

## Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, Guide to Reading

**Note:** the verb “to see” over and over again, also the noun “impression.”

### For February 12:

#### *Book 1*

- 1: Strether arrives in Liverpool, meets Miss Gostrey, who “led him forth into the world” (28). The feeling of having leisure just to take things in.
- 2: Strether’s conversation with Waymarsh, who looks like Lincoln (“like some great national worthy” 36); the “full life” (37); the “tribute to the ideal” (38).
- 3: Conversation with Miss Gostrey, who says: “I want to repeople our stricken country” (44); on Strether: “a woman of fashion was floating him into society” (47).

#### *Book 2*

- 1: Strether’s history: death of his wife, death of his son; Miss Gostrey: “Are you [Strether] quite sure she is very bad for him?” [the woman who is regarded in Massachusetts as a very low type (59); “how intensely you make me see her! [Mrs. Newsome, mother of Chad Newsome]” (65); “It’s her tribute to the ideal” (67).
- 2: “terraces, alleys, vistas, fountains, little trees in green tubs, little women in white caps, and shrill little girls at play all sunnily ‘composed’” (77); “yet it struck him [Strether] sometimes as the hum of vain things” (78); “the common unattainable art of taking things as they come” (79); the vast bright Babylon (83); “this knowledge of a *perched privacy* appeared to him the last of luxuries” [the young man enjoying a perched privacy is Little Bilham, Chad’s friend in Paris](90); Waymarsh . . . struck him as the alternative to the young man in the balcony (90).

#### *Book 3*

- 1: The Paris evening was for Strether in the very taste of the soup, in the goodness . . . of the wine, in the pleasant coarse texture of the napkin and the crunch of the thick-crust bread (94); “You can’t make out over here [in Paris] what people do know” (97); breakfast with Little Bilham (99); it was interesting for him to feel that he was in the presence of new measures, other standards, a different scale of relations (101); Miss Barrace on Waymarsh (101); perhaps, since she *was* there, smoking was the least of her freedoms (102); the faculty of seeing things as they were (103).
- 2: the meeting with Little Bilham took place . . . in the great gallery of the Louvre . . . before one of the splendid Titians (109); the young man [Little Bilham was his first specimen; the specimen had profoundly perplexed him (109); the Louvre –“the charged iridescent air, the glamor of the name, the splendor of the place, the colour of the masters” (110); lunch with Little Bilham (110-111); “What I’ve seen so often spoiled . . . is the happy attitude itself, the state of faith, and the . . . state of beauty” (114); Chad appears in the opera box (117).

### For March 11:

#### *Book 4*

1: Meeting with Chad; Chad is totally different; Chad seemed to be “designedly showing himself” (131); Chad: “Do you think that when I want to go anyone will have the power . . . “ (132); a person “at the same time couldn’t be both” [both a pagan and a gentleman] (134).  
 2: “call it poor dear old life that springs the surprise” (140); “Don’t make up your mind. There are all sorts of things. You haven’t seen them all” (142); Strether had never in his life heard so many opinions on so many subjects” (144); “But I am not sure,” said Little Bilham, “that I didn’t like him [Chad] as well in the other state [before he had been made into a Parisian gentleman?]”; Little Bilham, “You see he [Chad] is not happy”(both on 147); Little Bilham: “Because it is a virtuous attachment” (149); Miss Gostrey: “May’nt be that not everyone is so struck with him [Chad] as you?” (151); “But do you suppose, then, that Little Bilham has lied?” (155).

### *Book 5*

1: The gathering at the home of the sculptor, Gloriani. The day was soft and all sorts of things were in the air (161); personal acuteness [in Gloriani] that life had seasoned to steel (162); Little Bilham: “That’s half the battle here—that you can never hear politics” (164); Little Bilham: “What more than the vain appearance does the wisest of us know? I commend to you . . . the vain appearance” (166); Miss Barrace: “In the light of Paris one sees what things resemble” and “I like your Boston ‘really’s””(169).  
 2: Strether sees Jeanne de Vionnet and thinks she is the woman Chad is involved with. Strether to Little Bilham: “Live all you can; it’s a mistake not to” (176); Then there was something in the world covertly tigerish, which came to him across the lawn and in the charming air as a waft from the jungle (177).  
 3: Conversations with Miss Gostrey and with Chad. Miss Gostrey: “I wash my hands of her [Madame de Vionnet] (182); he [Chad] had never been more a man of the world (189).

### *Book 6*

1: At Mme de Vionnet’s plhome. Her heritage (196-97); she [Mme de Vionnet] was the poor lady for Strether now because she clearly had some trouble, and her appeal to him could only mean that the trouble was deep (199); Strether: “I’ll save you if I can” (204).  
 2: Strether thinks he is being used (205); repetition of “easy” in connection with Chad (207); It troubled him a little that she [Miss Barrace] wouldn’t be more explicit (210); Miss Barrace on Waymarsh: “he is never a bit banal” (213); Strether: “I seem to have a life only for other people” (214).  
 3: Conversation with Little Bilham. Little Bilham thinks that Madame de Vionnet cares for Chad more than Chad cares for her. “He [Strether] felt again the brush of his sense of moving in a maze of mystic, closed allusions” (222); Little Bilham: “They won’t think anything but a great name and a great fortune” (222); “That’s the point,” said Little Bilham, “it can’t be vulgar or coarse” (223); “*I’m speaking . . . of his manners and morals, his character and life. I’m speaking of him as a person to deal with and talk with and live with—speaking of him as a **social animal***” (223); LB: “A woman—a particular woman—may stand that strain. But can a man?”; Strether: “When it’s for each other that people give things up, they don’t miss them” (227).

### **For April 15**

### *Book 7*

1: Strether's visit to Notre Dame as a "remedy" (231), as "sense of safety, a simplification (232), a place where, ". . . for the refugee, the things of this world could fall into abeyance" (233); sees Madame de Vionnet praying; Strether has bought 70 bound volumes of Victor Hugo, "for the joy of life (234); the taste of her vagueness, which took for granted in him a sense of beautiful things (235); her deference to the solemnity about them, seemed to make her words mean something that they didn't mean openly (237); a woman who could be graceful with her elbows on the table (240); Strether and Mme de Vionnet talk about his saving her (241); they talk about Mrs. Newsome, Mme de Vionnet's fears of Mrs. Newsome, the possibility that if Chad goes back to Woollett, he will remain for the money (244); the thing that moved him most was that she was so deeply serious (245); the golden nail she had driven in pierced a good inch deeper.

2: the hum of Paris; through the plate glass, Waymarsh watches Strether reading a telegram from Woollett; the friendship between Waymarsh and Strether; entrance of Chad, looking easy and successful, pleasant and bold; Chad now ready to go home; the POCOcks are coming to Paris.

3: Conversation with Miss Gostrey; Strether: "I came out to find myself in presence of new facts—facts that have kept striking me as less and less met by our old reasons" (260); Miss Gostrey: "The wonderful and special thing about you [Strether] is that you are, at this time of day, youth!" (264).

#### *Book 8*

1: Strether's reflections on Waymarsh as a friend, "all the height of his consistency, all the depth of his good faith" (270); arrival of the POCOcks; recommitted to Woollett as juvenile offenders are committed to reformatories (272); conscious of how little worry, at the worst, he [Chad] wasted (275); Chad: "They're children! They play at life!" (275); Chad's urbanity fairly shamed him [Strether] (276); unconscious insolence of proprietorship (277); Chad could always take in the easiest way in the world the easiest suggestion (278).

2: He [Strether] had suddenly sounded the whole depth and gasped at what he might have lost (282); what Mamie was like was the happy bride (283); his own [Strether's] more timid dose (285); it affected him [Strether] while it lasted as he might have been affected *as some light pleasant perfect work of art* (285); Wouldn't it be found to have made more for reality to be silly with these persons than sane with Sarah and Jim? (286); [Jim POCOck on staying in Paris]: "You mean give this up and go back and boss the advertising!"

3: Strether pulled into Mme de Vionnet's boat./How could she [Mme de Vionnet] know how she was hurting him [Strether]? (294); was quite sufficiently to step into her boat (296); far-spreading presence of Paris came up (298); Sarah: "Well, Mr. Strether - !" (300); it would mark in himself [Waymarsh] a kind of intelligent generosity (303).

#### *Book 9*

1: In general - conversation with Mme de Vionnet at her house, marriage arranged for Jeanne, Strether shocked and troubled. / If Mme de Vionnet had, under Sarah's eyes, pulled him into her boat . . . (309); she [Mme de V] was so much a mixture of lucidity and mystery (312); Mme de V: "Ah . . . the things I leave to Chad!" (318); the whole thing made a vista, which he found highly melancholy and sweet (319); Mme de V: "We're marrying Jeanne." It affected him on the spot as a move in a game (320); Strether: "Does nothing depend on *her*?" (321).

2: Conversation with Maria Gostrey. Mamie knows how bad Jim is.

3: [Why does James as an artist feel that a conversation with Mamie is necessary at this point in the novel? Why does James have Mamie observe that of the people Jeanne wishes to please, her

future husband comes in third?] / Faint murmur of the huge collective life [of Paris] (332); he [Strether] had been conscious in respect to his young lady [Mamie] of something odd and ambiguous (335);, [she (Mamie) had things to say to him that she could say to no one else] (335); Mamie has “quiet dignity” (337); she [Mamie] made him, as under the breath of some vague western whiff, homesick (338).

### **For May 13:**

#### *Book 10*

1: Large party at Chad’s house. Conversation with Little Bilham, then conversation with Miss Barrace. / Treating her handsomely buttered no parsnips (347); that he could learn in talk with a personage so much his junior the lesson of a certain moral ease (348); Strether thinks Little Bilham should marry Mamie (350); Little Bilham: “Why of course she’s *difficile*—on any lines! What else in the world *are* our Mamies—the real, the right ones?” (354); “How can he [Chad] *do* . . . when he’s flagrantly spoiled?” (355); Miss Barrace on Mme de V: “*She* has courage!” (361) and “to be for him [Chad] . . . as young as a little girl” (362).

2: Waymarsh has profited immensely from his stay in Paris the small slippery *salle à manger* so associated with rich rumination (362); he had never conveyed in so mute a manner so much confidence and good advice (365); Waymarsh wouldn’t be his friend, somehow, without the occasional ornament of the sacred rage (367); Strether to Waymarsh: “Let yourself . . . go . . . These are precious hours—at our age, they mayn’t recur” (370).

3. Meeting with Sarah./ Sarah’s tone speaking to Strether (374); the nearest approach his vocal chords had ever known to a growl (374); what exposed his was poor old trick of quiet inwardness (375); Strether to Sarah: “I feel her ‘life’ [that of Mme de V] to be none of my business” (377); it probably was all at an end (379).

#### *Book 11*

1: Conversation between Chad and Strether about Sally Pocock. / Strether, at Chad’s house, senses “the spirit of the place” (384); everything represented the substance of his loss [the freedom in youth he never had]; his loss was “an affair of the senses” (384); everything came back with him [Chad] to his knowing how to live (385); “. . . as he noticed the smallness of anything corresponding to it on the part of his friend” (386-I frankly don’t know how to take this paragraph); Chad: “. . . because when you hate, you want to triumph” (392); Strether: “what it comes to is that more has been done for you than I’ve ever seen done by one human being for another” (393); Strether to Chad: “That’s because you have, I verily believe, no imagination” (394).

2: Conversation between Strether and Miss Gostrey./ Miss Gostrey: I dashed off so as not to be here if Mme de V should say anything to my detriment (399); Strether: “. . . what I want is a thing I’ve ceased to measure or even understand” (401); Miss G: “I think it will be treating you rather without ceremony of they do” [i.e., if Chad and Mme de V go off together without telling Strether]” (402); Strether: Mrs. Newsome “has a perfection of her own” (405); Miss G: “Yours [Strether’s imagination] is monstrous. No one has ever had so much” (406); Miss G: “But the worst . . . may be still to come; you may still break down” (408).

3: Strether takes a brief holiday in the country, meets Chad and Mme De V; circumstances reveal that they are and have been lovers. / In short—it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet (411); they were *the thing* . . . even to a greater degree even than Mme de V’s old high salon where the ghost of the empire walked (416).

4: Strether sees a boat approaching with two people, who are Chad and Mme de Vionnet./ . . . that this wouldn't at all events not be the first time (418); she was quickly and intensely debating with Chad the risk of betrayal (419); Our friend went down to the water with the odd impression of violence averted (419); but the present result [of Mme de V's switching to her native French] was odd, fairly veiling her identity (421); that they had something to put a face upon . . . and that it was she who, admirably on the whole, was doing this (422); fiction and fable *were* inevitably in the air (422); there had been simply a *lie* in the charming affair (423); it had been a performance (423); he [Chad] habitually left things to others (423); it was the quantity of make-believe involved . . . that most disagreed with his spiritual stomach (425); he almost blushed . . . for the way he had dressed the possibility in vagueness, almost as a little girl might have dressed her doll (425).

### **For June 10:**

#### *Book 12*

1: [This chapter pretty much sums up the whole book]. He mightn't see her at all, that was one of the reflexions he made after writing (430); implements that symbolized for Strether's too interpretative innocence something more acute in manners, more sinister in morals, more fierce in the national life (430); he had settled his hash (430); . . . that they were at least not all floating together on the silver stream of impunity (431); he was moving in these days, as in a gallery, from clever canvas to clever canvas (432); They were the smell of revolution, the smell of the public temper—or perhaps simply the smell of blood (433); quietness of her note at the center (433); that the objects about would help him (433); something old, old, old, the oldest thing he had every personally touched (434); or if it was the perfection of art it would never . . . be proved against her (434); a person committed to movement and surface; the fraud so lately practiced on his presumed credulity (434); the lie was simply a tribute to good taste (435); as she presented things, the ugliness . . . went out of them (435); Chad was always letting people have their way when he felt that it would somehow turn his wheel for him (435).

2: [In my view, this chapter most comes to life if one thinks of Mme de Vionnet here as art itself, the imagination's power to find life beautiful] / He [Strether] became fully aware that he must brace himself; he wished to look not too much at sea (437); Mme de V: "Where *is* your home moreover now – what has become of it?" (438) and "The only safe thing is to give. It's what plays you least false" (439); [Strether] felt what he had felt before with her, that there was always more behind what she showed, and more and more again behind that (439); what the matter with her was simply Chad himself (440); it was almost appalling, that a creature so fine could be, by mysterious forces, a creature so exploited (440); it came to our friend . . . that he was none the less only Chad (440); the word, however admirable, was nevertheless of the strict human order; in short it was marvellous that the companion of mere earthly joys, of comforts, aberrations (however one classed them ) within the common experience, should be so transcendently prized; the real coercion was to see a man ineffably adored (440); the passion, mature, abysmal, pitiful, she represented, and the possibilities she betrayed (441); she was older tonight; and yet he could see her there as vulgarly troubled, in very truth, a maidservant crying for her young man (442); it's only your beautiful patience that makes one forget one's manners. [How are we to take the last line of this chapter?]

3: Waymarsh who already, somehow, seemed long ago (444); Strether feeling old; she [Miss Gostrey] gave herself up to him with an understanding of which mere mute gentleness might have seemed the sufficient expression (445); freshness of a relation so simple was a cool bath to

the soreness produced by other relations. These others now appeared to him horribly complex (446); relation with Chad was bristling (446); he wished to do everything because he was lucid and quiet (447); it would have sickened him to feel vindictive (447); it came out for him more than ever yet that she had had from the first a knowledge she believed him not to have had . . . in other words a revulsion in favour of the principles of Woollett (448); she [Miss G had turned her back . . . to stay her hand from promoting these things (449); [the code of protective lies] (450); Strether: "It was all phantasmagoric. But the great fact was that so much of it was none of my business" (452); Strether: "Are you so sorry for her as that?" Miss G: "I am sorry for us all!" (453).

4: [Final meeting with Chad] / breathless sense of what Chad's life was doing with Chad's mother's emissary . . . it was transforming beyond recognition of the simple, subtle, conveniently uniform thing that had anciently passed with him [Strether] for a life of his own (455); it made him feel old (456); Strether: "you'll be a brute, you know. . . if you ever forsake her" (458); What was it that made him at present . . . so substantially young?; Chad: "One must sometimes get off" . . . "I'm delighted to gather that you feel we've made it" (458); Strether at this only gave him a stare: the way youth could express itself was again and again a wonder . . . yet he spoke of being 'tired' of her almost as he might have spoken of being tired of roast mutton for dinner (460); Advertising scientifically worked presented itself thus as the great new force. [Chad]: "It [advertising] really does the thing, you know." "The right man must take hold. With the right man to work it, *c'est un monde*" (462); "Advertising is clearly at this time of day the secret of trade" (463); "Ah," returned Chad as they parted, "you're exciting" (464).

5: Strether at Miss Gostrey's. / her place had never before struck him as so sacred to pleasant knowledge, to intimate charm, to antique order, to a neatness that was almost august (465); the board on the bare of a cloth and proud of its perfect surface, of the small old crockery and old silver, matched by the more substantial pieces happily disposed about the room. The specimens of vivid Delft, in particular, and the dignity of family portraits (465); Strether: "But it isn't his father in him . . . that troubles me" (466); Strether: "She's the same . . . But I do what I didn't before—I see her [Mrs. Newsome]" (468); Strether: "But I am not sure I've saved him. He protests too much. He asks how one can dream of his being tired. But he has all life before him" (469); Strether: "And it's our friend who has formed him"; Strether felt in it the strange irony (469); Strether: "But all the same I must go." He got it at last. "To be right. . . "Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself" (470).

