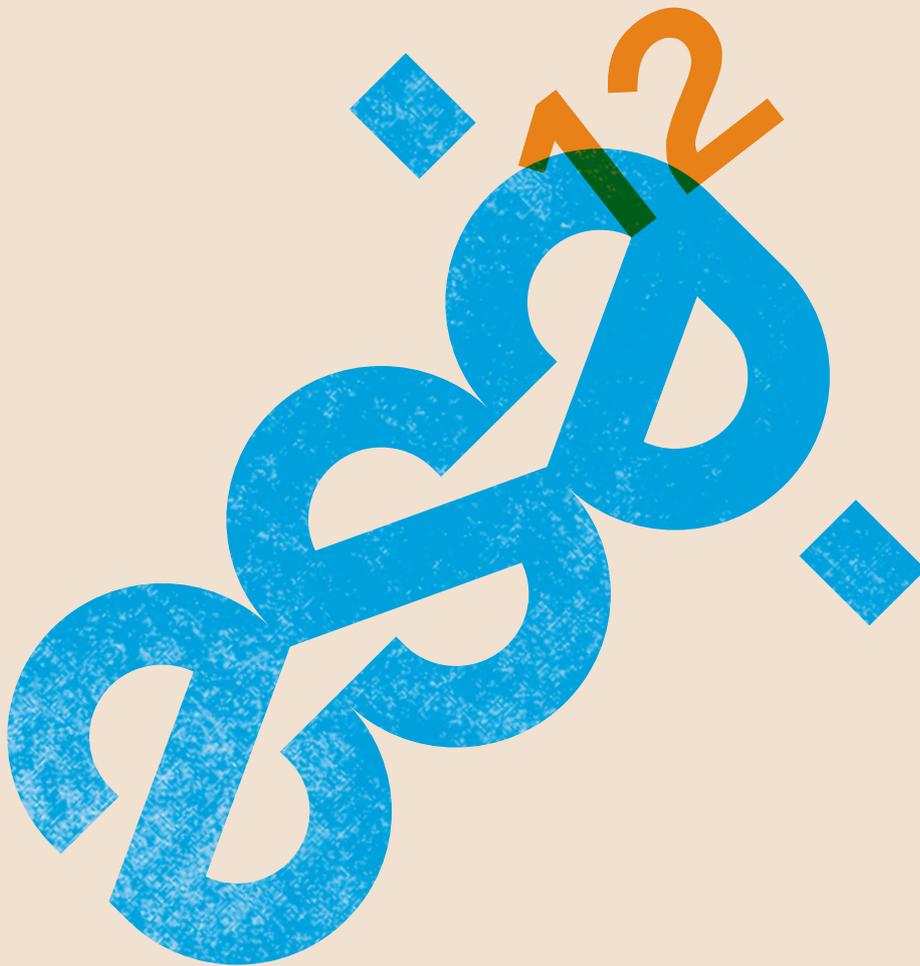


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Table of Contents

Marta Benenti and Lisa Giombini <i>The Aesthetic Paradox of Tourism</i>	1
Monika Favara-Kurkowski <i>A Reflection on the Criteria for Identifying Design</i>	32
Lilli Förster <i>Against the High Culture – On Leo Tolstoy’s Aesthetics</i>	49
Charles Lebeau-Henry <i>Nietzsche’s Artistic Ideal in Human, All Too Human and the Case of Music</i>	66
João Lemos <i>Moral Aspects’ Aesthetic Relevance</i>	84
Ancuta Mortu <i>The Repertoire as Aesthetic Category</i>	100
Salvador Rubio Marco <i>Aesthetic Values, Engaging Perspectives, and Possibilities</i>	122
Ken Wilder <i>Beyond ‘Visual’ Art: Non-Sighted Modes of Beholding Contemporary Art</i>	153

Aesthetic Values, Engaging Perspectives, and Possibilities in Literature

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ABSTRACT: This is a paper on the aesthetics of literature, but also on the phenomenology and axiology of art. I will try to defend: 1) that an approach to the engagement of the reader in literary fiction based on the concept of “perspective” (Donnelly) is compatible with interactionism and moderate autonomism concerning values in art; 2) that such an approach needs to pay attention to the complexity of the aesthetic qualities which contribute to the aesthetic value of the work in order to explain the quality of a “perspective” developed within the work (and thus basing the engagement of the competent reader), and must also determine (in some cases) the aesthetic properties playing a significant role as reasons for the presence of other non-aesthetic properties in the work; 3) that the “adventure” of the engaged reader can be explained in terms of “possibilities” and “aspects” in order to avoid some dangers of epistemic and ontological views; and 4) that some examples from Henry James’s novels (*The Golden Bowl*, mainly) may be particularly useful in order to exemplify my ideas.

1 salrubio@um.es Research work for this paper was funded by grants from FFI2015-64271-P (MINECO, Spain-FEDER, UE), 18958/JLI/13, 20934/PI/18 (Fundación SENECA, Plan Regional de Ciencia y Tecnología de la Región de Murcia, Spain), and PID2019-106351GB-I00 (Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades del Gobierno de España).

Nussbaum (1990) and Diamond (1996) have proposed that the experience of the reader of artistic literature creates an “adventure” because through our attentive reading of novels, the emotions, the stirred intelligence, the moral consciousness of her heroes and heroines become our very own adventure². I will take Nussbaum’s concept of “adventure” as a conceptual tool in order to take account of the imaginative responses of both characters and readers in literature. Nevertheless, in literary writing there is an asymmetric relationship between author and reader inasmuch as literature “does not purport to describe the world either from a common objective perspective (as we find with scientific, historical, or philosophical texts) or from a shared cultural perspective (as in the case of works of genre fiction)”. Instead, “literature invites the reader to reach out from his or her own subjective perspective to engage with an unfamiliar perspective” (Donnelly 2019, p. 11).

Some scholars (such as Walsh, 1969; Burri, 2007; or Donnelly, 2019) have defended that such an asymmetric relationship can be solved because, as Donnelly’s solution proposes in particular, “excellent literature impels the engaged reader to imaginatively transfer perspectival properties from things as they are characterized in his or her own experience to the fictional entities of the literary work” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 11), Donnelly’s “perspective” is “like a grid

² Nussbaum and Diamond have in mind James’s quotation of the preface to *The Princess Casamassima* (James, 1937, p. 70) referring to George Eliot’s characters: “Their emotions, their stirred intelligence, their moral consciousness, become thus, by sufficient charmed perusal, our own very adventure.” Diamond’s and Nussbaum’s ideas about “adventure” may be found in Diamond, 1996, p. 313, and Nussbaum, 1990, chapter 4, respectively.

through which my experience is structured” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 14). Thus, for example, imaginatively engaging in the perspective(s) developed in a literary work such as Zola’s “The Flood” implies that “Imagining that an event is unfolding and horrific only requires that I imagine that it is characterized by the perspectival properties events have when they are unfolding and horrific from my own perspective” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 15). Referring to Louis, the main character of “The Flood”, “I have no problem understanding this character’s perspective and respecting the motivations behind his decision to remain on his farm” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 18), even though engaging with the perspective of the text does not imply at all having (or having had) an experience similar to the experience of, or endorsing the perspective of, the character; often “we must to learn to temporarily set important aspects of our own perspectives on hold” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 19).

The goal of Donnelly’s argument is a defense of the “utility” of literary fiction which is not conceived as providing cognitive or moral direct gains, but rather as a means in order to develop tools and skills enabling us to identify, to compare, and to understand other perspectives and experiences. Even so, her argument becomes evaluative when she states that the imaginative engagement enabling that “utility” (which is an indirect or mediated one) constitutes at the same time an evaluative element of the artwork, insofar as “to make sense of characters’ actions, at least in a minimal sense, we need only grasp enough of their perspectives to see that

their values, goals, knowledge, and so on have the right sort of structure to support their actions” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 19).

The axiological implications of her theory appear more clearly when Donnelly says that

part of the aesthetic value of a literary work may lie in the sensory appeal of its combinations of words”, but “it seems that an important part of the aesthetic value of a literary work must lie in the quality of the perspective developed within it” and “this requires, at a minimum, that the literary work unfolds through a perspective that is internally coherent and embodies compelling ways of looking at the world (Donnelly, 2019, 21).

What is included in Donnelly’s “the right sort of structure to support their actions”? Is it not aesthetically determined by the author’s particular work with language (beyond any “sensory appeal”)? Is that “internal coherence” a matter of mere logical congruence (the reasons of the “what” of the story), independently of the “how” of the writing?

Recently, M.J. Alcaraz (2018) has defended a version of interactionism concerning values in aesthetics which is compatible with a moderate autonomism and with a certain particularism. In the light of that view (to which I am sympathetic), “grasping aesthetic properties can be a condition for grasping other non-aesthetic properties” and “aesthetic properties can play a significant role as reasons for the presence of other non-aesthetic properties” (Alcaraz,

2018, 29).

Donnelly's approach leaves the door open to the possible crucial relevance that aesthetic properties have, in some artworks at least (as Alcaraz punctuates), in order to explain the presence of moral and cognitive values, even if Donnelly insists (often confusedly) on the "structural" nature of the basis ensuring the engagement of the reader, and thus the artistic value of the text.

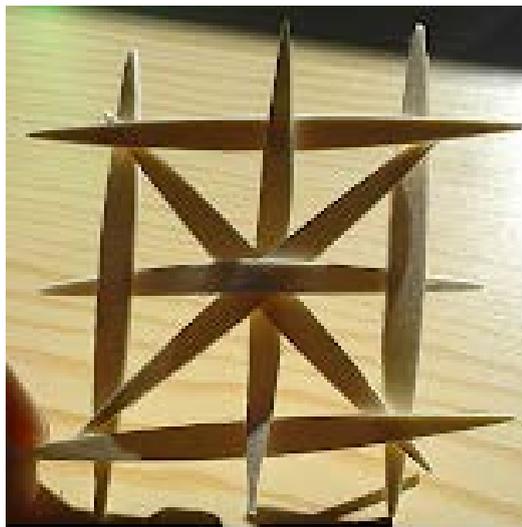
My hypothesis is that recent approaches to this topic (such as Donnelly's example) have not considered well enough the intimate relationship between the quality of a perspective ("internally coherent") developed within the work (and thus basing the engagement of the competent reader), and the complexity of the aesthetic qualities which contribute to the aesthetic value of the work, and also sometimes (in some works), to moral values or other non-aesthetic values.

Furthermore, I am convinced that a theory of aspects may offer a clearer view in terms of possibilities, supporting the idea that:

1) aesthetic-literary qualities are crucial in order to take into account the reader's engagement, endorsing the concept of perspective, at the same time, through the concepts of "aspect", "dawning of an aspect" and "possibilities" (in both the author's and reader's tasks). It goes beyond Donnelly's "sensory appeal".

2) some non-aesthetic values (moral or cognitive values) that the work has, even if their “utility” is an indirect or mediated one, are often based on aesthetic properties, which can be explained in terms of aspects in order to endorse a realism about properties that avoids a narrow ontological and epistemic viewpoint.

Henry James’s novels (particularly *The Golden Bowl*) are privileged examples because they demand their readers carry out a task which moves in parallel with the “adventure” of the development of the characters and the plot. That task, in terms of “possibilities”, is a necessary condition in order to be able to appreciate the adventures of the novels as adventures. In fact, the structure of the story of *The Golden Bowl* may be compared with the tensions which allows toothpicks to remain stable in a square-shaped arrangement, like this one:



Salvador Rubio Marco *Aesthetic Values, Engaging Perspectives, Possibilities*

Roughly summarized, the story of *The Golden Bowl* is also built on the basis of a square structure of main characters: Adam Verver, a widowed American millionaire, his daughter Maggie, Charlotte Stant (Maggie's close friend) and Prince Americo, a young Italian nobleman living in England. Even Maggie's marriage to Prince Americo does not notably change the pattern of her and her father's stable lives, a pattern that she believes to be complete when Mr. Verver marries Charlotte Stant. What Maggie does not know is that before her marriage, the Prince and Charlotte, both short of funds and therefore unable to marry, had been lovers, and now they resume, in a way, their former intimacy. Once Maggie becomes aware of this, being deeply in love with her husband and devoted to her father, she decides to remain silent. Finally, Mr. Verver and Charlotte leave for America and Maggie regains her husband's attention.

Obviously, the interesting thing about that novel (and James's novels in general) is not the events *per se*, but rather the moral adventure of the characters, that is, the interplay of tensions where the characters' agencies are working, or even more, the interplay of reflections from indirect views ("oblique"³ views, James says) where the few actions inhabiting James's novels are cooked up, and on a metalinguistic level, how that indirect way of taking everything into account is built up by means of literary skills. I will offer some example of that further on by quoting some fragments of the novel.

³ Preface to *The Golden Bowl* (James 1908, v).

It is perfectly possible to track in Martha Nussbaum's work some view very close to the theory of aspects with Wittgensteinian roots that I am defending here, and it is possible to do this by appealing to Nussbaum's own words which she devotes to interpreting *The Golden Bowl* in her well-known essay *Love's Knowledge*. Even though Nussbaum's frequent philosophical fulcrum is not Wittgenstein, but Aristotle, I find it highly significant, and an endorsement of my position, the fact that Nussbaum appeals directly to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in a passage in *Love's Knowledge*, chapter 5. The context of that passage is, not by chance, a comment about one of the crucial elements of James "oblique" strategy. The adventure of the main characters of *The Golden Bowl* is mediated (especially for the reader) by a secondary character (more exactly, by a couple of characters): Fanny and Bob Assingham's, a retired married couple. Fanny Assingham is a common friend of all the four main characters, and she is an enabler (not at all just a witness) of the events concerning both younger couples. Fanny symbolizes (for Nussbaum) the perception and the complexity of particulars, while Bob (an old Army-officer) symbolizes the attachment to the rules and to the general conceptions.

James shows us how a shared moral "basis", a responsible vision, can be constructed through the dialogue of perception and rule. (Nussbaum, 1990, 158)

A crucial moment in the story is the discussion between Fanny and Bob about the responsibility of both for having feed the

sentimental intrigue because of their blindness for the actual relationship between the Prince and Charlotte.

At the climactic moment, Fanny feels (as the result of *his* effort) a sharp pain of realized guilt; and Bob, responding with tenderness to her pain, opens himself fully to her moral adventure, to the concrete perception of their shared situation. She cries, and he embraces her “all with a patience that presently stilled her” [James, 1908, p. 378]. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 159)

One of the clues of that encounter is Bob's tenderness, abandoning rules and descending until he is in a "sort of vision of the concrete", submerging in himself, and learning

her [Fanny's] abilities; and he was able to learn them only because there was already something in him that went beyond the universal, namely, a loving, and therefore particular, vision of her.” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 160)

That allows Nussbaum to claim here, in Aristotle's way, for the previous character of perception, insofar as

if as members of moral communities, we are to achieve shared perceptions of the actual, we have better love one another first, in all our disagreements and our qualitative differences. Like Aristotle, he seems to say that civic love comes before, and nourishes, civic justice. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 160)

Nevertheless, there is another clue of that finding of a "common basis" (the "mystic lake", in James words, where both members of the Assingham couple are, finally, rowing together): it lies on "getting the tip" (or catching the insinuation, or the warning). The narrator's voice of *The Golden Bowl*, this time close to Bob's mind, says:

He conveyed to her now, at all events, by refusing her no gentleness, that he had sufficiently got the tip, and that the tip was all he had wanted. (James 1908, p. 379)

Nussbaum is quickly ready to interpret the words of James's narrator in those terms:

Finally, James's talk (or Bob's talk) of "getting the tip" shows us what moral exchange and moral learning can be, inside a morality based on perception. Progress comes not from the teaching of an abstract law but by leading the friend, or child, or loved one —by a word, by a story, by an image— to see some new aspect of the concrete case at hand, to see it as this or that. Giving a "tip" is to give a gentle hint about how one might see. The "tip", here, is given not in words at all but in a sudden show of feeling. It is concrete, and it prompts the recognition of the concrete. (Nussbaum 1990, p. 160)

And just here, at this point, Martha Nussbaum places Wittgenstein's quotation, in footnote 10:

Compare Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, 1968) Part II, Sect. 11, 227e:

Correcter prognosis will generally issue from the judgments of those with better knowledge of mankind.

Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can. Not, however, by taking a course in it, but through “*experience*.” —Can someone else be a man’s teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right *tip* [in German original: *Wink*]⁴. — This is what “learning” and “teaching” are like here. —What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right. Unlike calculating-rules.

What is most difficult here is to put this indefiniteness, correctly and unfalsified, into words. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 160, footnote 10)

Let us come back, for a moment, to the initial point of all that process of Bob’s change of attitude. In chapter XXIII we found the Assingham couple face to face, in silence, before the starting of their “divergent conversation” about the possible delay of Charlotte and the Prince returning together to their respective homes from their visit to Matcham. James’s subtleness reaches the narrator’s view (and,

⁴ The square brackets are mine.

consequently, the reader's view) concerning the expressive "tip" of Fanny Assingham:

There might, for that matter, even have been in Mrs. Assingham's face a mild perception of some finer sense—a sense for his wife's situation, and the very situation she was, oddly enough, about to repudiate--that she had fairly caused to grow in him. (James, 1908, 365)

That "There might, for that matter, even have been..." involves ultimately an incitement to the reader to participate in the play of possibilities which constitute the dimensional structure of aspects in the novel. The characters are playing the same play also. Let us pay attention to the fact that James's narrator avoids directly describing the expression in Fanny's face when she perceives a sign of sensibility in her husband's attitude, but rather the narrator throws that tip to the reader ("There might, for that matter, even have been in Mrs. Assingham's face a mild perception of some finer sense"). Thereby he anticipates something which, in terms of the "water metaphor", implies leaving the shore and plunging into the water where she was swimming alone until now. James exploits the "water metaphor" and "the mystic lake" in very crucial moments of the novel. We will see the structural matter of that fact in further passages.

Summing up, Fanny has managed to make Bob see the thing that he was initially unable to see (because of his tendency to "the

rules”), and that thing is her concern about the sentimental tension that has been created between both younger couples. And the tip (*Wink*) has consisted in experiencing the tenderness that his love for her inspires in him.

If we are to assess the claim that correct judgment is the outcome of a dialogue between antecedent principle and new vision, we need to see the view embodied in prose that does not take away the very complexity and indeterminacy of choice that gives substance to the view. The moral work involved in giving and getting “the tip” could hardly be shown us in a work of formal decision theory; it could not be shown in any abstract philosophical prose, since it is so much a matter of learning the right sort of vision of the concrete. It could not be shown even in a philosopher’s example, inasmuch as an example would lack the full specificity, and also the indeterminacy, of the literary case, its rich metaphors and pictures, its ways of telling us how characters come to see one another as this or that and come to attend to new aspects of their situation. (Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 160-161)

Those kinds of “tips” are what we can call, in Wittgensteinian vocabulary, *further descriptions* or invitations to see as (whether successful or failed) and, if it is successful, to see. *Further descriptions*, proposed in Wittgenstein’s courses of the 1930-1933 period, are explanations of the meaning consisting of comparisons,

associations, analogies, examples, metaphors, connections, juxtapositions, repetitions, transitions, redundancies, gestures, contextualizations, invitations to emphasize this or that element, the invention of new contexts for interpretation, etc. They are the sort of reasons that we utilize frequently in everyday aesthetic situations and they play an essential role in actual artistic and aesthetic practices. We cannot pass over the fact that Wittgenstein is just using here the term “descriptions” regarding *further descriptions*: indeed, there are descriptions that have one foot in some objective feature of the work (or the thing), for instance “listen to this transition...”, and the other foot out of the work (for instance “...as a protest against x”) in order to endorse an aesthetic judgment (“You will now see that the work is ironic”, for example) and set out to excite a reactive *seeing*, but without making its truth dependent on the success of this reaction.

We cannot ignore either the fact that Wittgenstein explains how we manage to catch the expressed thing (in an artwork or in a person) in terms of the concept of “imponderable evidence”⁵. I know (I see) that a musical piece is ironic because a certain transition works as a protest against this other passage of the piece. But I know (I see) also that someone loves actually by means of certain “imponderable evidences” such as “subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tones” (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 228). Let me quote briefly *Philosophical Investigations* part II, because I think that quotation

⁵ Even if, as Wittgenstein points out, we can also use documentary evidences in order to verify its correction.

allows a direct Jamesian reading. Wittgenstein says:

Imponderable evidence includes subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tone.

I may recognize a genuine loving look, distinguish it from a pretended one (and here there can, of course, be a 'ponderable' confirmation of my judgment). But I may be quite incapable of describing the difference. And this not because the languages I know have no words for it. For why not introduce new words? —If I were a very talented painter I might conceivably represent the genuine and the simulated glance in pictures." (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 228)

Nobody as much as Henry James has reflected the "imponderability" of the "imponderable evidences" (no paraphrase replaces completely what the subtle glance or the subtle gesture expresses), but at the same time, nobody as much as Henry James possesses the extraordinary literary skill of using words in order to evoke "imponderable evidences" in the reader's mind by means of an almost-pictorial literature (even though, obviously, James is not a painter, but a writer). Nussbaum says:

In the preface to this novel, James speaks of the "duty" of "responsible prose" to be, "while placed before us, good enough, interesting enough and, if the question be of picture, pictorial enough, above all *in itself*." (James 1908, ix-x)

Salvador Rubio Marco *Aesthetic Values, Engaging Perspectives, Possibilities*

(Nussbaum 1990, 161)

Chapter XLI starts with the Prince and Maggie at home when they receive a telegram from Charlotte announcing that she and Adam Verver will go there for a tea at five o'clock. That tea means in fact the farewell of both before their departure to America. And the chapter finishes with an involuntary contact of hands between the Prince and Maggie, with the sound accompaniment of a "Wait.Wait." where all Maggie's (and now also the Prince's) hopes of giving in to each other are condensed.

"'Wait!' It was the word of his own distress and entreaty, the word for both of them, all they had left, their plank now on the great sea", [...] "She has saved herself [...]" (James, 1908, pp. 352-353)

The echo in terms of the water metaphor from the Assinghams's conversation gains here a structural role to play. But there is still a new echo of it in the last paragraphs of the novel, when the Prince and Maggie find themselves alone again after the departure of Adam and Charlotte.

"Isn't she [Charlotte] too splendid?" she [Maggie] simply said, offering it to explain and to finish.

"Oh splendid!" With which he came over to her.

"That's our help, you see," she added —to point further her

moral.

It kept him before her therefore, taking in —or trying to— what she so wonderfully gave. He tried, too clearly, to please her —to meet her in her own way; but with the result only that, close to her, her face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders, his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: “See’? I see nothing but YOU.” And the truth of it had with this force after a moment so strangely lighted his eyes that as for pity and dread of them she buried her own in his breast.” (James, 1908, pp. 368-369)

The subtleness of James’s style allows us to glimpse that this is not at all the case of a *happy ending*; but rather like toothpicks in tension in the square structure (the moral tension, the balance of feelings) remains standing in its complexity and in its irreducible partiality (“complexity and indeterminacy” said Nussbaum in his pp. 160-161 quotation). The Prince is “trying to” take in (not simply “taking in”) what Maggie so wonderfully gave. The scene culminates with a half-embrace (or almost-embrace) of the Prince and Maggie: “she buried her own in his breast”. But, is this actually an embrace? Is it the Prince embracing Maggie? It seems not so at all. Is it rather a half-embrace made by Maggie’s gesture to the Prince? But, most of all, there is the echo of the (complete) embrace of the Assinghams, the elderly couple, and the contrast that we have remarked on previously. And there is also the contrast between the two words which dominate Assingham’s embrace (“tenderness and care”,

Nussbaum, 1990, p. 132 footnote 11) and the two words which dominate that almost-embrace (“pity and dread”). The reader has, no doubts, an active role in order to answer all of those questions.

James puts everything on the line when he describes the gestures in the very final scene of the novel, accompanying “she buried her own [eyes] in his breast”. Maggie ends up covering her eyes. If my hypothesis endorsing the central role of “seeing” is right, that detail is highly significant because it confirms that the whole of the final passage pivots on the “seeing”: “ ‘See’? I see nothing but YOU.” And there is a contrast between the two ways of “seeing” (the second one having been denied by the gesture of the almost-embrace in itself), insofar as the truth of the Prince's words (“the truth of it”) leads into his eyes (“strangely lighted”) which inspire Maggie's “pity and dread”. Nussbaum has remarked on this when she says:

It is instructive to examine the many places in the novel where a person is praised with the aesthetically linked word “splendid”. It usually emerges that to call a human being that is to refuse that person a properly human tenderness and care. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 132 footnote 11)

Finally, we cannot overlook the associations of the expression “to *bury* her eyes in his breast” (I italicize *bury*). There is a strange “truth” that has to be evaluated by the reader in the overall context of the gesture and its meaning, but also by comparing it with other previous

gestures, words, and feelings, which participate in a slippery and complex chemistry of writing.

Nussbaum interprets Maggie's final gesture and the words "pity and dread" in a decidedly Aristotelian tone:

Aristotle argued that tragedy brings illumination concerning values: through the "pity and dread" inspired by tragic events, we learn about what matters to us, and we are clarified. Maggie, in the last sentence of the novel, recognizes that the keen vision and acknowledgment of the good tragic spectator are themselves values which can, in the world of nature, collide with others values. To see all, to be present to all, requires of the spectator a narrowness of love; to surrender to love requires an infidelity of the soul's eyes. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 137)

Even though, later on Nussbaum makes Maggie's blindness and the reader's blindness the same when the reader, focusing his attention on Maggie (with the narrator's guide), no longer focusses on the "passion" of Charlotte. My emphasis on the comparison with the Assingham's embrace intends to suggest a less optimist interpretation than Nussbaum's one. Anyway, the issue of the final interpretation of the novel is not the actual goal of my paper.

Let us now retake the schedule of hypothesis promised at the beginning of this article:

1) aesthetic-literary qualities are crucial in order to take into account the reader's engagement, endorsing the concept of perspective at the same time, through the concepts of "aspect", "dawning of an aspect" and "possibilities" (in both the author's and reader's tasks). It goes beyond Donnelly's "sensory appeal".

Donnelly's approach has the undoubtable advantage of avoiding the radical epistemic argument, insofar as it does not base the utility and the value of the novel on a knowledge directly derived from the characters' descriptions or actions, but rather on the development of tools and skills when we share, as readers, the "adventure" of the characters, to the extent that it allows us to compare and understand the other's perspectives and experiences. Properly sharing the adventure of the characters involves, for Donnelly, "to grasp enough of their perspectives to see that their values, goals, knowledge, and so on have the right sort of structure to support their actions" (Donnelly, 2019, p. 19).

I am not aiming to exploit here all the descriptions in terms of a theory of aspects that James's novel, Nussbaum's interpretation of it, and Donnelly's perspectivist approach offer us, but I think that James, particularly in *The Golden Bowl*, makes it possible for us to see three characteristics under a very special light which are central in a typical structure of aspects:

Salvador Rubio Marco *Aesthetic Values, Engaging Perspectives, Possibilities*

a) its simultaneously perceptive (experiencing) and cognitive (interpreting, thinking, reasoning or reflecting) constitution; the *seeing* (experience) involves something more than a mere *interpreting*, even though it starts very often with an invitation to see as... (possibilities or hypothesis)

b) the intimate relationship between the understanding side and the evaluative side concerning the “downing of an aspect” (there are no “epiphanic guaranties”)

c) the role of *trigger* played by the “tip”, which is conveyed through the words in literature, even if it is open-ended, by means of the words, to a huge *ut pictura poesis* in the reader's mind.

I do not think that *a* and *b* need much more explanation: when I see an aspect, I am not simply asserting to a hypothesis, but rather I have to be able to see the object in accordance with the way proposed by the hypothesis (or possibility). At the same time, the evidence that my *seeing* is the proper one (or the correct one) is not something guaranteed by the properties of the object (even if my *seeing* has to be in accordance with them), and the criteria by which someone (me or another person) is able to test that you have come to actually see the object under the proper aspect is not guaranteed

either⁶.

The third characteristic *c* allows us to see specially well that Donnelly's perspectives have to work necessarily on the basis of the double articulation previously mentioned (perceiving/ knowing, understanding/ evaluating, stating/ imagining), and they do it in a way that is never standardized or guaranteed for the reader, rather they lie on the square-shaped structure of toothpicks which is ultimately the literary warp, the text of the novel itself. The efficacy of the “water metaphor”⁷, of the deployment of “tips” (glances, tears, embraces, contacts, words, tones of voice, etc.)⁸ when expressing what they are not merely representing, but rather what is behind those representations (that is, an aspect, a *seeing*), all those issues acquire an undoubtable tone in terms of a theory of aspects. And Henry James is every time being careful about never closing the interpretation of his “tips”, about leaving them ever open while we are tempted by him to find our guide with the help of them. What has Maggie really come to see in the Prince's gesture? And what has the Prince really come to see in Maggie's gesture? How do those examples of “seeing” compare with the Assingham's “seeing”? What is the reader's “seeing”? And what is the “seeing” of James's narrator

6 I have developed those characteristics of aspects in previous works as for example *Comprender en arte*, Valencia: Cimal, 1995, or “Aspectos, razones y juicios en la comprensión estética: una aproximación wittgensteiniana”, in Julián MARRADES (ed.): *Wittgenstein: Arte y Filosofía*, Madrid: Plaza y Valdés, 2013, cap. 6, pp. 155-178.

7 Is this an unnatural metaphor or not?

8 The deployment of “tips” works between the characters, for the reader, or for the author himself guiding his aim (whether he succeeded or not?)

who organizes all the plot⁹?

For, if we follow Nussbaum's thesis, James thinks that moral knowledge is a perception (the proper way of seeing something):

Moral knowledge, James suggests, is not simply intellectual grasp of particular facts; it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling. To know Maggie is to see and feel her separateness, her felicity; to recognize all this is to miss least of all. If he had grasped the same general facts without these responses and these images, in all their specificity, he would not really have known her. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 152)

On the one hand, Adam's moral learning consists of being able to come to see Maggie as a "water creature" (that means his daughter's sexuality and free maturity) by paying attention to the words that she employs in order to describe her passion for Americo (Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 279-280). On the other hand, Maggie's learning takes place when "her imagination, like his [Adam], achieves its moral goal in the finding of the right way of seeing", [...] "to imagine him not as father and law and world but as a finite human" (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 152).

Ultimately, the structure of aspects regarding the conferring of

⁹ Here lies above all the complexity of the Jamesian poetics which is shown, for example, in the prefaces of the New York edition (*vid.* James, 1937).

meaning and value to the artwork is explicitly present at the heart of *The Golden Bowl* in the object of the golden bowl itself. Now let us remember again that, for Donnelly, “part of the aesthetic value of a literary work may lie in the sensory appeal of its combinations of words” (Donnelly, 2019, p. 21). That “sensory appeal” needs to be extended to the expressive power of the combination of words which, after all, constitutes every literary text. The “sensory appeal” can work on a microstructural level (for example, the use of the word “wait”¹⁰, or the use of the conditional formula when interpreting the expression of the gesture in the perceived face); but it also works on a macrostructural level (the contrast between Assingham’s embrace and the final embrace between Americo and Maggie, or the water metaphor). Understood this way, it is no just a “part”, but all of the aesthetic value of the literary artwork that is grounded on the “sensory appeal of its combinations of words”. Furthermore, the connection between aesthetic value and moral value is very intimate, as the proper object of the golden bowl shows. And once again, this is true regarding the different layers of the literary communication: the way the characters interpret the actions of each other, the way the narrator leads us to interpret the novel, and the way every reader finally interprets all those data, even in the frame of the complete work of James considered as a whole. And that issue leads us to the

10 No by chance, the word “wait” is the crucial word also in the final passage of *The Portrait of a Lady*. Vid. my “Imagination, Possibilities and Aspects in Literary Fiction”, in Vaughan, C. (eds.) & Vidmar, I. *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, vol. 11, 2019, pp. 506-521. <http://www.eurosa.org/wp-content/uploads/ESA-Proc-11-2019-Rubio-Marco-2019.pdf>

second hypothesis proposed at the beginning of this article:

2) some non-aesthetic values (moral or cognitive ones) that the work has, even if their “utility” is an indirect or mediated one, are often based on aesthetic properties, which can be explained in terms of aspects in order to endorse a realism about properties that avoids a narrow ontological and epistemic viewpoint.

Alcaraz (2018) has defended a version of the interactionism concerning the values in aesthetics which is compatible with a moderate autonomism and with a certain particularism. The interaction between aesthetic values and moral values is implicit in the efficacy of the “adventure” shared by the characters and the reader, following Nussbaum's proposal to which I am sympathetic. In fact, Donnelly's “perspective” may be understood as a condition of the possibility of such an efficacy. Aligning with moderate autonomism, we may assume that “grasping aesthetic properties can be a condition for grasping other non-aesthetic properties” and “aesthetic properties can play a significant role as reasons for the presence of other non-aesthetic properties” (Alcaraz, 2018, p. 29). I think it has been clearly shown that a deficient understanding of the aesthetic properties (and values) of the novel, or, in Donnelly's terms, a deficient assumption (or judgement) of “perspective” may frequently involve other non-aesthetic (mainly moral) properties and values, even if we conceive of consequences in the non-immediate

terms (through the development of moral skills or tools) as proposed by Donnelly and Alcaraz. And the last “may” has to be decided concretely for every particular work; we can think, for example, that the *oblique* literary strategy used by James is more or less successful or efficient in this or that chapter of James’s novel and thus what kind of moral consequences result from it.

Furthermore, a theory of aspects according to which we understand an artwork when we are able to catch its correct aspect, that is, when we come to see it (the complete artwork or some of its elements) properly, is perfectly compatible with stating that the aesthetic properties *are in* the artwork. At the same time, it is perfectly compatible with an axiological position according to which both the aesthetic and the moral values of the artwork are substantially dependent on the reader's ability to base these two such kinds of values on the aesthetic qualities (literary qualities, in that case) of the work. The immanent character of those properties does not deny the role of the author, or the role of the reader, in the process of determining those values.

Nussbaum's view is aligned with that idea when she says:

In the preface to this novel, James speaks of the “duty” of “responsible prose” to be, “while placed before us, good enough, interesting enough and, if the question be of picture, pictorial enough, above all *in itself*” (James, 1908, pp. ix-x) (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 161)

I have to underline “responsible” here. Certainly, it is a duty of the author to provide his prose with the assumption of a proper “perspective” (in Connelly terms). The efficacy and the value of his work depend on that. It is subject to a normative (evaluative) regime insofar as the reader comes to see, or not, independently of the fact that he has experienced (or not) a situation similar to that described in the novel (for example, a suspicion of infidelity¹¹), thanks to the skill of the writer in order to create the proper literary conditions for the engagement (an aesthetic and moral engagement) of the reader.

The adventure of reading *The Golden Bowl* implies that the reader has to take sides for in that adventure, an aesthetic, moral (and philosophical, Nussbaum would add) adventure which consists mostly of conferring the proper expression and meaning to the gestures and words of the characters, while assuming the high degree of indetermination which is the signature of Henry James’s writing style and a key component of his particular and timeless value. And this also implies that the conferral of meaning entails the acknowledgement of the intimate link between gesture and expression as possibilities which have to be *seen* (by the characters, but also by the reader, if the representation is “pictorial enough, above all *in itself*”). Those possibilities (for example, the attention to the fact that the Prince is unable to embrace as Bob Assingham

11 Or rather, we could say the experience of managing an evidence of infidelity in the frame of a stable relationship (a “loving” relationship, maybe?). I think that those answers are part of the reader's final decisions.

does) allow the readers to assume a perspective from which they are able to see the moral value of a certain character's actions that the reader has never experienced in his proper life. That is the deep sense of Nussbaum's idea (after James's words) when she says that the experience of the reader of artistic literature creates an "adventure" because through our attentive reading of novels, the emotions, the stirred intelligence, the moral consciousness of her heroes and heroines become our very own adventure¹².

The main goal of Martha Nussbaum is to prove that literature is genuine moral philosophy, even though she bases that goal on a statement that Cora Diamond ignores (or rather she places secondarily): that this is made "through" (or "by means of") the aesthetic properties of the literary text itself. My intention has been to underline that idea, while to coming to a less "moralistic" view than Nussbaum's view and coming to one closer to Donnelly's or Alcaraz's view which would conclude that novels (like art in general) do not make us morally better necessarily. In other words, that novels do not provide us with the acquisition of knowledge (moral knowledge, in particular) directly, but they contribute (most often) to the development of tools and skills which may come to enrich our moral knowledge.

Obviously, people do not read novels with the main goal of enriching their moral knowledge. And we can even remove the word "moral" from the previous sentence: people's main reason for reading

¹² See previous note 2.

novels is not in order to acquire knowledge, while they may do so in order to enrich their lives (and here “enrich” involves typical aesthetic ends such as, for example, to enjoy the reading). Usually, it is “through” that enjoyment (an involved or engaged one) that novels find a way to place us in proper perspectives from which we are able to better understand others (characters) or we can take in some situations never experienced actually in our lives, by living the adventure of the novel as readers. And, ultimately, (maybe) to come to develop skills and tools for our moral actual life.

My thesis has been that the “learning” (if we can use that word here) from novels (artistic novels at least) has to be something conveyed through an aesthetic (literary) elaboration which may be clearly emphasized from the approach of a certain theory of aspects. In the case of Henry James’s novels (and particularly of *The Golden Bowl*), that elaboration is most especially sophisticated, subtle and complex.

And probably (I leave it for moral philosophers to consider) this works as a metaphor of the actual character of moral life¹³, where “moral exchange and moral learning” are “inside a morality based on perception” and where the concrete thing (a word, a story, an image, a gesture as a sudden show of feeling (and never the teaching of an abstract law) are the “tip”, the guide, in our moral learning, “by leading the friend, or child, or loved one [...] to see some new aspect

13 And even we may extend it to “expressive live” also (which is almost to say the “life” in general)

of the concrete case at hand, to see it as¹⁴ this or that.” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 295)

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14 The last three italics are mines.

Salvador Rubio Marco *Aesthetic Values, Engaging Perspectives, Possibilities*

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