The Flooded Text: Finding Dry Land in *The Wings of the Dove*

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And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove, which returned not unto him any more. – Genesis 8:12, KJV

The sense was constant for her that their relation might have been afloat, like some island of the south, in a great warm sea that represented, for every conceivable chance, a margin, an outer sphere, of general emotion, and the effect of the occurrence of anything in particular was to make the sea submerge the island, the margin flood the text. – The Wings of the Dove, 142

The Wings of the Dove, published in 1902, is one of Henry James's last novels. In its ten "Books," it tells the story of a wealthy but terminally ill American heiress, Milly Theale, who travels to Europe with a companion, Susan Stringham. In England they encounter a friend of Milly's, a poor journalist named Merton Densher who is engaged to an intelligent woman named Kate Croy. Though its ending is typically Jamesian in its inconclusiveness, the novel is essentially about the attempt made by Merton, led on by Kate, to make advances to the wealthy Milly in order to get access to her money. Like all of James's novels, it has attracted a great deal of critical attention. In this paper, I will attempt to draw out the implications of a single symbol that runs in various forms throughout the novel: the story of the Flood and Noah's Ark.

The action takes place on the ark. For nearly all the novel, James restricts the cast of characters to Milly Theale, Susan Stringham, Maud Lowder, Kate Croy, Merton Densher, Sir Luke Strett, and Lord Mark. Though a man short, this number roughly tracks the original passenger list of Noah, Ham, Shem, Japeth, and their wives (Gen. 7:7).[1] When other characters appear, generally en masse, James tends to describe them in animal terms, as though

they were below deck, as when he calls London socialites a "foolish flock" and a "huddled herd." Over the course of the novel, the cramped vessel containing James's small cast peregrinates through America, Switzerland, England, and Italy, floating over the canals of Venice and the parks of London. Only when Milly Theale, the dove, dies, and returns to her companions no more ("For a flight, I trust, to some happiness greater – !"), do Kate and Merton come to rest on the solid ground of Mt. Ararat, from whence they can take their solitary way, leaving the ark empty behind them.

"Attention of Perusal": James's Use of Metaphor

James's use of metaphor and allusion is an integral component of the often remarked-upon "complexity" of particularly his late style. Images, un- or half-articulated symbols, and puns all reveal things in the late novels that his characters are unable or unwilling to say: the recurrent imagery of immersion and "touching bottom" in *The Ambassadors* anticipates the riverside location of Strether's epiphanic sighting, just as the eponymous golden bowl symbolizes the rifts within the circle of relationships in James's final novel. As Virginia Fowler says, "We are obliged to allow the repetition of images and metaphors in different contexts to create within our minds the associative meanings that both clarify and complicate the text for us" (181).

One source of this complication is the number of metaphorical systems that James intertwines in his novels; as Fowler points out, Milly is variously interpreted as "American Girl, princess, dove" by the narrator and the characters around her. A reader explicating patterns in the novel derived from the third of these interpretations cannot expect complete metaphorical consistency with passages using the language, for example, of Milly as "princess." Little is dovelike, though much is regal, about the Bronzino portrait said to resemble her that she sees in Book V. Likewise, chronological imperfections are unavoidable when intertextual correspondences are drawn from imagery and metaphor in addition to plot. The curse of Ham only descends long after Noah and his family has left the ark, but the abuse Merton heaps on Lord Mark through the final two books ("idiot of idiots", "ass", giver of a "dastardly stroke", "scoundrel" etc.) anticipate it.

Biblical criticism offers a relevant precedent for this sort of interpretive multiplicity and achronicity: the fourfold hermeneutic first developed in the

Middle Ages that reads sacred text literally, allegorically (typologically), tropologically (morally), and anagogically (eschatologically). Gabrielle Botta suggests that James's Christological representation of Milly Theale is intended to make readers aware of this fourfold interpretive schema. Botta finds ample biographical and textual evidence to support the suggestion. Henry James, Sr. gave his children a liberal but extensive religious education, and James himself expressed great admiration for the technique of Hawthorne, for whose Puritan subjects fourfold interpretation remained a viable Biblical hermeneutic and who was capable of drawing on religious concepts for artistic purposes: "The sense of sin in Hawthorne's mind [. . .] seems to exist there merely for an artistic or literary purpose" (quoted in Botta, 142). The multiple interpretations James's characters bring to bear on Milly represent the different kinds of Biblical hermeneutic, though Christian dogma is replaced by a pluralistic worldview in which different interpretations compete rather than form a harmonious whole (Botta, 146).

This analysis has two further implications for my argument. First, finding Biblical allegory in James's works is not inconsistent with readings stressing the plurality and indeterminacy of his language: just the opposite. Second, interpretations seeing Milly as Noah's dove, the dove of Psalm 55, the dove of the Holy Spirit, and as Christ himself, are not by their nature competitive. Each dove should be read as the type of the others; in Jamesian terms, there are multiple figures in the carpet.

At the same time Christian theologians were developing the technique of the fourfold hermeneutic to read their bi-testamental text, their Kabbalistic colleagues were creating their own commentary on the dove. I quote from the novel *The Island of the Day Before* by semioticist Umberto Eco:

> Psalm 68 mentions the wings of a dove covered with silver and her feathers with yellow gold [. . .] why, in Proverbs, does a similar image recur when "a word fitly spoken" is likened to "apples of gold in settings of silver"? And why in the Song of Solomon, addressing the girl "who has doves' eyes," does the speaker say to her, "O my love, we will make thee circlets of gold with studs of silver"? . . . .
>
> The Jews commented that the gold here is scripture and the silver refers to the blank spaces between the letters and the words

> [. . .]. in every sentence of Scripture [. . .] there are two faces, the evident face and the hidden face, and the evident one is silver, but the hidden one is more precious because it is of gold [. . .] Having the eyes of a dove means not stopping at the literal meaning of the words but knowing how to penetrate their mystical sense. (353-54)

James clearly places such "golden meanings" in the omissions threatening to overwhelm what is actually said in his novel. The dove, in addition to all its other typological significances, symbolizes the quintessentially Jamesian search for hidden meaning itself.

It is necessary to make these points because *The Wings of a Dove* is not a crudely allegorical text. It has "multiplicity, contraries which are not reconciled, but challenge and supersede each other; different approaches are tried and abandoned," and not all of it can be read in terms of the metaphors of ark and deluge (Bradbury, 73). In his preface to the novel, James offers a complex metaphor for reading his books:

> Attention of perusal [. . .] is what I at every point [. . .] absolutely invoke and take for granted; . . . The enjoyment of a work of art, the acceptance of an irresistable illusion, constituting, to my sense, our highest experience of 'luxury', the luxury is not greatest, by my consequent measure, when the work asks for as little attention as possible. It is greatest [. . .] when we feel the surface, like the thick ice of the skater's pond, bear without cracking the strongest pressure we throw on it. The sound of the crack one may recognize, but surely never to call it luxury.

A work of art thus supports us, as we try to break through it by means of close reading and discover what lies beneath the surface. The greater the work of art, however, the harder we must press or hammer in order to break it open. And the most luxurious works never crack at all. Like Joyce and Nabokov[2] after him, James subscribes to an aesthetic of making reading difficult, asking us to look for things that are not actually there. To mix metaphors, the ark is below the ice. Nevertheless, the plot and imagery of the Deluge are a powerful undercurrent running through the whole novel.

"Small Floating Island": Space in *The Wings of the Dove*

On the ark, space is at a premium. Wherever James's characters travel, they almost always find themselves enclosed in rooms as if actually upon a ship, whether in Chirk St., Lancaster Gate, Brook St., the Palazzo Laporelli, or Densher's "shabby but friendly" Venetian lodgings, where Kate finally "comes" to him.[3] Admittedly, Milly and Merton occasionally walk the deck, and Merton and Kate even sit on deck-chairs in Kensington Gardens, but such breaths of fresh air are unusual. James is attuned to the different settings in which his characters operate and establishes the architectural qualities of their various rooms carefully. On the first page, for example, we sibilate our way through chez Croy, seeing the "shabby sofa" giving "the sense of the slippery and the sticky" and the "sallow prints on the walls." When we meet Kate again at Lancaster Gate, she is sitting by the upstairs fire, where the sofa is small and silk-covered, excruciatingly aware of her aunt, a lioness below decks: "Sitting far downstairs Aunt Maud was yet a presence" (20-21). When establishing Susan Stringham's bona fides as an author of fiction, James, writing with unusual levity, seems to conceive of the writer's art in terms of the choice of room in which the action of a story occurs: "She wrote short stories,[4] and she fondly believed she had her 'note', the art of showing New England without showing it wholly in the kitchen" (76). And when the reader learns second-hand that Milly dies when she learns that Merton and Kate are in love, it is in terms that place Milly in relation to her sick-room rather than the people in it: "'She has turned her face to the wall'" (410).

With the exception of when they take walks, even the characters' travels are in enclosed spaces, rooms, cabins. Merton and Kate meet for the second time in a carriage of the underground railroad rather than on the street. Mrs. Lowder travels in a solid, enclosed carriage. Even the gondola carrying Sir Luke Strett to his waiting patient after Merton meets him at the Venice train station is equipped with a felze, which, Peter Brooks notes in the Oxford edition, is "the covered and curtained passenger's compartment in a gondola."

James thus keeps his characters cooped up, even as they move around the world. It is like they are in a ship, and both the dove and the lion are kept in their cages. One effect of this strategy is to heighten the sense of conscious artistry in the novel. James's intentional use of "scene" and "picture" relate his fiction to theater and painting, two genres which must deal with spatial limitations; the former restricted to a stage and a set, the latter within its

frames.[5] Baggy monstrosities like *War and Peace* or *The Newcomes* can introduce vast spaces like the burning city of Moscow into the novel, but renouncing open space relates the novel to the theater, where vast spaces cannot be readily depicted, and directs attention to smaller actions (the pouring of tea, the receiving of an iced coffee, the contemplation of a window view) and dialogue, much like a modern chamber film.

Likewise, the limited number of "speaking parts" in *The Wings of the Dove*, fixed above at roughly eight, gives it a theatrical economy, as if James were putting it on as a play and could only afford a medium-sized cast.[6] A stage is small, but a picture is even smaller; when Milly is compared in Book V to a Bronzino portrait, she is contained within a very narrow frame indeed. This frame expands a bit to encompass a bridegroom and guests at a soiree later that is compared to Veronese's Wedding at Cana, but ultimately constricts again to an ark-like coffin when the heroine is "dead, dead, dead" (157).

James's oeuvre is saturated with a strong concept of place. One of his favorite plot techniques is defining his characters in respect of their place of origin and then setting them in a foreign environment and watching them try to adjust.[7] In *The Wings of the Dove*, the recurring chambers keep the characters close together; even when Milly is on the other side of the European continent from Merton, Kate, and the narrator in Book X, her presence is felt, almost suffocatingly. Just as Aunt Maud as a caged lion "remains a presence" even when in a different room of the house, Milly as a dead dove remains inescapably present even after she has died in a different room in a different house. Kate conceives of the dove's wings as close, tangible, keeping Merton and herself framed and enclosed: "'Well she stretched out her wings, and it was to that they reached. They cover us'" (508). This physical proximity, almost intimacy, was associated with the dove metaphor from Kate's very first use of it at Lancaster Gate: "Poor Milly hereby enjoyed one of her views of how people, wincing oddly, were often touched by her. 'Because you're a dove.' [Kate says.] With which she felt herself ever so delicately, so considerately, embraced" (201-02). At the end, Kate's "embrace" of Milly becomes Milly's "cover"- ing of Kate and Merton. All James's characters are in the same boat, and very close to each other indeed.

There are suggestions in the book's initial phase that this physical proximity corresponds to genuine communication, that Kate and Merton, at least, can "think whatever they like" and furthermore "say it" (47). James's

ark is the only place where the couple can be real: "nothing could have served more to launch them [. . .] on their small floating island than such an assumption that they were only making believe everywhere else" (*ibid*.). This ideal communication, qualified at the time as based on an assumption, quickly proves illusory. The silences, omissions, and taboos characterizing both the characters' interaction with each other and James's narrator's treatment of the whole, threaten to overwhelm the information that is given. The closeness of space on James's ark becomes an ironic commentary on the mental distances its passengers keep from each other.

"Forty days and forty nights": Time and Waiting

The novel's use of time, in contrast to its tactile, almost claustrophobic sense of space, shares an emphasis on abstract, ritualistic time quantities with the Biblical story. Merton spends the book's entire duration waiting; he waits in the Gardens for Kate Croy, waits fifteen minutes in the drawing room before his interview with Mrs. Lowder, and, much later, can still be found waiting (three days, no less[8]) for news of Milly after Lord Mark's visit, waiting for Sir Luke Strett at the railroad station,[9] waiting a fortnight before calling on Kate and Mrs. Lowder, and then waiting two months for the New York lawyers' letter containing Milly's will and testament. All the time, Densher is waiting to marry his secret fiancée, a wait Kate extends into the eternal when first contracting herself: "'I engage myself to you for ever'" implies with a sort of verbal irony that a wedding will never come (68). Merton's passivity is like that of Noah, who, patiently awaiting the will of God, endures "forty days and forty nights" of rain, followed by "an hundred and fifty days" of flood, then another "forty days," then "yet other seven days," and "yet other seven days" (Gen. 7:12-8:12). The olive branch that Milly sends him and Kate burns, arrives on Christmas Eve and is thus integrated into the sacred calendar, equated with a gift from the Divine. In both stories time periods accumulate, prolonging a period of sequestration and self-denial.[10]

"The Lord shut him in": Setting, Immurement, and Reification in James's Ark

As the hard rain begins to fall, Noah and his seven companions enter the ark and are sealed off from view: "and the Lord shut him in" (Gen. 7:16). The Biblical narrator honors the privacy of this divine sequestration, making no mention of Noah's activities other than confirming his survival, until Noah

opens "the window of the ark" after nearly a year (8:6). While the text describes the progress of the waters outside and the death of all living things on the earth, the interior of the ark remains a cipher. Until he curses Ham, Noah maintains a complete silence throughout the narrative.[11] This narration-by-omission will be familiar to any reader of James's late style. In assuming a selective third-person voice, James describes the progress of the waters outside his character without choosing to empathically show the processes going on inside. Milly in particular is "sealed up" inside herself by the narrator, whose depiction of her, after her ominous interview with Lord Mark at the end of Book VII, becomes completely elliptical.[12] In setting up scenes, recording conversations, and indicating gesture, tone, and facial expression, James intentionally depicts all his characters, even those whose mental processes the narrator is ostensibly following, from the outside; as things, not people.

This reificatory process, of which the Lord's immurement of Noah is a type, is a key component of James's style in the novel.[13] Both people and their mental abstractions are reduced metaphorically to concrete objects, often in complex relationships. The process begins in the Preface, where James makes his work a bridge whose stylistic piers are ephemeral but whose load-bearing capacity is real. The piers "were an illusion, for their necessary hour" but the span seems to be "a reality" (xxxix). William Stowe argues that these reificatory figures cannot ultimately be traced back to their abstract sources: "the current phase of Densher's relationship with Aunt Maud [. . .] is characterized in such a contradictory fashion as to constitute on the literal level a moment of indecipherable non-meaning." He goes on to identify some interpretive possibilities for this perplexing double figure, but concludes that James's figures are "nodes of unreduced plurality – islands, perhaps, of deviant [Barthesian] bliss in a rising tide of [Barthesian] pleasure" (197).[14] I would make them Milly's "floating island[s]," sealed arks whose contents are not accessible but whose physical exteriors remain buoyant.[15]

Metaphors often equate an abstraction with a concrete object, but the complexity of James's figurative language takes this process to new levels. A particularly beautiful example of metaphor as a reificatory tool occurs when Maud becomes a weaver and her plots a tapestry: "[Lord Mark] was personally the note of the blue – like a suspended skein of silk within reach of the broiderer's hand. Aunt Maud's free-moving shuttle took a length of him at rhythmic intervals; and one of the accessory truths that flickered across to

Milly was that he ever so consentingly knew he was being worked in" (152). Aunt Maud, like the short-story writer Susan Stringham, creates a work of art, weaving her own text that is concrete rather than merely semiotic. The abstract "truth" of her process moves across the loom to Milly like a concrete shuttle. Maud's marriage plans for Kate become both a physical object and a work of art, and the truths and perceptions forming it become the physical frame upon which it is woven.[16]

James's use of setting provides another way to transform the abstract into the concrete, enclosing an idea within a physical ark. Michiel Hayns argues that the novel's various settings together constitute a Saussurian *langue*, of which each individual setting is a *parole* (117). Thus Densher can read "the message of [Mrs. Lowder's] massive florid furniture, the immense expression of her signs and symbols." Signifiers become physical objects, allowing Mrs. Lowder to communicate with Densher even when she is not in the room, just as Milly's indisposition and the three days of sepulchral silence will allow the "court" and "outer staircase" of her "piano nobile" to communicate a different message to him seven books later. Both women are immured within the enclosed spaces of their own respective houses.

Even James's puns (and he indulges in punning to an unusual extent here) have this reificatory effect. A pun draws attention away from the referent, the physical object, by playing with relationships existing only on the level of the signifier. But James's puns turn abstract concepts into physical objects, as when Susan Stringham's connection to the Milly's brilliance becomes a torch made of pitch: "her own light was too abjectly borrowed and that it was as a link alone, fortunately not missing, that she was valued" (188). Likewise, the communication when Merton and Kate "meet" becomes the former's physical meat: '"Meet," my dear man,' she expressly echoed; 'does it strike you that we get . . . so very much out of our meetings?' 'On the contrary – they're starvation diet.'" (351). Three pages later, after placing Kate and Merton "in the middle of the Piazza San Marco," the narrator informs us that Milly's absence "had made a mark, all round." Milly's absence creates the real presence of St. Mark's Cathedral.

Perhaps the most radical of these Jamesian objectifications comes in the portrait scene. As Elissa Greenwald points out, Milly's English adventure is highly romantic up to the day of the Matcham party. Through Milly's eyes

we see "bright lights, careful arrangement, and people who talk like characters in a play" (182-83). But when Milly comes face to face with her Doppelgänger, she not only sees herself reduced to the physical object of a canvas, as ephemeral as Aunt Maud's tapestry, she also sees through the opacity of James's uncrackable ice into the real world. "The image resembles that of Minny Temple in James's memory, as described in the Preface. Milly Theale confronts the very image of her creation [. . .] [and] her own mortality" (183). In Biblical language, the temple is the human body, and the portrait Milly sees is a corpse – the ultimate reification of the body and her ineffable fate.[17]

Conclusion: The Silent Ark

The ark thus has multiple relevances to *The Wings of the Dove*. As a component of James's use of the medieval fourfold hermeneutic, the ark relates to other Biblical tropes in the novel such as Milly's Christological and pneumatological associations. This is an aspect of James's general approach to metaphor, which creates multiple significations irreducible to a single metaphorical system.

The story of the Flood is enormous, absolute, one in which "all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered" and "every man: all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, and all that was in the dry land, died" (Gen. 7:18, 21-22). Enormous lengths of time pass. But it is also a small, intimate story, with a small cast of characters contained in a single, rather snug setting. Throughout the novel James's characters are allured by the absolute, by the infinite, by "everything."[18] But in James's flood, everything is destroyed and "nothing" is left instead. The dry land at the end of the novel allows the characters to go their separate ways; Kate and Merton stop looking at each other, climb down from their ladders, and return to their respective gardens. Dry land allows no one to be fruitful and multiply; James's melodramatic ending becomes ironic in addition to tragic. While we read this novel, the terrain of meaning is constantly shifting beneath us, as the flood of the narrative carries us along. When we find dry land, the ark breaks open, and *The Wings of the Dove*, abruptly over, becomes completely silent.

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Notes

[1] Lionel Croy makes a tempting candidate for Ham, having committed some crime that makes him the accursed of the earth, but since neither Croy nor Mrs. Condrip appears explicitly on stage in the second volume they will be presumed, metaphorically at least, drowned, and Kate will be taken at her word when she broods about "the submersion of her father." The silent Eugenio will make the eighth crew member, though he is also paired off like an animal, and Lord Mark, who gazes upon Kate and Merton's nakedness, will be Ham instead of Lionel. That Maud, Kate and Milly underscore the Diluvian theme by becoming kids, lionesses, vultures, eagles, lions, and doves will not disqualify them from counting as people. Milly's unfortunate family, dead and more or less unmourned, will also number among the drowned.

[2] The echo is presumably unintentional, but Nabokov also invokes the image of the reader throwing him- or herself against a translucent surface, in an ineffectual attempt to reach the meaning on the other side, in the opening couplet of *Pale Fire*: "I was the shadow of the waxwing slain/ By the false azure in the windowpane."

[3] In the Palazzo Laporelli, where the ark comes to rest and Milly is released, James is explicit: "She was in it, as in the ark of her deluge." Though Milly will "ask nothing more than to sit tight in it and float on and on," the reader may suspect that the ark is about to become a mountain-top. In the previous line Milly, with regard to her "place" had "a vision of clinging to it," which recalls her vertigo in the final sentence of V, when "she continued to cling to the Rockies." In X, Merton finds himself on "a small emergent rock in the waste of waters [. . .] clinging to it and to Susan Shepherd, figur[ing] himself hidden from view." He remains in the now stationary but still enclosing ark, waiting in vain for the dove's return.

[4] "She wrote short stories" tracks "Susan Shepherd Stringham," which occurs in the previous sentence, in a positively Earwickerian way. For James, whose characters are each attempting to impose their own narrative on the others, you are what you write. The only paper mentioned by name in the novel is Mrs. Stringham's precious Boston Transcript, but one can only hope that Merton Densher's journalism is written for the Daily Mail.

[5] James's uses of "scene" and "picture" in his prefaces and other critical writings are fairly technical and have meanings for novelistic composition that are not intuitively related to their roles in the dramatic and visual arts. According to Robert L. Cesario, "picture appears to be analytic and contemplative narrative reasoning rather than dynamic presentation of acts" while the scenic mode, which he equates with drama, is "exclusively objective representation of appearances" (191).

[6] As far as dramatic roles go, the Preface designates Mrs. Stringham as Milly's "fairly choral Bostonian," though she hardly meets the Sophoclean standard for either keeping the audience informed or warning the heroine of approaching danger. James's use of a chorus reaches its apotheosis in *The Golden Bowl*.

[7] James was interested by the effect of Europe on Americans all the way from *Roderick Hudson* to *The Golden Bowl*. But he also considers the effect of New England on Southerners in *The Bostonians*, while Susan Stringham, of Burlington, Vermont considers Boston "far too south" (75)!

[8] Milly has been frequently identified as a Christological symbol; for John Carlos Rowe, "the incarnation, Passion, crucifixion, and ascent of Christ" constitute "the central myth of the novel" albeit one whose logocentricism James entirely undermines (134). The three days of Christ's passion, obliquely mirrored in the three days of Merton's waiting, are a particularly important component of this identification, because of the statement attributed to Jesus, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The intense psychobiographical associations this metaphor would have held for James, who made Milly in the image of his beloved cousin Minny Temple, are obvious.

[9] The doctor's visit corresponds to the beginning of Gen. 8:2: "the fountains of the deep and the waters of heaven were stopped," or, as James says, "The weather changed, the stubborn storm yielded, and the autumn sunshine [. . .] came into its own again" (428). As the water recedes, the ark comes to rest in 8:4: "And the ark rested in the seventh month [. . .] upon the mountains of Ararat." James causes Merton to come to rest, if only temporarily, on the same page: "That was where the event had landed him – where no event in his life had landed him before." Sir Luke Strett's arrival really does make Merton's boat stop rocking: "The result of it was the oddest consciousness as of a blest calm after a storm. He had been trying for weeks

[. . .] to keep superlatively still [. . .] but he looked back on it now as the heat of fever" (435). Only once the rain stops and the ark comes to rest does Noah release the dove, just as Milly dies only after Merton becomes still.

[10] Analogically, the forty days of the deluge anticipate the Israelites' forty years in the desert and Jesus' forty day fast in the wilderness; the latter, which included three satanic temptations, is clearly invoked in Book III when Milly "was looking down on the kingdoms of the earth" (89).

[11] The narrative ubiquity and thematic importance of silence in James's novel are important critical commonplaces. For John Auchard silence and related phenomena constitute Milly's, and the novel's, "abyss" (102-04).

[12] Milly, as well as the other characters, becomes another ark: the Ark of the Covenant, into which no human can look. Again, the ark is a type for James's hidden and inaccessible meanings.

[13] There is another fascinating scriptural precedent for this Jamesian reification. When the authorities forbade the wearing of phylacteries, the prophet Elisha donned them anyway. "He was seen by a casdor (quæstor), and the latter pursued him. Seeing that he could not escape, Elisha took the phylacteries from his head and carried them in his hand. When questioned by the quæstor what he carried in his hand, he replied: 'Wings of doves.' When opening his hand, he really found doves' wings." (Babylonian Talmud, 1:XIX). The dove's wings symbolize the merely textual (the Torah written on Elisha's phylacteries) becoming the physically real (doves' wings), just as externalities replace dialogue and interior thought in the sequestration of James's ark.

[14] Roland Barthes considers the Noah story as a myth of semiotic absence: "if it is true that every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father – [this] would explain the solidarity of narrative forms, of family structures, and of prohibitions of nudity, all collected in our culture in the myth of Noah's sons covering his nakedness." (10)

[15] James's indecipherable figures, seen this way, come close to revealing Deleuzian "essences" – the "unity of an immaterial [referentless] sign and of an entirely spiritual meaning [. . .] revealed in the work of art" (40-41). These essences, which Jacques Deleuze identifies with "absolute and ultimate Difference" (in a Proustian, pre-Derridean sense), are themselves sealed arks, in that the novel's characters cannot peer out: "In this regard, Proust is Lebnitzian: the essences are veritable monads [. . .] they have neither doors nor windows" (41-42).

[16] The metaphor works well for two other reasons: (1) because Maud becomes a reversed Penelope, weaving a suitor rather than weaving to keep suitors at bay; (2) because she is described as "Britannia of the Market Place." Britannia's figure is derived from Athena, the master weaver, and here Maud is weaving an economic transaction: a good marriage for her handsome niece.

[17] At the same time that Milly becomes a real corpse, the living Kate Croy is becoming a copy of a human being. Her expression of surprise when she finds Lord Mark in front of the portrait with Milly has a secondary meaning, uttered as it is in a room full of paintings: "'You had noticed too?' [. . .] 'Then I'm not original'" (158).

[18] "Everything" and "nothing" saturate the novel. People have everything, tell everything, see everything, and want everything, including wanting to escape everything. All the while, Densher's statement in Book II that "Everything's nothing" tends to apply throughout.