

## Henry James's *The Ambassadors*: A Drama of Confrontation<sup>(1)</sup>

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*The Ambassadors* abounds in imagery of war. The characters talk about "enem[ies]," "missile[s]," and "kill[ing]" each other. Sometimes an expression is so shockingly aggressive that the image it produces rises above the actual action of the plot, which stays within the commonly known range of the novel of manners. These recurrent images of violence when assembled form a process of a metaphorical war fought between the Americans and the Europeans. It is a metaphorical war in that whatever hostilities exist between the opposing sides they never yield physical violence; violence remains strictly a verbal matter<sup>(2)</sup>. This is a fight over Chad; both sides lay claim to him, but since the choice between America and Europe is his own, they must each try to capture him by offering better conditions than the other<sup>(3)</sup>.

In this essay I will analyze this war process which is at the same time the process of Strether's conversion. For, Strether is sent out to Europe as an American ambassador to present Chad with American values and conditions, but he gradually comes to side with Europe and to persuade him to stay there, finally acting entirely against the interests of America. To one interested in the origin of James's international theme the feeling that Americans and Europeans entertain toward one another is of extreme importance. *The Ambassadors* is unique because it presents it as manifestly hostile. During the three months that Chad takes to make his choice those on the European side try to persuade him to stay with them and those on the American side try to make him return home. They fight a war over Chad and also over the right to be acknowledged as provider of superior culture.

By Americans I mean the following people: Mrs. Newsome, Waymarsh, Sarah Pocock, Jim Pocock, Mamie Pocock, and Strether. On the European side are: Madame de Vionnet, Jeanne de Vionnet, Miss Gostrey, Miss Barrace, Little Bilham, and Chad. Europeanized Americans are considered Europeans because they have made their choice to live as Europeans. On each side Chad and Strether are deviations. Chad is a deviation because he keeps his position ambiguous throughout the process; Strether is another because he shifts from American to European side in the course of the war, as will be observed later.

When Strether arrives in England, he finds his "comrade (26)" Waymarsh already fighting against Europe, alone. While taking a walk in Chester with Maria Gostrey, Strether notices Waymarsh silently "fixing hard some object of minor interest, ... as if he were indulging it with a truce (26)." Waymarsh has been vacationing in Europe for three months and has found out that "he can't stand it (29)" and that Europe is his "enemy (28)." Strether on the other hand has just arrived in Europe and feels a pang of conscience as he compares himself to his friend, because Strether enjoys Europe. Then Waymarsh suddenly runs off across the street to a jeweller, an act which Strether observes "ha[s] somehow the note of a demonstration<sup>(4)</sup> (29)." Waymarsh in his attempt not to be outdone by the allures of Europe, does a demonstration by showing his power, a power to consume Europe.

Despite the extent of attraction Strether feels towards Europe, on his third day in Paris his loyalty is still with America. After the morning walk to the Luxembourg Gardens and further on

to the Latin Quarter, he feels that "his campaign ha[s] begun (66)." He proceeds to Chad's apartment on the Boulevard Malesherbes to take him by surprise and to carry on his job of presenting Chad with the conditions offered by Mrs. Newsome. Strether looks up at Chad's balcony and is struck by the house's "quality (68)." He feels as if he has been "challenge[d] (69)" by Chad and Europe; by Chad's display of a quality unseen while in America, and by Europe's endowment of that quality to him. That evening Strether confesses to Waymarsh that he has been "captured (71)" after talking to Little Bilham who was at the apartment in Chad's absence. Strether says "captured" meaning charmed, but it is possible to interpret it more narrowly as meaning "taken captive." Europe has taken hold of him now, and he will be used to enhance the interests of Europe; that is to persuade Chad to stay there and to convince Woollett of European values.

Hearing Bilham and Miss Barrace talk about Chad before Chad's entrance into the novel arouses Strether's curiosity. Strether tells Gostrey that when he meets Chad he wants her with him: "I want you the more therefore, you see, for my bluff (85)." This is one of the signs that his courage is failing him. His will to stay strong and to assert himself as an American is faltering. Soon after, he is driven to an "impulse to burn his ships (93)." Images which call up naval battle recur throughout the novel; in this instance Strether is feeling so uncertain about where his ships are "float[ing] (94)" that he wants to burn them and give up this battle. But he soon admits that he is "quite already in Chad's hands (94)," even before meeting him.

Meeting Chad who has transformed into a gentleman of sophisticated European manners makes Strether even more anxious. He decides to confront Chad with his business as soon as possible, before Chad has a chance to overpower him with the charm of Europe: "For what had above all been determined in him was not to lose another hour, nor a fraction of one; was to advance, to overwhelm, with a rush. This was how he would anticipate — by a night-attack, as might be — any forced maturity that a crammed consciousness of Paris was likely to take upon itself to assert on the boy (101)." Thus the long scene of negotiation takes place in which Strether communicates to Chad the conditions offered by Mrs. Newsome. Chad's reaction is not outright disobedience; instead, he brandishes a very European weapon called experience: "[E]xperience was what Chad did play on him, if he didn't play any grossness of defiance (109)." Chad's purpose here is to show off to Strether what refinement of manners and appearance he has achieved in Europe, and in his next move Chad shows off himself: "Chad raised his face to the lamp, and it was one of the moments at which he had, in his extraordinary way, most his air of designedly showing himself (110)." Strether calls this act "a kind of demonstration (110)." The negotiation continues for the next ten days during which time Strether provides Chad with ample information, including "facts and figures (116)," as to what he might gain if he inherited the Newsome business. The fact that Chad takes these talks seriously and "ask[s] the most intelligent questions, probe[s], at moments, abruptly, even deeper than his friend's layer of information (116)" is a sign that Chad is talented for business and that he might eventually choose America where he can practice that talent.

Strether soon becomes aware that he has gained some "tact (124)" even within the few days that he has spent in Paris. An aspect of this perhaps emerges when in "the grand style of fighting (115)" he succeeds in "carrying the war into the enemy's country by showing surprise at the enemy's ignorance (115)." That is, he talks to Chad of his "alliance (115)" with Gostrey as a matter of course considering her fame, and he feigns wonder at Chad's not knowing her.

Strether's befriending Gostrey is a factor which would work against him if Mrs. Newsome learned of it, therefore he is here trying to prevent Chad from communicating it to her. Strether's use of the word "alliance" is again curious; he is speaking in terms of "the war" where Gostrey is his ally. And fighting on Chad's side is Bilham; he is "the only close personal alliance [Strether's] observation ha[s] as yet detected in Chad's existence (124)."

The above structure of human relations changes when Marie and Jeanne de Vionnet enter the picture. It is around this time that Strether's observation becomes keener and imagination richer. For example, he leaves the possibilities open as to the Vionnets' age, name, and nationality, and also as to whether it is the mother or the daughter who is in the "virtuous attachment (128)" with Chad. In the conversation between Strether and Gostrey at the end of Book 4, he surpasses her both in knowledge and imagination because it is he who informs her of the Vionnets, and he who declares that it can be either the mother or the daughter that is the focus of Chad's attachment, whereas Gostrey limits the possibility to the daughter, considering Chad's age. It is also by Madame de Vionnet's entrance onto the scene that Strether's loyalty to Mrs. Newsome is fatally placed in danger. Overwhelmed by Madame de Vionnet's abilities proven by Chad's transformation he demands Chad: "Have I your word of honour that if I surrender myself to Madame de Vionnet you'll surrender yourself to me? (167)" It is not long before Strether literally surrenders to the interests of Madame de Vionnet, to the forces that aim to keep Chad in Europe.

Strether's first negotiation with Madame de Vionnet takes place at the outset of Book 6, when Chad leaves the two of them alone in her salon. It opens in a hostile manner:

'I don't think you seriously believe in what you're doing,' she said; 'but all the same, you know, I'm going to treat you quite as if I did.'

'By which you mean,' Strether directly replied, 'quite as if you didn't! I assure you it won't make the least difference with me how you treat me.'

'Well,' she said, taking that menace bravely and philosophically enough, 'the only thing that really matters is that you shall get on with me.'

'Ah but I don't!' he immediately returned. (174)

Madame de Vionnet provokes Strether by making light of what he "[is] doing" on the American side, and invites him to join the European side<sup>6)</sup>. Strether at first refuses to give in, but before long he is forced to accept her terms: "It had been all very well to think at moments that he was holding her nose down and that he had coerced her; what had he by this time done but let her practically see that he accepted their relation? (177-8)" And their relation will be "whatever she might choose to make it (178)," placing Strether under her subjection. The meeting closes with Strether's promise: "I'll save you if I can (180)."

Madame de Vionnet continues to press him for his help and final surrender. She demands that he recognize the value of what Europe can offer Chad, and the role she has played in transforming him: "Admit then that that's something (195)." The surrender takes place as a result of the "accident (213)" which, as Strether recapitulates, has occurred at Chad's dinner party when Madame de Vionnet said "Thank you! (213)" to Strether for his concern. Strether decides that there is nothing else for him to do but give in: "If all the accidents were to fight on her side... he could only give himself up (214)." In return for the surrender he is granted the

pleasure of her company: "To this tune and nothing less, accordingly, was his surrender made good (214)." Madame de Vionnet asks that Strether act as a mediator and make Mrs. Newsome soften her attitude: "[L]et her trust me a little. That's all I ask. Let her recognize in spite of everything what I've done (218)." Strether sets forth that she should let Chad go over to America and let him refuse whatever plan of marriage his mother has prepared for him:

'The point is that it's for Chad to make of it what he can. His being proof against marriage will show what he does make.'

'If he is proof, yes' — she accepted the proposition. 'But for myself,' she added, 'the question is what you make.'

'Ah I make nothing. It's not my affair.'

'I beg you pardon. It's just there that, since you've taken it up and are committed to it, it most intensely becomes yours. ...' (219)

Madame de Vionnet insists on making it Strether's affair, not Chad's, and argues that it is up to him to solve the situation. Her plea for help is a mark of her fear that Chad is beginning to be inclined towards the material values of America.

Her fear is proved correct when Chad comes to Strether with his assent to go back to America. Chad presents himself as a refreshed person: "[I]t was as if now, for his definite surrender, he had gathered himself vividly together (223)." Chad who had immersed himself in the pleasures of Europe is now ready to surrender to the material opportunities of America which Strether explained to him in detail more than a month before. Strether confides to Chad of the "ultimatum (225)" that he has recently received from Mrs. Newsome, in which she declares that if Strether cannot bring Chad home he should come back to America, and she will send a second wave of ambassadors, the Pococks. Strether now encourages Chad to stay in Europe, and "the change of position (229)" is complete. The message that Strether cables to Mrs. Newsome consists of the words: "Judge best to take another month, but with full appreciation of all reinforcements (237)." Strether calls the Pococks "reenforcements," but when they come they will not be fighting for him but against him. After he has failed to comply with Mrs. Newsome's ultimatum all communication between them ceases. He calls this her "demonstration (238)," the execution of her power to punish him by way of silence. With this silence the presence of Mrs. Newsome in his mind gains all the "greater intensity (238)." In the conversation between Strether and Gostrey at the close of Book 7 as they anticipate the arrival of the Pococks and the impending battle, Gostrey says that if he returns wounded she will help him heal the wound:

'Yes — then I might patch you up.'

'Oh for my real smash, if it takes place, there will be no patching.'

'But you surely don't mean it will kill you.' (240)

This exchange sounds as if taking place between a man who is going off into battle and a woman sending him off and encouraging him. Knowing how aggressive Sarah Pocock can be, Strether feels that his chances against her will be remote: "[H]e had not at present the smallest ground (242)."

By this time a tacit understanding has evolved between Strether and Waymarsh that they

will go separate ways. Strether tries to get Waymarsh to confess to his “intervention (243),” the fact of his having written to Mrs. Newsome about Strether’s disloyal behaviour, but fails. Waymarsh, however, does not hide his “impulse of triumph (243)” as he learns that the Pockocks are on their way to fight on his side. Strether tells Chad that Waymarsh and Sarah will undoubtedly get on well: “[There is] no doubt of the alliance (248).” Since Waymarsh stands for the same values as Mrs. Newsome, Sarah will invite him to fight on her side: “Mrs. Pocock will take him into her boat. For it’s your mother’s own boat that she’s pulling (249).” It will be Sarah’s boat against Madame de Vionnet’s, and Chad reports on Madame de Vionnet’s state of mind as she faces the approach of her enemy: “She’s under arms, ... she’s prepared (251).” Whatever scenes of hostility await between herself and Sarah, she is prepared to fight.

Surprisingly, what happens to Strether as he receives the Pockocks at the station is “an instant renewal of his loyalty (256)” to Mrs. Newsome. He remembers the values represented by her, those of hard work, honesty, and morality. With mixed feelings he asks Jim Pocock how Mrs. Newsome is taking her first ambassador’s betrayal, and Jim answers: “[S]he’s prostrate — just as Sally is. But they’re never so lively, you know, as when they’re prostrate (267).” Jim’s answer is a testimony to the present state of Woollett; Mrs. Newsome has been disadvantaged by Strether’s betrayal, but she is stronger all the more because of it.

The battle between Sarah and Madame de Vionnet takes place as early as the next day. When Strether visits Sarah’s salon he finds Madame de Vionnet already there: “Madame de Vionnet was already on the field ... (267).” Waymarsh is there, too, as Sarah’s “reserve (268),” silently imposing pressure on Madame de Vionnet. The battle opens as thus, after Madame de Vionnet asks Sarah if there is anything she can do for her:

‘Oh you’re too good; but I don’t think I feel quite helpless. I have my brother — and these American friends. And then you know I have been to Paris, I *know* Paris,’ said Sally Pocock in a tone that breathed a certain chill on Strether’s heart.

‘Ah but a woman, in this tiresome place where everything’s always changing, a woman of good will,’ Madame de Vionnet threw off, ‘can always help a woman. I’m sure you “know”— but we know perhaps different things.’ She too, visibly, wished to make no mistake. (269)

One notes that Sarah’s mode of speaking is very aggressive. She makes sure that she does not betray any weaknesses to the enemy, especially the weaknesses that come from the fact that she is in Paris, her enemy’s territory. She tries not to let Madame de Vionnet believe that she lacks any knowledge about the place. Madame de Vionnet’s manner is no less competitive; she insists on being second to none in her knowledge of Paris. Madame de Vionnet’s next move is to make it clear that Chad belongs to Europe: “Your brother ... has become one of us in a marvellous way (270).” Strether feels the “bravery (270)” of this act, to dare to oppose Sarah so manifestly. Madame de Vionnet now pronounces Strether to be on her side, too: “It’s he, I gather, who has learned to know his Paris, and to love it, better than any one ever before in so short a time (271).” What Madame de Vionnet has done here is that she has “publicly [drawn] him into her boat<sup>(6)</sup> (270)” by stating in front of the Americans that his love is for Paris, and his sympathy for the cause of Madame de Vionnet. Sarah’s comment on this matter is one of feigned indifference: “[T]he privilege of his society isn’t a thing I shall quarrel about with any one (274).” Sarah has

apparently given up on Strether and says that his inclination is not what is at issue. But she does fight to win Chad back and to assert the values of Woollett: "I've never wanted for opportunities to see my brother. We've many things to think of at home, and great responsibilities and occupations, and our home's not an impossible place (272)." Sarah maintains that she has never needed Madame de Vionnet's help in seeing Chad; if she has not seen him for the past five and a half years it is because business has kept her busy.

The following comment by Madame de Vionnet, although superficially polite, shows that Chad is indeed what they will be fighting for: "That the Boulevard Maiesherbes may be common ground for us offers me the best prospect I see for the pleasure of meeting you again (273)." Madame de Vionnet says that Chad's apartment on the Boulevard Maiesherbes will be their "common ground." They will both be visiting there because winning Chad's favour is their common aim, and his apartment will be their fighting ground.

Madame de Vionnet eventually applies another strategy for severing Strether from the Americans, when she reveals his intimacy with Maria Gostrey. Waymarsh points out the injustice of this remark:

'I've seen her quite a number of times, and I was practically present when they made acquaintance. I've kept my eye on her right along, but I don't know as there's any real harm in her.'

"'Harm'?" Madame de Vionnet quickly echoed. 'Why she's the dearest and cleverest of all the clever and dear.' (276)

Here Madame de Vionnet takes advantages of the irony that Gostrey is harmful all the more if she is clever and dear, because Strether allegedly has chosen her over Mrs. Newsome. Madame de Vionnet in order to show the Americans the closeness of herself to Strether even induces him to play the following "performance." She asks him to come visit her on Tuesday and he plays along:

'Tuesday then with pleasure.'

'And at half-past five — or at six?'

It was ridiculous, but Mrs. Pocock and Waymarsh struck him as fairly waiting for his answer. It was indeed as if they were arranged, gathered for a performance, the performance of 'Europe' by his confederate and himself. Well, the performance could only go on. 'Say five forty-five.' (278-9)

This bit of "play-acting" is indeed more important in its effect than content; all the individuals present know that what is at issue is not the content of Strether's answer but his assent to participate in this performance of "Europe." Therefore in this scene of confrontation which covers the whole of Section 3, Book 8, Madame de Vionnet has publicly secured Strether's position as her ally.

It is possible to see the marriage of Jeanne to a Monsieur de Montbron, which Madame de Vionnet has asked Chad to arrange, as another of her strategy. It serves to show the Americans that Chad is on her side, performing the very European act of arranging a marriage. Strether's reaction on hearing this news is one of pity to Jeanne for being used as a "move" in her mother's

tactics: "It affected him on the spot as a move in a game (295)." He again feels uncertain whether he really sympathizes with the ways of Europe: "He had struck himself at the hotel, before Sarah and Waymarsh, as being in her boat, but where on earth was he now? (297)" He feels hesitant about an alliance with a woman who marries her daughter without consulting Jeanne's feelings. Jeanne is also employed by her mother to compete against Mamie Pocock in a rivalry between the French *jeune fille* and the American Girl. Concerning this matter Madame de Vionnet tells Strether: "I do want my child ... to do what she can for me (293)."

Meanwhile, the Americans spend their days seeing the sights of Paris. Sarah and Waymarsh order "a hundred francs' worth of food and drink" which they "scarcely touch (302)." They go around at once consuming and resisting the various pleasures of Paris. Tony Tanner has argued that Sarah and Waymarsh consume Europe so as to secure an advantage over the Europeans: "[T]hey are enthusiastic purchasers (to buy something is to show your power over the seller; thus to reduce Europe to a shop is to treat it like a contemptuous patron) (116)." Strether observes the present situation as at "an equilibrium (299)." He wishes: "If the equilibrium might only prevail! (299)" but he also knows that sooner or later the situation must get hot again. He tells Gostrey: "I doubt ... if Sarah has at all directly attacked him [Chad]. ... I shall be used for it ... [t]o the last drop of my blood (305)." Sarah has not taken action yet as regards confronting Chad. Strether knows that Chad will use him as an agent to be "attacked" by Sarah; using people is Chad's strong point.

Silence is Sarah's effective strategy against Strether: "[H]e had now more than ever the sense of her success in leaving him a prey to anxiety. It wasn't to be denied that she had had a happy instinct, from the point of view of Woollett, in placing him thus at the mercy of her own initiative (307-8)." Sarah refuses to disclose her thoughts on the change in Chad, on Madame de Vionnet, what message she has been exchanging with Mrs. Newsome, or what she plans to do with Strether. All the while she leaves Strether in suspense she faces her own ordeal in dealing with the pleasures of Europe. Chad has arranged it so that her stay in Paris is full of "amusement (319)." Strether notices her "privately stiffening a little each time she missed the chance of marking the great nuance (319)." By the "great nuance" he presumably means the reassertion of American values which must be proclaimed when they are placed in danger of being enclosed by European forms of entertainment. Sarah, too, is under Mrs. Newsome's pressure. The pinnacle of Chad's programme of entertainment is when he hosts a grand dinner party for Sarah, inviting all the friends he has made in Paris. Strether observes the effect of the wonderful music on Sarah as "actually so sharp as to be almost painful (320)" so that it is a kind of torture. Bilham judges from her face that Sarah admires the music and wants to hold such a party in Woollett — to show that she is just as qualified in doing so as an European. Bilham also judges that Sarah "has made up her mind (321)" to take action. The climax of the war approaches.

During the party Strether also talks to Barrace about how the arrangement of this party serves as a weapon against Sarah, because Chad has invited so many people that his sister cannot move. Barrace says: "She's bricked up, she's buried alive! (330)" to which Strether argues: "Oh but she's not dead! It will take more than this to kill her (330)." Strether declares that Sarah is buried "only up to her chin" so that "[s]he can breathe (330)," and her "respiration (330)" is enough to torture him. Therefore this party scene, although dominated by festivity and good will on the outside, is also an important part of this war process, where rivalries and tactics abound.

Strether's negotiation with Sarah, which marks the final stage of the war, takes place in his

hotel room. He immediately notes Sarah's aggressive manner:

Her calculation was sharp in the immobility with which she held her tall parasol-stick upright and at arm's length, quite as if she had struck the place to plant her flag; in the separate precautions she took not to show as nervous; in the aggressive repose in which she did quite nothing but wait for him. Doubt ceased to be possible from the moment he had taken in that she had arrived with no proposal whatever; that her concern was simply to show what she had come to receive. She had come to receive his submission, and Waymarsh was to have made it plain to him that she would expect nothing less. (345)

The flag that she holds up is that of America and Woollett, and she has come to accept nothing but an unconditional surrender from him. "The form of his submission was to be an engagement to acquit himself within the twenty-four hours (346)." Again, Sarah's demand concerns Chad, and Strether's "acquitting himself" takes the form of telling Chad to go back to America. The greatest difference that the two ever fail to resolve is their variant interpretations of Chad's change. Recognition of Chad's change as valuable yields recognition of Madame de Vionnet and moreover of Europe, and Strether asks that Sarah do so, which will open the way to a compromise. Therefore her outright refusal of these terms is as effective a weapon as a "missile":

Everything Mrs. Pocock had failed to give a sign of recognising in Chad as a particular part of a transformation — everything that had lent intention to this particular failure — affected him as gathered into a large loose bundle and thrown, in her words, into his face. The missile made him to that extent catch his breath .... (348)

The split is finalized in the following exchange:

'You don't, on your honour, appreciate Chad's fortunate development?'

'Fortunate?' she echoed again. And indeed she was prepared. 'I call it hideous.' (351

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Strether asks that Sarah acknowledge Chad's change as "fortunate," but the adjective Sarah attributes to it is "hideous." If Sarah has no intention of softening her manner then mutual understanding is impossible. Strether's grief is great as he realizes that his efforts to bring about that understanding have ended in failure. "Ambassadors exist so that they might make compromises<sup>(7)</sup>," thus Strether suffers from a sense of failure in carrying out his duty. As he watches Sarah go he feels as if he has been pierced through by an arrow: "[T]he manner of her break, the sharp shaft of her rejoinder, had an intensity by which Strether was at first kept in arrest. She had let fly at him as from a stretched cord, and it took him a minute to recover from the sense of being pierced (352)." Strether is visited by a "sense of being pierced." It has been a sensorial war and what Strether has been getting all along is a sense of being in a war. That all comes from being placed in the middle of the great rivalry and hostility.

A time of relaxation comes to Strether after the "retreat of the Pockocks (382)" to Switzerland. It is during this time that Strether goes to the countryside to enjoy the



Lambinet-like landscape: "It most of all came home to him, as he lay on his back on the grass, that Sarah had really gone, that his tension was really relaxed; the peace diffused in these ideas might be delusive, but it hung about him none the less for the time (383)." Strether immerses himself in peace, although he knows that this peace is "delusive" and only temporary. The process of confrontation is over and the result of the war is soon to be made known when Chad decides whether to stay in Europe or to go back to America. As I have argued, this particular confrontation has been over Chad, therefore the result depends on his decision. Both sides claim him and each has tried to win him by parading the charms and values that each has to offer. Each side refuses to acknowledge the value of the other and each asserts itself to be superior; may the one to be chosen by Chad prevail. And it is implied that Chad will choose America, the land of business opportunities. Chad speaks of the "art of advertisement (430)" by which he will be able to make Woollett flourish. Although Chad denies that he will leave Madame de Vionnet for "the money in it (432)," Strether is certain that he will.

However, even if this particular confrontation ends in America's triumph the general tension between American and Europe continues because there are many other wars being fought over many other Chads. The story recounted in *The Ambassadors* is only one version of the many wars being fought around this time in various places of Europe and America. The tension must continue because each is so unyielding towards the other, exemplified by Sarah's rigid behaviour. In this sense the ending of *The Ambassadors* is extremely pessimistic. In the final scene Gostrey asks Strether if he will be able to amend his relation with Mrs. Newsome, and Strether's answer is a firm negative: "There's nothing any one can do. It's over. Over for both of us (436)." Strether's words when applied to the more general frame of America-Europe relationship state that mutual understanding is impossible at least for the time being and that the tension must remain, causing more wars.

Even Chad's decision does not make it a one-sided American victory. Sarah and Waymarsh do in a way feel attracted to Europe, for example to its sophisticated forms of entertainment, art, and scenery. Strether notices after some time that Waymarsh has lost his "sacred rage." R. W. Stallman defines the "sacred rage" as an "obsession ... to look at the hour without enjoying its values, without experiencing time in its point-present nowness (43)." Strether analyzes Waymarsh's dilemma that he now "enjoys" Europe: "Waymarsh was having a good time — this was the truth that was embarrassing for him, and he was having it then and there, he was having it in Europe, he was having it under the very protection of circumstances of which he didn't in the least approve (340)." However, since he and Sarah can neither admit to nor justify their enjoyment of and attraction towards Europe they can only deal with them by consuming them. Also, there are Americans like Strether whose sympathy ever floats towards Europe, and Americans like Gostrey, Bilham, and Barrace who have abandoned their country to live as Europeans. Remembering these facts, it can be realized that it is less important to consider who wins each war, but much more so to find out what causes the wars collectively, forming the background to international novels such as *The Ambassadors*.

I have looked at the plot of *The Ambassadors* as a process of war, paying attention to the war terms. Such terms are indeed many; to list a few that have been quoted: enemy, truce, demonstration, campaign, capture, ships/boat, alliance, surrender, reinforcements, ground/field, ultimatum. It is not difficult to notice these war metaphors, nor is it very original to use them when writing about two groups of people who are opposed to each other. War metaphors are

common in everyday language, such as when one speaks of “fighting a bitter campaign against crime.” However, when such terms are so consistently used as in *The Ambassadors* the use is intentional. Strether says “campaign” when he could have said “job” and “alliance” when he could have said “friendship.” They are used to bring out a sense of war, to emphasize the gap between the values that the Americans and the Europeans fight for.

## Notes

- (1) This essay is a revised version of a part of my MA thesis, submitted to the University of Tokyo in December 1999.
- (2) Michael Levenson points out the absence of the body in *The Ambassadors* and argues that the characters instead rely heavily on the use of metaphors to transact their experience. See *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, pp. 14–21. Ian Watt in “The First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors*” analyzes the stylistic features of the incipit to conclude that James’s frequent use of abstract nouns as subjects serves to keep the narrative within the mental and distanced from the physical.
- (3) Tony Tanner has pointed out the abundance of violent imagery in *The Ambassadors* but he does not interpret it as occurring in a war between the Americans and the Europeans. See “The Watcher from the Balcony: Henry James’s *The Ambassadors*,” pp. 109–10.
- (4) The *OED* shows the definition of the word “demonstration” when used as a military term to be: “A show of military force or of offensive movement, esp. in the course of active hostilities to engage the enemy’s attention while other operations are going on elsewhere, or in time of peace to indicate readiness for active hostilities.”
- (5) Ronald Wallace reads *The Ambassadors* as a comedy of manners and he interprets this particular scene as one in which Strether assumes a parody of the ambassadorial role to negotiate a peace. My interpretation, rather, is that this is not a parody of war but metaphor of war. See “The Major Phase: *The Ambassadors*,” pp. 100–101.
- (6) William Gibson also links the boat image to Strether’s movement from America to Europe, but he does not treat it as part of the overall war imagery. See “Metaphors in the Plot of *The Ambassadors*,” pp. 295–6.
- (7) Seidel, pp. 133–4.

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