secret between Densher and Kate, in a way unspeakable between them – “the need to bury in the dark blindness of each other’s arms the knowledge of each other that they couldn’t undo” – but it was clear that Milly saw it throughout, and her lawyer’s letter to Densher makes it apparent – this again is Lacan’s idea of love raised to the “second power”, that each successive gaze is not merely progressive but regressive, the retrospective explanation of everything that comes before – that it was in fact her idea that he fall in love with her. That Densher and Kate’s marriage was Milly’s idea and not their own.

It is undoubtedly for this reason that Densher, upon receiving the letter from the lawyers and guessing its import, decides not to open it himself but send it on to Kate. It is suddenly difficult for him to accept the money, knowing that Milly knows. He would only be able to do so insofar as he did not know, as though she had died unaware and left him the money. This would be the idea that Milly as the loved one can always be seen to be reflective of Densher as her lover. That is to say, Milly’s apparently free decision to bequeath Densher her money after her death would have been secretly willed by Densher, following thus an implacable fate that he set out for her in advance. Now that this is no longer the case, with Milly looking back at him after her death, it can appear that his plans were an effect of *her*. That his plan to marry Kate with Milly’s money had been her desire from the beginning. Now no matter what he does his actions appear inadequate, not willed by him but needing to be explained for another reason. That is, if he accepts the money, he reveals himself to be calculating, mendacious and hypocritical in merely pretending to want to marry Milly when he wanted her only for her money. And if he does not accept, he is revealed as weak, unable to carry through with his plans and moreover still poor and ineligible. In both cases, he would be the kind of suitor neither Milly nor Kate would want to marry. In response to this dilemma, as we say, he sends the unopened lawyer’s letter to Kate, to ask her – this is his explanation and self-understanding – to make the decision he no longer wants to make nor indeed seems capable of making.

The concluding sequence of the novel begins when Kate enters Densher's room where he waits in a kind of suspense, holding the lawyer's letter, which she then puts on a table between them. If Densher manifests his love for her (as Milly did for Densher) by creating a situation in which anything she does is revealing of her, she is now returning his look. She is not merely looked at by Densher but looks back at him, and Densher can in turn see her looking back at him and she can in turn see that. It is this sequence of looks that Pippin outlines that we would say constitutes love in its proper sense. Kate states the situation in the following terms in the final pages of the novel and then the following conversation ensues:

'How can I touch it [the money] but through you?'

"You can't. Any more", he added, "than I can renounce it except through you".

"Oh, ever so much less! There's nothing", she said, "in my power".

"I'm in your power", Merton Densher returned.

"In what way?"

"In the way I show – and the way I've always shown. When have I shown", he asked with a sudden cold impatience, "anything else? You must surely feel – so that you needn't wish to appear to spare me in it – how you 'have' me".

"It's very good of you, my dear", she nervously laughed, "to put me up so thoroughly to it!"

"I put you up to nothing. I didn't even put you up to the chance that, as I said a few moments ago, I saw for you in forwarding that thing. Your liberty is therefore in every way complete" (454).

To all of this of course Densher has no adequate response. The letter as a partial object *a* is a beautiful example of love, which in Lacan's terms arrives as soon as it is posted. It is not in anything the letter actually says that it (or love) arrives, but as soon as it is posted it arrives because the other can always be seen to be responding to it. Densher sends it to her, she brings it back, he gives it back to her again, and each time the one to whom it is given cannot avoid being seen to be responsible for it.

And so we want to say that Kate and Densher are never more in love than during this sequence in which each looks at each other without doing anything. Without doing anything because, as we suggest, their

silence, their indifference, is everything. Each thought doubles the other, being not merely the effect of what has come before but its retrospective explanation. Each party knows, or thinks they know, exactly what the other is thinking, but they can also think how this might be itself an effect of the apparent indifference of the other. It is an impasse – in Lacan's analogy, a "poker game" (12) – only broken when Kate attempts to dispel the opening gaze of the sequence, which Densher has passed on to her: that of Milly onto Densher. She demands of him: "Your word of honour that you're not in love with her memory". To which Densher responds finally with decisive words of practical action: "'I'll marry you, mind you, in an hour". To which Kate asks: "As we were?" (456-7) And Densher confirms, repeating her words: "As we were". But then famously and still a little enigmatically, their love is over, almost as suddenly as it arose. The break-up is described, following and as though coming out of Densher's words, in the abrupt last lines of the novel, which now itself appears over too soon and requiring further explanation: "But she turned to the door, and her headshake was now the end. 'We shall never be again as we were!'" (457).

Žižek in his reading of the novel indicates that for him the love between Kate and Densher ends earlier in the novel at that moment when Densher sends Kate the letter and asks her for her decision. What he faults Densher for, and what he implies Kate reacts negatively to, is Densher's apparent hypocrisy in seeking to keep his actions from the Big Other. That is, in not accepting the money it would be as though Milly was not aware of his motivation in wanting to marry her, as though he could remain indifferent to her and not be seen by her. It is what Žižek calls the "temptation of the ethical" because it still works within the existing symbolic order and does not attempt to go beyond this order by means of a true ethical act. As he writes in 'Kate's Choice': "Densher wants Kate neither to accept Milly's bequest nor to reject it in a grand symbolic gesture but to join him in his hypocritical attempt to sell the refusal to choose as a choice".<sup>14</sup> But we for our part argue almost the opposite of this. We begin by locating the moment of the couple falling out of love a little later: not at all when Kate walks into Densher's room with the letter, but only when Densher proposes marrying her, as though he could thereby get rid of Milly's memory. And we would say that the

real issue at stake in the sequence is not that Densher *fails* to get rid of the Big Other in wanting to hide something from Milly, but rather that he *succeeds* too well in getting rid of the Big Other by directly declaring his love to Kate. And it is in fact Kate as much as anyone who is surprised by this. It is she, after all, who proposed to Densher that she would love him and allow him to accept the money on the condition that he gave up the memory of Milly, but when Densher attempts to do so – this is our reading of his offer to marry Kate, even though he does not say so explicitly – she no longer loves him. It is to make clear the idea that their love *does* proceed under the gaze of the Big Other, and that it is a matter not of them hiding from the Big Other but becoming themselves at each exchange of the gaze or objet a the Big Other, although this is retrospectively revealed each time as possible only because of another Big Other. Each of them can see everything, even what lies behind the apparent indifference or non-reaction of the other, but only because of a gaze preceding them. It is not that the Big Other is simply fixed and eternal, but rather there is an infinite sliding of Big Others, each falling into a from the position of another A. When Densher offers to marry Kate without Milly looking on, without the covering of the wings of the dove or the gaze of the Big Other, when they are forced to look at and understand each other directly without intermediaries or partial objects, it is all over. To love is to double.

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<sup>1</sup> Seymour Chatman, *The Later Style of Henry James*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1972, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Sigi Jöttkandt, *Acting Beautifully: Henry James and the Ethical Aesthetic*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 2005, p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 2006, p. 132.

<sup>5</sup> We might point here, however, to Erik S Roraback's *The Philosophical Baroque: On Autopoietic Modernities*, Brill, Leiden, 2017, which includes a small chapter on James, 'Folds of an Autoipoietic and Unconscious Monad: Henry James, Benjamin and Blanchot', which does bear some relation to what we are saying here.

<sup>6</sup> Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, Penguin, London, 2001, p. 29. All further references to *The Wings of the Dove* in brackets in main text.

<sup>7</sup> Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, New American Library, New York, 1960, p. 139. All further references to *The Ambassadors* in brackets in main text.

<sup>8</sup> Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, p. 481. All further references to *The Golden Bowl* in main text.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*, University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015, p. 175. All further references to *Transference* in main text.

For a good discussion of love being a matter of two and of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real registers of love, see Bruce Fink, *Lacan on Love: An Exploration of Lacan's Seminar VII*, Transference, Polity Press, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> *After the Beautiful*, p. 50. Pippin is in fact speaking of Proust's Swann in this passage, but goes on immediately to make the connection with James.

<sup>14</sup> 'Kate's Choice', p. 137.