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In Between the Dots and Dashes: Telegrams and the Mediation of Intimacy in The Golden Bowl

Sean Jemison
University of New Orleans, jemison.sean@gmail.com

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In Between the Dots and Dashes: Telegrams and the Mediation of Intimacy in *The Golden Bowl*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
English
American Literature

by

Sean Jemison

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Abstract

Using a poststructural and reader-response theoretical framework, the author explores competing ideas of interpretation, epistemology, and the problematic nature of truth and meaning in Henry James's novel, *The Golden Bowl*. The author analyzes the ways in which emergent nineteenth century communication technologies, specifically how telegraphy both mediates and facilitates intimacy in a modern landscape. James anticipates modern forms of social media by exploring the nuanced and the potential erotic nature of mediated communication and knowledge.

Henry James; telegraph; *The Golden Bowl*; telegram; technology; primal scene; American Literature; epistemology; intimacy

1. Introduction

Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* is a novel about the difficulty of attaining knowledge about people and how they connect in an increasingly modernizing world. New forms of mass and social communication, such as the development of the telegraph, reconfigured time and space, thus making the transmission of communication across borders and oceans more rapid, more public, as well as a more compressed version of a letter or a longer correspondence. The most significant feature of the compressed style of the telegram in *The Golden Bowl* is its status as a constructed artifact, thus giving the creator the ability to carefully edit its contents, and moreover, to code its contents—to manipulate the disposition of the self. The compression of the text of the telegrams necessitates an economy of language and discourse, a layered coding of self-expression.

James illustrated his interest in telegraphy as early as *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), in which he delineates Lydia Touchett's "devotion to the wire" (220). She is the consummate authority of the medium, having "thoroughly mastered the art of condensation" (67). James presents us with a telegram from Mrs. Touchett that exemplifies the ambiguity and mystifying characteristics of the telegram's coding, publicity, and compression. The telegram reads: "Changed hotel, very bad, imprudent clerk, address here. Taken sister's dead girl, died last year, go to Europe, two sisters, quite independent" (67). In this one telegram, James's international theme is reflected within the concise and terse telegraphic style, yet he also shows just how oblique the language of telegrams can be.

Moreover, in *In the Cage* (1898), James gave telegraphy an extended treatment of the nuances of what to do with intercepted knowledge once it is deciphered. James draws upon more

than the telegram's effects on language and how it affects the unnamed telegraphist's consciousness. The interception of electronic information is somewhat different than a simple send and receive relationship of exchange—the telegram is read and interpreted by the telegraphist who attempts to attain a knowledge of coded telegrams. Both of these texts illustrate that, in general, communication in the telegrams is disembodied—a lack of access to body language, tone of voice, and direct discourse can obstruct intended meaning. The heroine has a visceral yearning for the knowledge in the telegrams she intercepts from Lady Bradeen and Captain Everard. She “had, in the cage, sounded depths, but there was a suggestion here somehow of an abyss quite measureless” (211). The telegraphist is enticed by the possibilities of romance, but her inability to access knowledge of the couple's world marginalizes her and places her within a cage of ignorance.

James's later phase is more concerned with the potentially positive and negative effects of then new media forms of communication, especially in *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), respectively. James anticipates the Modernists' perspective that there is no objective truth, and that attempting to consciously possess a certainty of truth is futile. James displayed throughout his body of work that we can perhaps only achieve partial truths. The telegraph, then, functioned simultaneously as the locus of deferred and obscured meaning.

Meaning, truth, and knowledge in *The Golden Bowl* are already obstructed by the lack of direct discourse between characters (specifically when it is linked to the question of sex and intimacy), as well as characters' unwillingness to disclose things they know or only partially know as a means of self-preservation, or even as a conscious decision to remain ignorant. To admit knowledge is thus revealing a complicity in the matter as it is observed, for example, in

Fanny Assingham's connivance to keep Charlotte and the Prince's affair a secret. The telegrams add an additional barrier that prevents the characters from attaining knowledge, particularly of a sexual kind. Societal and ethical norms of infidelity are not given precedence in *The Golden Bowl* as technology both subverts and becomes incorporated into existing social mores and norms.

Telegraphy's surface-level function in *The Golden Bowl* is to keep the Prince and Charlotte's illicit affair a secret. Adam and Maggie Verver, Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant, and Fanny and Bob Assingham all attempt to *read* each other, but all they have to go on is what they can see on the surface, of which telegrams form a significant portion. Thus, characters are repeatedly misreading each other given the scant amount of evidence the telegrams leave behind. Moreover, these telegrams not only disrupt direct discourse, but they also create gaps in meaning or what Wolfgang Iser refers to as "blanks," gaps in the text that the reader must fill in order for communication to happen between the text and the interpreter (1281). During the reading or communication process, the "blanks indicate that the different segments and patterns of the text are to be connected even though the text itself does not say so. They are the unseen joints of the text, and as they mark off the schemata and textual perspectives from one another they simultaneously prompt acts of ideation on the reader's part" (1281). Iser is not concerned with excavating hidden meaning from the text as though it is buried treasure lost in the depths of the sea. Iser argues that "appearance is, for James, a man reaching into the void. In James's view, appearances are no longer the veil concealing the substance of a meaning; now they are the means to bring—into the world something which has never existed at any other time or place before" (6). The gaps in meaning then become clues for interpretation, but that interpretation can

also bring us closer to a kind of meaning between reader and text even when the information is not complete. The telegrams, with their gaps in meaning, present us with a new set of rules that govern what is concealed. However, this concealment of meaning is also a type of revealing.

Moreover, Iser postulates that the uneven ground between the text and reader is indeterminate, and it is that exact uncertainty that maximizes the various possible transmissions of utterances. If we conceive *The Golden Bowl* as a multi-level text within a text—a frame of communication and visual interpretation—then we can consider how meaning and knowledge is disjointed. The telegrams are mediating discourse between characters, but they are not very successful in conveying meaning if other characters do not have access to the text objects or the context to decipher the meaning of the telegrams. The telegrams create the largest gaps and blanks, which Iser postulates are sites where the communication between reader and text occurs. Yet, telegrams are not the primary gaps in the text; they are just the facilitating gaps, the blanks that compound the lack of knowledge of sexual relationships. Telegrams are the gaps that illustrate James’s apprehensive relationship with modern communication technologies. James suggests that new forms of communication make meaning less transparent, but he does not yearn for a world where communication is simple; rather, he is seeking to explore the effects of the new medium on intimate relationships, where knowledge and meaning are most keenly sought after. James’s characters already had trouble communicating, but the invention of and greater reliance on telegrams adds another opaque *screen* between minds—making meaning difficult to assess correctly. I use the word “screen” because characters constantly rely on visual cues, body language, and speech to *read* their interlocutors as a visual text.

Coming to knowledge and obtaining meaning in James's texts is often a source of power, but can also be the site where power is revoked. Often we are met by an indeterminacy of meaning through the telegrams. Opposing Iser's theory that meaning is constructed by the reader or the viewer of a text, Shoshana Felman argues, in her study on *The Turn of the Screw*, that James creates a linguistic trap within his texts in order to create or retain ambiguity. She also argues that the text itself is a trap. Felman says that James's "invitation to undertake a reading of the text is perforce an invitation to *repeat* the text, to enter into its labyrinth of mirrors, from which it is henceforth impossible to escape" (215). Yet, if we get lost in the funhouse of interpretation, it seems that we encounter an endless array of mirrors, reflecting and distorting our analysis back at us. The result of Felman's analysis brings us beyond the Lacanian notion that language constitutes the framework of the unconscious. Taking Derrida's lead, Felman removes the centric force of a text, which is a governing structure. Felman leaves us wondering whether, if we attempt to find that structure, or the meaning in the text, we both vainly perform the text and get caught in its web. Felman argues that James's texts puzzle readers so we must "demystify our errors and our madness; it is we ourselves that James makes laugh—and bleed. The joke is indeed on us, the worry, ours" (228). There is no definitive interpretation of any text, but even more so a Jamesean text, which itself is often about the opacity of language. Nonetheless, the telegrams, cryptic and bewildering as they are, are not the end of analysis, but the starting point. The medium of the telegram and James's anxiety about modern communication suggest that we are not merely caught inside of a chasm where we get lost in the meaning of vapid word games. Some of the outside signs Jennifer Sorensen Emery-Peck refers to in "'Clearnesses, Clearances': Telegrams and the Formal Economy of *The Golden Bowl*," are

pauses in dialogue and misinterpretation of body language. Just as the attempt to glean meaning of the surfaces around us can be nebulous, language can add another layer of indeterminacy.

It is significant that in, *The Golden Bowl*, characters often “hang fire” or pause sharply when a character consciously represses knowledge or feelings, especially when telegrams are present. Ned Lukacher argues that to “hang fire” refers to an impasse that cannot be traversed; the phrase “locates the point of maximum resistance, the point at which saying something also becomes a way of not saying something else” (132). Thus, hanging fire is not merely a hesitation to communicate feelings or thoughts but an explicit suppression of meaning. Since meaning cannot be conveyed in a coherent way, the bulk of meaning is left in the shadow of the fire. Lukacher posits that the “primal scenes”¹ of James’s works are “situated” in the “zone of *différance*,” which is the *multiplex* of the “temporal space of the always already but not yet. It is an origin that is an effect of its effects. It is not real, but it takes us closer to the real than any other reading has done” (129). The multiplex is the simultaneous conveyance of several disparate messages or utterances that transmit meaning along a single conduit of communication. However, the primal scene is where this channel of communication breaks down and where meaning is more difficult to interpret. Following Lukacher’s logic, contact between characters breaks down at the linguistic level. Borrowing from Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive framework, Lukacher suggests that interpretation is de-centered, a space where meaning is constantly deferred.

¹ The primal scene is a psychoanalytic term first applied by Sigmund Freud in the “Wolf Man” case to analyze trauma and psychosexual development in children. Lukacher argues that the primal scene is not a way to “extinguish the ‘incalculable,’” but that it “opens a new path towards it” (129).

My analysis of telegrams will lead us to somewhat of an understanding, a partial portrait, of how communicating meaning is disrupted by the mediation of emergent technologies. James also suggests that, paradoxically, the very technologies that we construct to bring us in closer contact—the telegraph and eventually texting and contemporary forms of social media such as Twitter and Facebook—also drive us apart and make communicating meaning more difficult. A conventional response to new media is a positive one, especially for the innovation it allows. But as James shows us, technology complicates the mediation of intimacy. Even though the telegraph allowed for more public and mediated connections as well as easier access to love and sex (through the greater ease of arranging assignations between lovers), the negotiation of intimacy through the telegraph causes the potential for more misreading and communication than ever before. However, the relationships that are mediated by electronic communication, including telegrams, are also more fluid and operate differently than unmediated intimacies.

My framework of analysis is influenced by Mark Goble's analysis of telegrams and the connection to intimacy in *The Ambassadors*. Goble's book-length study *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* analyzes how technology mediates modern intimacy and sex. His first chapter focuses on James, primarily *The Ambassadors*. With a few pages on *The Golden Bowl*, Goble's brief analysis is apt but does not include the last telegraphic exchange. Goble's analysis of *The Golden Bowl* is incomplete because it fails to address Maggie's psychological tragedy, as well as her subsequent transformation from ignorance to knowledge. Without this telegraphic exchange we cannot sufficiently analyze the role technology plays in the mediation of intimacy. Goble's perspective is a bit too optimistic, and by considering the consequences of

technology and relationships, we come to a fuller understanding of how the telegrams are functioning in relation to intimacy.

While I am also indebted to Emery-Peck's critical analysis of James's use of telegrams, she somewhat dismisses Mark Goble's analysis of the function of telegrams as perhaps making love easier and safer (because it is distanced and detached). However, Emery-Peck offers the most extensive analysis of the telegrams in *The Golden Bowl* thus far. While Emery-Peck acknowledges that class and especially money or cost have much to do with *The Golden Bowl* and the "formal economy" that James constructs through the relationships between the Ververs and the Prince, she hardly acknowledges the impact that the telegrams have on love and how they shape intimacy. The economic cost of telegrams is just one aspect of the mediated romance in their world. Communication costs the characters a great deal, and not just economically, but she does not acknowledge, just as Maggie and Adam Verver's *innocent* capitalistic American world-view fails to recognize, that in the Prince's world, economics, class, and intimacy are not separate. I also refer to Richard Menke's extensive work on emergent communications technologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to demonstrate their connection to Victorian realism. His work provides essential context for the function of and public reaction to the technological mediation of discourse.

2. The Prince's Telegram

The most significant metaphor in *The Golden Bowl* is the actual gilded crystal bowl itself. In the little Bloomsbury shop, the crack that the Prince and Charlotte notice in the bowl does not represent a certain moral flaw in their illicit sexual relationship, but a split in direct communication. The bowl's singular beauty, the shopkeeper argues, is the fact of its' "*being* crystal," and its "hardness is certainly its safety" (87). In the scene where the bowl first appears, James's trademark reticent dialogue is on display. To both the Prince and Charlotte, the bowl represents a physical marker of their clandestine relationship, an object that symbolizes their intimacy, yet also the inability for them to be together through marriage. J. Hillis Miller argues the Prince refuses the bowl from Charlotte because he "refuses to recognize publicly that he has any obligation to her [Charlotte], or that their liaison ever existed. Charlotte, however, could buy the bowl as a wedding present for the Prince and Maggie, since that will be a publicly attested, licit, event" (243). Yet, the point of the Prince's refusal is to ensure that there is no direct and material marker of their affair, as Maggie will later discover the affair through her association of them with the bowl. Moreover, the Prince ultimately refuse's Charlotte's gift not because he can see the crack, although that is his logical reasoning, but because it would potentially be a trace of their intimacy. Charlotte says, "A *ricordo* from you—from you to me—is a *ricordo* of nothing. It has no reference" (81). Charlotte's logic is that if there is no material memento that can link them both to the affair, then they cannot be exposed. The notion of *seeing* is key in this passage: the Prince and Charlotte can both see the crack in the bowl, but they both know that concealment of the truth is imperative. The Prince's desire is partially expressed through his need for concealment, but it is a bit inhibited and guarded by his short replies. They may not be "free" to

“offer” each other a gift, but Charlotte is the one who “refer[s]” back to the relationship (82).

Charlotte reminds the Prince that it “would be impossible to give her [Maggie] an account of the pretext” of their private excursion to the Bloomsbury shop (83). Charlotte’s seemingly trite but diplomatic half-truth about the *cost* of the bowl implies that even if the Prince knew the true cost of the bowl, he would be less inclined to accept it. Yet, we are left wondering if language itself can take them, in this dream of acquisition, far enough to express their desires, and emotional needs for each other.

The telegrams that the Prince and Charlotte later exchange are also material markers of their intimacy; however, they are compressed, coded, and transcribed into a language that only they can understand, albeit at a distance. Emery-Peck reminds us that the telegrams “refuse the ‘technical conditions of interiority and privacy’ because they are constructed for public transmission” (168). This suggests that the telegrams exchanged within the novel are composed specifically as if they were going to be for “public consumption;” therefore, they are constructed in cipher (179). Even a telegram that is not shared publicly, for instance the Prince’s telegram to Charlotte on the eve of her wedding to Adam, “seems already coded . . . and thus refuses intimate, unmediated communication” (179).

However mediated, the Prince and Charlotte do have a connection, but that intimacy is neither fully linked to telegraph cables nor to the physical world. Their relationship exists in a more liminal space, where they are connected on both sides of the threshold of material and wired boundaries. The telegrams, in fact, help Charlotte and the Prince to construct an intimacy that extends beyond physical boundaries, and to experience pleasure without even being in the same room. Goble provides a provocative framework of mediated communication in James’s

later phase—what he calls “the romance of communication” and the “pleasure of communication” (12)— and how James illustrates the link between “sexuality and technology in texts fascinated by the coded languages, practices, and cultural iconographies of the telegraph” (82). Moreover, Goble seeks not only to explore how James’s depiction of intimacy and relationships are facilitated by telegraphic exchanges, but how connections are “made possible *by* technology that are experienced as equally as satisfying, if not more intense and affecting, as relationships *with* technology” (12). Emery-Peck, on the other hand, departs from Goble’s notion of “the erotic charges of ‘better loving through technology’” by arguing that James does not create a narrative that supports Goble’s assertion that telegraphic mediation makes intimacy “‘better’ or more erotically charged” (167). Instead, Emery-Peck argues, technological mediation “functions as the *only* kind of relation that can exist in a novel that lacks alternative forms of private, uncoded, unmediated communication” (167). Emery-Peck focuses mainly on how James’s insertion of telegrams within free narrative discourse “refashion[s] the formal economics of the novel genre,” and how the characters and readers alike are “transacted” through the telegrams’ “financial exchange” and “public circulation” (167). Goble and Emery-Peck exist on two sides of the spectrum. On one hand, Goble believes that the possibility for intimacy is even higher and perhaps preferred in a culture that is becoming more dependent on its evolving communications technology. The telegraph, however far it detaches the body from direct discourse, still allows for an intimacy through the wire, and still allows for a closeness. Emery-Peck takes a more cynical perspective that ultimately economic forces are driving not only the narrative structure but also characters’ intentions, coupled with the economy of the telegrams themselves.

While the *cost* of the telegrams within characters' relationships does register, the economic cost is not the only thing at stake here, just as Goble's concern with intimacy is not. Intimacy and the economic cost of the mediated life are not mutually exclusive—they are linked and we can observe this in perhaps the most important telegraphic exchange of volume one: the Prince's telegram to Charlotte on the eve of her wedding night. What is significant about this scene between Adam and Charlotte are the levels of language and consciousness that James manipulates for narrative effect—he rejects both Adam and the reader's access to knowledge vis-à-vis Charlotte's concealment of the Prince's telegram. James also revokes access to Charlotte's consciousness which, in turn, prevents the reader and Adam from knowing her thoughts. Adam is left frustrated and struggling to figure out Charlotte by painstakingly attempting to *read* her on a surface level. Goble argues that the reader “knows more about the fatal telegram than Adam does, and this means everything, and yet we don't know anything at all. No actual information has been given to the reader; no message has been delivered” (78). After the emissary hands Charlottes the telegram, she holds it unopened and then reads its contents once Adam arrives. Charlotte proceeds to break the seal of the envelope; “then in silence, and for a minute, as with the message he himself had put before her, studied its contents *without a sign*” (177; emphasis added). Emery-Peck reminds us that before Charlotte reveals that the telegram was sent from the Prince and not Maggie, as both the reader and Adam are led to believe, the “narrative offers no information to immediately contradict this,” thus allowing Adam to interpret Charlotte visually (175). He watched her without a question, and at last she looked up. ‘I'll give you,’ she simply said, ‘what you ask’” (177). What he has asked for is her hand in marriage, but it is unclear whether or not Adam desires it merely because of Maggie's suggestion. Furthermore, James

shuts us out from Charlotte's thoughts, and Adam's gaze cannot penetrate her surface— her facial expressions giving him no clues to her feelings. The expression of Charlotte's face is "strange" to Adam, and "her expression still made stranger by the blur of his gratitude" (177). Metaphorically blind here, Adam can only think of gendered clichés: "but since when had a woman's [face] at moments of supreme surrender not a right to be?" (177). He cannot see through Charlotte, yet Adam does not know of the power that Charlotte truly holds over him, Maggie, and even the Prince. However, we do, to an extent, although we are also kept ignorant of the contents of the telegram and Charlotte's reaction to it.

This is one of the many scenes where James illustrates Adam as almost comically naive, or perhaps myopic. Before this scene, Adam's desire to marry Charlotte is illustrated in a conversation with her where the issue of *knowing* is raised. I have stated that the notion of *knowing* within James's fiction is linked to a sexual knowledge that may be both known and unknown, and Ned Luckaker's work on the "primal scene" in *The Turn of the Screw* is all the more apt here. Adam views himself as inadequate for Charlotte compared to her "youth" and "beauty," and Charlotte asks, "Do you think you've 'known' me?" (163). The narrator then gives the reader a window into Adam's consciousness:

He hesitated—for the tone of it, and her look with it might have made him doubt. Just these things in themselves, however, with all the rest, with his fixed purpose now, his committed deed, the fine pink glow, projected forward, of his ships, behind him, definitely blazing and crackling—this quantity was to push him harder than any word of her own could warn him. All that she was herself, moreover, was so lighted, to its advantage, by the pink glow. (163)

This passage gains status as a primal scene not because of sex but because the scene exists as a site where both sex and knowledge congeal. However, most importantly, Adam deep in thought, knows he is excluded from knowing—from knowing Charlotte and who she really is. I am suggesting, as I believe James is trying to convey, that primal scenes such as this shine a light on exclusion and absence. The telegrams that follow this scene paradoxically make the absence of knowledge wider, while seemingly bringing us closer to knowledge. James pulls us into the void, holding us over the chasm by our feet, but never lets us fall in completely. Sex is not the secret or the thing to be concealed, but it is the knowledge of it. Sex and knowledge about sex is different and James privileges the latter here because it is what is at stake. James tries to control knowledge by burying the clues in coded telegrams and tries to contain it by not giving Adam or the reader access to Charlotte’s consciousness here.

We have seen how the telegram as a public form of social communication presumably changes multiple hands before it is read; however, the Prince’s telegram is only semi-public. Once Charlotte reads it, it never leaves her hands or the privacy of her pocket, and neither are its contents revealed. With the “document always before them,” Charlotte asks Adam if he would like to read its contents, and when he refuses, she asks him again because of her “conscience” (178). Perhaps Charlotte knows that Adam would not be able to decipher the message, but she also *knows* his psyche. She needs his trust because it’s enough for their “question” (178). Adam assumes the telegram is a word of approval about his and Charlotte’s marriage. Emery-Peck argues that James’s use of the “opaque, coded communication of the telegram and Charlotte’s unyielding surfaces,” the reader begins to “distrust” the “free indirect discourse that allows access to Adam’s distorted perspective and constructs his desires for and

failures to achieve omniscience” (171). Yet, while Emery-Peck is correct in observing that Adam’s thoughts are given to the reader through “free indirect discourse” and that Charlotte’s terse responses are “opaque, coded, and limited like the telegrams,” I disagree with her notion that their uneven financial relationship corresponds with their “ability to speak and even to think narratively” (173). Their financial relationship is unequal, but Adam’s lack of intellectual insight and sensitivity is to blame for his ignorance of Charlotte’s true intention—to get closer to the Prince through their marriage. Yet, paradoxically, James’s text eschews notions of truth. Adam cannot read and misreads Charlotte again and again because the surface is all he wants to see because his superficial knowledge of Charlotte is safer. Economic power is a large part of the relationships in the novel, but Adam’s inability to access Charlotte’s thoughts and feelings is the result of him not wanting to know who she truly is. Adam’s willful ignorance of the telegram perhaps gives Charlotte the confirmation to continue her affair with the Prince. However, this is just one of the first glimpses of Charlotte’s brinkmanship. Charlotte manipulates Adam’s sensibility to pursue an affair that could possibly ruin both marriages; she pushes the limits of safety in order to achieve the most advantageous outcome—to be able to continue to the affair without exposure—the ultimate outcome being in relation to love and sex but not money or status.

Moreover, the telegram adds another blurred screen to Adam’s ability to access knowledge, and thus, in this primal scene, Adam pauses again, perhaps intentionally, not wanting to know what the telegram says because of the information it potentially contains:

He *hesitated afresh*, but as for amiability, not for curiosity. “Is it funny?” Thus, finally, she again dropped her eyes on it, drawing in her lips a little. “No—I call it

grave.” “Ah then I don’t want it.” “Very *grave*,” said Charlotte Stant. “Well, what did I tell you of him? he asked, rejoicing, as they started: a question for all the answer to which, before she took his arm, the girl thrust her paper, crumpled, into the pocket of her coat. (178; emphasis added)

Sex figures the knowledge of the telegram, and there exists a shock of violent surprise that can result from a sudden and unanticipated coming to knowledge. Adam’s violent pang of unforeseen knowledge is managed by both his lack of access to Charlotte’s thoughts on the narrative level, as well as his deliberate refusal to read the telegram. The repetition of the word “grave” signifies to the reader the danger the telegram may produce if it changes hands again. The portent of Charlotte’s linguistic choice produces a curiosity in the reader but not Adam; in fact Adam, already shut out of the correspondence, does not “want it” because it is not “funny,” or in other words, the potential information does not mesh with his auspicious view of his and Charlotte’s future together, as well as his view of the Prince being the bastion of Old World grace, honor, and integrity (178). Even though Adam attempts and fails at reading her, we can see that his lack of access to knowledge facilitates his “fancies” (175). Emery-Peck argues that James’s intentional narrative suppression of the telegram “creates a readerly desire for knowledge about the missive, which the novel plays with through Charlotte’s offer to let Adam read it” (175).

One can argue at this point that Maggie and Adam’s view of the Prince is unrealistic and naive and that Charlotte not only recognizes this but takes advantage of it. After the cryptic message of the Prince’s telegram is revealed to the reader four chapters later, Maggie and Adam are at Eaton Square, leaving Charlotte and the Prince to privately resume their affair. Charlotte

remarks to the Prince that the Ververs are “very, very simple,” and that she does not fear making a “beastly mistake” (228). Charlotte’s estimation of Adam’s psyche can be summed up by his “sweet simplicity” (228). Ultimately, Charlotte and the Prince seal their “sacred” oath with a vow of trust (228). The word *grave* returns in the scene mirroring Charlotte’s usage in the passage above. The narration emphasizes the spatiality of Charlotte and the Prince’s hands in relation to their bodies, shining a light on how the telegraphic form is mimicked in the narration: “They were silent at first, only facing and faced, only grasping and grasped, only meeting and met” (228). The clipped and coded trademarks of the medium translate to their lovers’ discourse. Moreover, Charlotte and the Prince embrace intensely and draw in to each other “as at the issue of a narrow straight into the sea beyond,” consummating their affair with “a violence that had sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillness” (228-29). It cannot be denied that their respective marriages brought the Prince and Charlotte closer together, but it is the connections of the telegraph that facilitated their secret and relatively private intimacy.

While telegraphy is making the Prince and Charlotte’s illicit romance possible, Ruth Bernard Yeazell takes a more pessimistic perspective on language and knowing in *James*, as opposed to Goble. Yeazell argues that the language that constructs Charlotte and the Prince’s pledge of trust creates an “almost comic alacrity” and reconstitutes “their treachery into its opposite, the undertaking of a sacred trust” (84). Yet, by the end of the second half of the novel Yeazell assures us Maggie’s triumph of consciousness will make it “increasingly difficult for us to see that adultery as in any way sacred or beautiful” (86). I do not think that *James* is being overly moralistic or suggesting that the second movement of the novel forces the reader to consider adultery only through the victims’ perspective, but that we should consider both in a

more nuanced way. Yeazell is correct, however, in stating that the “full truth in James’s late novels is never spoken,” and whether or not Charlotte or the Prince explicitly express their profound passion through language in this scene, it does resemble a telegraphic style—which is ironic because we can assume that the lovers share a language that they do not need to question.

Yet, this “grave” danger weighs heavily on both Charlotte and Adam. Charlotte removes the possibility of any revelation of the affair by playing upon Adam’s willful ignorance, knowing that his hopeful perspective of her is unchangeable. However, there is a violence in the action of “thrust[ing] the “crumpled” telegram “into the pocket of her coat” (178). Emery-Peck argues that Charlotte’s “gesture stands in for language,” where James employs the telegram to “exploit the novel’s central tensions between surface and depth and between knowledge and opacity as the materiality of the telegraphic again emphasizes our access to only surfaces and coded communication” (176). The possibility of exposure is perhaps more dangerous. Charlotte’s “thrust” of the “crumpled” telegram is a sign indicating what is at stake here: the exposure of a sexual knowledge. We can clearly see how direct communication between Adam and Charlotte fails here. That relationship between meaning and language is the exposure facilitated by the technological medium through which desire and intimacy are channeled and coded. Charlotte works out this problem in relation to Adam by becoming expressive through nonverbal communication—through different gestures and motions with the telegram in hand. But if Charlotte is attempting to avoid verbal communication through the body, a text beyond language, a Derridean perspective rejects this notion with his radical proclamation: *Il n’y a pas de hors-texte* (158).² Deconstruction embraces the precept that meaning is always indefinite, thus the *text*

² “There is Nothing Outside of the Text” from *Of Grammatology*. By rejecting the Saussurean notion of the sign, Derrida claims that everything is a text. All experience is interpretation.

becomes a metaphor for every other feature of human life that is accessible to some form of meaning. Yet, to James, conveying meaning through language is not impossible. *The Golden Bowl* recognizes difference and nuance between meaning through language and meaning beyond the text. James appears to explore the possibilities of the same pluralism that Deconstruction examines, yet Deconstruction often exceeds the limits of pluralism with the final result being to always end at an impasse.

Since Adam has no direct knowledge of the text (telegram) or the origin or sender, he attempts to read and, as a result, misreads Charlotte as a text. I do not think James is trying to convey the notion that there is no direct experience of reality outside of language, but he does point to an absence of knowing rather than a presence with his revocation of access to Charlotte's consciousness. Menke argues that the telegraph gave Victorian realism an "embodiment of writing"³ and that fiction "itself is an exploration of the power and the limits of written textuality in an age busy producing alternatives to it" (11). Narrative focus on Charlotte's hands is almost cinematically telescopic in this scene. The scene begins with the telegram being exchanged between multiple hands publicly before it gets to Adam and Charlotte. Then, as the information about the telegram is "revealed" to Adam, it is as though James pans in to Charlotte's hands, never ceasing to let the reader know where the telegram is in relation to Charlotte's hands and her body. The spatial concealment of the telegram is not coincidental since James often juxtaposes gaps, reticence, and problems in linguistic meaning with non-verbal forms of

³ Menke notes that we may get a more "disembodied" and a "Derridean sense of absence where we look for a producer or an origin" of a text. The telegraph, however, stores data through writing, in contrast to contemporary media technologies that are able to store data without a written text, through the "real-time *transmission*" of texts (10-11).

expression. Thus, James illustrates that telegraphy is not a disembodied communication in any *absolute* way.

We cannot forget how the telegraphic exchange is making Charlotte and the Prince's affair possible; the technology helps shape intimate relationships and influences experiences of sexuality. The link between intimacy and detachment is facilitated by technology, but it is not merely a simulation. Goble posits that our "inability to know the 'things' of romance in a direct and transparent fashion does not lessen their value nor render their effects trivial or immaterial" (24). This is what Goble coins "the romance of modern life," relationships between characters that are connected by "circuits," mediated by technology, and experienced at a distance (24). Yet, with the telegram in the private space of Charlotte's pocket, readers are left ignorant of its contents for a while. If we view the reading of the telegram as a primal scene, then we know that the avenues of communication that connect both Adam and Charlotte short-circuit. Access to the truth of the telegram is hindered by a faulty connection, against which the only protection is Charlotte's reticent language, and the coding of the telegrams. When the Prince's telegram is revealed, however, meaning and knowledge are more removed than ever, problematizing the already tenuous relationship between language and expression, vision and interpretation. Charlotte has an embodied relationship with the telegrams which stems from the lack of tangible contact with the Prince. Thus, the telegrams stand in the place of contact in a Derridean sense, replicating the sentimentality of a long-form letter, which is ironic because telegrams are usually more ephemeral.

In his analysis of communication in *The Ambassadors*, Goble points our attention to the scene when Lambert Strether discovers the sexual nature of Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship. He argues that James does not "desubliminate communication" in order to experience pleasure and sexuality through socially approved means (83). However, in his discussion of *The Golden Bowl*, Goble suggests that by offering the Prince and Charlotte mediated fulfillment through the telegraph, there are "pleasures in the world of media that are particular and native to that world, pleasures that are not repressed or obligated into always more circuitous expressions but that persist and thrive on being mediated" (83-84). It seems plausible, then, that people who engage in more disembodied romances become attached differently to the medium of transmission itself, as evidenced by Charlotte keeping the telegram in her possession. When we are finally able to read the Prince's telegram, we discover that its contents are even more mysterious and coded than Charlotte first let on. The narrator explains,

That telegram, that acceptance of the prospect proposed to them—an acceptance quite other than perfunctory—she had never destroyed; though reserved for no eyes but her own it was still carefully reserved. She kept it in a safe place—from which, very privately, she sometimes took it out to read it over. '*A la guerre comme à la guerre then*'—it had been couched in the French tongue. '*We must lead our lives as we see them; but I am charmed with your courage and almost surprised at my own.*' The message had remained ambiguous; she had read it in more lights than one. (212)

Instead of bearing the trademarks of the medium, this telegram is unusual because of its lack of word economy and its trimmed and direct style, but it still bears a coded and cryptic language.

This telegraphic exchange is unusually longwinded. The key to the ambiguity of this telegram is its lack of clarity. Although the telegram is published to us, in a way we are still mystified as to its meaning. There is a problem in translation as Virginia Smith, the editor of the Oxford World Classics edition (2009), has cogently explained. The turn of phrase “*A la guerre comme à la guerre*,” Smith says; “approximates to English (a) ‘we must make the best of things’ or (b) ‘all’s fair in love and war’; but has more spirit than (a) and is less blatant than (b)” (571). Is James commenting on how the mediation of intimacy allows for more misreading and miscommunication, and that technology is in fact not only mediating intimacy more than ever before, but making it an imitation—a substitution of physical love? The telegraphic exchanges situate sex in the space of the imagined erotic, making their multilevel ambiguity potentially erotic. As Felman argues in *Turning the Screw of Interpretation*⁴, sexuality is not uncomplicated in James and does not lend a tidy interpretation, but

points rather to a multiplicity of conflicting forces, to the complexity of its own divisiveness and contradiction, its meaning can by no means be univocal or unified, but must necessarily be *ambiguous*. It is thus not rhetoric which disguises and hides sex; sexuality *is* rhetoric, since it essentially consists of ambiguity: it is the *division and divisiveness of meaning*; it is meaning *as* division, meaning *as* conflict. (111)

Felman leaves us wondering whether sex and knowledge of sex differ in *The Golden Bowl*. As I have observed in the telegraphic exchange between Adam and Charlotte, Adam recognizes his

⁴ Felman is disagreeing with Freudian critic Edmund Wilson here in his summation that the concealed meaning in *The Turn of the Screw* is “simply” about sex. Yet, Felman reminds us that the “status of sexuality” is not “*simple*,” but it is “composed by two dynamically contradictory factors, sexuality is precisely *what rules out simplicity as such*” (111).

exclusion from the knowledge that Charlotte possesses, which in part causes his willful ignorance. Coming to knowledge for James can potentially be a totalizing experience. Knowledge itself has the power of arresting oneself in a position of being caught—producing an alienating effect. Coming to the truth can be visceral and confrontational, causing a violent shock, but I think that James reminds us, through these comparative scenes, that knowledge is inclusive but paradoxically can always be the agent of one’s exclusion.

Goble goes on to argue that Charlotte does not even know what the telegram means through the repetition of reading and of interpreting it from different perspectives. Goble also postulates that “no amount of translation” will help us understand the position the message “is or isn’t taking on the question of Charlotte’s mercenary daring and duplicity in marrying Adam Verver—which is as much to say, the Prince’s own mercenary daring and duplicity in marrying Maggie” (80). While we are left with just as much information of the affair as we had before, I think it is plausible to speculate that Charlotte *does* know what the Prince means, and that the message, in and of itself a complex and ambiguous translation, speaks to Charlotte in a language they both can understand, even though it is not in their shared language of Italian or readily seen within the telegram.⁵ Conveying the message in French could be an extra protection for them both, especially given its obliqueness. Yet, when Maggie and the Prince arrive in Paris, Charlotte did not have to inquire for an “explanation” about the telegram—just as the Prince “had not asked if the document were still in her possession” (213). Charlotte has thought of the Prince’s message from multiple perspectives. Goble argues that technology “presented powerful new

⁵ Emery-Peck notes in her endnotes that the Prince’s choice of French problematizes Charlotte’s understanding of the telegram’s meaning. She argues that the Prince’s repudiation of Italian as their language of secrecy produces a “distancing ambiguity about his meaning—and stresses the gaps between them in spite of the shared pronoun ‘we’ to describe their situation” (185).

models for representing experiences of ‘connexion’ that were already at the center of his familiar constellation of concerns” (80).

On the other hand, Emery-Peck asserts that Charlotte’s re-reading of the Prince’s telegram ultimately displays James’s “formal economy,” and that the telegram can “at once function as a fleeting momentary form of communication—a node to generate action and conversation . . . and as a text to be read over and over, as a sort of private, eternally meaningful message whose meanings develop over time to other messages and other contexts” (177). Thus, the telegraphic functions here both as a very transparent and immediate transmission conveyed through telegraph networks and eventually human hands. The telegram also functions here on a private level—a sort of “cherished keepsake to be consumed in private” (178). But is James using the telegram in this instance to highlight bodily distance, Charlotte’s isolation from the Prince, and the fact that he cannot simply spell out his desire in a letter? Goble reminds us that James was very much concerned with showing us not only the possibilities that technologic mediation allows, but also exposing its pitfalls. Goble asks, “what is the significance of sex without its ‘carnal attributes’?” (46). This is an important question that Goble elaborates on vis-à-vis Claudia Springer’s work in “The Pleasure of the Interface,” Goble paraphrases Springer:

‘The purest form of romance’ in the Western tradition has long been predicated on ‘the idea of bodiless sexuality.’ This is all to say simply that the pleasures of the telegraphic should not be overlooked if we are concerned with understanding an imaginary geography ‘where the vices have no bodies,’ a place where one can ‘sin’ only with the organs of communication. (46)

If James is calling attention to a certain alienation from Charlotte's knowledge of her relationship with the Prince, then Charlotte's misreading (or failed interpretation) of the Prince's telegram shows us exactly how technology is transforming our romantic topography. These telegraphic exchanges alter the sender and receiver's perception of sexuality, if not sex itself. If taken literally, the Prince wants Charlotte to act as though if one is in wartime, thus advocating Charlotte's military-like brinkmanship to employ deceit to get exactly what they both want. If anything, James is showing us just exactly what lengths people will go to in the search for love, a love that is free from feelings of vulnerability and insecurity. I agree with Goble's notion that mediated intimacy as it is illustrated here can give the Prince and Charlotte a certain sense of safety. James shows us how the telegraph constructs new avenues for intimacy, how fluid they are, and how perhaps physical intimacy is not the real issue. Yet, hiding in between the dots and dashes, Charlotte and the Prince's search for an intimacy without consequences only creates new problems, erects new barriers in communication, and is the ultimate agent of Maggie's psychological tragedy.

3. The Final Telegram

Maggie's internal struggle is not entirely dissimilar from Isabel Archer's in *The Portrait of a Lady*.⁶ Both heroines are psychologically trapped and manipulated by the people around them. In Maggie's case, the Prince's sexual and emotional treachery is made worse by the fact that she is unable to read her situation, as though she is caught in a flood of speculation without having access to any concrete clues. Most critics of *The Golden Bowl* agree that Maggie triumphs over her situation and over Charlotte by being able to read and come to a full understanding of knowledge better than she can. Maggie gains control over her life through her encounter with golden bowl, which not only gives her the capacity to "destroy" but also the freedom "and the responsibility—to construct and create" (McWhirter 155). Once the revelation of the affair occurs to Maggie, there is still a third of the novel remaining in which, as David McWhirter suggests, "Maggie now possesses the freedom and power to choose and act. And what she is already choosing to enact is the possibility of renewal—just as James is choosing to resume the story of the Prince and Maggie's marriage, to continue rather than end the narrative which began with their wedding vows" (156).

Before we move on to an analysis of the last telegraphic exchange between Charlotte, Maggie, and the Prince, we should examine the scene in which Maggie confronts Fanny Assingham directly with her limited knowledge of Charlotte and the Prince's affair. This scene is key in not only understanding Maggie's transformation but also her newfound power and knowledge in relation to the Prince. While Maggie's suspicions are already confirmed by the

⁶ The scene in *Portrait of a Lady* when Isabel discovers Madam Merle and Osmond in private is a primal scene that is comparable to Maggie's sudden realization of the Prince's infidelity. Maggie reads her discovery in the crack of the gilded bowl. Maggie's sudden revelation is expressed through the metaphor: "some strange, tall tower of ivory" (299).

hideous crack she sees in the bowl, Maggie also confirms Fanny's culpability in the affair. Maggie asks Fanny bluntly if she has any information regarding the affair: "What awfulness, in heaven's name, is there between them? What do you believe? What do you *know*?" (378). Fanny denies having any incriminating knowledge and even goes so far to say that the relationship is inconceivable; she believes and knows nothing. Yet Maggie knows that the Prince and Charlotte are on one of their "weekend visits," and she has planned this confrontation with Fanny perhaps with the knowledge that Fanny will lie to her. Again there is a narrative emphasis on seeing, and here Maggie successfully reads Fanny. Maggie figures out Fanny's lie by her changes of color, facial expressions, and the movements of her eyes. The narrator says, "Fanny Assingham turned pale for it, but there was something in such an appearance, in the look it put into her eyes, that renewed Maggie's conviction of what this companion had been expecting" (379). Sharon Cameron postulates that *The Golden Bowl* is "charged with a tension between an empowering of consciousness and a contesting of that power. For the issuing of a promissory note on magical access to other minds (akin, say, to the ability to 'read' another's mind) is simultaneously called into question by what is visible, or audible" (85). The face-to-face moment is essential to this scene, where both gazes interlock. Even when Maggie expresses her ultimate sorrow, how she is "tormented" and "helpless" over the knowledge she has been shut out from, Fanny still denies having any knowledge of the affair.

Yet, Maggie says that, until this moment, she chose to stay silent about her ultimate suspicions: "And if I'm both helpless *and* tormented I stuff my pocket-handkerchief into my mouth, I keep it there, for the most part, night and day, so as not to be heard too indecently moaning. Only now, with you, at last, I can't keep it longer; I've pulled it out, and here I am

fairly screaming at you” (379-80). Even at Maggie’s most vulnerable moment, when she needs a friend, Fanny exclaims that she still knows nothing—that she is “bound to confess” that she has “never imagined your [Maggie’s] existence poisoned, and, since you wish to know if I consider that it need be, I’ve not the least difficulty in speaking on the spot” (380). Fanny may not have difficulty speaking, but she clearly cannot tell the truth. The characters in this story display a fondness for taking secret oaths, but they do not seem to particularly care when they break them, especially marriage vows. Since Fanny knows that she carries a large, if not burdensome, responsibility for the affair, this passage between Fanny and Maggie is reminiscent of an earlier scene, in Book One, when Bob and Fanny pledge to each other that “Nothing—in spite of everything—*will* happen. Nothing *has* happened, Nothing *is* happening” (294). Miller argues that Fanny and Bob’s oath is similar to a “legal disposition: both sign before witnesses, here, before the narrator as witness. It is also like a soldiers’ watchword, a secret code phrase that ensures safe passage amongst enemies. When they meet one another one day they will whisper, ‘We know nothing on earth’” (240). Their oath, sealed with a negation of knowledge, only proves that Fanny’s reticence contributes to Maggie’s suffering.

What has ended up happening, however, is that Maggie has felt that she has lost her love, and it has trapped her in a position where not only does she have no clues to work with, but no one will tell her the truth. She ends up having to essentially read Fanny’s mind to confirm her suspicions fully. Maggie and Fanny exchange their own pledge to each other in the end of the chapter, albeit spontaneously. Mirroring Bob and Fanny’s pact, Fanny keeps silent about their knowledge, echoing nothingness:

“You never *have* entertained it?’ Maggie pursued. ‘Never for an instant,’ said Fanny with her head very high. Maggie took it again, yet again wanting more. ‘Pardon my being so horrid. But by all you hold sacred?’ Mrs. Assingham faced her. ‘Ah, my dear, upon my positive word as an honest woman.’ (387)

Miller argues that Maggie and Fanny’s pledge to each other is “more of a promise to behave as if they knew and believed nothing than a truthful report of what they actually know by believing” (241). But how does this assessment hold up to the final scene where, in their embrace, Fanny’s tears are described as “sympathetic” and “perverse” (387)? It does not seem likely that Fanny convinced Maggie that the affair is “impossible,” but that their mutual embrace signifies a release, or at least an unconscious acknowledgment of Fanny’s role in suppressing the knowledge of the affair. The narrator says, “She [Fanny] had held out her arms, and Maggie, after a moment, meeting her, threw herself into them with a sound that had its oddity as a sign of relief” (387). Maggie’s reserve in directly telling Fanny what she knows here is telling. By reading her face, Maggie reads her thoughts, deciphering Fanny as a text. Thus the embrace is mutual acknowledgement of what they both know but are unwilling to express directly. Although Maggie knows that Fanny is lying to her about the extent of her knowledge of the affair, she also *knows* that Fanny is struggling as well. Yet, as McWhirter has suggested, Maggie has the power of agency now to choose what she will do in her marriage. Fanny, on the other hand, is a text that Maggie has successfully interpreted. But we do see the extent of Maggie’s psychological tragedy and just how much she is trapped from speech after the golden bowl is smashed into three pieces. The narrator says, “she felt, within her, the sudden split between conviction and action” (435). Virginia Llewellyn Smith notes that, “fixed by Charlotte and Amerigo in a situation

where she can take no conventional line of attack, Maggie is trapped in a blind alley. Suddenly she feels the liberating force of her creative imagination: she has ‘lift-off’” (574.20). But Maggie confronts the Prince about the value of the bowl, which represents the value of their adulterous relationship in Maggie’s estimation. Speaking of the shattered bowl, Maggie says, “What I know now I’ve learned since—I learned this afternoon, a couple hours ago; receiving from it naturally a great impression. So there it is—in its three pieces. You can handle them—don’t be afraid—if you want to make sure the thing *is* the thing you and Charlotte saw together” (437).

Maggie’s knowledge and her ability to shape her life circumstances from here on out completely influence the way the last lengthy telegraphic exchange should be read. This final telegraphic exchange between Charlotte, Maggie, and the Prince navigates, through free indirect discourse, an extensive narrative description of Maggie’s deliberation of her future relationship with the Prince. The narrative introduces their *tête-à-tête* as a discussion over Charlotte’s telegram. Yet, readers gain access to Maggie’s thoughts and successful interpretations of the coded meaning in the telegram, but we are shut out from the Prince’s response. While maintaining the traditional markers of the technology (word economy as well as publicity), there is something markedly different in the narrative discourse. In the telegraphic exchange between the Prince and Charlotte, the narration destabilized Adam and the reader’s ability to interpret Charlotte’s consciousness below any surface level. Emery-Peck is one of the only scholars thus far to analyze this particular telegram extensively. Although Emery-Peck conveys the final telegraphic exchange as, more or less, an economic victory for Maggie, Maggie already has money. It is Charlotte and the Prince who are in precarious financial positions. Emery-Peck demonstrates that in the final telegraphic exchange between both couples, James employs “free

indirect discourse . . . to narratively construct Maggie's realization of her own coming into power and her growing *possession* of her husband" (179; emphasis added). Emery-Peck's use of the word "possession" intimates that Maggie is fully aware of the economic disparity, that gives her power over the Prince. While I agree that she is flexing her power in this scene, it is the knowledge that she has that gives her that power, but it is not merely about economic control. I agree more with McWhirter's assertion that although Maggie is in the middle of Charlotte and the Prince's deception, she recognizes the truth completely by "acquir[ing] her knowledge *in time*, before it is too late, before the narrative is finished. And by giving her the chance to respond, freely, and powerfully, to a truth that is no longer a secret, James is radically altering what had always been his basic narrative structure" (157). Thus, even after the revelation of the affair, Maggie chooses to love the Prince again, or at least put herself in a position to repair their relationship on her own terms. The final telegraphic exchange, however, displays the results of her newfound touchstone of power, centering her consciousness around knowledge, being inside of it, and choosing freely how to shape her world.

Chapter forty-one, the penultimate chapter, begins with Maggie reading Charlotte's telegram: "We shall come and ask you for tea at five, if convenient to you. Am wiring for the Assinghams to lunch" (543). Maggie is having trouble interpreting the telegram at first because the "document," in which "meanings were to be read," is ambiguous (543). Maggie presents the telegram to the Prince having already read it, thus James is situating the reader, Maggie, and the Prince within knowledge. Maggie interprets the telegram, "adding the remark that her father and his wife, who would have come up the previous night or that morning, had evidently gone to an hotel" (544). Emery-Peck notes that James's "narrative merges the objective 'document' with

Maggie's 'meaning' presented in free indirect discourse . . . the novel emphasizes the public consumption and circulation of the telegraphic medium and again the 'document' is treated as an objective, concrete, material narrative fact" (179). The result of uniting free discourse and Maggie's interpretation of the telegram is an assertion of her thoughts, of herself in relation to the Prince. Emery-Peck goes on to say that, as opposed to the earlier telegraphic exchange which confused Adam and Charlotte alike, the telegram "from Charlotte liberates Maggie and its overriding meaning—that Amerigo is now 'hers'—appears crystal clear for her" (181). What Maggie reads into the telegram is Charlotte's capitulation, conceding to Maggie, the superior reader. The private reading of the telegram brings Maggie and the Prince closer together, confirming that he has in fact completely given himself over to Maggie:

[W]hat Charlotte's telegram announced was, short of some incalculable error, clear liberation. Just the point, however was in its being clearer to herself than to him; her *clearness*, *clearances*—those she had so all but abjectly laboured for—threatened to crown upon her in the form of one of the clusters of angelic heads, the peopled shafts of light beating down through iron bars, that regale on occasion precisely the fevered vision of those who are in chains. (547; emphasis added)

The narrator's choice of the word "clearness" is key. Charlotte's telegram is more transparent to Maggie than it is to the Prince—her manacles have been broken, Maggie feels a "liberation" in knowing, which creates "clearances" where there were formerly barriers to meaning and knowledge. The communal reading of the telegram here suggests that the power now lies with Maggie, whereas before the telegrams denied the receiver any power to interpret and access knowledge. Emery-Peck's analysis of Charlotte's final telegram before she is exiled to America

hinges on Maggie's superior perception—her power to decode the message. Charlotte's message in the telegram does not give the reader any indication of some sort of intention. The Prince's alliance has clearly shifted towards his marriage with Maggie at this point, but what is Charlotte really trying to say? Emery-Peck argues that the telegram is not coded, that Maggie has the "awareness that there is no special, secret, private communication between her husband and her former mistress that gives him any insight into the telegraphic message" (181). There is no doubt that Maggie's superior ability to decipher the telegram bestows power to her. While I do not agree with Emery-Peck's notion that the "costliness" of the telegrams illustrates the economic inequality and power between characters, but I agree that Maggie's successful decoding of the telegram signifies a triumph of knowledge when there is an imbalance of intimacy between characters. The Prince's thoughts on Maggie's conclusions about Charlotte's telegram are never fully expressed, and although he is by Maggie's side at the end of the narrative, I do not think there is any evidence that suggests Maggie's triumph is only for her and her plutocratic father. The significance of the Prince's silence in the end, coupled with this being Charlotte's last transmission to the Prince, illustrates Maggie's usurpation of the communication between them.

As the telegram is exchanged between Maggie and the Prince, narrative emphasis is on the connection between the Prince and Maggie:

He gave her back *her* paper, asking with it if there was anything in particular she wished him to do. She stood there with her eyes on him, doubling the telegram together as if it had been a precious thing and yet all the while holding her breath. Of a sudden somehow, and quite as by action of their merely having between them these few written words, an extraordinary fact came up. He was with her as

if he was *hers*, *hers* in a degree and on a scale, with an intensity and an intimacy, that were a *new* and a *strange* quantity, that were like the irruption of a tide loosening them where they had stuck and making them feel they floated. (180; emphasis added)

Holding the folded leaf in her hands, the telegram is “hers,” Maggie is the authority of knowledge now, and she realizes now, by extension, that the Prince is completely “hers.” Emery-Peck argues that “Maggie continually asserts her position as omniscient author and interpreter of the scene. She completely co-opts any power on the part of the actual sender/author of the telegram, her rival, Charlotte” (180). The emphasis on having possession of the Prince signified by James’s use of water imagery and the use of the possessive, illustrates Maggie’s newfound position. The narrative grounds the reader on Maggie’s side, not giving us any real sense of the Prince’s thoughts, merely becoming the embodiment of Maggie’s thoughts and wants.

4. Conclusion

The dissemination of electronic communication in contemporary culture has altered the way we conceive of information and knowledge. The Internet, for instance, and computer technologies have effectively shrunk the world—making communication across oceans, national borders, and cultures much more accelerated than ever before. However, the fluidity of information exchange in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has not completely left us in a post-human state. Yet, do we not tend to conceive of the instant and totalizing transmission of information as akin to a nebulously fluctuating and bodiless entity, since online means of communication are detached from human contact? Does the mediation of new communication technologies fracture the space and materiality between the sender and the recipient? Electricity in the Victorian age was the main facilitator of the telegraph's rise in the transmission of information, which, as Menke postulates, gave telegrams the “ability to stimulate animal matter and to charge lifeless wires with pulses of human thought [;] electricity ran a circuit between the organic and inorganic worlds that animated both, becoming an impersonal, secular spirit invisibly permeating the world” (76). Without a doubt, the telegraph altered the way individuals exchanged information and those indelible marks are still visible in contemporary communication. Henry James recognized that being increasingly connected by telegraphic communication created fissures between the world's expanding interconnectedness and the distinct breaks in the continuity of physical communication, creating a sharp disjointedness of speech acts as well as written utterances. James's anxiety about the mediation of telegrams disrupts direct discourse between people, and gives us an illustration of modern love—something that is becoming easier to access but is increasingly detached from materiality.

Henry James illustrates how intimacy is shaped by the telegraph in *The Golden Bowl*. James explores the nuances between textual interpretation on the narrative level and the telegrams by showing us how they are transferred, the publicized, received, and interpreted as coded messages. My analysis of the telegrams allows us to consider why James employs modern communication technologies instead of private letters in order to illustrate just how wide the divide is between reading and interpretation. The telegrams both facilitate knowledge and create gaps in knowledge, producing an overreliance on reading characters' surfaces without reaching any depths. James shows us how technology mediates intimacy through telegraphic exchanges, but the first one from the Prince and the last from Charlotte work in radically different ways. In the first telegraphic transmission between the Prince and Charlotte, the telegram illustrates how it constructs barriers between knowledge and interpretation, leaving Adam to misinterpret Charlotte's consciousness and her surface-level body language. Moreover, James shows how the coded message can create ambiguity in relation to sexuality, creating an alienating effect between characters and the reader. The last telegraphic exchange, between Charlotte, Maggie, and the Prince gives power back to the reader (Maggie), rather than undercutting her through narration and free indirect discourse. Maggie uses her knowledge of the affair as a source of power to transform her self and her relationship, positioning her self in control of communication, deciphering the oblique codes of Charlotte's telegram. As a result, James sets up dichotomies between sexual and physical knowledge versus mental and concrete physical knowledge. The role of telegrams in James's proto-modern romance thus creates a fissure between narrative content and telegraphic language. James is neither preoccupied with the more positive aspects of intimacy mediation as Goble is nor with the telegram's relation to unequal financial and power

dynamics as Emery-Peck is. James shines a light on the ambiguity telegraphic communication creates, yet, at the same time, does not lament more disembodied romances. However, he rather shows us the nuances, the way modern communication technologies can both disjoint and simultaneously bring us closer to meaning and knowledge, albeit always incomplete.

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Vita

Sean Jemison was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. He graduated with a Bachelor's of English from the University of New Orleans in 2012. From 2008-2012, he studied American Literature at the University of New Orleans. After earning his Bachelor's degree, he enrolled in the graduate English studies program at the University of New Orleans. He will be pursuing a doctoral degree sometime in the near future.