Suspended Affect in Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl*

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Abstract

The last major work of fiction completed in Henry James’ career as an author, *The Golden Bowl* sits apart in the context of his oeuvre. In the novel, narrated action has migrated away from the description of exterior events toward a style of indirection, implication, and a focus on the inner workings of its characters. The essay argues that *The Golden Bowl* stages a suspended affect that denies narrative closure in a strategy on James’s part to emphasize the versatility of the novel form. By contextualizing this phenomenon alongside contemporaneous and more modern theories of emotion, the essay contends that the suspended affect staged in the novel results from negative emotions owing to ambiguous social relationships as well as characters’ difficulties in translating and verbalizing embodied emotions that are ultimately irretrievable.

**Keywords:** Henry James, suspended affect, embodied emotion, negative emotion
Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl* (1904) opens with Prince Amerigo reflecting on a conversation he has had with Maggie Verver, daughter of the immensely wealthy Adam Verver, and his wife-to-be. Having admitted his identity as owing much to history, Amerigo recalls telling Maggie that “there’s another part, very much smaller doubtless, which [...] represents my single self, the unknown, unimportant—unimportant save to you—personal quality. About this you’ve found out nothing” (2009, 31). Maggie faces the gloomy pronouncement with gusto, ensuring the Prince that their marriage will remedy this lack of understanding. The same cannot be said of Amerigo. Foreshadowing the emotional turbulence depicted in the novel, he reminds Maggie that the “happiest reigns … are the reigns without any history” (31). Emblematic of a novel in which the personal and emotional lives of its characters are conspicuously ambiguous, the passage cues readers to consider the difficulty of plumbing the depths of another person’s inner workings. It will come as no surprise, therefore, that *The Golden Bowl* is novel that foregrounds its characters’ struggle to unravel the knots of their social and emotional circumstances. Most scenes in James’s novel revolve around the teasing out of sentiments and motives, more often enabled by physiological emotional response than conversation. Such scenes, furthermore, are not restricted to social interactions but frequently also characters’ internal reflections and conscious *effort* to understand the causes of their own impressions. I emphasize the word *effort* as this process is never simple.

The last major work completed in James’s career as an author, *The Golden Bowl* sits apart in the context of his oeuvre. Though themes of innocence, disillusionment, and love are not uncommon to the author, the cast and milieu of this late novel is remarkably scaled back in comparison to earlier works such as *The Portrait of a Lady*.
(1881) or *The Awkward Age* (1899). Coupled with its complex style, the six-hundred-page chamber piece that is *The Golden Bowl* can be a challenge to any reader. The novel is divided into two volumes, taking as their focus the separate experiences of Prince Amerigo and Maggie Verver, respectively. Despite its length, James provides only six more-or-less fleshed out characters and a plot deficient in action that can be described as a sequence of non-events. James seems less concerned in the novel with creating “a sequence of moments in time than an attempt to capture something that resides between them,” and the novel’s characters have been described as “most interesting when they are least active, when they enter a zone of feeling and experience” (Haralson and Johnson 2009, 90-91). James has migrated away from reported action toward indirection, implication, and a focus on the internal workings of characters in his last novel. Indeed, Leon Edel has written of James’s late “complex indirect style” that it demonstrates how the author “reconciled himself to diminished omniscience” at the end of his career, and the idea that “[o]ne could never know everything” (1977, 417). In his preface to the New York Edition, James commented that what stood out for him in revisiting *The Golden Bowl* was a “marked inveteracy of a certain indirect and oblique view [of] his presented action”, while avowing that this view was also “the very straightest and closest possible” (2009, 3). He professed, as a justification for his small cast of characters, that readers could encounter in the novel “as much of them as a coherent literary form permits” (6). There are two things to note about James’s statements: first, that the novel is meandering and meticulous; and second, that the scrupulous attention paid to its few characters suggests a focus on their subjective perceptions of the events that slowly unfold. Time and again, the narrator intervenes on behalf of characters in lengthy elucidations of impressions that they often seem incapable or unwilling to express with frankness, especially in conversation with each other. These interventions notably provide only another partial perspective.

It is this vacillating uncertainty that lies at the heart of my reading of James’s final novel. What follows is an exploration of four character’s emotional experiences and their struggle, as well as that of the narrator, to verbalize them. My argument is as such founded on an understanding of *The Golden Bowl* as concerned with the distress generated by a postponement of emotional release. Through this, the essay argues that *The Golden Bowl* stages a suspended affect that denies narrative closure to its characters as well as its readers. Narrative closure is here defined as “the phenomenological feeling of finality that is generated when all the questions saliently posed by the
narrative are answered” (Carroll 2007, 1). Affect is understood as similar but not synonymous to emotion, drawing on Sianne Ngai’s definition of the affects being “less formed and structured than emotion, but not lacking form or structure altogether” (2005, 27). The distinction is not crucial, but serves to illumine how, in certain passages from James’s *The Golden Bowl*, emotions sometimes exist in an uncertain state prior to characters fully comprehending them. The suspended affect discussed below is seen to manifest through negative, non-cathartic emotions experienced by its characters, stemming from ambiguous social relationships and their struggle to comprehend their own mixed emotional states and those of others. Both with respect to its theme of adultery and the postponement of emotional resolution, then, *The Golden Bowl* is doubly a novel of unfulfilled promises. Furthermore, I locate in the novel a tone of discomfort that arises from a continued failure by its characters and narrator to take account of an emotional world that is unsettling in its defiance of literary representation. Inspired by Chunlin Men’s discussion of affect in *The Ambassadors*, I argue that this emotional tone is a formal strategy adopted by James to “sustain the impenetrable aura surrounding the novel as an art” (Men 2020, 41). This impenetrable aura, recalling what Walter Benjamin described as “the unique phenomenon of a distance” or “cult value” (1969, 222, 243) of a work of art, is here understood as the “infinite” plasticity and elasticity that James ascribed to the novel form (1963, 184).

Marshalling theoretical strands from the field of affect theory, and enriched by theories of embodied emotion in circulation at the time that James was writing, my reading of negative emotion in the novel demonstrates the centrality of suspended affect in *The Golden Bowl*. Following Jane Thrailkill (2007), I contest the New Critical notion that emotions are irrelevant in literary criticism, and draw on her idea of ‘emotive realism.’ I proceed from this to explore the form, tone, and significance of specifically negative emotions in *The Golden Bowl*, forwarding the argument that they contribute to a suspension of affective release. The essay is chiefly indebted to the work done by Thrailkill on the representation of emotion in American literary realism, as well as the work of Sianne Ngai on the negative feelings that constitute what she calls the “noncathartic aesthetic [of] art that produces and foregrounds failure of emotional release” (2005, 9). The identification of suspended affect in James’s late novel will both shed light on the author’s disposition concerning the novel form at the end of his career, and offer a significant contribution to a continued study of affect in *fin-de-siècle* English literature. As the crowning achievement of his career—James himself referred
to *The Golden Bowl* as “the most composed & constructed & completed” (2000, 403) of his works—the novel provides an unmatched vantage point from which to survey the author’s fictional art at its zenith.

The suggestion that James may indeed have been fascinated by emotion as influencing the perception of reality can be contextualized through Thrailkill’s study of affect in American realist literature. Thrailkill asserts that the late-nineteenth-century dissemination of scientific discourses concerning emotion as an embodied phenomenon—including evolutionary biology, physiological psychology, and pragmatist philosophy—contributed to an awareness among realist writers of “the interanimation of the human mind and body, in which emotion was increasingly understood to mediate our experience of the exterior world” (2007, 8). Thrailkill earmarks James as prominent in the treatment of emotion, suggesting that he engaged directly “with questions about the affecting nature of experience and art’s privileged connection to the sources of human emotion and sensuality” (21). Citing the New York preface to *Roderick Hudson*, she observes that in revisiting his first novel, James realized that, even then, he had been convinced that “feelings weren’t simply about things or happenings. The feelings were things, or more precisely they themselves were ‘happenings,’ effecting a transit between self and world” (18-19). In other words, James was aware early on that emotions were important in the representation of reality. As we will see, emotions can in James’s last novel be seen to function in a mediating role.

In keeping with Thrailkill’s claim that emotion was of interest to realist writers owing to the dissemination of contemporary scientific discourses, this essay draws on theories of emotion in circulation at the turn-of-the-twentieth century, such as those proposed by William James in *Principles of Psychology* (1890), and those of the French psychologist Théodule Ribot in his *The Psychology of the Emotions* (1896). Aside from being an adherent of William James’s theories, Ribot was importantly also in correspondence with him (Bixler 1945). Aside from the assumption that William’s work was familiar to his brother Henry, the dates of publication of these works are suggestive of their availability among established writers of the fin-de-siècle period. I make this last point to pre-empt the critical impulse to emphasize the importance of Sigmund Freud and the field of psychoanalysis that was coming into its own at the time Henry James wrote his final novels. Arguably, the immense influence that Freud’s theories would come to have on many modernist writers had yet to make itself felt in the early years of the twentieth century. In carrying out this essay’s historicist reading
of emotions in *The Golden Bowl*, therefore, the adoption of Freudian psychoanalysis might be an anachronism. Whereas Freud would come to conceptualize emotion as owing to what he called *Trieb*, a term connoting the unconscious “urge, impulse, impetus, and desire” (Beer 1998), the psychologies of emotion espoused by James and Ribot can instead be described as physiological. In Ribot’s words, the physiological doctrine of emotion connects “all states of feeling with biological conditions, [considering] them as the direct and immediate expression of the vegetative life” (1897, vii). Similarly, William James hypothesized that an understanding of emotion as purely cognitive was flawed. It was not that a stimulus produced an emotion that *then* compelled a subject to act, but that the action itself produced the feeling. In a pedagogic formulation, he proposed that

one mental state is not immediately induced by the other, that the bodily manifestation must first be interposed between, and that the more rational statement is that we feel sorry *because* we cry, angry *because* we strike, afraid *because* we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry or fearful, as the case may be (1950, 450; my emphasis)

William James’s and Ribot’s emphasis on emotion as embodied helps expand the analytical purview of emotion in Henry James’s final novel. As an example from *The Golden Bowl*, embodied emotion can be seen at work in the twenty-fifth chapter when Amerigo is surprised at finding Maggie unexpectedly at home. Upon his arrival, the Prince appears “visibly uncertain” (James 2009, 335) as to why Maggie may have departed from her routine. The physiological aspect of emotion—in this case Amerigo’s body language—here precedes both his own and Maggie’s cognitive reaction to his surprise, resulting in a “strange little timed silence” (333) distended past its brief duration in Maggie’s recollection of the event. Another important aspect of this scene in terms of embodied emotion is how Maggie’s choice to depart from her routine is motivated by an uncontrollable impulse she cannot fully explain. As the narrator informs us, Maggie “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” (330) belonged. Her decision to break with custom may seem insignificant but, as she later reflects, it was accompanied “with an infinite sense of intention” (331). It is Amerigo’s reaction to her change in behaviour that awakens Maggie to understand that her intuition was not
mis guided. Indeed, as Dorrit Cohn has argued, Maggie’s behaviour is not motivated by her already harbouring suspicions of adultery; rather, it is “Amerigo’s expression that makes her” (2001, 2) suspicious. I will discuss William James and Ribot’s theories in greater detail below; for now, it is enough to note how the physiological aspects of emotion are brought to the forefront by Henry James in this scene.

In the effort to conduct a reading of emotion that prioritizes the visible over the hidden, I draw on what Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus have described as surface reading¹. The method involves an increased appreciation of the possible autonomy of the literary artefact, and entails a recognition of how texts may plainly state their meanings, just as well as contain hidden ones. As Best and Marcus put it, surface reading involves focusing on what is “evident, perceptible, [and] apprehensible in texts … what insists on being looked at rather than what we must train ourselves to see through” (9). Surface reading will be helpful in my analysis of unresolved affect as a phenomenon that above all contributes to a lack of narrative closure. In other words, my interest is the function and effect of the unresolved, instead of its possible causes. An adherence to the surface of a text as such implies a straining against the critical impulse to ascribe textual phenomena to forces beyond or below the horizon of a literary work. In investigating how negative emotions exist in structural and stylistic co-dependence with suspended affect, the method of surface reading helps to insulate the relationship between text, style, and effect from such extratextual forces. A commitment to the surface texts means an “attentiveness to the artwork itself [as] a kind of freedom,” one that allows critics to approach literature without “a political agenda that determines in advance how [they] interpret texts” (Best and Marcus 2009, 16). While this ideal may also have an unconscious agenda, its guiding principle is nonetheless an enthusiasm for self-reflectivity as important to the analytical process.

To take an example from The Golden Bowl, while a symptomatic reading might emphasize the role of early consumer capitalism as the nexus around which the novel revolves, I opt to treat this as a backdrop against which the text is situated. While I recognize that the socio-economic status of the principal cast is an enabling factor for the novel’s drama, for the purposes of my current reading, it matters less how the billionaire Adam Verver may have amassed his fortune. What does matter is that his

¹ Surface reading is an alternate approach to ‘symptomatic readings’ which treats texts as receptacles of obscured meanings. Symptomatic readings have been included in what the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur termed as a broader ‘hermeneutics of suspicion.’
limitless fortune functions to provide economic independence. Another example of how a surface reading contrasts with a symptomatic one can be illustrated through the scene above. A symptomatic reading might focus on Maggie’s introspective reasoning, highlighting a metatextual relationship with the unconscious that speaks to James’s novel as an example of the inward turn associated with modernist literature. By contrast, my own reading of this scene focuses on how Maggie’s suspicion gains traction through the unexplained nervous reaction of the Prince, and not its unknown cause. What matters in my analysis of this scene is not what Maggie’s suspicions may suggest about her state of mind, but how her suspicions function as a phenomenon.

The essay is divided into two chapters, separated by an interlude. My first chapter engages with the intellectual context of how emotion was understood in mid-to-late nineteenth-century England, and how writers such as Henry James began to see it as compelling in representing reality. I outline the central tenets of Alexander Bain’s relation psychology, and William James, and Théodule Ribot theories of embodied emotion. The definition of emotion as it came to be understood at the close of the nineteenth century will allow for an expanded recognition of its literary configuration in James’s *The Golden Bowl*. My subsection on embodied emotion carries over into a discussion of it as a feature of English literary realism, drawing on Thrailkill’s study of ‘emotive realism.’ Following this, I engage in an interlude discussing Sianne Ngai’s concept of the noncathartic aesthetics, as well as her understanding of ‘tone’ in literary works. Ngai’s concepts provide an analytical tool that helps connect negative emotions in James’s text to the phenomenon of suspended affect.

My second chapter consists of an analysis of four negative emotions—fear, anxiety, suspicion, and uncertainty—and how they contribute to suspended affect in *The Golden Bowl*. The choice of these negative emotions is motivated by their noncathartic character, as well as their salience in the novel. My discussion is divided into subsections, the first three treating Fanny Assingham, Prince Amerigo, and Maggie Verver in relation to the negative emotions that most aptly finds expression through them, and a fourth analysing uncertainty through material pertaining to these three characters, as well as Charlotte Stant, Maggie’s childhood friend, Amerigo’s lover, and Adam’s wife. Fear is the topic of my first subsection, which I locate in Fanny’s realization that her pursuit to marry the two Ververs to Amerigo and Charlotte, respectively, has had terrible consequences. In the subsection that follows I turn to the anxiety of Amerigo throughout his affair with Charlotte. Suspicion is my next theme,
as I discuss Maggie’ sudden—though paradoxically drawn out—awakening to the fact that her family constellation has come under threat. In the last subsection of my analysis, I use the uncertainty of the principal cast about Adam Verver’s awareness of the affair as a springboard to discuss how this scarcity of knowledge contributes to the lack of narrative closure.

Chapter One: Embodied Emotion and Emotive Realism

This chapter works to connect the nineteenth-century idea of embodied emotion to the realist aesthetic that James drew on in composing his last novel. I open with an outline of the psychological theories of Bain, William James, and Ribot, who emphasized the physiological aspect of emotion as crucial to its expression. Their theories will serve as an intellectual basis that contributes to an expanded recognition of emotion in works of literary realism, including The Golden Bowl. The second subsection of this chapter explores the prevalence of emotion in selected works of literary realism, beginning by briefly discussing George Eliot’s Middlemarch as an important precursor to how realist literature engaged with emotion. I proceed from this to detail Thrailkill’s recognition of an under-researched ‘emotive realism.’ The key argument I wish to highlight in Thrailkill’s study is that physiological psychology—the conception of embodied emotion as mediating between external stimuli and cognition—can be seen as an important enabling condition for “literary realism and its practitioners, who hover uncomfortably between fabricating events and mobilizing an apparatus of expertise to elicit the inmost secrets of persons and society” (Thrailkill 2007, 115-16).

Embodied Emotion

At the middle of the nineteenth century, Victorian psychology afforded slim importance to aspects of individuality, instinct, and physiology. A school of thought that was “overwhelmingly rationalist and intellectualist in methodological demeanour …, Victorian psychology was also powerfully normative and, on the whole, sought a bland elimination of unruly subjectivity” (Rylance 2000, 148). In the wake of Charles Darwin and ground-breaking evolutionary theories such as those proposed in On the Origin of Species (1859), however, such convictions were challenged by a new wave of thinkers that recognized the influence of physical environments on human development (Anderson et al. 2020, 25). This new brand of psychology was spearheaded by the
relational psychology of Alexander Bain, whose influence can be felt in the later theories of both William James and Théodule Ribot. Bain departed from the neurocentric models of the early Victorian era, instead gravitating toward what has been described as the “immersive engagement of minds in worlds” (Anderson et al. 2020, 31). In his two major works, *The Senses and the Intellect* (1855) and *The Emotions and the Will* (1859), Bain opposed the adage that the human mind is an isolated entity, instead forwarding it as existing in mutual dependence with the body.

Considered by one near-contemporary as the most widely read psychologist of his day, Bain insisted that “the relationship between body and mind must be understood as one transacted throughout and across the nervous system” (Rylance 2000, 164, 172). Unwilling to break entirely with the Victorian fondness for generalization, however, Bain divided his understanding of consciousness between two spheres: the emotional and intellectual. Bain’s use of the term emotional denoted “feelings, overt mental excitements, and the apparently neutral state … which is nevertheless a state of nervous arousal,” whereas the intellectual sphere included “all the standard forms of the activity of intelligence” (Rylance 2000, 192). In the context of embodied emotion, it is interesting to note that Bain insisted these spheres must be understood as permeating each other: “there is an intellectual component in feeling … and an emotional component in the activity of the intellect” (Rylance 2000, 192). Aside from Bain characterizing the emotional sphere of consciousness as physiological, also important was his insistence that consciousness was an active process, a continuous negotiation between mind and body. As Rylance argues, “what distinguishes consciousness from non-consciousness” for Bain is “the registration of change and difference. … Consciousness is not merely a state of not-being-dead; it is a state of energetic activity” (2000, 193). In some respects, however, Bain’s theories can be thought of as incomplete. Rylance points out that he does not fully develop his relational psychology, that he is unable to specify how the physical processes it depends on function and that, though his discussion of habit seems to indicate an awareness of the unconscious, this topic is not pursued (193). Nonetheless, Bain presided “over a decisive shift in theorising … cognition as representing to cognition as doing” (Garratt 2020, 49; my emphasis). This idea, also echoed in Henry James’s description of the novel as “a living thing, all one and continuous” (1984, 54), lies at heart of the theories of emotion proposed by William James and Ribot. In fact, Ribot affirmed in 1877 that Bain’s work
was “the most complete theory in existence of exact and positive psychology, placed
au courant with recent discoveries” (quoted in Rylance 2000, 174).

Ribot was not alone in his admiration of Bain’s work. William James, who drew
on his work in his Principles of Psychology (1890), described Bain as one of his heroes
in psychology (Gerald Myers 1986, 36). In what later became the James-Lange theory
of emotion, William James took Bain’s theories one step further, arguing that feelings
were contingent on bodily processes. “[T]he emotional brain-processes not only
resemble the ordinary sensorial brain processes,” he suggested in 1884, “but in very
truth are nothing but such processes variously combined” (188). William James argued
that the physiological aspect of feelings had been wrongly subordinated. Physiology
was to be given precedence over cognition, and was crucial in the expression of feeling,
a point made in The Principles of Psychology (1890):

What kind of an emotion of fear would be left if the feeling neither of
quickened heart-beats nor of shallow breathing, neither of trembling lips
nor of weakened limbs, neither of goose-flesh nor of visceral stirrings,
were present, it is quite impossible for me to think. (1950, 452)

Undeniably, there remains a cognitive aspect to emotion in William’s theory, but
characterizing emotions as purely cognitive misses their being essentially a bodily
phenomenon. Just as an actor’s “artificially imitated sneeze lacks something of the
reality” (450), James suggests, to cast feeling as occurring in an isolated mind would
result in it being “pale, colorless, [and] destitute of emotional warmth” (449). The
problem that results from this is that emotions themselves elude strict definition, an
issue which would be a source of worry to adherents of the early Victorian fondness for
rationalizing the mind. But for William James, “the mere distinguishing and
cataloguing [of the emotions] becomes of subsidiary importance” (449). The aesthetic
metaphor of how emulating emotions is difficult since their physical processes often
blend into each other and vary in constellation illustrates the near-impossibility of
separating one emotion from another. In short, since “there is no limit to the number of
possible emotions which may exist … such questions as ‘What is the ‘real’ or ‘typical’
expression of anger, or fear?’ is seen to have no objective meaning at all” (454).

Throughout his theory, William James returns to the point that the subtraction
of physiological aspects from any feeling robs them of their identity as emotions. As
proof of his theory, he refers to individuals suffering from mental unhealth to demonstrate the existence of what he calls objectless emotion (1950, 458). Their experiences provide cases of “absolutely unmotivated fear, anger, melancholy, or conceit; and others of an equally unmotivated apathy which persists in spite of the best of outward reason why it should give way” (459). The example might seem crude by today’s psychological standards, but James is convinced that emotional reactions to impressions that are imaginary or imperceptible can be considered as objectless. If there are objectless emotions, it follows that emotions are not purely cognitive. Though the negative emotions in The Golden Bowl are often connected to an arguably distinct-but-unspeakable object, William James’s objectless emotion helps contextualize how emotions are often prevalingly physiological in the novel.

It is important to note that the debate between the physiological school of emotion and its counter-part, described either as the intellectual (Ribot 1897, vi) or spiritual school (Stanley 1886, 66), took place in an intellectual climate indebted to Darwinian theories of evolution. Proponents of both schools drew on Darwinian ideas to argue their case: the physiological school pointed to the influence of physical environments on the evolution of emotion, while the intellectual school instead argued that they derived from the cognitive processes that primitive humans had internalized to react to external stimuli through the repetition of actions. An advocate of the intellectual school, Stanley argues that “[i]n the order of evolution, pain and pleasure arise from certain actions to inhibit or stimulate repetition of actions,” and as such that “the original dependence is that of expression on emotion” (1886, 70). Conversely, William James contested the intellectualist recourse to evolutionary theory by stating that “not even a Darwin has exhaustively enumerated all the bodily affectations characteristic of any one of the standard emotions,” and that “as physiology advances, we begin to discern how almost infinitely numerous and subtle they must be” (1884, 191). If emotion is impossible to reverse-engineer based on their physical expressions, it follows that the intellectualist project is untenable. Ribot shared this sentiment in a comprehensive study of the physiologist stand-point.

In the preface to The Psychology of the Emotions (1897), Ribot discredits the intellectualist standpoint in a similar fashion to James, arguing that the reduction of

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2 Stanley’s use of the word ‘expression’ recalls Darwin’s, who defined it as the “expression and gestures involuntarily used by man and the lower animals, under the influence of various emotions and sensations” (Darwin 2009, 28).
“emotional states to clear and definite ideas … is to misunderstand them completely and to condemn ourselves beforehand to failure” (1897, viii). Also indebted to evolutionary theory, Ribot pushes Stanley’s argument to its furthest, tracing emotion to microscopic life. The capacity of the primitive organism to adapt, he argues, is “the outline of the superior form of conscious memory” that Stanley suggests is the origin of the basic emotions of pain and pleasure. Paralleling this relationship, there also exists “an inferior unconscious form—organic sensibility—which is the preparation and the outline of superior conscious emotional life” (3). This organic sensibility is visible in the affinity of primitive organisms for attraction and repulsion, physico-chemical responses that form “two poles of the life of feeling” (6) The example forms the basis for Ribot’s argument by which he illustrates that “beneath the conscious life of feeling there exists … an embryonic form of conscious sensibility” (6). Ribot’s evolution of the emotion proceeds from organic sensibility along four additional stages: the state of needs—what he called “life in action” (1897, 10-11)—denotes basic requirement for life such as hunger and sleep; the emergence of primitive emotions; followed by the development of simple emotions; and, finally, complex abstract sentiments.

In sum, Ribot’s evolution of the emotions proceeds from the basic tendencies of an organism, through needs and primitive emotions, to the plane of simple and complex emotions. The complex emotions are described by Ribot and James as “subtle” or “superior” emotions (James 1950, 468; Ribot 1897, 99-101) and include sentiments such as the moral, aesthetic, and intellectual. While the characterization of the complex emotions as “subtle” suggests the difficulty of connecting them to the primitive, Ribot argues that “in the same way as the highest [intellectual] conception retains the characteristic of the concrete whence it sprang … so the most ethereal sentiments cannot entirely lose the characters which constitute them emotions, on pain of disappearing as such” (1897, 98). His evolution of emotions provides a useful link between physiology and complex emotions, demonstrating that even abstract emotions may have their origin in the theatre of the body. It is important to point out, however, that neither Ribot nor James considers emotion to be completely detached from cognition. Ribot points out that setting physiology in opposition to cognition is unproductive, instead advocating a “unitary or monistic” (112) understanding freed from competing theories of cause and effect. As he clarifies: “all that is objectively expressed by movements of the face and body … is expressed subjectively by correlative states of consciousness” (112). Put simply, physiology and cognition are
two parts of the same phenomenon, “a single occurrence expressed in two languages” (112). So, while this essay conceives of emotion in Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl* as embodied, I recognize that emotions must also be understood as both cognitive and physiological. In James’s novel, however, the two states do not always correspond to each other.

**Emotive Realism**

Nineteenth-century theories of emotion such as those of Ribot and James formed a backdrop to the development of English literary realism. Pioneers such as George Eliot were open in their admiration for the ideas of psychologists such as Bain (Garratt 2020, 47). At root, physiological psychology and literary realism treat experience and the representation of reality as an essentially active process. As Thrailkill notes, “[w]orks of literary realism … are not photographic representations of a real world elsewhere; they are condensations and expansions of human thought, sentience, and experience” (2007, 26). Henry James avowed the importance of an expansion of experience important to the novelist’s work in similar terms, recognizing experience as equally comprised of thought, emotion, and energy (1963, 181). As we shall see, the nineteenth-century realist aesthetic was indeed “profoundly influenced” by contemporary psychological trends (Thain 2020, 79). I begin by briefly discussing Peter Garratt’s claim that George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* engages with the idea of extended cognition. Its presence in Eliot’s novel helps contextualize how embodied emotion was a part of the realist aesthetic James drew on in writing *The Golden Bowl*. I proceed from this to discuss Thrailkill’s *Affecting Fictions* to highlight the salience of embodied emotion in other works of English literary realism. The following section is, as such, an important cornerstone for my reading of emotion in *The Golden Bowl*.

As Garratt argues, *Middlemarch* (1872) can be read as a form of realism indebted to Bain’s ideas of the mind as bound up with the body. Garratt’s project is broader than my own, but his reading of *Middlemarch* shows how cognition relies on its corporeal manifestations in Eliot’s novel. Garratt’s focus is on perception in *Middlemarch*, a choice motivated by its being a key strategy in Eliot’s realism. Though it is often described as a deeply cognitive novel, Garratt suggests that in *Middlemarch* Eliot is also concerned with the problem of over-intellectualizing the intellect itself (2020, 57). He situates this problem in the contrast between a characterization of the intellect as detached contemplation and of perception as an active interaction with the
world. The failure of the intellect to grapple with embodied perception is brought out in a chapter that takes place in Rome, where Dorothea’s mental image of the city comes into conflict with the reality before her, and she becomes overwhelmed by “[a]ffective imagery” (57). For Garratt, this bewilderment suggests how, in Middlemarch, Eliot is experimenting with the idea visual impressions “contributes to perceptual consciousness only in tandem with coordinated skilful action” (57). Garratt’s main argument is that “a meaningful parallel might be drawn between the procedural, formal task of Eliot’s literary realism … and enactive perception” (59). Though Eliot belongs to an earlier literary school than Henry James, Garratt’s discussion illustrates how, before James, preeminent novelists of English literary realism such as Eliot were already concerned with the embodied mind.

Moving on to Thrailkill, what is of particular interest in her research is the underlying endeavor to overhaul the notion of English literary realism as an artform that eschews “emotional entailments” and “affective concerns” (23). This assumption, she suggests, has its origins in definitions of emotion “predicated on a strong distinction between mind and body, and between cultural processes and biological ones” (15), a distinction perpetuated by schools of literary criticisms such as the New Critics, who argued that the subjective nature of emotion made it inexpressible, and the field of cultural studies that emphasized emotion as culturally constructed and subject to ideological hegemony. For Thrailkill, by contrast, realism is emotional, and to combat earlier inclinations she proposes an amended definition of emotion that situates it somewhere between the two poles of inexpression and powerlessness. Emotion, she suggests, can more constructively be understood

as embodied but not mindless; as culturally conditioned in its expression but not in its biological substrate; as a vital component of the operations of consciousness but not identical to thinking; as embedded deep within the body but nonetheless essential to an individual’s flourishing in the external world. (2007, 16)

Her emendation draws on an expanded theoretical purview, incorporating into literary studies more recent insights from fields such as neuroscience and affect theory. In this sense, emotion acts in a mediating role in the experience of reality. Furthermore, since many of the aspects of Thrailkill’s definition significantly echo the theories of
embodied emotion I have discussed, this way of conceiving emotion may illumine its prevalence in nineteenth-century literature.

One might saliently pose the question, then, as to why embodied emotion has been frequently overlooked in studies of literary realism. For Thrailkill, the answer is twofold. First, that its significance has been downplayed because of characterizations of realist literature as an attempt at mimetic verisimilitude and an artform indebted to scientific inquiry. An example of this might be found in Ian Watt’s influential theory of the novel, where he argues that early novelists were deeply concerned with producing “an authentic account of the actual experiences of individuals” by adapting prose styles to provide their works with “an air of complete authenticity” (2000, 27, my emphasis). Second, emotion has also been downplayed by a prevailing emphasis on “modernist and postmodernist texts [that] has tended to … sustain theorizations of affect that center on the mind” (2007, 25). Simply put, Thrailkill argues by this second point that an emphasis on the mind in texts from later literary epochs overshadowed the study of emotion in earlier realist texts. Published between 1902-1904, the novels of James’s major phase straddle the border between realism and modernism, which may explain the limited critical attention to emotion in them. By considering these two aspects in tandem, one begins to see how the notion of realist literature as detached from emotion may have emerged. This idea misses the point that the nineteenth-century realist aesthetic was closely wound up with psychologies of emotion. George Henry Lewes, partner to Eliot, wrote extensively on the mind’s embodied involvement with the world in the wake of Bain. Attributed with the earliest use of the word realism for a literary movement, he also affirmed the connection between realism and emotion, stating that good literature, that which has “reality for its basis,” is “essentially the expression of experiences and emotions—of what we have seen, felt, and thought” (1852, 130).

Henry James expressed similar opinions in his literary criticism. As he wrote in “The Art of Fiction” the novel form was essentially “a personal [and] direct impression of life” (1984, 52). The “air of reality” that James considered the “supreme virtue” (53) of the novel could only be realized through an understanding of experience as “never complete” (52). Indeed, it was for James impossible to write a good novel without appreciating that reality could take “myriad forms” (James 1984, 52). The experience that formed the basis of any novel was to him a vivid, “immense sensibility … suspended in the chamber of consciousness” that converts the “pulses of the air into revelations” (52). Writing was for James an animated art. An emotive reading of The
Golden Bowl will as such lend support to what Jennifer Travis has called a particularly Jamesian form of “psychological realism,” concerned with “characters who live the life of the mind and who exhibit the painful emotion of the soul” (1998, 852). With these points in mind, we can more fully appreciate Thrailkill’s suggestion that there rests at the heart of English literary realism “a conception of the intelligent, feeling human body, that militates against overly simplistic distinctions between objective and subjective experience” (2007, 26). If emotion and cognition were understood as playing of each other in this way, realist writers could indeed have been concerned with an affective engagement with the worlds they sought to represent. Thrailkill describes such literature as “emotive realism” (27). Reminiscent of William James’s notion that emotion divorced from bodily aspects would be a pale thing, Thrailkill argues that a realism divorced from the “subtle judgements” enabled by emotion “would be about as compelling and coherent as a rummage sale” (30). This is a motif that might resonate with James’s The Golden Bowl, though as an emotional “rummage sale” rather than a sale of objects. Returning to Maggie’s puzzling confrontation with Amerigo discussed in my introduction, she considers prior to his arrival the “accumulation of the unanswered” (James 2009, 335), disconcerting impressions she has stowed away to avoid worry. The accumulated impressions are described as a “roomful of confused objects, never as yet ‘sorted’” (335). The passage is reminiscent of Henry James’s idea of emotions as things, and provides an interesting reversal of Thrailkill’s suggestion that realist work would be dull without emotion, the proverbial rummage sale described here consisting of disconcerting—emotional—impressions. Setting aside The Golden Bowl, an outline of Thrailkill’s main arguments will clarify her idea of emotive realism.

Echoing Ribot’s emotional evolution, Thrailkill’s study of emotive realism proceeds along a “continuum of increasing [stylistic] complexity” (2007, 14). She argues that realist writers depended on homing in on “the vivifying form of human perception itself, without which the world appears as inert, lifeless, and bleak” (52). These “feelings of reality,”3 (9) a phrase borrowed from William James’s The Varieties of Religious Experience, are as such arguably a fundamental part of realist fiction. She illustrates this by pointing to how Mark Twain, in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, uses laughter to inquire “what it means to feel emotion for an ‘unreal’ object” (46). As

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3 The phrase is likely used by Thrailkill for its convenience, as the focus of James’s lecture from which it is sourced concerns hallucinatory experiences of supernatural presences (James 2011, 72).
another example, she suggests that Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.’s novel *Elsie Venner* is above all about pity and casts it as an emotive realism. She garners additional support for emotion in Holmes’s realism through his essay collection ‘The Professor at the Breakfast-Table’ (1860). Using a metaphor of a portrait painter, Holmes opines in one essay that the skilled artist works from a series of impressions, rather than “a copy of [an] exact look at any one time or to any particular person” (cited in Thrailkill 2007, 73). Thrailkill contends from this that an artist’s skill resides in their being both “psychologist as well as draftsman” (73-74). The comparison of novelist and painter was later also employed by Henry James in what he referred to as a “complete” analogy, through which he asserted that just as the inspiration and process of the painter and novelist were the same, so too was their success (1884, 46). Moving on from pity, Thrailkill’s analyses how fear in Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” (1894) is an embodied phenomenon capable of affecting dramatic bodily responses disconnected from cognition. Her analysis recalls William James’s idea of emotion as occurring in the interstice between stimuli and conscious apprehension. Before proceeding to *The Golden Bowl*, an interlude staking out two concepts from Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings*—non-cathartic aesthetics and ‘tone’—will provide the analytical tools for my analysis of how James’s text deploys negative emotions to suspend affect and prevent narrative closure.

**Interlude: Non-Cathartic Aesthetics and ‘Tone’**

In *Ugly Feelings*, Ngai analyzes negative emotions that have been avoided in favor of grander passions in literary criticism. She focuses on emotions that offer “no satisfaction of virtue … nor any therapeutic of purifying release” (2005, 5-6). The novels she discusses in her study foreground emotions such as irritation, envy, and anxiety that give rise to an aesthetics “that produces and foregrounds failure of emotional release” (9). A link between contemporary and modern theory can be found in Ribot’s discussion of “morbid emotions” (1897, 62), similar to Ngai’s non-cathartic feelings. He provides three criteria that qualify emotions as morbid: an extraordinary intensity; a lack of determining cause; and an unreasonable prolongation (62-63). Ngai’s non-cathartic feelings only differ from Ribot’s morbid emotions in their intensity, but this difference arguably owes to her avoiding the grander passions that Ribot includes. The emotions I discuss—fear, anxiety, suspicion, and uncertainty—all qualify as non-cathartic in Ngai’s sense, since they “interfere with the outpouring of
other emotions” (2005, 6). They also often prevent release by their “absence of object” as well as accompanying “states of inaction” (22). As I will show, they also variously fulfil Ribot’s criteria of morbid emotions. The fears of Fanny Assingham are intense but impossible to verbalize or openly act upon. Likewise, the prolonged anxiety and suspicions of Amerigo and Maggie both hinge on an absent cause. It is clear enough that uncertainty belongs to a non-cathartic aesthetics since it depends on the absence of an object. Taken together, the prevalence of these emotions in James’s novel constitutes a pervading atmosphere of suspended affect that can be helpfully approached through Ngai’s notion of the ‘tone’ of literary works.

Ngai defines tone as the “global organizing affect” of a text (2005, 28). It is the emotional component of a work that enables descriptions of it as, for instance, melancholic. More importantly, it is the ‘tone’ of a literary work that makes such “affective values meaningful with regard to how one understands the text as a totality” (28). Tone is a concept meant to reflect how a literary work can be invested with a mode of feeling that is not dependent on the reader’s subjective impression, and to serve as an analytical tool that permits the treatment of “‘objectified emotion,’ or unfelt but perceived feeling” (28). In the context of this essay, while a reader may indeed identify with the particular emotions I discuss, the suspended affect I claim as the tone of The Golden Bowl can instead be thought of as an effect that describes in a more holistic sense the non-cathartic nature of the negative emotions represented in the novel. Ngai illustrates her concept through a reading of Herman Melville’s The Confidence-Man (1857), the story-world of which she argues “runs on a feeling that no one actually feels” (69, original emphasis). The same is true of my idea of suspended affect, in that none of the characters in The Golden Bowl—except perhaps briefly Fanny Assingham—demonstrate an awareness of the suspended emotional states they are caught in.

It warrants mention that Ngai’s own analysis has an ideological bend, and that her broader aim is to relate non-cathartic emotions and obstructed agency to political allegory. I depart from Ngai’s at this juncture, electing instead to focus on the emotions and the narrative effect they produce as a formal aspect of James’s last novel. In as much that Ngai contends that a novel’s tone “is always ‘about’ something” (87), however, I follow her line of reasoning in proposing that the tone of suspended affect in James’s last novel makes it as a novel about the distressing irreducibility of the emotional attachments it describes. This idea resembles Chunlin Men’s identification of James’s earlier novel The Ambassadors (1903) as a “representational project of affect
self-reflexively bordering on its non-representation” (41). In a similar vein, I argue that the suspended affect James stages in *The Golden Bowl* is a broader challenge to novelistic representations of reality as complete.

**Chapter Two: Suspended Affect in *The Golden Bowl***

Thus, we arrive at James’s last novel equipped with the tools for casting it in the mold of an emotive realism, and are perched to develop an understanding of it as a work concerned with negative emotions. My choice of emotions—fear, anxiety, suspicions, and uncertainty—is motivated by their identity as negative and non-cathartic, as well as their prevalence in the text. Because of my focus, the psychological ideas I draw on in the work of William James and Ribot is limited to these negative emotions when possible, and the authors’ broader commentary on emotions when not. My first subsection discusses the fears of Fanny Assingham which manifest through her hypothetical involvement in providing Amerigo and Charlotte’s access to Adam Verver’s wealth, but also their infidelity. I move from this to Amerigo, whose anxieties about his position in the Ververs’ family are exacerbated by his relationship with Charlotte, enrolling him in a tenuous balancing act that he uncomfortably recognizes as a particularly English aversion to clear situations, or “*les situation nettes*” (James 2009, 287). Maggie, who I discuss in my third subsection, begins to cultivate suspicions from a sudden but vague awareness that “[s]omething had happened” (328) to disturb the delicate equilibrium of her family constellation. Her suspicions are doubly negative in that they are not only painful if they are confirmed, but also in her distress at having, let alone pursuing, such thoughts. The uncertainty I discuss in my final subsection coalesces in the novel’s final chapters around the mystery of Adam’s knowledge about the illicit relationship, and concretizes the tone of suspended affect that denies narrative closure. Helpful in this regard, Gibson has argued that love is in James’s novel “indefinitely suspended within an ambivalent middle that contributes to an overwhelming sense of uncertainty and anxiety” (2015, 2). As it is predicated on a lack of clarity, uncertainty is perhaps the most evidently non-cathartic emotion. As a constituent part of the three preceding negative emotions, I approach uncertainty through all three characters previously discussed, as well as Charlotte.

James’s ultimately gloomy treatment of love, the pursuit and preservation of which are shown to produce a hollow status quo in the novel, have been aptly expressed
by Leon Edel. He suggests in his biography of James that the central theme of The Golden Bowl is how the translation into life of “the terrors of the heart … would be unbearable” (1977, 535). Amerigo, toward the novel’s close, provides a similarly grave diagnosis: “Everything’s terrible,” he says to Maggie, “in the heart of man” (James 2009, 582). In the effort to approach these terrors of the heart without fully translating them, The Golden Bowl is demonstrative of Rebekah Scott’s notion of James’s late style as characterized by “evasiveness” that produces “ambiguity, obliquity, subtlety and prolixity” (2021, 943). Since Fanny is the catalyst for both marriages in the novel, as well as the first character upon whom their fearful results dawn, she represents an ideal starting point from which to begin my analysis.

Fanny Assingham – Fear

We are introduced to Fanny through Amerigo who, anxious about his marriage, decides to seek consolation in “a friend whom he had often found ironic” (James 2009, 39). Fanny has been the decisive force in facilitating Amerigo’s marriage, though he is at pains to determine why. “She had made his marriage,” we are told, “though [Amerigo] could scarce see what she made it for” (40). It is even a problem for Fanny to determine her motive in facilitating the marriage between the impoverished Prince and the rich Maggie Verver. Fanny is described by her husband Colonel Bob Assingham as a hopeless meddler in the lives of other people. For him, a man uninterested in society life, she is a woman whose “finer consciousness” abounds in complicated social situations, as many as “fifty at once” (72). Fanny’s involvement in the two marriages, as she later admits, was indeed the acts of a “meddlesome fool” (311). Her part in Charlotte’s marriage to Adam is importantly also motivated by fear. As Bob soberly cautions, Fanny’s later attempt to “cover … all the ground” to make sure her first mistake does not result in catastrophe, may amount to her “making another” (87-88).

Fanny’s fear takes several forms: a fear of Charlotte’s motives in returning to England; a fearful realization of the nature of Charlotte and Amerigo’s relationship; a fear of being exposed as complicit in the affair; and a fear of Maggie seeing through her feigned ignorance. Importantly, her fears are often connected to a physical agitation that she must reason through to cope with. These two components resonate with Ribot’s division of fear into a “primary, instinctive, unreasoning fear preceding all individual experience, and a secondary, conscious, reasoned fear posterior to experience” (209). Her manner of coping by attempting to reason through her fear does not amount to a
release from her worries, however. In fact, it often results in a worsening of her anxious state, echoing Ngai’s idea of negative emotions as interfering with emotional outpouring. The most detailed explication of her fears occurs during conversations between Fanny and her husband in their home that Tessa Hadley refers to as interludes of “choric commentary” (2016, 133). In these scenes, Bob spectates his wife’s worries like he had “watched at the Aquarium the celebrated lady who … did tricks in the tank of water which looked so cold and uncomfortable to the non-amphibious” (James 2009, 72). His calm highlights Fanny’s obsessiveness. Despite her denials and glosses, Bob’s commentary reveals she is aware that the equilibrium is under threat. Between my analysis of the two choral exchanges, chapter four and twenty-three, I will discuss two conversations between Fanny, Charlotte, and Amerigo in chapter fourteen and fifteen to illustrate how fear contributes to a tone of suspended affect.

Fanny’s fears first manifest during Amerigo’s visit in chapter two, referred to above, with the two visibly disconcerted at Charlotte’s reappearance, but reluctant to admit this. Emblematic of James’s narrative logic in The Golden Bowl, the significance of the scene is couched in the unsaid. As the narrator relates, the “fact of their serenity was … made as important as if some danger of its opposite had directly menaced them” (James 2009, 55). Their multiple insistences that all is well are difficult to reconcile with the troubled atmosphere. Their refusal to acknowledge their fears conflicts with the physiological responses it provokes. Recalling William James’s idea that disembodied emotion is a non-entity (1884, 194), the tension of the scene would not function properly without Fanny and Amerigo’s physical discomfort. Seeking to justify her concern to the Prince, Fanny provides an insight that helps shed light on her fearful disposition: “My first impulse is always to behave about everything,” she affirms, “as if I feared complications. But I don’t fear them – I really like them. They’re quite my element” (James 2009, 55). As we will see, the excessive reasoning Fanny employs to combat her embodied emotional responses during the choral interludes is suggestive of her preference, though her anxiety indicates that she is not so confident.

After the Prince’s withdrawal from their home and Charlotte’s repairing to her room in chapter three, Bob is “summoned to meet his companion over the situation that … their visitor’s advent had created for them” (James 2009, 71). Though we are not privy to the beginning of their exchange, it is impossible to misjudge Fanny’s distress. The gravity of what Fanny calls the “situation” of Charlotte’s appearance, though its exact nature is sidestepped, is never out of sight in the exchange. Through Fanny’s
fragmented narration, we understand that her worries derive from uncertainties about Charlotte’s motivations. That she should return to London to see him is “as a fact” not the problem, Fanny states obtusely. The question is “What does she want it for?” (73). This is the crux of the exchange: despite not knowing what Charlotte’s motives are, Fanny is convinced they are harmful. Her fear is at this point not unlike one of William James’s objectless emotions, and fulfils Ribot’s morbidity criteria of absent cause. A piece of advice from Bob helpfully characterizes Fanny’s fear: “‘If you can’t think what to be afraid of, wait till you can think’” (75). The adage is not enough, and Fanny elects to reason her way toward the object of he fears. The intensity of this exercise, coupled with Fanny’s incessant pursuit, results in a sense of unresolved fear.

In the fourth chapter, then, we perceive Fanny through the eyes of her husband whose mild interest accentuates her intensity. After Fanny cryptically notes that the “immense complication” is Charlotte’s friendship with Maggie being “so natural” (James 2009, 75), the Colonel asks if this friendship is not a sufficient reason for her return. The emotional inflection of her response is telling: “‘How will it do, how?’ she went on as without hearing him. ‘That’s what one keeps feeling.’ … ‘That anything of the past,’ she brooded, ‘should come back now? How will it do, how will it do?’” (75). Fanny’s repetitions and her glossing over Bob’s question is indicative of her nervous excitement, as well an awareness that Charlotte’s return is disconcerting. We can glean an aspect of what has provoked her restlessness from the Colonel’s next question, which seems to exacerbate it: “‘When my dear,’ the Colonel pursued as he smoked, ‘have you ever seen anything of yours – anything that you’ve done – not do?’” Fanny’s response is lightning quick: “Ah, I didn’t do this!’ … ‘I didn’t bring her back.’” (75). We see at this point that she is ready to concede of having done something. The sharpness of her reply, and the recognition of her husband’s comment, also point to her involvement. As Fanny proceeds, we learn that Amerigo and Charlotte have been lovers, and the implication surfaces that she is a threat to his marriage, but Fanny herself cannot bring herself to explicitly state this. She comes close, however:

Nothing was enough, Mrs. Assinghaim signified, but that she should develop her thought. ‘She doesn’t deliberately intend, she doesn’t consciously wish, the least complication … She’s incapable of any plan to hurt a hair on her head. Yet here she is – and here they are.’ (76)
Charlotte doesn’t *deliberately* intend, she is *incapable* of any plan to disturb the marriage, although the frightening feeling that Fanny cannot rid herself of points to the opposite. The situation becomes too much for Fanny to cope with and, unable to entirely discredit them, begins to recount for the Colonel, and herself, what she believes are facts that deny her culpability. This shift can be contextualized through Ribot’s distinction between healthy and morbid fear. Healthy fear, a “means of protection,” becomes morbid when it “instead of being useful, becomes hurtful” (1897, 212). Fanny fear visibly shifts from healthy to morbid at this juncture through her realization that she cannot reason through it. Its non-cathartic character curtails its protective function.

She attempts to assure herself there is nothing wrong: “I believe in him [Amerigo] … So I haven’t – and she stated it as she might have quoted from a slate, after adding up the items, the sum of a column of figures – ‘so I haven’t, I say to myself, been a fool’” (James 2009, 79). Fanny’s exercise is reminiscent of William James’s idea of a reasoned fear, relying too heavily on the cognitive aspect of emotion. Despite Fanny’s determination, the words ring hollow. Her getting up from her chair “as if she had proved what was needing proof, as if the issue of her operation had been almost unexpectedly a success,” fails to impress even Bob who is not “uplifted by her relief” (80-81). The sudden change in her disposition suggests desperation. This becomes apparent when the Colonel points out her inability to let the matter rest. If she is convinced that no ill will come of Charlotte’s return, Bob asks, then “‘why aren’t you quiet?’” “‘I am quiet,’” Fanny retorts, and Bob looks at her as “she moved about again a little, emphasizing by her unrest the declaration of her tranquility” (84). In the words of William James, Fanny’s fear here “betrays itself in voice and color” (1950, 442), it becomes visible through her mannerisms, despite attempts to suppress it. The final segment of this choral exchange proves Fanny’s misgivings. Fanny must expedite a marriage for Charlotte: “‘It will be,’ Mrs. Assingham continued, ‘the great thing I can do’ … ‘It will make up’” (James 2009, 87). The Colonel points out that her new resolve contradicts her calm: “‘If everything’s so alright what is there to make up for?’” (87). Fanny’s mistake is only hinted at, but it dominates the first choral chapter. William James’s revised sequence of emotion is here apparent. Fear exists in an uneasy mediating role between Fanny’s physiological anxiety and her attempt to reason through it. Her inability to do so is a strong indication of the suspension of her fear. Her attempt to cover all the ground of “any nervousness [she] may ever feel” (88) through Charlotte and Adam’s marriage fails, and the terrifying realization of her second
mistake surfaces at a party during deceptively candid exchanges with both Charlotte and Amerigo.

After a curious comment from Charlotte that hers and the Prince as being there without the Ververs is business “as usual” (James 2009, 210), she and Fanny repair for a private conversation. Their exchange in chapter fourteen about the propriety of Charlotte being present without her husband is ladened with dreadful significances. Fanny becomes conscious

that she was in presence of still deeper things than she had yet dared to fear, that there was ‘more in it’ than any admission … so that, not to seem to understand where she couldn’t accept, and not to seem to accept where she couldn’t approve, and could still less, with precipitation, advice, she invoked the mere appearance of casting no weight whatever into the scales of her young friend’s consistency. (217)

Not being able to approve of or accept that which she knows is wrong—that is, Charlotte’s public display of affection for the Prince—Fanny’s only possible response is to feign ignorance. Her sudden display is excessive, “as she was quickly enough to feel … It brought her, her invocation, too abruptly to her feet. She brushed away everything. ‘I can’t conceive, my dear, what you’re talking about” (217-218; my emphasis). Again, we are made aware of the discrepancy between Fanny’s utterance and her bodily reaction. Her movements precede her appreciation of what they reveal about her disposition. The moment recalls both the corporeal aspect of emotion, as well as Ngai’s idea of how non-cathartic feelings often occur as emotions about another emotion. One cannot help but feel that Charlotte’s intention in this exchange is to suggest through veiled allusions that the groundwork has been laid for her and the Prince’s intimate relationship. Groundwork that, should Fanny recognize the idea, could be cast as laid by herself. It is a distressing double-bind. Should she admit to understanding Charlotte’s meaning, Fanny must recognize her involvement in the affair, and be subject to the fear of its exposure. In feigning ignorance, she is instead faced with the arduous task of upholding her illusion, and a fear of discovery.

Her fear is also visible in an ensuing exchange with Amerigo in chapter fifteen. There is something strange about his conversation, Fanny reflects, “a kind of ominous intimation” that “appeared to peep at her” (James 2009, 222) from behind his words. William James spoke at length on feelings about such ephemeral presences in his lectures on religion, observing that even though they may be “but an abstract idea,”
they may still “appear real and present” (2011, 63). Amerigo’s intimations are described in physical terms, as a lurking yet formless entity, shaped as an expression of Fanny’s fears. After elatedly describing his and Charlotte’s marriages as boats from which they must “jump out from time to time to stretch [their] legs” (223), Fanny becomes aware of “something as yet unnamable … in his look, when something strange and subtle and at variance with his words, something that gave them away, glimmered deep down” (223-24). Again, we become aware of the discrepant relationship between the spoken word and physical mannerisms. Ribot’s contention that emotion can be divided into corresponding physiological and cognitive aspects is here challenged by Fanny’s apprehension. The Prince’s intimations, as observed by Fanny, exist through the discrepancy between his words, mannerisms, and meaning.

The topic of Fanny’s comprehension returns after the Prince explains how Adam’s preference for his daughter results in a filial impression of Charlotte’s marriage, casting her more as his daughter than his wife. Amerigo, obliged to Adam for his luxurious life, cannot criticize his father-in-law, whereas he feels no such obligation with Fanny who, he affirms, “‘always understand[s] so blessedly what one means’” (James 2009, 224). Fanny’s reaction testifies that she understands more than enough:

[S]he was now conscious of having never in her life stood so still or sat, inwardly, as it were, so tight … Invited, in other words, to understand, she held her breath for fear of showing she did, and this for the excellent reason that she was at last fairly afraid to. (224-225)

The fearful reaction that Ribot describes as an “accentuated paralysis of the whole voluntary motor apparatus” (1897, 208) is here unmistakable. The close of the scene details Fanny’s struggle to withdraw from the Prince without visibly showing her fear. Unfortunately, the intensity of her inward struggle prevents this as her “face betrayed her trouble” (225). The Prince, now aware that she comprehends his latent meaning, affirms their friendship to cement her involvement in the affair. Her terror of this shines through in the final lines of the chapter: she “had to turn away. She had never turned away from him before, and it was quite positively for her as if she were altogether afraid of him” (227). The two conversations lay bare Fanny’s fear but also underscore the physiological turmoil connected with the emotion. The indirection in these conversations, furthermore, indicate how in The Golden Bowl spoken discourse is often elaborately constructed around ulterior motives “oriented around ascertaining others’
knowledge, divulging or concealing personal knowledge, or attempting to circumscribe the spheres of others’ knowledge” (Campbell 2011, 105).

During the Assingham’s journey home, the exposition of Fanny’s fear continues. Submerged in thought, a sudden “shaft [of light] from the lamp of a policeman” illumines their carriage and makes her “wince at being thus incriminated only that she might protest not less quickly, against mere blind terror” (James 2009, 228). Two variants of Fanny’s fears occur in rapid succession in this moment: a fear of incrimination, and then a fretful protestation against her fear of incrimination. The sequence is suggestive of the non-cathartic status of her fears. Her realization has become “preposterously terror” (228), and she cannot think clearly. She attempts to draw comfort from the ambiguity of the Prince and Charlotte’s relationship: “Not to know what it would represent on a longer view was a help … since if she had stood in the position of a producing case she should surely be less vague about what she had produced” (229). Fanny’s strategy is a fine example of how James relies on indirection and partial information to create suspense in The Golden Bowl. As Campbell has observed of the major phase novels, James favors in them “a multiplication of reference through certain ‘loose end’ words, statements, and questions” (2011, 103). Like her reluctance to understand, this exercise also contributes to my understanding of her fear as non-cathartic, in the sense that her strategy works to sustain it. She is enveloped by ambiguity in a limbo state that denies emotional release. The second choral exchange neatly captures the conflict between her awareness and the decision to suppress it. The chapter occurs well after the intimate nature of Charlotte and Amerigo’s relationship has been made plain to the reader.

Following their return home from a fateful visit to the country estate of Matcham, Fanny feels she has had ample opportunity to consider her own position. Sinking heavily into a chair, we are told she “recalled a little … the immemorially speechless Sphinx about at last to become articulate” (James 2009, 295). The suspense is palpable. “‘We were all wrong,” Fanny unexpectedly proclaims, “There’s nothing [between them]” (296). The statement begs the question whether Fanny has come around to admitting to her suspicions, as the Colonel is quick ask. Fanny responds by recasting her misgivings:

‘I’ve never till now guaranteed anything but my own disposition to worry. I’ve never till now … had such a chance to see and judge. I had
it at that place … I have seen. And now I know. Her emphasis, as she repeated the word, made her head, in her seat of infallibility, rise higher, ‘I know’ (296)

Her “disposition to worry” is a striking contrast to the preference for complications noted above. The arguable irony of the phrase “seat of infallibility” also undermines the gravity of Fanny’s opening statement. Her knowledge seems more a decision than observed fact. Again, Bob functions as a soundboard here, but an important difference is that the excessive reasoning in this chapter has a desperate emotional tone. Bob’s perception that Fanny “desired obviously to reassure him … absolutely in her own way,” coupled with “candid gathering glittering tears” (298) in her eyes, speak to a need of reassuring herself rather than her disinterested husband. The vague comments Fanny provides are confident but peppered with doubt. “I can imagine the way it works … it’s so easy to understand,” she begins, but rejoins: “Yet I don’t want to be wrong … I don’t, I don’t want to be wrong”’ (299). This is the aspect of the choral exchange in chapter twenty-three that most significantly contributes to my understanding of Fanny’s fear as non-cathartic. She wants to convince herself, but cannot fully expel her doubts. A comparison with the passage in which she repeatedly expresses to “have seen” and now “know[s]” to the following further illustrate this uncertainty:

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. ‘Whatever they’ve done I shall never know. Never, never, because I don’t want to and because nothing will induce me …’ She uttered this last with another, irrepressible quaver, and the next moment hear tears had come. (303)

The sudden display of emotion entirely undermines the meticulous reasoning she has gone through up until this point. More than ever, we can distinguish the turbulent emotional state of her fears. While it is possible to argue that this surge of emotion is a form of cathartic reaction, in the wake of which “the basis [for Fanny’s fear] had at last once and for all defined itself” (304), the fact that this basis is still only implied by the narrative nonetheless speaks to an element of uncertainty. I argue that Fanny’s refusal to explicitly acknowledge the love affair, capable of provoking intense emotional turmoil, is another aspect that casts her fears as a negative emotion that is left unresolved. As I have shown, the conflict Fanny experiences as she tries to comprehend and grapple with her fears in these three scenes can be read as contributing to a tone of
suspended affect. That her fears resurface despite the effort to suppress them are also suggestive of their non-cathartic nature. In the sense that they are maintained for much of the novel, the uncertainties that plague Fanny’s fears are in my final reading also a key aspect that works to prevent narrative closure. I now turn to Amerigo, whose anxiety is another link in the chain negative emotions.

Prince Amerigo – Anxiety

Let us return for a moment to the opening scenes of The Golden Bowl. Having finalized the formalities of his wedding to Maggie, the Prince experiences a moment that “had something of the grimness of a crunched key in the strongest lock that could be made” (James 2009, 28). The somber tone of his reflections is palpable, but he is at a loss to explain why. His “capture” of Maggie has unexpectedly landed him a state of consciousness that is “rather serious than gay” (28). The circumstances of his pursuit are bothersome since, owing to his relative poverty, it would be difficult to characterize his marriage as motivated by anything other than financial recompense. The burning question here is whether the Prince can rightly be said to have been bought. Maggie suggests as much herself when the Prince recalls she has referred to him as a “rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price … what they call a morceau de musée” (33). The Prince does, of course, not see himself as an object, and he finds it difficult to believe that his value resides only in his princely status. The motivations of Fanny Assingham promoting the marriage are for him equally vague. “These things,” the Prince ponders, “the motives of such people, were obscure, a little alarmingly so; they contributed to the element of the impenetrable which alone slightly qualified his sense of his good fortune” (40). The Prince, in short, is unnerved by his luck. The “state of mind of his new friends … had resemblances to a great white curtain” (41), concealing expectations that he cannot make out. The vague anxieties of the Prince in the opening of the novel hint at the uncertainty that will plague him throughout. Tellingly, his conference with Fanny Assingham does not reward any calm. The Prince suspects as much when he reflects prior to his arrival that, should he venture to ask Fanny “what was … behind their veil,” she would likely answer vaguely: ‘it’s what we expect you to be” (42).

The verbal tête-à-tête that ensues during the Prince’s visit to Fanny is cause enough to feed his developing anxieties. After admitting his worries, a supposedly harmless burst of laughter from Fanny irritates him, as he pictures it emanating “from behind the white curtain” (2009, 43) still before him. Frustratingly for the Prince,
Fanny’s “deep serenity worried him instead of soothing him,” doing little to ease his “mystic impatience” (43-44). As he had predicted, she seems privy to meanings that are not forthcoming. As is often the case in The Golden Bowl, the verbal sparring in the first chapter beats around the bush of the veiled ‘heart of the matter’, which is in this scene both the cause of the Prince’s and Fanny’s anxieties. As Campbell has noted, Jamesian speech in the major phase writings complicates this task “in such a way that we can’t assume a direct correspondence between the knower, the known, and the knower’s interlocutor” (2011, 105). His persistence in “work[ing] upon” (46) Fanny bears some measure of success, however, as he perceives under her veil of confidence that she too is “nervous, though trying to disguise it” (48), and that his arrival “had shown her as disconcerted” (48). The fact that she must work actively to conceal her disconcertedness, and that the Prince manages to pick up on it despite this, speaks to the fact of its physiological aspect. The result is a tense moment that “neither [of them] could have said how long it lasted” (49), where both parties seem to be aware of the Prince’s predicament but leaves it hovering uncomfortably in the air between them:

It fairly befell at last for a climax that they almost ceased to pretend—pretend, that is, to cheat each other with forms. The unspoken had come up, and there was a crisis … They might at this moment, in their positively portentous stillness, have been keeping it up for a wager, sitting for their photograph or even enacting a tableau vivant. (49)

The halt in their conversation resonates with a suspended affect, locked in which the Prince and Fanny are both aware of but unwilling to pursue the matter of “the unspoken” any further. The fact that the novel intersperses a lengthy narration of Fanny’s appearance and character before their conversation resumes provides an additional element of suspense. As it turns out, the cause of Fanny’s anxieties does not match the Prince’s: “Something has happened for which I hadn’t been prepared,” she tells Amerigo, “But it isn’t anything that properly concerns you” (James 2009, 51). Fanny reveals that Charlotte has returned to London, and the fencing match resumes. The two continue mincing words, and it becomes apparent that neither of them wishes to admit to that Charlotte’s arrival is worrying.

Throughout the exercise of their once again “cheat[ing] each other with forms” (James 2009, 49), their anxiety remains present. The Prince is notably distressed when he learns that Charlotte is about to arrive at the house: “Oh, he promptly declared –
‘charming!’ But this word came out as if a little in sudden substitution for some other. It sounded accidental, whereas he wished to be firm” (53). As with Fanny above, the physiological aspect of his emotion chafes against his wish to conceal it. Charlotte’s unexpected arrival is clearly distressing to the Prince. It warrants mention that at this point in the narrative we are unaware of the Amerigo and Charlotte’s earlier relationship. The exchange provokes a measure of guesswork, even if it is perhaps not difficult to assume his reasons for being worried. As Fanny suggests, a “handsome, clever, odd girl staying with one is always a complication” (56). The conclusion of their discussion about Charlotte bears a striking resemblance to Fanny’s suppression of her fears in the later choral exchanges:

‘So it’s all right.’
‘It’s all right,’ said Mrs. Assingham.
‘Then why are you troubled?’
It pulled her up—but only for a minute. ‘I’m not—any more than you’

‘Oh well, I’m not!’ he rang out clear. (55)

Indeed, the two practiced conversationalists seem to be assuring themselves that despite the entirely obvious anxieties they perceive in each other, there is paradoxically nothing the matter. An important part of this final exchange is a description of the Prince by Fanny that occurs between the two final lines of the passage above. The length of the description defies full quotation, but its significance is easy enough to summarize. Fanny pictures the Prince as a medieval ruler on the balcony of a palace in a rehearsed public appearance before his subjects. “He seemed,” she muses, as “leaning on crimson damask, to take in the bright day … he was beautiful innocent vague…” (55). In terms of suspended affect, we can find in this passage the Prince’s trouble both to express and comprehend his anxieties. The indirection and conversational sleights of hand in this chapter generates a prolonged, oppressive emotional atmosphere.

The Prince’s anxiety is also present in chapter twenty-five, which I have briefly touched upon in my introduction, where he appears “visibly uncertain” (James 2009, 334). While the chapter primarily concerns Maggie’s state of mind, her perception of the anxious Prince is a useful adjunct to the novel’s tone of suspended affect. The scene in question occurs at the close of the chapter, and revolves around a single look that passes between Maggie and the Prince. Maggie has, though she is at pains to explain why, departed from her father’s house based on an intuition. The Prince has hurried
from his father-in-law’s house, arguably not knowing what Maggie’s withdrawal might mean. She waits for him at home, not knowing herself quite “what she had expected of him” (336) when he arrives. The uncertain look they exchange suggests to Maggie “a shade of embarrassment” (335). The embarrassment, she posits, arises from an awareness on the Prince’s part that he must appear to Maggie as assigning the commonplace with gravity. As she continues:

She had naturally had on the spot no ready notion of what he might want to see; it was enough for a ready notion, not to speak of a beating heart, that he did see, that he saw his wife in her own drawing-room at the hour when she would most properly be there. (336)

This passage provides the key to the strangeness of the scene, in what can be read as a skillful reversal of earlier accounts when involved parties are aware of problems they refuse to name. To any independent onlooker, the occurrence would be a commonplace one. There is nothing out of order, yet both Maggie and the Prince are notably on edge. The Prince’s uncertainty doubles back as embarrassment when he realizes that there is nothing that ought to warrant concern. His worked up emotional state is based on an entirely hypothetical scenario. Amerigo’s agitation recalls William James assertion in that a physical reaction to a thought may “notoriously in many cases [be] as strong as” the thought itself, and “may be even stronger” (2011, 53). The moment stays with Maggie and becomes the point of departure for her suspicions in the second half of the novel: “it kept coming back to her [Maggie] that the blankness he had showed her before he was able to see might … have a meaning” (336). The look is only a matter of a few seconds, but James works on the moment by Maggie’s later reflections to draw it and suspend the anxious states of both characters. As the Princess relates, “the uncertainty in his face had become … and uncertainty in the very air” (336).

The anxious uncertainty in the air is prolonged even further through James’s use of what has been described as ‘hypothetical discourse,’ or “dialogues or monologues which are presented as quoted speech … though not in fact (or fiction) ever verbalized” (Young 1989, 382). This form of discourse is exercised throughout The Golden Bowl by a variety of characters, but has been observed as particularly prominent in the novel’s second part. In this scene, Maggie imagines an exchange which would have the potential both to undermine her, and effectively do away with the uncertainty she has provoked in the Prince. As the narrator suggests, it was not
unmistakable for Maggie “that [Amerigo] might easily have made an abject fool of her … Three words of impatience the least bit loud, some outbreak of ‘What in the world are you “up to”, and what do you mean?’ any note of that sort would have instantly brought her low” (James 2009, 336). Such words do not occur, however, and functions in the chapter as proverbial bait for the reader to consider the tenuous nature of the uncertain atmosphere. We are provided with a possible solution that would dispel the troubled atmosphere but, in the next moment, are denied it. James’s use of hypothetical discourse can, as such, be seen to exacerbate the suspended tension.

Completing the visual trifecta of this subsection, the third scene of anxiety to be considered occurs in the novel’s sixth chapter, and is centered around a glance that passes between Charlotte and the Prince in their encounter with an antique dealer. “Didn’t you see … the way he looked at us and took us in? I doubt if either of us have ever been so well looked at before. Yes, he’ll remember us’—she was to profess herself convinced of that almost to uneasiness” (James 2009, 102). These lines are uttered by Charlotte after the event the chapter in question relates and are indeed proven to be ominous. In an interesting chronological reversal, however, Charlotte’s utterance is given to us before the pair’s interaction with the dealer, cueing readers to the significance of what is to take place. Having bought no wedding present for Maggie, Charlotte enlists the Prince on an outing to scour a series of antique shops. Though their quest is unsuccessful, a fact later that will underscore Maggie’s notion that their search was an excuse to spend time together, the episode in the antique shop provides an important element to the novel’s unresolved emotional tensions. Both polyglots, Charlotte and the Prince speak Italian as they peruse the shop, comforted by how “their foreign tongue covered what they said” (104). Their register would to someone fluent in Italian indicate their affection for each other. Shockingly for them both, the antique dealer is. After having hovered in the background of the shop “with his eyes on them” (104), the dealer addresses Charlotte in “the suddenest sharpest Italian” (106). The effect of the dealer’s speech is unmistakable:

Charlotte exchanged with her friend a glance that matched [his], and just for a moment they were held in check. But their glance had after all by the time said more than one thing; had both exclaimed on the apprehension of the wretch, of their intimate conversation, let alone of her possible, her impossible, title. (106)
The dealer, addressing Charlotte as “signora principessa” (106), is doubtless of the impression that the pair are married. The jovial mood crumbles, and the Prince becomes anxious to leave the shop. Importantly, it is their reaction about their reaction to the dealer’s words, more than anything, that affects this change of mood. It is another example of a non-cathartic emotion about the affective charge their glance was imbued with. Later telling Charlotte that he “didn’t want to have another scene with [her] before that rascal” (111), the Prince is clearly troubled by the dealer’s notion of their relationship. The fact is that their relationship has been compromised, if only by someone arguably insignificant. Their troubled conversation about the titular golden bowl solicited by the antique dealer, the crack in which is seen by the Prince as an ill omen, neatly captures the anxiety of the Prince. The crack in the bowl, and the exchange at the antique shop, comes to symbolize Amerigo’s anxieties for his happiness, his safety, his marriage, and “for everything” (112). As implied by Charlotte’s first quoted speech, the significance of the scene cannot be understated. After the dealer makes an appearance toward the novel’s close and inadvertently informs Maggie of the secret outing, she confronts Amerigo with her knowledge, and we can discern how the bothersome event has stuck with Amerigo.

One of the most climactic scenes in The Golden Bowl, Amerigo’s confrontation with Maggie in chapter thirty-four is characterized by ambiguity. The scene that unfolds hints at the promise of emotional release but ends up nullifying this possibility. As the Prince appears on the scene and notices the now-shattered golden bowl in Maggie’s possession, he vaguely recognizes it. It “reminded him,” we are told, “unmistakeably though confusedly, of something known, some other unforgotten image” (James 2009, 457). The destruction of the bowl affects Amerigo as a “shock … a pain,” as if its breaking “had been a violence redoubled … a violence calling up the hot blood as a blow across the mouth might have called it” (457). This impression demonstrates how the bowl’s breaking extends to the Prince as physiological, emotional violence. The crucial element that contributes to a suspended affect is that Maggie is not forthcoming with the details of her knowledge. She wants Amerigo to work out the extent of her knowledge himself, providing him only with circumstantial evidence. She perceives in his face the traces of an “impulse to take up something she put before him that he was yet afraid to directly touch … the discomfort of his privation yearned at her from out of his eyes with an announcing gleam of the fever, the none too tolerable chill, of specific recognition” (464-65). The Prince recognizes the bowl but refuses to infer from
it what he stands accused of. His anxiety is referred to in terms of a fever, anxiety, fear, vividly presented as “the pulse of fever throbs under the doctor’s thumb” (459). The physiological aspect of the emotion is in this metaphor unmistakable. The element of not knowing manifests as an intense emotion, prolonged by the incapacity at candour. The final words exchanged in the chapter aptly illustrate this point:

‘I know nothing but what you tell me.’
‘Then I’ve told you all I intended. Find out the rest—!’
‘Find it out—?’ He waited.

…
‘Find out for yourself!’ (472-73)

As I will argue in my last subsection, the Prince must infer the full extent of Maggie’s knowledge which, by the novel’s end, has become such an oppressive state of mind that it converts his anxiety to an overpowering emotion of shame. Through the prolongation of such fleeting moments as have been discussed here we see how James’s treatment of the Prince’s anxieties contribute to an effect of a suspension of affective release.

Maggie Verver – Suspicion

The twenty-fifth chapter, discussed above, which details the Prince’s return home is the first in the narration of Maggie’s awakening to her suspicions over adultery. It will be fruitful to remain a while longer with it, and the one that follows it. Through a closer discussion of the two, we can begin to explore the suspended character of Maggie’s suspicions. Much of the first chapter relates the complex state of mind and the vague perception on Maggie’s part of an “inward voice that spoke in a new tone” (James 2009, 328). Importantly, the complicated chronology of these two chapters can be read as a form of suspension. Indeed, the chapter opens with the disclaimer that it “wasn’t until many days had passed that the Princess began to accept the idea” (328) of her having departed from her usual routine. At the time the narrated events occur, then, Maggie is arguably unaware of the significance of her actions. Cohn has described the chronology of these two chapters as a form of “analectic prolepsis,” by which the narrator “looks forward to a future moment when the experience described will have come to lie in the past for the remembering consciousness” (2001, 5). Simply put, the actions of the Princess in these chapters occur simultaneously in the present and in the past as Maggie later reflects on them. The chronology is reminiscent of what Men has referred to as an affective “disconcertedness [arising] through a temporal confusion” (2020, 35) in
James’s *The Ambassadors*. The experience can be understood as affective in the sense that it is described both in physiological and cognitive terms. Ribot’s idea of emotion as an experience in two parts—embodied and cognitive—can thus help us situate Maggie’s disordered experiences as a non-cathartic emotion. Moreover, Maggie’s later reflections provide only a vague awareness, an impression of a “difference that she couldn’t measure” (James 2009, 336). These two chapters produce a suspended affect, both in their chronological postponement and insofar as Maggie does not achieve any clarity. Let us dwell for a moment longer on the Princess’s uncertainty.

As has already been noted, Maggie is unsure of what she wishes to accomplish in challenging the status quo of her relationship with the Prince. Though freed from a cause, what is interesting is that she is absolutely convinced that her challenge does have immense significance. In vivid imagery, Maggie’s uncertainties are described as a “wonderful beautiful but outlandish pagoda” in “the garden of her life” (James 2009, 328) around which she circulates. What strikes Maggie as odd is that the tall pagoda has no apparent point of entry, despite its many “apertures and outlooks” (328). That her suspicions are given physical form is noteworthy. Indeed, though the pagoda “is only a structure in the mind,” it is arguably “more vivid than the house [in which] she awaits her husband” (Yeazell 2009, xxviii). It is another instance of how an emotional impression has the potential of being “realized with an intensity almost like that of a hallucination” (William James 2011, 72). Maggie’s confusion as to why she has had no desire to enter the pagoda is reminiscent of Ngai’s idea of disconcertedness as a state whereby one is “confused about what one is feeling” (2005, 14). Maggie’s tolerance of the thought-structure owes to the comfort that her own and Adam’s marriages have not impacted their relationship in any significant way—in any way at all. Something has stirred, however, and she surveys the structure with new curiosity.

A conflict ensues within her, nonetheless. Recognizing that she “has ceased to take comfort in” what the structure has represented—her undisturbed relationship with her father—Maggie is reluctant “to ask herself with proportionate sharpness why” (329). This reluctance sets off the landslide of her suspicion. Moreover, it is the question as to why she is reluctant which catalyzes her excited state. While aware of her newfound perception, Maggie is torn by an acute need of having to quell the effect it has on her: “She could at all events remember no time at which she had felt so excited, and certainly none … that so brought with it as well the necessity for concealing excitement” (330; my emphasis). It is not only a morbid, non-cathartic emotion in the
sense that Maggie is reluctant to discover its cause, but also through her appreciation of her apprehension, as well as her struggle to suppress her excitement.

She had but wanted to get nearer—nearer to something indeed that she couldn’t, that she wouldn’t, even to herself describe, and the degree of this achieved nearness was what had been in advance incalculable. (James 2009, 332)

Incalculable, unanswerable questions indeed dominate the forefront of chapters twenty-five and twenty-six, casting Maggie’s uncertainties not only as uncertainties, but also as questions she is deliberately avoiding the answers, added to by her reluctance to ask why. Her state of mind, struggling with the nascent suspicions that will come to the fore as the second volume gathers momentum, is pictured as a compressed spring that may violently expand at the least disturbance of the delicate equilibrium upon which her relationships to her father and the two lovers rest upon. They are both cognizant of the threat: it was “her conscious fear about it [the equilibrium], that had brought her heart into her mouth; and the same fear was on either side in the silent look she and Amerigo exchanged” (337). We are thus introduced to the looming threat to the “equilibrium” that is to have a commanding presence throughout the second volume of The Golden Bowl. Maggie’s later actions, and the Prince and Charlotte’s attempts to dispel her doubts, are hinged on upholding it. For the two lovers, the motivation seems, other than to prevent the exposure of their infidelity, a desire to spare Maggie psychical harm. The threat to the delicate equilibrium, I argue, is one of the main contributing factors to an oppressive emotional atmosphere sustained in the second volume.

Maggie’s reluctance to disturb the equilibrium puts her in a precarious position in relation to her suspicions. The untold significance of the momentary look between her and the Prince remains with her, feeding her curiosity about his embarrassed reaction. With such high stakes, however, her suspicions cannot be pursued in straightforward fashion. She decides that the best way forward is to continue to enact small departures from decorum that, while noticeable, have no obvious reason. She resolves, in short, to attempt to “bring about a difference, touch by touch, without letting either of the three [Amerigo, Charlotte, and Adam] … so much as suspect her hand” (James 2009, 349). Such a difference, she is aware, will likely produce an effect in the two lovers, just as her waiting had done for Amerigo. Maggie likens her family situation to
a coach Charlotte and Amerigo are pulling, in which she and her father are sitting comfortably. Her departure from routine amounts to her having jumped from it:

She had seen herself, at last … jump from the coach; whereupon, frankly, with the wonder of the sight, her eyes opened wide and her heart stood still for a moment. She looked at the person so acting as if this person were somebody else, waiting with intensity to see what would follow. (342)

The image lays bare the uncertain nature of her actions, as well as her difficulty in gauging their results. Her “waiting with intensity” sums up the emotional atmosphere that follows her decision. It is as if she is holding her breath. Though a reader is aware at this point in the narrative of the Prince and Charlotte’s intimate relationship, Maggie is not. Furthermore, it is never perfectly clear if the two lovers ever consummate their affair. This partial knowledge serves to doubly exacerbate the tense atmosphere. That her impression is related as a scenic vignette speaks to its embodied character. The intensity of the passage suggests that a decisive moment is to follow, but the novel continually postpones this impression throughout the second volume. The unequal balance between the small changes and the significance with which Maggie invests them creates a taxing atmosphere whereby the promised resolution is postponed. At several points, too, Maggie appears on the verge of abandoning her suspicions. This is partly due to her impression that Amerigo and Charlotte are trying to divert her attention, but also to her attraction to the Prince.

In chapter nine, the Princess reflects of Amerigo that she never “so found him heart-breakingly handsome, clever, irresistible … as when she saw other women reduced to the same passive pulp that had then … constitute[d] her substance” (James 2009, 146). From this, we can surmise that his personality and physical attributes have a certain power over Maggie. His capacity to affect her in this way is significant in the second volume. As my discussion of hypothetical discourse has shown, speech is in the episode not a viable option for the two to address their uncertainties. Amerigo instead attempts to banish the tense atmosphere through physical contact: “he had advanced upon her smiling and smiling, and thus, without hesitation at the last, had taken her into his arms” (337). Their embrace seems harmless enough, and Maggie believes as much when she considers his embrace as an affectionate response to her longing for him. However, since her longing is expressed as hypothetical discourse, words that in fact
“didn’t ring out” (338), it is difficult to ascertain how aware the Prince is of her need for him. The exercise is repeated once the Prince returns after having gone upstairs to prepare for dinner. This time, though “there was still for the instant something in suspense,” the Prince’s look “passed more quickly than on his previous entrance. He was already holding out his arms” (342). The second embrace again suggests how the Prince employs physical nearness to dispel Maggie’s doubts. A third instance offers additional support for this idea.

Upon their return from dinner, the Prince takes “possession of her [Maggie’s] hands … and that had the effect of simply putting her, as she would have said, in his power” (James 2009, 345). The doubts she has harbored are allayed by his embrace: “She gave up, let her idea go, let everything go; her one consciousness was that he was taking her again into his arms” (345). The embrace, Maggie later reflects—always later—seems to have “operated within him instead of the words he hadn’t uttered” (345). Furthermore, she perceives “that the spring acting within herself might well have been beyond any other the impulse legitimately to provoke it” (345). This is to say that the Prince, noting her tense disposition, decides to calm her with his embrace. In terms of suspension, the ebb and flow of her doubts contribute to the uncertain continuation of her new awareness. Her decision to “give up” and “let her idea go” does indicate that her doubts can be dispelled by the Prince’s nearness, but his increased physical affection is also strange to Maggie. The embrace that provokes her surrender is the “third time since his return that [Amerigo] had drawn her to his breast” (345-46, my emphasis), during the same evening. Attuned to how the Prince may be practicing on her with his nearness, Maggie “taste[s] of a sort of terror of the weakness they produced in her” (346). What are ostensibly sincere displays of affection become tainted by a manipulative element. The comforting effect of Amerigo’s embrace is contested by Maggie’s attention to her ‘weakness,’ once again pitting emotion against cognition in a conflict that challenges a strict definition of an emotion as corresponding physical and intellectual states. One could describe her state as a blend of cognitive and physiological aspects of emotions that occur along a trajectory: suspicion, disarming comfort, terror at the comfort, and a nagging resolve derived from her original impression of the Prince’s embarrassed hesitation. Through her terror, though the embrace briefly belays her suspicions, she remains aware that she “had positively something to do, and that she mustn’t be weak” (346). Her suspicions persist because Amerigo’s affection seems so strangely unprecedented.
In the weeks that follow her change in perception, Maggie notices that Amerigo and Charlotte, too, are consistently departing from the common routine. There is a renewed intimacy, where two lovers are constantly at the side of Maggie and her father. The change in behaviour is relevant both in the nervous mood that seems to underlie the two lovers’ actions, but also the question with which Maggie is faced as to its reasons. The Princess asks her why such a “promptitude of harmony” is necessary (James 2009, 355). The perplexing contradiction between emotion and action that has already been seen as an important factor in the choral dialogues, as well as the Prince’s conference with Fanny Assingham, resurfaces here. The fact that Charlotte and Amerigo seem to be bent on upholding an image of untroubled relationships with their spouses implies that these relationships are under threat. Maggie finds this expressed on Charlotte’s part as “a new note of diplomacy, almost of anxiety” (351). The Prince and Charlotte unwittingly provide further cause for wonder on Maggie’s part. It dawns on her that the pair are “treating her, that they were proceeding with her … by a plan that was the exact counterpart of her own” (354). Importantly, their reasons remain occluded to Maggie, who pictures her uncertain state as living “in submarine depths where everything came to her through walls of emerald and mother-of-pearl” (355). Her suspicions are worked against and sustained by Charlotte and Amerigo’s behaviour. As such, the balancing act that unfolds creates an uneasy atmosphere whereby Maggie, the Prince, and Charlotte are constantly guessing about each other’s motives. It is sustained for much of the second volume, at least up to the point of Maggie’s confrontation with Amerigo. Prior to the confrontation, a conversation between the Princess and Fanny provides a good example of suspended affect.

“What awfulness, in heaven’s name, is there between them? What do you believe, what do you know?” (James 2009, 403), a surprisingly explicit Maggie asks of her guest. Fanny, first turning unmistakably pale, nonetheless adopts a “stare of ignorance,” before she rejoins “‘Between them’? What do you mean?” (404). These two lines of dialogue set up the operative tension of chapter thirty. Maggie, caught up in her uncertainties, wants a confirmation of their grounds. Fanny, on the other hand, while she is aware of the affair, is prepared to defend the Prince and Charlotte, or at the very least assert her own ignorance of their affair. Maggie observes a strange discrepancy between Fanny’s words and her appearance, however:
If she had dared to think of it so cruelly she would said that Fanny was afraid of her, afraid of something she might say or do, even as for their few brief seconds Amerigo and Charlotte had been … The difference however was that this look had in the dear woman its oddity of a constant renewal. (400)

It is a puzzling passage that hedges Maggie’s awareness of Fanny’s fear by the narrator’s hypothetical comment “if she had dared to think.” The amorphous impression remains, and we are made to ask if Maggie is capable of such clarity of thought. The exchange is a curious mixture of Fanny attempting to make Maggie verbalize the accusation of adultery she perceives below the surface and Maggie’s refusals to do so. Fanny goes so far as to name the issue—this is the only chapter when infidelity is explicitly referred to—though in an incredulous tone. “‘You imagine, poor child, that the wretches are in love? Is that it?’” (405), Fanny asks. Maggie’s distraught answer testifies to her inability of facing her suspicions alone: “‘Help me to find out what I imagine. I don’t know—I’ve nothing but my perpetual anxiety’” (405). It is indeed a perpetual anxiety, as we have seen in her reflections on her changes in behaviour. Only now, we are made aware of the emotional toll it has taken all the while on Maggie:

‘I live in the midst of miracles of arrangement, half of which I admit are my own; I go about on tiptoe, I watch for every sound, I feel every breath, and yet I try all the while to seem as smooth as old satin dyed rose-colour.’ (405)

Maggie’s sentiment not only reflects the tension generated by her pursuit, but also the immense effort she has undertaken not to expose herself as well as her painstaking attention of her surroundings. The sustained state of her suspicions materializes in this passage as a highly negative cluster of emotions she cannot resolve on her own. This conference with Fanny represents a high point in Maggie’s anxiety where she has at last become unable to remain silent. Fanny attempts another summary: “have you undertaken to convey you believe your husband and your father’s wife to be in act and in fact lovers of each other?” (409), but Maggie does not answer. The proposition passes untouched, as if it were too terrible to recognize.

It is remarkable that Fanny’s insistent emphasis on infidelity, despite the incredulity of her speech, is left hovering uneasily above their conversation. Maggie is only willing to admit to being “bewildered and tormented,” and hopes that Fanny would at least be able to “meet [her] halfway” (James 2009, 410). “‘Halfway to what?’” Fanny
queries, “To denouncing … two persons, friends of years … against whom I haven’t the shadow of a charge to make?” (410). The shadow of a charge is exactly what the two seem to be sitting in. Their exchange comes to a head in a surprisingly firm denial—an outright lie—on Fanny’s part. The “criminal intrigue” that Fanny has twice suggested as lying beneath the Princess’s distress, is to her “impossible … for a moment to entertain” (412). The final moments of the chapter are testament to the intense emotional distress of Maggie’s choice to suppress her suspicions:

‘I’ve convinced you it’s impossible?’ She had held out her arms, and Maggie, after a moment of meeting her, threw herself into them with a sound that had its oddity as a sign of relief. ‘Impossible, impossible,’ she emphatically, more than emphatically, replied; yet the next minute she had burst into tears over the impossible, and a few second later, pressing, clinging, sobbing, had even caused them to flow, audibly, sympathetically and perversely, from her friend. (412; my emphasis)

While the words uttered suggest a measure of relief, I argue that the impossibility for Maggie to abandon her suspicions is made visible in this moment. The fact of Maggie throwing herself into Fanny arms, coupled with the “tears over the impossible” that follow, is indeed an odd iteration of relief, as the narrator observes. She is beset by the terror and helplessness from bearing the burden of her suspicions alone, and must abandon them until they can be proven. The meaning of the passage, I suggest, is that her suspicions remain with her, latently. A few words from Maggie before their rapturous embrace speak to this fact: “‘Then you’re no longer unhappy?’ her guest urged … ‘I doubtless shan’t be a great while’” (412, my emphasis). Maggie seems to be anticipating the return of her anxious suspicions.

As I have shown in this subsection, from her suspicions first dawning on her as an unfamiliar feeling she both pursues and shies away from, through her exploration of them in the strained atmosphere, to her final conversation with Fanny Assingham, Maggie’s suspicions are characterized by an incompleteness. Moreover, the object of her suspicions, despite Fanny twice suggesting it to be the unspoken infidelity, is always just out of sight for Maggie. The way she suppresses her suspicions, too, suggests how they are impossible to prove at this point in the narrative, yet also impossible to dismiss. While Maggie’s eventual purchase of the golden bowl and the discovery of Charlotte and Amerigo’s outing are sufficient proof of their affair for her, the inviolable equilibrium which the two parties struggle to uphold also denies Maggie
any final closure in terms of her suspicions. The uncertainty that plagues all characters at the close of the novel—except perhaps the Delphic Adam Verver—is the subject of my final section. It is the emotion that unifies the three constituent parts of the novel’s tone of affective suspension I have hitherto discussed.

‘But they won’t know ... That, will be their punishment’: – Uncertainty

The title of this subsection is sourced from the final lines of chapter thirty-two, as Fanny Assingham reflects on the results of Maggie’s purported discovery of the illicit relationships. The line is an apt summary of the tension that swathes the final chapter of the novel, where not only Charlotte and Amerigo, but Fanny too, are left guessing as to what Maggie will do, and to what extent Adam is aware of the infidelity of his wife and son-in-law. It is indeed a punishment, we are shown, that plagues the three as they struggle to uphold the equilibrium. It is also a punishment with no end in sight. In a brilliantly crafted vignette, Maggie ruminates in chapter thirty-six on:

the facts of the situation … the fact of her father’s wife’s lover facing his mistress; the fact of her father sitting, all unsounded and unblinking, between them; the fact of Charlotte keeping it up, keeping up everything, across the table, with her husband beside her; the fact of Fanny Assingham, blessed creature, placed opposite to the three and knowing more about each probably, when one came to think, than either of them knew of either. (James 2009, 495)

The passage is an apt description of the crippling tension that Maggie’s discovery has affected. They are each aware, to some degree, that somewhere beneath their upheld forms there lurks the danger of breaking of the equilibrium. Dorothea Krook has provided a succinct summary of the situation: “each [character] ‘knows’ that the other ‘knows’; or, rather, each knows that the other knows something but none knows exactly what the other knows” (1962, 260). Maggie, studying them from a corner as they play bridge, notes that “beneath and behind all their apparently straight play” there resides “the imputation of wondering” (495). The three, despite their efforts at composure, are “more present to the attention of each than the next card to be played” (495). Their “conquest of appearances … acted on [Maggie’s] nerves precisely with a kind of provocative force” and she asks “at last how they could bear it” (495). The unease, the sense of being watched, and of them each watching the other, provides the scene as Maggie observes it, with an almost physical weight. The reference to its forceful impact
on Maggie’s nerves also suggests that the emotional tension is corporeally taxing for Maggie to observe. Negative emotions of fear, anxiety, and suspicion abound, and all contribute to the distressing tone. Even Maggie is torn by uncertainties as she reflects on her newfound power to maintain or destroy the equilibrium. She is thrilled by “with the idea of the prodigious effect that … she had at her command; with the sense that if she was but different—oh ever so different!—all this high decorum would hang by a hair” (496). Maggie is not different, and the atmosphere is not destined to come crashing down. It is there, however, suspended above the bridge party, this terrible possibility, and the three parties appear as if their decorum, “the matter of gravity and propriety … the stiff standard of the house” (495), does indeed hang by a thread.

Chapter thirty-six seizes on this moment for its tone, but its primary focus is an interaction between Maggie and Charlotte where the latter finally attempts a confrontation about the changes in her daughter-in-law’s behaviour. Their ensuing exchange is another exquisitely crafted arrangement that permits both for Maggie’s accusations of adultery to momentarily surface, and her enforcing Charlotte’s uncertainties by, in the same sentence, denying them. As Charlotte withdraws from the bridge game to seek Maggie out, the two meet on the terrace of the house:

‘It’s too close indoors.’
‘Very—but close even here.’ Charlotte was still and grave … ‘The air’s heavy as if with thunder—I think there’ll be a storm.’ She made the suggestion to carry off an awkwardness … but the awkwardness didn’t diminish in the silence that followed. (James 2009, 502-503)

One could cut the air with a knife. Charlotte has, like Amerigo, been aware of Maggie’s small challenges to their relationship but, unlike the Prince, she was not present at the shattering of the golden bowl and the affirmation of the Princess’s suspicions. Charlotte has, nonetheless, decided to speak: “‘Have you any ground of complaint of me? Is there any wrong you consider I’ve done you?’”, she begins, and Maggie replies “What in the world should it be?” (506). Their conversation closely echoes the one between Fanny and Maggie, where the object of worry is kept steadily out of sight. Though Maggie, just like Fanny, finally lies when questioned about whether something is the matter, her assurances to Charlotte are less decisive than they may appear at first glance. Her declaration, “I accuse you—I accuse you of nothing” is (507), is separated by a pause and, as Campbell has observed, Maggie both “accuses Charlotte and doesn’t accuse
her, and we are left with an impression of ambiguity” (2011, 116; my emphasis). That Charlotte requires additional assurances speaks to this fact. Maggie swears “upon [her] honour,” but even this is not enough for Charlotte. She sees “in Charlotte’s face and felt it make between them, in the air, a chill that completed the coldness of their conscious perjury. ‘Will you kiss me on it then?’” (James 2009, 508-509), Charlotte asks for a final gesture of assurance. The “coldness of their conscious air of perjury” is a remarkable formulation, the collective noun suggesting an awareness in both parties that their exchange rings hollow. The falsity of their avowals contributes to the tense atmosphere. Maggie “couldn’t say yes,” to Charlotte’s request for a conciliatory kiss, but “she didn’t say no” (509). They embrace, and suddenly the Princess becomes aware of the presence of the rest of their party. “Charlotte’s embrace of her—which wasn’t to be distinguished for them either, she felt, from her embrace of Charlotte—took on with their arrival a high publicity” (509). The ending of the scene speaks to the familiar motif of evidence and absence, in that the embrace must have had a reason for occurring. As Maggie later reflects, if the onlookers were to recognize a “note of the reconciliation,” it would imply “some proportionate vision on the ground of their difference” (526). The ubiquitous silence of the party is another revealing aspect of the tension that exists in their relationships. The question remains unanswered, and the chapter provides the insight that their suspended state of distress has no promise of release. All that remains, finally, is to briefly discuss Charlotte’s and Amerigo’s states of mind toward the novel’s end, after which I will close this chapter with an interpretation of its final paragraphs.

The news that Adam and Charlotte are to depart for America has a grievous effect on Charlotte. During their final months in England, Maggie perceives that her mother-in-law has become seized by fear and anguish at the uncertain fate that awaits her. Charlotte follows doggedly in Adam’s steps, “hovering, watching, listening” (James 2009, 534). As Maggie reflects, it was as if her father had been holding “the end of a long silken halter looped around her beautiful neck” (535). In another piece of hypothetical discourse, Maggie interprets three soundless smiles of her father:

‘I lead her now by the neck, I lead her to her doom, and she doesn’t so much as know it is though she has a fear in her heart ... you would hear thump and thump and thump. She thinks it may be, her doom, the awful place over there—awful for her; but she’s afraid to ask, don’t you see? Just as she is afraid of not asking; just as she’s afraid of so many other things that she sees multiplied all about her now as perils and portents. She’ll know, however—when she does know. (535)
The defining component of Maggie’s, importantly hypothetical, description of Adam’s view of wife, is uncertainty. Charlotte does not know, she fears the possibility of, and she cannot bring herself to ask but cannot resist asking what the “awful place” may hold for her. The negative emotions feed on the uncertainties that surround her, multiplying into yet further worries. Furthermore, the final vague comment made in Maggie’s interpretation of her father’s look is also indicative of the indefinite suspension of Charlotte’s state. It can only be guessed at when she will know. A final component to note is that the object of Charlotte’s fears is also unknown to her. Are we to infer that it is her separation from Amerigo that will disassemble her, or a life of seclusion with a man who only married her for his daughter’s sake or, even still, an unfulfilling life as a fixture in Adam’s proposed museum. Her terror fulfills all criteria for morbid and non-cathartic emotions. Charlotte’s anguish is made painfully clear when Maggie observes a guided tour she is holding for visitors at the Fawns country-house:

The high voice [of Charlotte] went on; its quaver was doubtless for conscious ears only, but there were verily thirty seconds during which it sounded, for our young woman, like the shriek of a soul in pain. (538)

The tone of anguish is so prominent that Maggie finds herself having “suddenly turned to crying” (538). In my reading, the heart-wrenching scene signifies how Charlotte’s terrors are too much to bear, and surface without her volition despite her attempts to suppress them. Her struggle to hide her terror is made apparent by Maggie’s comment that only “conscious ears” could recognize her anguish. Unlike chapter thirty-six, where she and the others successfully conquer appearances, Charlotte is here finally defeated by the bodily manifestations of her suspended terror, at least to Maggie.

For the entire period at Fawns, the Prince is absent. He has departed for London, giving the dubious reason that he is “arranging books there” (539). In the night following Charlotte’s display of emotion, Maggie pictures the Prince “wander[ing] in the closed dusky rooms … or else for long periods reclin[ing] on deep sofas and star[in] before him through the smoke of ceaseless cigarettes,” as if he is “doing penance in sordid ways—being sent to prison or being kept without money” (539, 540). Maggie realizes that the Prince has himself perceived Charlotte’s anguish and retreated to London “to escape from … [her] high coerced quaver” (540). The Prince, as Maggie
pictures him, is apathetic and despondent. He is, for lack of a better word, defeated. As I will show, the novel’s last paragraph reveals the suspension of his defeated state. Before this, the last conversation between Fanny and Maggie requires our attention. It neatly summarizes the uncertainty that pervades the novel’s final chapters.

The Princess and her aged friend meet one last time in chapter thirty-nine. Fanny is curious about the extent of Adam’s knowledge. She asks Maggie whether Adam is aware of Amerigo and Charlotte’s relationship and whether the two “know” of her father’s knowledge in turn. In a fashion typical of James’s novel, the topic of adultery requires no explication. The closing moments of the exchange deserve quotation:

‘Your father. He knows what you know? I mean, Fanny faltered—‘well, how much does he know?’

…

‘Do you think he knows?’
‘Know at least something? Oh about him I can’t think. He’s beyond me,’ said Fanny Assingham.
‘Then do you yourself know?’

…

‘I’ve told you before that I know absolutely nothing.’
‘Well, that’s what I know,’ said the Princess.

…

‘Then how is Charlotte so held?’
‘Just by that.’
‘By her ignorance?’
‘By her ignorance.’ Fanny wondered.
‘A torment—?’
‘A torment,’ said Maggie with tears in her eyes
Her companion a moment watched them. ‘But the Prince then—?’
‘How he’s held?’ Maggie asked.
‘How he’s held.’
‘Oh I can’t tell you that!’ And the princess again broke off. (James 2009, 571-72)

The exchange is emblematic of all points of uncertainty I have discussed. We are aware that neither Amerigo nor Charlotte can determine how much Adam knows. When asked the question herself, Fanny refers to her earlier avowal of ignorance, and the Princess soon follows suit. Charlotte’s torment at now knowing is also reiterated. In an interesting turn of phrase, Fanny’s question as to whether Adam knows “at least something,” suggests her belief that he cannot be blind to the indications that Maggie have grasped. Of course, the older lady immediately professes to have no notion of
Adam’s mind. Furthermore, exactly how the Prince is “held” is shown to be more of a concern to Maggie than may perhaps have been expected.

The last pages of the novel speak to this fact and are testament, I argue, to the suspension of Maggie and Amerigo’s emotional release. They are also a contributing factor to the lack of narrative closure in *The Golden Bowl*. Added to the questions of whether Charlotte’s fears are affirmed, and how much Adam knows, is the burning issue as to whether the harmony of Maggie and Amerigo’s marriage is, at the end, restored. The Princess awaits Amerigo’s return with their son following her father and Charlotte’s departure. She experiences herself “closer than she had ever been to the measure of her course and the full face of her act,” but also senses a “terror” that precedes such revelations. The crescendo has seemingly arrived. Maggie pictures herself as having “thrown the dice” but that Amerigo’s “hand was over her cast” (594). Their reunion is cast in pecuniary terms as Maggie looks to be “paid in full” by the Prince and, for a moment, believes herself to be. In a jolting reversal, she suddenly sees herself from Amerigo’s eyes as “waiting for a confession” (595). The sight “charged her with a new horror: if that was her proper payment she would go without money” (595). There is no final admission to be had. The Prince will never confess. The hoped-for blissful reunion founders as she realizes what their relationship has become. Maggie speaks lightly of Charlotte to diffuse the tension, and observes with distress how

[Amerigo] tried, too clearly, to please her – to meet her in her own way; but with the result only that … he presently echoed: “See”? I see nothing but you.’ And the truth of it had with this force after a moment so strangely lighted his eyes that as for pity and dread of them she buried her own in his breast. (595)

This passage has been variously interpreted. One account holds that Maggie buries her face to conceal “a smile rather than tears,” beholden to the “traditional view” of the novel’s ending as “*Amor omnia vincit*” (Boone 1986, 384). Alternatively, Nussbaum has emphasized its moral component to argue it details the couple’s reconciliation through sacrifice and love (1983, 38). By contrast, I suggest that Maggie’s dread stems from a realization of how Amerigo has been returned to her as a hollow man. They may have achieved a return to consistency, but the price has been both the separation from her father, and the “devouring [of] the Prince’s individuality” (Boone 1986, 384). As Sallie Sears has argued, the passage provides “no indication that Amerigo has come to
love her better than he did in the beginning, or indeed at all” (cited in Boone 1986, 385). He might be exercising the forms of loving her, but presumably does not at heart. As Gibson has aptly noted, there is no “final stage of reconciliation where love is recovered without question or ambivalence” (2015, 13) in James’s last novel. In my reading, the final sentence of *The Golden Bowl* is a powerful image of despair about how the promise of resolution remains painfully unfulfilled.

**Conclusion**

Where does James’s last novel then leave us in terms of suspended affect? In a narrative where “[e]verybody is lying to everybody else most of the time” (Lodge 2002, 232), it can be difficult to provide an answer to this question. While the characters’ fondness for avoiding the truth can variously be attributed to self-preservation, maintaining an equilibrium, or preventing emotional harm, I propose that James’s broader purpose in *The Golden Bowl* is to experiment with the difficulty of expressing emotions to invest his last novel with what he later referred to as the “sharper specification of the signs of life, of consciousness, [and] of the human scene” (James 1963, 313). I have argued that James’s achieves this task through an understanding of consciousness as an ongoing emotional process that is never complete. In my reading, *The Golden Bowl* utilizes suspended affect and a lack of narrative closure to, as Joseph Conrad observed of James’s novels, leave a reader with “no suggestion of finality”, and “the sense of the life still going on” (1916, 585, 591). While his brother William James “lamented ‘the method of narration by interminable elaboration of suggestive reference’” in *The Golden Bowl*, longing instead “‘for absolute straightness in the style’” (cited in Scott 2021, 955-56), and Edith Wharton frustratingly asked why he had suspended the novel’s principal characters “in the void” (cited in Yeazell 2009, xxv), I suggest that James considers ambiguity as fundamental to the experience of reality in his last novel. In the sense that James held the novel form as “the most comprehensive and the most elastic” of artforms that has “for its subject … the whole human consciousness” (James 1963, 182), I have argued that the suspended affect and lack of narrative closure in *The Golden Bowl* represent James’s desire to illustrate the boundless yet perpetually incomplete potential of literature to fully account for a reality mediated by emotion.

I have endeavored to approach this sentiment by analysing how a selection of negative emotions experienced by its principal cast can be characterized by a non-
cathartic element that contributes to a tone of suspended affect and a lack of narrative closure in *The Golden Bowl*. To approach how these negative emotions, while defiant of literary representation, still manage to find expression in James’s novel, my analysis has been informed by the nineteenth-century theories of embodied emotion in the psychological works of Alexander Bain, William James, and Théodule Ribot. These theories have helped to expand the analytical purview of emotion to include the physiological aspects coupled with them in *The Golden Bowl*, and have helped emphasize the central role played by emotion in the novel which might otherwise have been difficult to pinpoint. The important part played by emotion in James’s novel has made it possible to cast *The Golden Bowl* as an example of what Thrailkill has described as emotive realism. The term challenges strict definitions of realist texts as unconcerned with affective engagements. As such, this essay offers a significant contribution to the continued study of affect in fin-de-siècle literature. Furthermore, the analysis of emotions through the lens of the psychological theories of Bain, James, and Ribot also represents a deliberate effort to counter psychoanalytical approaches to later modernist literature that have arguably trickled back onto literary realism. The renewed emphasis on emotion has permitted my analysis of *The Golden Bowl* as producing a narrative tone of suspended affect, as opposed to individualized interpretations of its characters minds. In so doing, the essay tends toward post-critical scholarship, such as the method of surface reading proposed by Best and Marcus. Their emphasis on the visible has made it possible to argue that suspended affect is a narrative effect that speaks directly to James’s idea of the novel art as never complete.

The emotions I have discussed—fear, anxiety, suspicion, and uncertainty—have been read through the lens of what Ngai has termed non-cathartic emotions that do not result in any therapeutic or purifying release, and actively interfere with such affective resolution. Fanny Assingham’s fear of Amerigo and Charlotte’s rekindled friendship spur her to take preventative action, but her involvement ironically works to enable the ensuing affair. From the fear of complications she refuses to name, through terror-struck realizations, and the emphatic disavowal of her involvement, Fanny’s affective investment in the novel’s two marriages produces a note of suspended desperation that stems from her inability to order her negative emotional state. Amerigo’s anxiety is equally non-cathartic, introduced as a negative emotion that stems from his inability to gauge his companions’ motives. As I have shown in my analysis of the scene in the antique shop, the dealer’s apprehension of Amerigo and Charlotte’s
glance makes plain the Prince’s anxiety that undergirds the illicit relationship. The visual motif functions similarly during his unexpected encounter with Maggie, where a few seconds are extended to lay bare the intense anxiety he experiences. Maggie’s suspicions have served as another example of suspended affect. They are vague as they first emerge, provoked by differences she cannot measure. Neither can she pursue her suspicions without alerting the two lovers. Until her discovery of the lover’s visit to the antique shop, her suspicions place her in an intolerable limbo where she can neither prove nor dismiss them, as I have shown through her despaired entreaties to Fanny for help. Her realization that the Prince will not confess show that her suspicions will never be definitively proven, and thus remain as non-cathartic. The uncertainty that pervades the three first emotions is arguably the most overtly non-cathartic. My analysis of how the principal cast’s lack of knowledge about Adam Verver coalesces at the close of the novel to form a distinct atmosphere of emotional distress strongly indicates the painful lack of narrative closure. Thus, the four suspended affects I engage with in my second chapter all contribute in a significant way to the novel’s non-cathartic tone.

It is perhaps a bleak assessment of The Golden Bowl that most, if not all, characters are toward its end suspended in a state of emotional distress. What Leon Edel aptly refers to as the terrors of the heart have kept pace with the novel’s exploration of emotion. The terrors are made partially visible at a few moments of intense despair, such as Fanny’s desperate attempt to assuage her fears with her husband, Maggie’s anguish at not being able to prove her suspicions, or during Charlotte’s suspended terror before her departure for America. In this, The Golden Bowl may indeed contain a germ of what James would later attempt to inscribe in his unfinished novel The Sense of the Past as the “terror of consciousness” (Edel 1977, 805). But the novel’s ending is not all darkness. There occurs a curious moment just prior to the separation of the two couples. After her parting words to her father, Maggie observes a “note of that strange accepted finality of relation … which escaped awkwardness only by not attempting a gloss,” it “defied insistence precisely because of the vast quantities with which it dealt” (James 2009, 590). The instant is laden with significance, but to do it “justice would have been in some degree to question its grounds” (590). The motif of meaning detached from cause is familiar to us at this point, but the difference here is that every party seems, to Maggie at least, reconciled to the idea that unearthing its particulars will only disperse the wonder. What are the “vast quantities” with which the moment deals? What are its grounds? Questions such as these, like so many others in his final novel, are what James
leaves hovering in the air. It is up to the reader to dare disturb the equilibrium for answers—if there are indeed any to be found.

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