

ISABEL ARCHER, THE GOVERNESS AND MAISIE FARANGE: A READING

THREE JOURNEYS INTO AWARENESS: A READING OF
ISABEL ARCHER, THE GOVERNESS AND MAISIE FARANGE
(WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ROLES OF
PANSY OSMOND, MILES AND FLORA)

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ABSTRACT

It is my purpose to demonstrate how, through exposure to evil, three young Jamesian heroines experience a journey from innocence into a fuller awareness of life.

Romantic and idealistic, Isabel Archer finds evil where her heart had looked for love. Through her gradual involvement with Pansy Osmond, Isabel is given an identity with which she can go forward into a new life. As an agent of grace, Pansy is the magic talisman which puts the seal on Isabel's decision to return to Rome. Pansy deepens the poignancy of Isabel's choice.

As a young woman who is as romantic and idealistic as Isabel, the governess, in *The Turn of the Screw*, innocently supposes that her life is enriched by the presence of the two beautiful children who are in her care. Miles and Flora, who appear to embody "the sweet, shy bloom of ideal infancy," are not, however, like Pansy Osmond--a means of grace. They are, themselves, the main source of evil. Their corruption draws demons from beyond the grave who, in their maleficent solicitation of the children, also become sources of evil. The governess copes with her experience of an ever tightening turn of the screw of evil through the agency of two confessions: an oral confession to Douglas and a written confession in the form of a journal.

Maisie Farange, who is perhaps the loveliest of James's fictional children, journeys into awareness through exposure to the evil of a morally squalid domestic atmosphere. Maisie, always maintaining her innocence and sense of wonder, matures with charm. Through what she comes to know, it is Maisie, herself, who is an agent of grace. In trying to save the adults of her circle, she surmounts her evil surroundings and moves forward into adolescence.

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TO JOHN

For the gift of time

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A NOTE ON ABBREVIATION OF TEXTS

Quotations from the works of Henry James are identified by an abbreviation and a page number as follows:

PL *The Portrait of a Lady*

TS *The Turn of the Screw*

WMK *What Maisie Knew*

AN *The Art of the Novel*

NHJ *The Notebooks of Henry James*

Ellipsis which commences or ends a quotation is omitted.

A NOTE ON THE FORMAT

Within each chapter, there are sub-headings. The journeys, particularly those of Isabel Archer and the governess are strongly influenced by children who merit attention in their own right. Maisie Farange, however,

bears the entire weight of her journey into awareness herself. Aspects of her life which enable us to realize her ordeal are therefore important. They, too, are differentiated through the use of separate headings.

APPENDICES

There are two appendices. Each appendix sheds some extra light either on one of the fictional heroines or on her setting. Since these aspects have no direct bearing on the argument, they have been "appended" to the main body of the thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

Isabel Archer and *The Portrait of a Lady*

I James as Portraitist

A Biographer

In creating the portrait of Isabel Archer, Henry James assumes several roles. This presents the reader with the dilemma of the artist's identity. First, in the guise of narrator, James refers to his self-styled mandate as being "our heroine's biographer" [PL 109].¹ By presenting her early life in Albany through the imagery of architecture, her preferences in reading and her restless insatiable penchant for the romantic in life, James is able to suggest a great deal about his heroine. Once in England, the same bright-eyed intelligence accompanied by a certain air of presumption which has so pleased Mrs Touchett, quickly engages the interest of the male Touchetts, father and son.

From Gardencourt, a middle ground between the New World of America and the Old World of Europe, her biographer follows the unfolding events of her life; from here, charming and complex, this "certain young woman [affronts] her destiny." By setting down the facts of her life as it proceeds, and by deciding to "place the centre

of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness," James succeeds in "really 'doing' her" [PL xiii]. This is the challenge, he retrospectively remembers, which he proposed to himself in the spring of 1880 [NHJ 29, note 2].²

B Historian

Secondly, James, still as narrator, undertakes not only to set forth the events of the story as they happen but also to note the story's genesis of form. He says:

it took nothing less than that technical rigour, I now easily see, to inspire me with the right confidence for erecting on such a plot of ground the neat and careful and proportioned pile of bricks that arches over it and that was thus to form, constructionally speaking, a literary monument.

[AN 52]3

Deed by deed and thought by thought, James chronicles the history of Isabel's journey from innocence into knowledge of evil and thence into awareness of life. Isabel, as keystone of his story, this "structure reared with an 'architectural' competence," carries the weight of the whole edifice. As such, the patronym she bears, supports more than one connotation.

As a recorder of occurrences in her life, he decries the lack of action in the early portion of the story. He has a concern that:

the weakness of the whole story is that it is too exclusively psychological--that it depends too little on incident; but the complete unfolding of the situation that is established by Isabel's marriage may nonetheless be quite sufficiently dramatic. [NHJ 15]

Although he carefully notes the complications, he deliberately edits out any argument that "does not concern this history, which has too many other threads to unwind" [PL 502]. As intimate historian of the subject for the portrait of a lady, he must testify to relevant facts only. To do this he needs an unerring eye for not merely the young woman's actual adventures, but, more importantly, for the exquisite lucidity which "her sense of them, her sense for them" [AN 56] brings to bear on each incident. Small details build to great epiphanies. Each instance brings the time closer to when, finally, "Isabel awakes from her sweet delusion" [NHJ 15].

C Playwright

Like Turgenieff, James first becomes conscious of figures as dramatic entities complete in themselves.

Similarly, as Turgenieff has to:

find for them the right relations, those that would most bring them out; imagine, to invent and select and piece together the situations most useful and favourable to the sense of the creatures themselves, the

complications they would be most likely to
produce and to feel, [PL vii]

so, as dramatist, does James.

The figure which appeals to his creative sense, and about whom he builds his dream, is Isabel Archer. To complement her and to complete the drama, James secures a supporting cast of *Dramatis Personae*. As some of these are "of the essence, so others are only of the form" [PL xiv-xv]. Of the actors in James's drama, those of the essence serve vitally, as "true agents," and affect the complications. The main dramatic force, however, is the "mystic conversion" of Isabel's perceptions and impressions which, for James, become the "stuff of drama" [PL xvii].

For James, the "'international' light [lying], in those days, to [his] senses, thick and rich" upon the stage, serves admirably as his *mise-en-scène*. It is, he says, "the light in which so much of the picture [hangs]." The penultimate sentence states: "but that is another matter."

D Artist

The other matter is the matter of "the picture." James, as artist, must establish the form and sustain the tensions which are necessary in order to create, from life, an authentic work of art. This art R. P. Blackmur aptly calls "the imaginative representation of life" [AN xxxviii].

The initial dilemma of the narrator's identity is resolved. The true artist must be an amalgam of biographer, historian and dramatist. He must deal in social aspects as well as in form. He must successfully show in all the multifarious facets:

the image of the young feminine nature
that [he has] for so considerable a time all
curiously at [his] disposal. [AN 48]

For James, the novelist is a painter since both represent life and both, through their art, "attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning."⁴

II Isabel

A Isabel as Maiden

As a title, *The Portrait of a Lady* is a misnomer. In painterly terms, a portrait is "the likeness of a person produced, usually, from life." For a writer, a portrait is "a vivid word description." James, however, shuns description, keeping expository phrases to a minimum. Characteristically, James refrains from describing at all if metaphor, analogy, state of mind, act of vision, the actions and re-actions of others, mental impression or subtlety of form can better project his idea and elicit an answering response from the reader.

If the definite article, "the," with which the title begins is intended to render the substantive "portrait" particular or even definitive, this too is misleading. Isabel is a multi-dimensional and complex character. She is much more than an interesting specimen of young, nineteenth-century, New World womanhood cast upon the romantic, European landscape. This particular young woman could not possibly sit still long enough for anyone, not even 'The Master,' to paint her portrait. Certainly "*The Portrait of a Lady*" would not be possible.

If portraits there must be, two present themselves to the watcher's discriminating eye. Both of them present Isabel framed in a doorway and in both of them she wears black. We never will know the length of her hemline nor the cut of her gown for James's portraits are psychological renderings. Particulars of her garb are largely inconsequential, for it is the woman herself who fascinates us. Only later do "appurtenances" have import.

In the first portrait, Isabel stands upon the threshold of a doorway. Here she prepares to step out into the fragrant English estate of "Gardencourt." This marks the beginning of a new life in a new land. As a recent expatriate, she surveys the English demesne with an interested coolness which indicates "a great deal of confidence both in herself and in others." She looks "at everything with an eye that [denotes] clear perception," and

in a manner which bears out the rumour which has preceded her and in which "it [was] intimated that this one [has] a high spirit." We know that "her mind [is] a good deal of a vagabond" and that she is endowed with an imagination that is "by habit ridiculously active: when the door [is] not open it [jumps] out of the window."

Incorrigibly romantic, Isabel is also an ardent idealist. As a young person who is "fond of [her] own way," she is liable to make strong pronouncements and make them in a bold and saucy manner that is shockingly un-European. Perhaps this is why she is said "to have too many theories," and why she accepts the comment "that [she lives] too much in the world of [her] dreams...not enough in contact with reality." Passionately jealous of her freedom, she widens her eyes, registers impressions and rejoices in her "desire to leave the past behind her and, as she [says] to herself, to begin afresh."

It is interesting to note that through later textual revision, Isabel becomes "willowy" rather than "thin" and the psychological note sounds a warning hint that Isabel, while still observably slender, will need both grace to survive her experiences and much strength to bend without breaking under her future burdens. It is with just such delicate brush strokes that the artist proceeds. Most of what is necessary to complete the first portrait we learn from the first six chapters. Isabel is twenty-three.

B Isabel as Mistress

The second portrait shows Isabel "coming out of the deep doorway" within an ancient and imposing Italian structure bearing the uncanny name, "Palazzo Roccanera." This "domestic fortress" whose "massively crossbarred" windows, referred to with pathetic fallacy as "jealous apertures," effectively rejects the idea of both human sympathy and human congress.

Married, bereaved by the loss of an infant son, bound, as she will later acknowledge by "tremendous vows" to a husband who is a slave to tradition and propriety, this exquisite woman in black velvet is a commanding figure. She complements her husband's role of cicerone by the dignity with which she performs the social duties of chatelaine if not exactly by his side certainly, at least, by his hearth. The "tight, tender young rose" that was transplanted from the sweet free land of England into the barren soil of Italy still imparts its delicate fragrance. Despite the blighting and inhospitable circumstances of her life in a world that has become a "[realm] of restriction and depression:"

the flower of her youth [has] not faded,
 it only [hangs] more quietly on its stem.
 She [has] lost something of that quick
 eagerness to which her husband [has]
 privately taken exception--she [has] more
 the air of being able to wait. Now, at all
 events, framed in the gilded doorway, she
 [strikes Ned Rosier] as the picture of a
 gracious lady. [PL 367]

C Isabel as Madonna

Midway between these two high water marks in Isabel's history, each one representative of a particular phase in the degree of her innocence and in the awareness of life to which she has been awakened through experience, there is an exchange between Mrs Daniel Tracy Touchett and Madame Merle. Actually, there are two. In the first, Mrs Touchett, very recently a widow, relates the disposition of her husband's will to Madame Merle who, "the moment she had crossed the threshold [,] ...[had] received an impression" that she was not one of those to receive a bequest.

"There's one remarkable clause in my husband's will," Mrs Touchett added.
 "He has left my niece a fortune."
 "A fortune!" Madame Merle softly repeated. [PL 208]

Here, with the brush-stroke of a feather, James causes a *frisson* to run down the spine. Untouched in revision, the adverb, "softly," is so subtly breathed into the atmosphere, that the reader might almost miss this most portentous and deadly exclamation. This qualifier is among those "certain elements in any work [which] are of the essence." As Madame Merle registers the word "fortune!" and repeats it, with emphasis, albeit "softly," an idea, one which has lain dormant in the back of her mind, suddenly emerges. No longer part of a passively psychological state, her idea becomes an active determination. It certainly will change

the course of Isabel's journey. Furthermore, Madame Merle's idea will eventually, tragically, awaken Isabel to knowledge of evil. From her romantic and idealistic American innocence, awareness of the dark aspects of life as she will now, inevitably, experience them in the old tradition-bound culture of Europe, will become her portion. Tradition, in the suffocating and stultifying sense that Osmond worships and which he would force upon his wife, is his personal warped misapplication of otherwise enriching, time-honoured custom.

From ancient days, it has been "the love of money [that] is the root of all evil" [my emphasis], not money itself that is the *radix malorum* which casts an evil shadow. Ralph, perceptive and sensitive as always, will later say of this woman that she is:

too good, too kind, too clever, too learned, too accomplished, too everything. She's too complete, in a word. I confess to you that she acts on my nerves and that I feel about her a good deal as that intensely human Athenian felt about Aristides the Just. [PL 151]

The second conversation, between these two women is also crucial. The following colloquy takes place:

"[Ralph's] not in the least addicted to looking after number one."
 "It depends upon whom he regards as number one!" said Madame Merle. And she remained

thoughtful a moment, her eyes bent on the floor. "Am I not to see your happy niece?" she asked at last as she raised them.

"You may see her; but you'll not be struck with her being happy. She has looked as solemn, these three days, as a Cimabue Madonna!" And Mrs Touchett rang for a servant. [TPL209-10]

Isabel returns shortly thereafter and receives a kiss from Madame Merle.

Within this seemingly straightforward exchange there are seven references to eyes or acts of looking. This indirect communication, demands a closer reading to elicit what is really taking place. There are levels of meaning here that have deep implications for future events. James's narrator is not interested in the idle chatter of Mrs Touchett concerning her son's apparent disinterest in his father's will nor does he much care about her niece's drooping reaction to it. This outward form merely serves as the vehicle in which the true meaning is being conveyed. Language itself imparts his unspoken messages to the reader's consciousness, and the language of looking, the language of *seeing*, becomes the means to this end. It is true that "much of James's most important drama goes on just behind the eye."⁵

When Mrs Touchett declares, colloquially (but strongly), that Ralph is not in the least addicted to "looking after" number one, she refers, quite literally, to

Ralph himself. Madame Merle, however, with the words, "it depends upon whom he regards as number one," accurately makes the jump to Isabel Archer. The word "regards" combines the act of 'looking' with the psychological state of 'caring for.' The result is the unspoken but linguistically communicated idea of bonding between Ralph and Isabel Archer.

Madame Merle, with her lowered eyes, eyes which are "bent on the floor," remains "thoughtful." She has just received a piece of information that has administered a thrill, a shock of instant recognition which she cannot, she dare not, allow to be seen in her eyes. Carefully gathering and sorting new possibilities which a lifetime of necessity and as yet unfulfilled ambitions have made necessary, the mind behind the lowered gaze is intensely active. Now that there is such a rich prize in the offing, she must play a very careful game. It behooves her to take enough time to gain absolute control of herself. The form of her next query, phrased so lightly in the negative, necessarily invites the denial which is forthcoming and which is now, more than ever, exactly what she wants. Her emotions well in hand, she can "at last" chance a direct look at Mrs Touchett. She raises her eyes. "Am I not to see your happy niece?" she asked at last as she raised them."

"You may see her..." Mrs Touchett says, responding to the outward form. "She has looked as solemn, these three

days, as a Cimabue Madonna!" Now, if we take this at face value, we see Mrs Touchett, who has resided in Italy for most of her married life, casually bringing to the fore a simile representative of the art of the thirteenth century Florentine master, Cimabue to which, no doubt, she has inevitably had frequent exposure. As such, it could be a throw-away line, and merely a convenient way to describe her niece early in her bereavement who is still somewhat in shock and weighted with the news of her inheritance. However, in James, there is never a throw-away line. The significance is considerable. In fact, simply stated, it forecasts the subject of a third portrait: Isabel as Madonna. For Isabel to become a Madonna, she needs a child. The child, is Pansy Osmond.

III Pansy and Isabel

In his critical Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, 1908, James lists among "the right complications" which would render his heroine interesting, not events, as one might suppose, but people: Ralph Touchett and his parents, Madame Merle, "Gilbert Osmond and his daughter and his sister," Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood and Miss Stackpole. Within the convention of this cataloguing, it is interesting to note the dehumanizing referential epithet "complication" used and to note further that these individuals serve mainly to enhance the "form" of his fiction. Within this roster,

Pansy does not even count as an individual by name but only as an adjunct to Gilbert Osmond. She is "his daughter." To add insult to injury, she is not given so much as the courtesy of a comma before being lumped in with "his sister" who really is a piece of unsatisfactorily crude machinery of the *deus ex machina* sort. Pansy must be removed from amongst those who are "only of the form" and placed closer to the central consciousness where she rightfully belongs.

If Isabel's name can support several metaphorical analogies, Pansy's name is sufficient unto itself. Etymologically it is derived from the French *pensée* meaning "thought" and "fancifully applied to the plant." As Ophelia remembers in her madness, "...and there is pansies, that's for thoughts." Colloquially, this flower is also called "Heartsease" or "Love-in-idleness." These names indicate both the child's own future identity and the role she will assume. In speaking to his daughter, Osmond later calls her *mignonne* and asks her to "pluck a flower or two for Madame Merle." "*Mignonne*", the feminine form, is also from the French and means "small, delicately formed." Used as an affectionate diminutive, it is connotative of *mignonette*, a fragrant and dainty flower. Throughout, flowers become the most consistent metaphor used to represent this lovely child.

When first we meet Pansy she has just returned from a convent where she has been "impregnated with the idea of

submission, which was due to anyone who took the tone of authority" [PL 235]. This is their system and it pleases her father who worships propriety and tradition. The language and its tone are interesting choices in view of the fact that what has been undertaken by the gentle nuns is for the supposed benefit of a sweet and flowerlike, virginal maiden. "Impregnated," as it is used here, has a little of the act of unwarranted violence and force perpetrated against an innocent and passively unsuspecting recipient. It also signposts future events. Already Pansy has been moulded into the pawn necessary to entrap the queen in the game that fate is preparing. The convent, *con-venire*, a place of "coming together" for sanctuary and spiritual refreshment, may yet become a place of evil.

Although we have heard about this "dear little girl" and know her name, our first actual sight of her is standing in silence before a picture on an easel in her father's villa. "As she [turns] round [she shows] a small, fair face *painted with a fixed and intensely sweet smile* [PL 229, my emphasis]. This is an important introduction, for it is in the role of child in the portrait of 'Isabel as Madonna' that she will be considered. Shortly thereafter she is told to go out and gather flowers in the garden "into which she [directs] her innocent, wistful eyes." The flowers are roses of an inferior sort which cluster in a "tangled garden" behind the villa. By contrast, there comes into the mind's

eye the impressionistic picture of a group engaged in performing the soothing ritual of tea in mellow and leisured ambience "upon the smooth, dense turf" at Gardencourt [PL 5]. Later, the ritual of tea will be repeated at Osmond's villa. The differences are a painter's metaphor for the innocence of Isabel as 'Maiden' and the knowledge of evil that later comes to Isabel as 'Mistress.' Here, at this latter ceremony, Isabel and Pansy Osmond will meet for the first time.

If, as Wordsworth claims, "The Child is father of the Man," so that he already is in childhood what he later becomes in his adult years, could not the reverse be equally valid? "The Child is *mirror* of the man." In this rendering, the man, looking at the child, sees himself and what he may become. If Isabel had the vision to look into the mirror of Pansy's innocent, pure young eyes and see herself reflected, how much grief might be evaded--for Pansy is Isabel writ small. The important, complementary corollary however is: no vision, no experience; no experience, no awareness of evil. For Isabel Archer, to avoid evil would be to avoid her fate. To be true to her authentic self, Isabel must go forward. Driven by a strange inner force, she says: "It's that I can't escape my fate....It's not my fate to give up--I know it can't be" [PL 131]. She further says, "I can't escape unhappiness," knowing that she cannot, *will* not separate herself "from

life. From the usual chances and dangers, from what most people know and suffer" [PL 132]. Isabel Archer is, and will continue to be, an active agent, one who "[affronts] her destiny."

Where Isabel acts with deliberation, Pansy is "a passive spectator of the operation of her fate" [PL 235]. She is entirely what she has been made by others. She has been "taught," "directed," "fashioned," "formed." She has been dehumanized and objectified. Now, "admirably finished; she [has] the last touch; she [is] really a consummate piece" [PL 357]. As has been said earlier, "She's perfect. She has no faults." Where Isabel unequivocally states, "I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs" [PL 161], Pansy remains:

really a blank page, a pure white surface, successfully kept so; she had neither art, nor guile, nor temper, nor talent--only two or three small exquisite instincts: for knowing a friend, for avoiding a mistake, for taking care of an old toy or a new frock. Yet to be so tender was to be touching withal, and she could be felt as a victim of fate. She would have no will, no power to resist, no sense of her own importance; she would be easily mystified, easily crushed: her force would be all in knowing when and where to cling.

[PL 315, my italics]

That Isabel resolves the question of Pansy's genuine innocence in the face of her own small doubt about this

"ideal *jeune fille* of foreign fiction" who was "like a sheet of blank paper," is an important step in the quality of their relationship. It rouses an unsuspected protective, nurturing component in her. Isabel, more and more, is responding to Pansy's unspoken need. This is also:

a part of her tenderness for things that [are] pure and weak. Pansy [is] dear to her, and there [is] nothing else in her life that [has] the rightness of the young creature's attachment or the sweetness of her own clearness about it. It [is] like a soft presence--like a small hand in her own; on Pansy's part it [is] more than an affection--it [is] a kind of ardent coercive faith. On her own side, her sense of the girl's dependence [is] more than a pleasure; it [operates] as a definite reason when motives [threaten] to fail her.

[PL 405-6]

What is happening is that an empathy and mutual trust is building up between the child and the young woman which will have important results in the future. They are two sides of but a single rare coin, an amalgam of metal from a new land and metal from an old. Together they are unconsciously forging strength which must withstand as yet unsuspected evil.

Where in the earlier two portraits of Isabel she wears black, Pansy, as befits an object being prepared for sacrifice, wears white. Even her hair is bound and "neatly arranged in a net." Pansy:

in her prim white dress, with her small submissive face and her hands locked before her, [stands] there as if she were about to partake of her first communion.

[PL 255]

There is irony in the supposition, "as if she were about to partake of her first communion," for it is not for communion that she is being readied. The sacrificial purity of her garb, the "submissive face," the "locked" if not 'bound' hands, the concentrated stillness as "she "[stands] there," compose a picture painted by a master. "Mr Osmond's diminutive daughter [has] a kind of finish that [is] not entirely artless."

As for Osmond, he "has always appeared to believe that he's descended from the gods." As victim, the child is helpless in the hands of this god, her father. This motif is forcefully made evident in a powerfully sexual image when Osmond ends an interchange by:

drawing her out of her chair and making her stand between his knees, leaning against him while he [passes] his arm round her slimness.

[PL 257]

The subtlety of Osmond's power manifests itself in the language used to describe his actions. The gerunds, "drawing," "making," "leaning," soften while at the same time they extend his actions: all of which masks Osmond's unspoken power over the helpless child. In this frightening vignette, we begin to understand that what holds Pansy now, will gradually enmesh Isabel. To add to the feeling of inevitability, Osmond, in the manner of a true predator, has always known how to wait.

In the characterization of Pansy, her "slimness," revised from her "little waist," is not so much a physical attribute as a psychological one. As Isabel earlier became "the willowy one" to connote her inner fibre and her future needs, so "slimness" becomes a reference to Pansy's place as the perfect and pliable European *jeune fille*. Slimness represents both her resources and her chances for either autonomy or fulfilment much more than it characterizes her dainty proportions. When one considers that what is being done with Pansy is what, in effect, is being planned for Isabel, "holding" Pansy, euphemistically speaking, "between his knees" becomes a strongly sexual image for Osmond's intentions concerning the fate of Isabel Archer.

As he encloses the child within his arm it is as if he were enclosing her in a prison. The convent, as we have already seen, has overtones of imprisonment as does their future home, the Palazzo Roccanera. Her lover will later

think of it as a "dungeon," a "domestic fortress which [bears] a stern old Roman name, which [smells] of historic deeds, of crime and craft and violence" [PL 364]. He will be:

haunted by the conviction that at picturesque periods young girls had been shut up there to keep them from their true loves, and then, under the threat of being thrown into convents, had been forced into unholy marriages. [TPL 365]

Isabel herself has always harboured a fear of being imprisoned "even as some wild caught creature in a vast cage" and so has twice fled marriage. Ironically, she will be seen by Ralph, always a reliable barometer of psychological pressures, as being "caught." "You're going to be put into a cage," is his concerned and unequivocal assessment of her choice of Osmond as a marriage partner. The ironic tragedy of her situation is that, according to her way of thinking:

the sole source of her mistake [has] been within herself. There [has] been no plot, no snare; she [has] looked and considered and chosen [PL 405]

as a free agent. As a "free agent," she accepts it. Little by little the evidence that links Pansy with Isabel accumulates.

In her confident, easy, American way, Isabel is almost stridently enamoured of "[her] liberty" and what she

terms her "personal independence." Concomitantly, she believes that "one ought to choose something very deliberately, and be faithful to that." In marrying Osmond she has fulfilled both tenets of her creed. Once married, however, she experiences a series of epiphanies, discoveries through shock, that open her eyes to realities undreamed of in her romantic, girlish imaginings. Dark cruelties smother her idealism and clip the pinions of her winged spirit. Into what was to be an Eden, Osmond's monumental egotism lies "hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers." Like the admonition to Macbeth:

to beguile the time,
 Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
 Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
 But be the serpent under 't[,] [Mac.I.v.63]

Osmond has practised deception. Through the form "simply of her motionlessly *seeing*," Isabel's awakening gradually takes place. The reader, along with Isabel, experiences the shock of her step-by-step journey into an awareness of the miasma of evil which now surrounds her, which is in the very air she breathes.

What causes Isabel the deepest anguish is the use made of her step-daughter as a means to bring Isabel herself into subjectivity. "Not to neglect Pansy, not under any provocation to neglect her--this [Isabel has] made an article of religion." It has become a trust and a sacred,

self-imposed duty. The only thing more sacred than a duty is a promise and Isabel has promised the child three things: to be "ever so kind" to her, that she "won't desert" her and that "yes, [she'll] come back" to Rome. As the events of Isabel's life unfold, more and more she becomes the Cimabue Madonna of the third portrait --and Pansy becomes the child.

Pansy, throughout, is being prepared to be the perfect sacred child. Submissive in all things to an all-powerful god-like father, she accepts but never questions. For this father, "she's a little saint of heaven! She is [his] great happiness!" The child has the loveliness that comes from inner strength and the grace that is derived from doing her filial duty. Trained to please, "her anxious eyes, her charming lips, her slip of a figure [are] as touching as a childish prayer." Always the delicate flower, "her force [is] all in knowing when and where to cling," and, perceiving worth through sensitive intuition, she clings to Isabel. Although she sees the evil which surrounds her, she remains uncorrupted by it for she has a surprisingly sure grasp on the realities of her life. Indeed, Isabel is "touched with wonder at the depths of perception of which this submissive little person is capable." The child, Pansy, has a "sufficient illumination of her own" not only to provide light for her own darkening life, but to light the way for Isabel. Wise in her innocence, "she [puts away all knowledge of the secrets of

larger lives than her own." Perfect and without fault, she accedes, [bowing] her pretty head to authority and only [asking] of authority to be merciful."

In the end, it is only to Isabel, the Madonna, to whom she prays and to whom she turns for help.

A Madonna sacrifices because of her child and suffers because of her. The child is a purity and a propriety. The child is a sufficiency and a balance. With the child there is rightness. Both completion and closure create a perfect form. With Pansy, these truths come into being for Isabel Archer. With Pansy, the third portrait of Isabel as a Cimabue Madonna is fully realized. With this new identity, Isabel will attain the stature and the courage to go forward. Pansy has enabled Isabel Archer to affront her destiny anew.

CHAPTER TWO

The Governess and *The Turn of the Screw*: Part One

Pansy, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, is the means of grace through which Isabel Archer gains the dignity of self-hood. Isabel has made, and survived, the tortuous journey from innocence, through the experience of evil, into a fuller awareness of life. Through the choices she makes in her new strength, Isabel will henceforth exist in the knowledge that she is now being true to her own authentic inner being. Bound by her "old passion for justice" she can, with purposeful deliberation, choose the "very straight path" back to Rome. Given who she is there is no other choice open to her. Goodwood, who has never known the real Isabel, says:

What have you to care about? You have no children; that perhaps would be an obstacle. As it is you've nothing to consider.

[PL 590]

Ironically, he emphasizes the one crucial factor that has become the fulcrum of balance and *raison d'être* for Isabel: the child.

I Chinese Boxes and Mirrors

A The Prologue: The "I" Narrator

The prologue commences *in medias res*. James's general or "I" narrator, whom the reader trusts and with whom, by convention, the reader identifies, speaks to an assembled group about a party at which he was present on a previous occasion. This we may gather from the pluperfect verb, "had held," in the opening five word clause, "the story had held us," which is connotive of time more than completed. On the occasion of this previous party, Douglas, who is one of the guests and a friend of the narrating "I," tells an uncanny story. The general narrator, who is now recalling it, invests all that took place at the Douglas party with the dramatic immediacy of time present.

Drawing his audience, along with the reader, into the previous circle gathered "round the fire...on Christmas eve in an old house," he presents the circumstances of the then unnamed tale to which he himself has since given the title, *The Turn of the Screw*. It may be noted here, with interest, that the "I" narrator never does tell the story *directly* to the present assemblage. Although he says:

that this narrative, from an exact transcript of my own made much later, is what I shall presently give, [TS 5]1

it is rather from Douglas *through the agency of the general narrator* that the story is finally transmitted and we hear what we do.

The present group, which comprises the "I" narrator, the reader, and, one is tempted to say, James as well, is in a time frame which could be sixty years, or thereabouts, in the future of the horrors which the story relates.² The members of the Douglas party are distanced from the dreadful occurrences by exactly fifty years. The background of the girl who becomes the governess, precedes, necessarily, these events which take place during the time that she is governess. The dreadful tale, as related by Douglas, is therefore boxed in by incidents in time which are both prior to, and subsequent to the happenings which constitute the story. The mirrors firmly arranged by James succeed in turning back to reflect two separate periods in the past and, as it is accepted convention in all fairy-tales, turning forward to face towards the future.

B The Prologue: Griffin's Tale

If the gathering addressed by the narrating "I" constitutes an outer box, the Douglas party may be said to be a second, inner box, which in turn becomes the outer box for the third and innermost box which contains a small, select group, in fact a group of two people only. Griffin, another guest at the Douglas evening, tells "a strange tale"

which the gathered listeners unanimously deem to be "gruesome." This bizarre case concerns an old house; a young boy; his mother, who is the female caretaker of the child; a sleeping apartment; and finally, the wide-awake "appearance of a dreadful kind." The fact that the apparition which appears is seen by *both the child and the adult* is an important element with regards to the later experiences of the governess.

This little, innermost, Chinese box has a very special, even crucial, function. With the double impact of the series of coincidental elements and the unique circumstance of "such a visitation [falling] on a child," Griffin's story effectively serves as the "germ," the "*donnée*" which awakens a deeply suppressed memory within the mind and heart of Douglas. It acts as the drop of oil which clicks the spring that finally allows the "outbreak" of his long held tale. Furthermore, it adds yet another "turn" by mirroring James's own *donnée*. As he "[confesses]" in a letter to A. C. Benson three months following the first serialized publication of *The Turn of the Screw*:

At one of those two memorable...winter nights that I spent at the sweet Addington, your father, in the drawing-room by the fire, where we were talking a little, in the spirit of recreation,...repeated to me the few meagre elements of a small and gruesome spectral story that had been told *him* years before and that he could only give the dimmest account of...because there had *been* no details and no coherency in the

tale as he received it, from a person who also but half knew it. [James's italics]3

A decade later he makes a further, although less specified, reference to this particular facet of his tale's genesis in the Preface to "The Aspern Papers" [AN 169-70].4

C Prologue: Douglas

Waiting for some time after Griffin's tale, for he is still wrestling with his own, long buried memory and his habit of silence, Douglas feels, finally, compelled to speak. At first he underplays Griffin's apparition and then he piques the curiosity of those present. He says:

I quite agree--in regard to Griffin's ghost, or whatever it was--that its appearing first to the little boy, at so tender an age, adds a particular touch. But it's not the first occurrence of its charming kind that I know to have involved a child. If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to two children? [TS 1-2]

The language here is worth a pause. Knowing all that he does, but what as yet no one else knows, Douglas is able to scoff at Griffin's spectre. Genuine as it may have been, he has yet a tale of such horror to relate that Griffin's "ghost," as he himself names it, will melt, by comparison, like Prospero's actors' spirits, into thin air and dissolve.

Griffin's child, being but "a little boy," he

acknowledges, "adds a particular touch." What is unknown to the others at this time, is the fact that not only is one of the children in Douglas's tale the merest infant, but she is also a girl child, a child redolent with associative sweetness and purity, which thereby compounds the infamy. Also, with "two" children, there will be twice the cathartic value through the resultant pity and terror which cannot but be evoked.

The choice of the substantive, "touch," in Douglas's speech, is both unconsciously and prophetically ironic. As it is used in Griffin's story, the word is straightforward; it triggers sympathy. The ghosts of his own tale, on the other hand, "touch" the children both psychologically and morally and even, it may be inferred, physically, in ways which both appal and disgust. Further, it is the "touching" of the young female caretaker, the children's governess, that becomes equivocal. Of an equally ambivalent nature will be the "touches" initiated by the young boy in the tale which Douglas proposes to tell. The "particular touch" in Griffin's tale elicits a single reading: sympathy for the small boy. In Douglas's tale of the governess, "touch" not only has powerful emotive values but, in addition, it becomes a strong verb of action.

At this point, Douglas says, "it's not the first occurrence of its *charming* kind that I know to have involved a child" [my italics]. "Charming," here used with the

rhetorical force almost of an oxymoron, becomes a signpost which James deliberately inserts. Aware of the many changes which will be rung on the word, "charm," its cognates and its varied connotations before the last turn of the screw, James knows that not the least of these is the spell under which the tale puts the reader. Finally, the phrase, "the turn of screw," gives the general narrator the perfect title for the governess's untitled manuscript. Introduced here, it becomes the tale's central metaphor. The many ingenious readings add not only to the tale's depth and ambiguity, but they also allow other imagery to develop.⁵

Douglas is now in the position of having to make good his boast. There are, however, obstacles to overcome. He must break a self-imposed silence of forty years, become involved with letters, a valet, a key, a long-locked drawer, a wrapped packet and, most importantly, the journal of his friend the governess which is written "in old, faded ink, and in the most beautiful hand." This breaching of the *sanctum sanctorum* is not only a physical act undertaken to retrieve a document; even more, it is a psychological act that frees a man from a long bondage of self-imposed reticence. The manuscript itself, although it is "thin" and covered in "faded red," is metal bound. Douglas opens "the faded red cover of a thin old-fashioned gilt-edged album" [TS B]. The two descriptive compounds are themselves joined by a bar and no comma breaks this solid, final clause.

Douglas "could" do all of this. The subjunctive indicates his ambivalent, bitter-sweet feelings; it shows also that his emotions are strongly engaged. He "[appears] almost to appeal for aid not to hesitate" to the narrator [75 2]. The mutual fixing of deep looks, the empathy of minds that enables the anticipation and completion of each other's thoughts and the mutual trust which causes Douglas, before his death, to commit his treasured document to this friend, all demonstrate the close bond that exists between these two men. The sensitivity of the general narrator makes him acutely aware of Douglas's hesitancy (although at this time he does not know the cause). Douglas's facial expressions, delaying tactics, and also, as is frequent in stressful situations which confront Jamesian characters, the turning of his back, are all signs of emotional strain. Persuaded to reveal his story, four days later, he begins.

Not yet satisfied that his "Christmastide toy" is sufficiently distanced, James inserts yet another prologue within the "Douglas" prologue. This one relates the necessary background before the events recorded by the governess occur. It is here that the general narrator interjects his characterization of the master at Bly. He says: "One could easily fix his type, it never, happily, dies out" [75 5]. This he can do only through long familiarity with Douglas and, doubtless, as a result of many conversations between the two friends *following* this first

rendering of the tale at the Christmas eve fireside. James thus forges a "narrative chain"⁶ which links the time elements through a series of prologues and narrating voices. These Chinese boxes and mirrors both distance events and draw them near enough to impart the intimacy "of a common thrill." They hide as much as they reveal. The result is that we suspend our disbelief and allow past illusion to become our present reality.

II The Reliable Witness

A The General Narrator

The narrating "I," in *The Turn of the Screw*, with no hidden design to influence him, deals with his Prologue in a straightforward and believable manner. He is a reliable witness not just by convention, but because he earns the designation. The reader may accept his statements and judgements with both assurance and equanimity. Indeed, he likes the reader well enough to include him in the house party where friends gather to socialize, to exchange stories, and even, a little, to gossip. Flattered, the reader finds both his fellow guests and the ambience charming. Confident that the general narrator is presenting the essential facts as they are, that is, as he truly believes them to be, the reader can infer through the developing mood, tone and even through language, whatever

else may be necessary. Each detail the "I" narrator gives presents its full weight in the balance so that the Prologue (and the tale which follows it) has:

the small strength--if I should n't say
rather the unattackable ease--of a perfect
homogeneity, of being, to the very last
grain of its virtue, all of a kind. [AN 169]

B Douglas

The reader accepts the general narrator as reliable. Douglas, through his long affiliation of both personal and social friendship with the narrating "I," is also accepted by the reader as worthy of trust. As well, Douglas earns this authenticity in his own right.

Due to his emotional involvement with the governess, Douglas may be expected to look back to a previous, romantic summer with rose-tinted glasses. He "quietly" recalls that:

It was long ago, and this episode was long
before. I was at Trinity, and I found her
at home on my coming down the second summer.
I was much there that year--it was a
beautiful one; and we had, in her off-hours,
some strolls and talks in the garden--talks
in which she struck me as awfully clever and
nice. [TS 3]

He remembers this young woman with warmth, and understandably so. In spite of this, however, the background he gives is fair to his subject and informative to the assembled listeners. A born story-teller, Douglas

"with quiet art, [prepares] his triumph" [7S 2]. Since the word is "art," and not "artifice," the reader is made aware, through the language of the Prologue, that the assembled house-guests accord this narrator a fair hearing. They are ready to believe him. In this manner, all present including both the reader and Henry James are drawn together into an intimacy of mutuality and trust.

Douglas, while he is but a youth, is able to instil sufficient confidence in the heart of a mature woman (a woman in fact, who is ten years his senior) that she tells him a story the "impression" of which he has held in his heart for forty years. This tale "she [has] never told anyone. It wasn't simply that she said so, but that [he knows] she [hasn't]" [7S 3]. Before her impending death, it is to him she sends her journal.

Douglas not only engenders trust, he gives it. The narrating "I," after many more years pass, becomes, in his turn, the repositor of the governess's manuscript. He says, "poor Douglas before his death--when it was in sight--committed to me the manuscript" [7S 5]. Douglas knows that as he himself would never betray the governess, neither will the general narrator betray him. Between these two narrators of the Prologue, there is a mirror effect; each man reflects the trust of the other.

The intense love (and love of a youth of twenty is always intense) which Douglas harboured for the governess

and may harbour even in his maturity, is a factor which could mitigate against his objectivity. Let it be noted, however, that this "charming" woman is the same person who has, apparently with success, survived the ugly ordeal which is the subject of their conversations. Then too, the long friendship between Douglas and the "I" persona, which may also have shades of intimacy, could easily render the testimony of either narrator if not outrightly suspect at the very least, equivocal. Despite these psychological elements there yet remains sufficient reason to believe that both of these men are reliable narrators.

III Governess, Ghosts, and Children

A The Governess

What are the facts that we glean from the Prologue about this young woman and how do we come by them? Before reading the governess's journal to the assembled house-guests, Douglas offers "a few words of prologue" in order to set his stage. These few words, however, in actuality, are being filtered first through the consciousness and then through the words of the general narrator. There is a time lapse of approximately one decade from the occasion at which Douglas offers them to his party on Christmas Eve. The information we are about to hear is therefore first distanced from (a): the time *prior* to the events; (b): the

events themselves (for which they are to be the "prologue"); (c): the time at which Douglas first heard about them during his summer holiday (which was also his first personal acquaintanceship with the young woman in question); and (d): whatever it is that Douglas really does say to his fellow guests on Christmas Eve. Further, because of the close personal relationship between the narrating "I" and Douglas, these occurrences, so important to Douglas, have doubtless been the subject of conversation between the two friends. This would make the general narrator thoroughly conversant with the background of the governess. As a consequence, the "words of prologue" which we are promised as coming from Douglas are assuredly not his words *verbatim*.

The reader acknowledges this caveat and proceeds. The salient "facts" are as follows: an unsophisticated girl of twenty leaves her parson father and older sisters to take the position of governess on an estate outside London. She has at least a modicum of breeding and education with, doubtless, both a firm moral background and a well-honed sense of duty. Here she will care for two orphaned children: a girl, and a boy. Her employer, a worldly and "charming" man (with whom she falls instantly in love) exacts her promise never to bother him in any way. "But the salary offered much [exceeds] her modest measure, and on a second interview she [faces] the music, she [engages]" [TS 7]. Although she has now accepted the

position, the entire ordeal has been understandably unnerving. This is the innocuous *curriculum vitae* with which this normal young Englishwoman enters into her great adventure. Little does she know that nothing will touch it "for dreadful--dreadfulness!" nor can she know that it will be fraught from the start with "uncanny ugliness and horror and pain" [TS 2].

She remembers "the whole beginning as a succession of flights and drops, a little see-saw of the right throbs and the wrong" [TS 9]. With this imagery she sets the tone for what will become her journey into a fuller awareness of life through the ever tightening turn of the screw of evil.

Before we are privy to her journal, we know very little of her psychological background, perhaps no more than that she is of a romantic bent and has "courage [which] she afterwards [shows]" [TS 6]. In his passion for integrity of form, James deliberately:

[rules] out subjective complications of her own--play of tone etc., and [keeps] her impersonal save for the most obvious and indispensable little note of neatness, firmness and courage--without which she [won't have] her data.

7

All that we otherwise know is contained in the prologue of Douglas via the general narrator. An important datum should be noted here: "this episode," as Douglas characterizes the congeries of incidents contained in the journal, occurs

before Douglas's summer at Trinity, he therefore, in offering comments upon the governess, does so when he meets her *one decade* after their occurrence. He finds her, at *this time* "a most charming person." In fact, for him she is "the most agreeable woman [he's] ever known in her position." She also "[strikes him] as awfully clever and nice" [TS 3]. These delineations are reasonable and they are unemotional. They are neither fraught with thwarted passion nor angry with long-harboured resentments.

Once the reading of the autobiographical journal commences, the governess is herself the narrator and outside sources for particulars about her become closed to us. This young woman enters into our lives in much the same way as she enters Bly: as a *tabula rasa* on which life has as yet to inscribe the characters. What we do know, and this from James himself, is that "she has 'authority,' which is a good deal to have given her" [AN 174]. We have already seen that she is reliable. What James's designation amounts to is tantamount to a request from him to respect his heroine as "credible."

B Ghosts

For each artistic work, James recollects a "staring-point, a "germ" which becomes its genesis. He says, "we must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his *donnée*: our criticism [applies] only to what he makes of

it."8 Within a year of this statement, James becomes acquainted with but "the shadow of a shadow" of a "dreadful matter," a "ghost-story" in fact, which makes a strong impression upon him. This particular shadowy source is an anecdote which he hears from Archbishop Benson and writes down, on Saturday, January 12th, 1885, in his *Notebook*. Later, it becomes the germ for a ghost story of his own. What he asks that we "must grant" him --are the ghosts.

Employed as "servants in an old country house," the haunting apparitions have been "wicked and depraved" while alive and remain so in death. Their victims in life are, moreover, their same victims still. Hungry for further corruption, "they try and try and try, these evil presences, to get hold of them. It is a question of the children 'coming over to where they are'" [NHJ 178]. The sole maleficent intention behind the demons' solicitations is that their prey, the hapless children, "may destroy themselves." The whole force and persistency of their evil power are directed towards this end.

The ghosts are characterized with a different orientation from that used to particularize the governess. The ghosts present themselves as projected accomplishments of intended *form* on the part of James and as such there is only his retrospective purpose to guide us before the fact of the story itself. His apparitions "please at the best but through having helped [him] to express [his] subject all

directly and intensely " [AN 175]. The story, his "designed horror," James, himself, styles as a "sinister romance," and he deliberately intends that this tale should provide the reader with a journey, "an excursion into chaos" [AN 172] through exposure to evil. By means of technical skill, "ingenuity pure and simple," and "cold artistic calculation," the author creates pricking-of-the-thumb, "heart-shaking" dread. James sets down, in writing, his intent with regards to creating the real thing in order "to rouse the dear old sacred terror." He says:

it [is] clear that from the first my hovering prowling blighting presences, my pair of abnormal agents, [will] have to depart altogether from the rules. They [will] be agents in fact; there [will] be laid on them the dire duty of causing the situation to reek with an air of Evil. Their desire and their ability to do so, visibly measuring meanwhile their effect, together with their observed and described success--this [is] exactly my central idea.

[AN 175]

One additional feature deserves comment. These "agents" are not "ghosts" in the familiar psychical sense. James recognizes them rather as "goblins, elves, imps, [and] demons as loosely constructed as those of the old trials for witchcraft." He refers to the demon-spirits as "evoked predatory creatures," and, by these words, conveys more than a designation of the merely inhuman. Through the force of his language, he insinuates into the reader's mind the idea of tireless beasts of prey who lie in wait with hungry,

mindless instinct for the chosen victims. This characterization also provides for a rich source of imagery within the story. Because the "abnormal agents" have laid upon them "the dire duty of causing the situation to reek with the air of Evil," and because they are endowed with daemonic intention, they act. The victims towards whom all this weight of evil is directed--are the orphans at Bly.

C The Children

There are two sets of facts which provide information about the children in *The Turn of the Screw*. In the first place, Douglas's prologue apprises us of the facts that there are two children who are orphaned "by the death of their parents in India." We learn also that their wardship for the previous two years has been in the hands of their uncle. Although not temperamentally suited for this heavy responsibility, he has managed until recently when "by the strangest of chances" he finds himself without a governess. The previous one, "a most respectable person," has died. On behalf of his young wards' welfare, their uncle has provided the children:

from the first, with the best people he could find to look after them, parting even with his own servants to wait on them. [TS 6]

The boy, Miles, has of necessity, been sent to school; the little girl, Flora, is under the charge of a housekeeper

(long in the employ of the family) in the country. There is, additionally, a staff of five.

In this part of the Prologue to *The Turn of The Screw*, James's narrating "I" has incorporated, with reference to the uncle, the clause, "but he immensely pitied the poor chicks and had done all he could" [TS 6]. In Act IV of *Macbeth*, Scene iii, Macduff learns that his wife and babes have been mercilessly put to the sword; all are killed. Macduff says:

All my pretty ones?
Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?
What, all my pretty chickens, and their dam
At one fell swoop?

Not only is the poetry jagged with Macduff's grief but his anguish chooses from among nature's most helpless creatures to speak of it. The uncle at Bly, doing his best for the motherless children in his care, uses the same metaphor to emphasize the pity he feels for the young ones, with whom he has a blood-tie, in their helpless and dependent state. Ironically, it is "his own servants" whom he sends to care for them that wreak the catastrophe which results in "uncanny ugliness and horror and pain" and, eventually, the death of Miles. The moral downfall of the children at Bly will be occasioned by the same mindless and demonic savagery as that used to slaughter "all [the] pretty chickens" of Macduff.

The prologue furnishes not only factual information but, through the subtlety of the language, it succeeds in providing hints to future events. The most helpful psychological information about the children, however, comes from the *Notebook* entry for Saturday, January 12th, 1895. Clearly, James sets out a game plan; unequivocally, he specifies both the players and the place. He inscribes his *donnée* as:

the story of the young children...left to the care of servants in an old country-house, through the death, presumably, of parents. The servants, wicked and depraved, corrupt and deprave the children; the children are bad, full of evil, to a sinister degree. The servants *die*...and their apparitions, figures, return to haunt the house *and* children, to whom they seem to beckon, whom they invite and solicit, from across dangerous places...--so that the children may destroy themselves, lose themselves, by responding, by getting into their power. So long as the children are kept from them, they are not lost; but they try and try and try, these evil presences, to get hold of them. [James's italics]. [NHJ 178]

Three years later, James publishes *The Turn of the Screw*.

Concerning the governess, the ghosts and the children, there has been considerable critical debate. For Edna Kenton, the ghosts and children are figments of the "troubled thought within [the governess's] mind, acting out her story."⁹ Edmund Wilson claims that "the young governess who tells the story is a neurotic case of sex repression, and the ghosts are not real ghosts at all but merely the

governess's hallucinations."10 Robert Heilman considers Flora and Miles to be "symbolic children as the ghosts are symbolic ghosts."11 John Lydenberg states that:

We recognize that the children are symbols of the tortured state of mankind, and that the horror of their corruption is heightened by the fact that they are essentially such angelic children. But this Heilman interpretation is, if not too rationalistic, at least too abstract; it provides a symbolic interpretation that we can grasp intellectually but that we do not truly feel.

....Heilman's conception makes sense intellectually but not emotionally. I do not feel the corruption of the children or the horror of their *putative* relations with Quint and Jessel. [my italics]

12

These are, obviously, subjective assessments and poetic readings which are interesting in and for themselves. They have little to do with the governess, the ghosts and the children as the textual evidence proves or as both the Preface to "The Aspern Papers" and the *Notebooks* proclaim. There is a governess and there are children; they do exist. There are ghosts who have corrupted the children in the most heinous manner. These are the given elements; what James does with them is the tale, *The Turn of the Screw*.

CHAPTER TWO

The Governess and *The Turn of the Screw*: Part Two

Journey into Awareness

As promised in the Prologue, the tale commences. In it, the governess recreates, autobiographically, the months of her sojourn at Bly, from the "close of June" until "the dull things of November." This is her *confessio amantis*; in effect, it becomes her apologia. Her task is difficult for, through it, she both exposes and relieves the pain of her journey through experience into a fuller awareness of life. As auditors, we easily accommodate ourselves to becoming participators, with her, in this journey. We, like this determined, conscientious, courageous and slightly nervous young woman, meet the individuals who affect her life exactly as she meets them. We enter into her thinking processes and react to her judgements. Our judgements are not necessarily hers, nor ought they to be.

Although James intends that the story be told by "an outside spectator, observer," the actualities of the young governess experiencing the events of the summer at Bly and interpreting them at *that time* are far different from recalling and recreating them after the fact. A decade following the publication of *The Turn of the Screw*, James clarifies this in *The New York Preface*:

It was 'déjà très-joli,' in 'The Turn of the Screw,' please believe, the general proposition of our young woman's keeping crystalline her record of so many intense anomalies and obscurities--by which I don't of course mean her explanation of them, a different matter. [AN 173]

I The Children's Deception

The little girl, Flora, who accompanies the housekeeper, "[appears] to [the governess] on the spot a creature so charming as to make it a great fortune to have to do with her" [TS 9]. The ironic subtlety of the verb "appear" so early in the text of the journal gains importance as a signpost to the tone throughout in which illusion and reality vie for precedence. How the governess acts depends upon what she believes the reality to be. In the revised New York Edition, the child "[affects the governess] on the spot as a creature too charming not to make it a great fortune to have to do with her."¹³ By tightening the verb from the nebulous "appears," to the specific, subjectively experienced "affects," the narrator indicates that the governess (and with her the reader) accepts at face value, the charm of the little girl.¹⁴ Flora is, without qualification, "the most beautiful child [the governess has] ever seen." The irony deepens as the governess says:

it was a comfort that there could be no uneasiness in a connection with anything so beatific as the radiant image of my little girl. 7S 10J

Endowed with "angelic beauty," and imbued with "the deep, sweet serenity of one of Raphael's holy infants," Flora is a paragon of beauty and seeming innocence unsurpassed in the history of childhood. Flora is a child of eight.

Miles, "the little gentleman" may well be the original mould from which Flora is cast for he too is "incredibly beautiful." With an aura of "something divine" he emanates a "sweetness of innocence" which calls forth a "sort of passion of tenderness for him." Like "a little fairy prince" he too appears to be unequalled in annals of either reality or Faerie. Miles, we learn, is "scarce ten years old." Together, the children give so little trouble and are "of a gentleness so extraordinary" that the sudden "space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and all the mystery of nature" [7S 19] create in the young governess a mood of exhilaration and confidence. Ahead of her she envisions "the making of a happy and useful life" [7S.

Then certain things begin to happen at Bly. Golden days that seem clear and invitingly alive with birdsong become ominously quiescent. Charming stillness metamorphoses into "a hush in which something gathers or crouches. The change [being] actually like the spring of a

beast" [75 19]. Unknown to herself, the young governess possesses a rare and "dreadful liability to impressions" so that, inexperienced as she is, there comes to her the apprehension that Bly harbours prowling malevolence. Infernal beings, corruptive in life, return to claim their own--their own, are Miles and Flora.

Following her own logic, the governess awakens to the dire and unshakable certainty that danger is abroad. "A portentous clearness now [having possessed] her" [75 33], she finds herself entered into the lists with little to support her but her own gritted determination. Evil incarnate in the guise of Quint, the master's former valet, and Miss Jessel, the previous governess at Bly, contend against her for the souls of the children. There now commences a game for very high stakes. Later, Maisie too, finds herself thrust into a strange game of life. For her, it will become "very much like puss-in-the-corner, and she can only wonder if the distribution of parties [will] lead to a rushing to and fro and a changing of places. She [is] in the presence, she [feels] of restless change" [WMK 76].¹⁵

Already inculcated into the paths of depravity, the children harbour their corruption like a worm in the bud of their seeming innocence and in the heart of their actual beauty. In the game of "puss-in-the-corner" they are already more than halfway over onto the side of irrevocable damnation. All that stands between is one whose innocence

and lack of experience is matched only by her determination and sense of duty. Being human, she blunders.

Weighted with evil and wise beyond their years, the children too play a game, the game of deception, and they play it very well. Precocious as Alice in Wonderland, they encompass the governess in a world of their own invention including her and excluding her at will while she, charmed and enchanted by the appearance of innocence and romance in this "pair of little grandees, of princes of the blood," falls blindly and neatly into their trap.

Flora, at eight, is an adept at deception. An innocent outing, for instance, becomes a nightmare at high noon. Besought by her especial familiar, the child's inspired ploy is the double strategy of first gathering all of her life forces into an intensity of soundlessness and then (a sure sign of deep emotional involvement for a Jamesian character) of "[turning] her back to the water." As we have already noted, there is a direct, intense, correspondence in nature, between cause and effect. Sounds fade. The waiting stillness is like "that hush in which something gathers or crouches." Within the moment of its occurrence, the governess senses the immanence of evil. Her "heart [stands] still for an instant with the wonder and terror" of the malevolence that hovers beseechingly. Deeply aware "that there [is] an alien object in view--a figure whose right of presence [she] instantly, passionately

[questions]" [TS 39], the governess holds her breath and waits for the cry that Flora never utters.

On her part, the child's deception deepens as she seizes upon a mindless activity with bits of wood that frees her senses to reach across to the apparition while at the same time serving to keep the governess unconscious of the changed configuration. What Flora succeeds in doing, however, is to force awareness of evil where there has been love and trust.

What one does with seeming ease, two do with practised and consummate skill. The credulous governess shrinks equally from the temptation to "gaze into the depths of blue of [Flora's] eyes and pronounce their loveliness a trick of premature cunning" [TS 45] and from enumerating the diversive tactics she feels sure are used by the children who are enthralled by evil forces from beyond the grave. The governess, helplessly loving the delightful pair, embraces them yet again. Painful musing oppresses her almost at once:

'What will they think of that? Doesn't it betray too much?' It would [be] easy to get into a sad, wild tangle about how much I might betray; but the real account, I feel, of the hours of peace that I [can] still enjoy [is] that the immediate charm of my companions [is] a beguilement still effective even under the shadow of the possibility that it [is] studied.

[TS 50]

Part of this beguilement is a tacit agreement between these angelic fiends "by which one of them should keep [her] occupied while the other [slips] away." The very fact that she is aware of this sufficiently to record it, even retrospectively, indicates that her eyes are equally unsealed to both the alien spirits and to the machinations of the children to serve the demons' foul demands.

On her part, Flora, in response to an intuition that "someone" is in the grounds, leaves her bed. "Deceivingly," in order to hide her absence, she pulls the white bed-curtains forward. By the adroit tactic of putting the governess immediately on the defensive, she forestalls the governess's deserved reproach and diverts her questions. With disarming guile Flora says, "'You naughty: where *have* you been?" [TS 55]. By means of a further subtle duplicity, the child excuses her actions:

Flora luminously [considers]; after which,
with her little divine smile: 'Because I
don't like to frighten you!' [TS 56]

Shortly thereafter, the governess learns that Miles and Flora have contrived together to manipulate her into looking and to seeing what she in fact does see in the garden at night. A particular little turn of fiendishness is Miles' use of his previous reserves of goodness to make his story credible and to render his excuses valid.

Other facets of the death-in-life game the children play incorporate the "systematic silence of each" of the four players who perpetually meet: the corrupting dead and the corrupted living. Through what she has seen, the governess gradually acquires certainties that make her "more lucid, [make her] get hold of still other things" [75 64]. She cites the children's "'more than earthly beauty, their absolutely unnatural goodness. It's a game...it's a policy and a fraud!'" as proof of her belief. Owned by the aliens, body and soul, the governess envisions the children, not lost together in their fairy-tale world of make-believe, but lost to innocence in the world of reality. Her unsealed eyes see the two beautiful children wandering ever closer to the abyss of damnation across which their familiars reach out to them with all the power of evil at their command.

The closer Evil comes, the more nearly the death of the year approaches:

The summer had turned, the summer had gone;
the autumn had dropped upon Bly and had
blown out half our lights. The place with
its grey sky and withered garlands, its
bared spaces and scattered dead leaves, was
like a theatre after the performance--all
strewn with crumpled playbills. [75 68]

Again there is a one-to-one correspondence between the growing desperation of the young governess, the depravity of the children, the encroaching evil and the *mise en scène*.

By a strange paradox, the dizzying flights of

attainment the children reach in their exuberance of deception have been prepared for, ironically, by the tutelage of the previous governess. While Miles exercises the virtuosity at the piano that causes the present governess to "[start] up with a strange sense of having literally slept at [her] post," the child, Flora, disappears. Despairingly, the young woman acknowledges that "the trick's played...they've successfully worked their plan. [Miles] found the most divine little way to keep me quiet while [Flora] went off'"[75 89]. The place towards which Flora is bound is to a meeting with the "pale and ravenous demon," Miss Jessel. As before, Flora turns her back on the apparition. Through her beautiful eyes Flora's corrupt soul peers out at the governess who sees her now as an "old, old woman." Evil has withered the bud that is the child, in just the way that dying nature has made sear the "big, ugly spray of withered fern" which Flora deliberately stoops to pluck, recognizing it at once as her own, special device. Cornered, she mounts a counter-attack against her accuser with fiendish brilliance. Inadvertently, the demon-child shows her colours with the result that:

her incomparable childish beauty had suddenly failed, had quite vanished. I've said it already--she was literally, she was hideously, hard; she had turned common and almost ugly.

[75 96]

For both children, *not* saying things is a technique they use consistently to their advantage. Whether it is Miles' skirting the subject of his being dismissed from his school, Flora's stillness in the absolute presence of alien evil, or their silent "play at innocent wonder about [the governess's] non-appearance" at church, this withdrawal from normal social intercourse is the means they use to "[beguile and befool]" their caretaker. That their deliberate silences bode ill, is, however, sensed by the governess:

The more I've watched and waited the more I've felt that if there were nothing else to make it sure it would be made so by the systematic silence of each. *Never*, by a slip of the tongue, have they so much as alluded to either of their old friends, any more than Miles has alluded to his expulsion. [James's italics]. [TS 63]

Always, there is the correspondence, in nature, of silence concomitant with the presence of evil. "The element of the unnamed and untouched [becomes], between [the governess and the children] greater than any other" [TS 67], and their mutual, unspoken avoidance of subjects which might tread on forbidden territory becomes their *modus vivendi*. It is no small wonder, in the face of these endless "flights and drops," that the initiation into the knowledge of evil which confronts the governess daily, as she journeys into awareness, is uneven. And yet it does proceed. Equally with Maisie Farange, the governess surely must sense that:

As she was condemned to know more and more,
 how could it logically stop before she
 should know Most? It came to her in
 fact...that she was distinctly on the road
 to know Everything...what in the world had
 she ever done but learn and learn and learn?
 She looked at the pink sky with a placid
 foreboding that she soon should have learnt
 All.

[HMK 195]

II Touching

The problem of deception is straightforward; the children deceive the governess. Their single purpose is to free themselves for congress with "the dead restored." With "touching," however, ambivalence creeps in, for touching is both actual and psychological. Nor does the action extend in one direction only for touching takes place between the governess and the housekeeper, Mrs Grose, and between the governess and the children. Furthermore, the touching is instigated by all parties with different intent and different degrees of fervor. Messages are given and received but messages are also given which are either misconstrued or ignored. To further complicate touching, the results from it have, within the context of the governess's journey into awareness, both salutary and dire consequences.

In terms of imagery, "the turning of screws to increase pressure, to extort information...is a primary image used to describe the behaviour of the governess."¹⁶ The need to exert psychological pressure by means of

physical touching increases as the young woman's awareness of evil at Bly increases. Sensing that Mrs Grose harbours information about the child Miles, the governess "[holds] her tighter," urging her to speak. At one point, she even "[makes] her turn pale," while consistently she "[presses her] interlocutress," about the several threatening relationships at Bly, [my italics]. Later during one of their midnight colloquies, the governess says to the housekeeper:

there's a thing I should require now, just without sparing you the least bit more--oh, not a scrap, come!--to get out of you. What was it you had in mind when, in our distress, before Miles came back, over the letter from his school, you said, *under my insistence*, that you did not pretend for him that he had not literally ever been 'bad'? [last italics James's]. [TS 46-7]

Actual experiences of evil sharpen her suspicions that more lurks to be routed out. This drives her to push the housekeeper further to the wall by intensifying her forceful approach. "Lord, how I *pressed* her now....but I *shall get it out of you yet!*" she promises, [my italics]. On more than one occasion, when there is a suspicion of collusion between the adored children and the old housekeeper, the young woman, in studying the "odd face" of the housekeeper is sure that the children have:

in some way bribed her to silence; a silence that, however, [she will] engage to

break down on the first private opportunity. [my italics].

[75 79]

Driven by the most conscientious intentions, her methods are nevertheless unfortunately unsophisticated and clumsy. This very lack of finesse will have tragic repercussions.

As often as the governess turns the screws of emotional pressure on the housekeeper she just as often turns to her for reassurance. Unlike the touching of psychological coercion, these physical touchings are warm and mutually supportive. Together, for instance, they clasp hands in a great vow "to see it out." After they "[embrace] like sisters, [the governess feels] still more fortified." (Their pledge of clasped hands will be repeated when the housekeeper finally agrees to take Flora and leave). Later, when the governess puts out her hand to Mrs Grose she "[holds] her *hard* a little, liking to feel her close to [her]" for the human support which, at this time, only this homely woman can provide, [my italics]. Indeed, Mrs Grose proves herself to be a consistently reliable bastion against the despair that threatens to engulf the young woman as her enlarged vision of corruption increases her awareness of evil at Bly. As the horrors of the Quint/Jessel relationship unfold, Mrs Grose:

once more [takes the governess's] hand in both her own, *holding it as tight as if to*

fortify [her] against the increase of alarm
[she] might draw from this disclosure. [my italics]
[7S 43]

Captivated by the radiant beauty of the children which holds her in thrall despite her growing knowledge about their demonic possession, the governess caresses them spontaneously. Emotionally involved, she "covers Flora with kisses." Without even closing her eyes, she can conjure up the redolent delights of childish "pressure on one's heart and their fragrant faces against one's cheek." She finds herself, "by an irresistible impulse[,]. . . catching them up and pressing them to [her] heart." Flora, for her part, and in her fiendish wisdom, can "put her little conscious hand straight upon the spot that [aches]." Confidently, the little girl "[patters] straight over to [the governess, throws] herself upon [her] knee, [gives] herself to be held" and, with infernally inspired irony, offers her beauty as a salve to ease the hurt caused by her own evil.

Strong as her feelings are for both of the children, there is something of an unconscious confusion in her relationship with the boy, Miles. Dressed by his uncle's tailor, sporting with manly flair the same debonair waistcoats and just as persuasively charming to women as the older man to whom she is admittedly attracted, young Miles presents a different problem from that of Flora. After taking him "by the hand without a word and [leading] him,

through the dark spaces...and so to his forsaken room," never has she "placed on his little shoulders hands of such tenderness as those with which, while [she rests] against the bed, [she holds] him there well under fire" [TS 62]. Later, as she writes about it in her journal, she renews the vividness and immediacy of her confused feelings. The overwhelming, gentle love she feels (perhaps not even being sure who, exactly, is the object of her emotions) becomes confused in her mind with the urgency to press from the child, at all costs, a confession. Devil driven, he neatly side-steps her query, bends forward for an exchange of kisses and, "[glittering] in the gloom," he submits to being enfolded in her arms. He, seemingly, fully possesses the knowledge of evil which she, even now, is only journeying towards.

This relationship, which is a combination of genuine concern and fear admixed with helpless love, bodes ill. The young protectress gathers all her strength for a final assault on the forces of corruption which she senses are about to prevail. Each time she confronts the child, and confront him she must, she rationalizes her actions. In a paroxysm of tenderness and pity, she throws herself upon him and, with their faces close, she embraces him. As soon as she catches the light of an answering response, "a small faint quaver of consenting consciousness--it [makes her] drop on [her] knees beside the bed and seize once more the

chance of possessing him" [79 85]. It is by just such diabolical subtlety that she is drawn into the well of his evil. With each hint of success her perseverance escalates; concomitantly, her fall from innocence into awareness nears the absolute.

As the prologue tale of Griffen involves a young boy and his mother together in their bedroom where an apparition terrorizes them, so the final occasion of touching takes place between Miles and the woman who acts *in loco parentis* to him; it too, takes place in his bedroom where an equally heinous apparition approaches. This is no new theatre for the scenes of their drama. Each instance repeats a previous one with variations on the theme of demands by the governess for a confession from Miles about his duplicity and his involvement with the dead valet, Quint. On each occasion Miles cleverly evades a direct reply. Furthermore, between the governess and the boy, the occasions are marked by an emotional embrace with latent sexual overtones.

Like a brilliant prestidigitator, the governess keeps the fiend at bay while at the same time:

[she enfolds, she draws Miles] close; and
 while [she holds] him to [her] breast,
 where [she can] feel in the sudden fever
 of his little body the tremendous pulse of
 his little heart, [she keeps] her eyes on
 the thing at the window. [79 112]

Throughout, she maintains an inquisitorial line of patter that is in reality her plea to him, through his confession,

for life. As before, "for pure tenderness" she shakes the child. Her kisses now meet the drenched forehead of the victim who is being tragically sacrificed as equally on the altar of her love as he is being sought, for the purpose of damnation, by the fiend. In the last passionate touching, the governess catches the spent child in his final fall.

III Knowing

Leon Edel, in his "Headnotes" to *Henry James: Stories of the Supernatural*, reminds us that "the evidence left by James himself is that he intended to make the story the record of the young governess's mind."¹⁷ Having edited the 1898 version of his tale, *The Turn of the Screw*, for the New York Edition of 1908, James states in the Preface that "the study is of a conceived 'tone,' the tone of *suspected* and *felt* trouble...--the tone of tragic, yet of exquisite, mystification," [my italics, AN 172-3]. James deepened the 'tone' of the revised version through judicious changes in a "determination 'to alter the nature of the governess' testimony from that of a report of things observed, perceived, recalled, to things *felt*."¹⁸ As a logical sequence in an epistemological principle it can be said that: "whatever is evident is reasonable...and whatever is reasonable is acceptable."¹⁹ The corruption, therefore, which the governess encounters, being evident to her (as she receives it through impressions, visions, inferences,

fancies, appearances and what she senses) is both reasonable and acceptable as a *bona fide* item of knowledge. For her, the horror is both real and it is terrible. Also, the apparitions accord exactly with "the air of reality (solidity of specification)" which, for James, is "the supreme virtue of a novel."²⁰ Being admitted into the status of knowledge, these "abnormal agents" have the ripple effect of ever-widening rings of evil for the governess, and, as she truly believes, for the children in her care.

Undertaking the "admirable and difficult" quest in James's "fairy-tale" and surmounting the attendant obstacles is, at first, a game where "[they are] united in [their] danger, they [have] nothing but [her], and [she]--well, [she has] them" [TS 37]. Only too soon, however, the game gets out of hand. Before the end, it becomes an obsession. In order to obtain the knowledge to solve the riddle of evil at Bly, the governess must find a magic formula. The secret is "seeing"--therein lies the basis of her power.

"Looking," "seeing," and "perceiving" are all forms of vision that offer possibilities to the governess as she journeys into awareness of evil and hence into fuller awareness of life. Even in after years, she acknowledges that while at Bly, she strangely experiences a "bewilderment of vision." Like an impressionistic painting, objects diffuse and shimmer; the line between reality and illusion becomes tenuous.

In the intensity of her commitment she sometimes makes errors in logic. Following the deep, hard stare of the apparition at the dining-room window, the governess experiences an epiphany: "On the spot there came to me the added shock of a certitude....He had come for someone else" [75 27]. "A portentous clearness now [possesses her]:" Quint wants Miles. There are no logical steps here, only instinct. Through her inner vision, the situation is evident; if evident it is then both reasonable and apparent. What is apparent then becomes the truth.

Never through her text do we learn that either child actually sees the fiends, but the governess, in naming the horrors to Mrs Grose, makes this appear to be so. What she "[takes] in with certitude" through "[becoming] aware," and what she sustains through the "apprehension of what [Flora does]," these provide all her logic for the conclusion: "Flora [sees]!" In reinvestigating the episode step by step the young woman forms links to the knowledge which she has already gained through intuition and revelation. Through deduction, she arrives at the conclusion that, with Flora and Miss Jessel, communion is a matter of habit. Later, Miles having contrived an opportunity for Flora to give the governess "the slip," the child disappears. Flora has gone without her hat; Miss Jessel is always hatless, *ergo*, the governess deduces, "She's with *her*!" [The governess and Mrs

Grose] must find them" [TS 88]. Upon reaching the lake the young woman envisions more:

'No, no; wait! She has taken the boat'....
 'Our not seeing it is the strongest of proofs. She has used it to go over, and then has managed to hide it.'
 'All alone--that child?'
 'She's not alone, and at such times she's not a child: she's an old, old woman.' [TS 91]

Never would these jumps in logic have been possible nor would they have even occurred to the innocent girl newly arrived from the Hampshire vicarage. Only through the progressive unsealing of her eyes to the evil abroad is the protectress of the children even now able to reach the dire conclusions which, for her, constitute knowledge.

Where Miles is concerned, the emotional ambivalence creates a peculiarly sensitive response to the demonic threats which become increasingly evident. Still without knowing the reason for his sudden return home from school, and still captivated by the fairy-tale enchantment of his undeniable charm, the governess jumps to the conclusion that his expulsion is:

for wickedness. For what else--when he's so clever and beautiful and perfect? Is he stupid? Is he untidy? Is he infirm? Is he ill-natured? He's exquisite--so it can only be *that*; and that would open up the whole thing. [TS 81]

Assuming Miles' need to confess, "[she seems] to [herself], for the instant, to have mastered it, to see it all." What she does not see, however, is that it is *her* need to have Miles confess and to this end, she exerts pressure. In later years, this confusion about confession will take an interesting turn. As Miles has repeated monstrous "things" to "those he liked," and "they must have repeated them. To those *they* liked," so the governess tells monstrous "things" to Douglas whom she likes. Like Miles, Douglas, who is a schoolboy at the time, is also exactly ten years her junior. He, in his turn repeats them to his friends. One of these friends, who is the narrating "I," prepares to continue the turn through a repetition to *his* friends of "things" that are "beyond everything....for dreadful--dreadfulness!....for general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain." [TS 2].

Hardly does the governess register her success in forcing the boy's confession, when "[she feels] a sick swim at the drop of [her] victory and all the return of [her] battle." What she "[sees]," Miles meets "with a divination." She "[perceives]" that "even now he only [guesses]" that the demon lurks beyond the window. Her temporary victory has had the effect of sealing the child's eyes, while at the same time leaving her vision clear. All of her awareness is focused on the proximity of the owner of the white face of damnation. "It now, to [her] sense,

[fills] the room like the taste of poison, the wide, overwhelming presence" [TS 116]. When, earlier, she claims to "know everything," what she doesn't, can't know, is that, following her partial victory, the sudden release of the intense pressure under which she has virtually held the child prisoner, will cause an equally strong reactionary backlash of extreme anguish. Caught up in the turning wheels of her pride and blind to the stress under which the child in her hands is labouring, she gives one turn too many. Finally, she begins "to feel what it truly [is] that [she holds]." In the end, at the last terrible hour, full awareness comes to her. Miles' eyes are, and will remain, irrevocably sealed. Now, her victory is complete.

IV Lost Innocence

Despite its initial impact of Edenic, prelapsarian sweetness and light, Bly is really a microcosm of London which James characterizes as the "great grey Babylon," and a place of urban moral depravity. Bly becomes a metaphor for all that appears lovely but which is corrupt at the core. Sadly, the ultimate example of this is the children themselves. Not only is Bly a fallen world *per se*, but it provides the ideal nurturing medium for the growth of evil. Quint corrupts Miss Jessel and together they corrupt Miles and Flora. "The spirits of certain 'bad' servants, dead in the employ of the house" reappear to take back unto

themselves, their own--the morally diseased children. On this note of "sinister romance," the strange grotesquerie develops. Since the children are corrupt to begin with, by the time the governess arrives at Bly, they are already initiated into awareness of evil. The innocent and naïve one is the young, untried governess who brings into the garden her romance and her anxious earnestness. It is her gradual awakening, through experience, to evil and hence to a fuller awareness that must be our concern.

While the governess attempts to rescue the children from further corruption by the demons, this firmly entrenched evil gradually erodes her innocence. Step by step the defiled children and their infernal captors initiate the young woman whose sole commitment is to:

serve as an expiatory victim and guard the tranquillity of [her] companions. The children, in especial, [she] should thus fence about and absolutely save. [TS 34]

Her anxiety on their behalf is deep; her despair is real.

It wrings from her an admission of her innermost fears. She breaks down before Mrs Grose:

'I don't do it!' [she sobs] in despair; 'I don't save or shield them. It's far worse than I dreamed--they're lost!' [TS 44]

The governess is "simply there to protect and defend" them. The more she sees, the less they will. Realizing only too

soon that she is blessed--or cursed--with a "dreadful liability to impressions" the remainder of her stay is an impressionistic nightmare of things which she feels, fancies, senses, and intuits. There are inexplicable occurrences which she becomes aware of, has direct vision of, apprehends, takes in with certitude, sees with unsealed eyes, and has impressions of. Her innocence falters before situations she perceives, figures out through induction and deduction and about which she has firm convictions. Through this labyrinth she holds, as Theseus held Ariadne's thread, her good intention. It is her ironic tragedy that, as her innocence is replaced by the knowledge of evil, she herself compounds the evil through her very desperation. Diabolically, the same children she would protect and save, are the very means by which she is sucked deeper into the quagmire of evil.

In the tale *The Turn of the Screw*, as there was a narrative chain, so there is a chain of evil. From the single instance of Griffin's tale, the evil doubles. Beginning far back in time, it journeys through the master's "own man," Quint, to the governess, Miss Jessel. Again it doubles as these caretakers corrupt two children. All the compounded depravity travels through this ghastly linkage to the new governess who, with her "dreadful liability to impressions" is helplessly inculcated into awareness of evil. Through her initiation, she learns that her eyes, now

permanently unsealed, can never again look without seeing. Having borne the weight of her vision of evil for ten years, she confesses it to the young Douglas and later commits it to a journal where, after many vicissitudes, it comes to us so that we too may look--and see.

CHAPTER THREE

Maisie Farange and *What Maisie Knew*

Isabel Archer, in her journey into awareness, is initiated to life by means of a double exposure to evil: the realities of her marriage, and the victimization of Pansy Osmond. The innocence she brought to Europe has been replaced by a darker but truer vision. Through the agency of Pansy's grace, Isabel acquires the determination to go forward into her new life.

The governess, progressively exposed to the horror and evil of events at Bly, also journeys into fuller awareness of life. A victim of circumstance, she is lacking the experience to deal effectively with the magnitude and moral complexity of the problem which confronts her there. In good faith, she tries to save the already corrupted children from absolute and irrevocable damnation with mixed results. Although she has the courage to go on, awareness that their tragedy is now hers, burdens her soul and darkens the future she nevertheless has the courage to face.

Maisie Farange, like Isabel, Pansy and the governess, is a victim of her place and time. Lack of

nurturing love, through the pursuit and fulfilment of their own sensuality on the part of her caretakers, has been her portion from earliest infancy. As she learns to cope, she comes to know what she wants. Her hard-won knowledge is the key to her freedom. It enables her to pursue her way untrammelled by the audacious and self-serving demands of lesser moralities. Like Pansy and like the governess, Maisie is destined to act as an agent of grace. She is also a creative artist who, in moulding her own plasticity, is fated to mould others.' It is in her capacity as artist that her journey into a fuller awareness of life becomes important.

I Author as Artist

In the Preface to *What Maisie Knew*, James retrospectively sees his work, which is centred about the growing consciousness of a child, as comprising certain appealing configurations and situations.

Sketchily clustered even, these elements [give] out that vague *pictorial* glow which forms the first appeal of a living 'subject' to the *painter's* consciousness; but the glimmer [becomes] intense as I [proceed] to a further analysis. The further analysis is for that matter almost always the torch of rapture and victory, as the *artist's* firm hand grasps and plays it....That [is] the charm, sensibly, of the *picture* thus at first confusedly showing. [my italics].

[WMK 6]

He also, as the emphasis indicates, sees his subject, a little girl, through the eyes of a painter. The form or "design" of the work "would be to make and to keep her so limited consciousness the very field of [his] picture while at the same time guarding with care the integrity of the objects presented" [my italics, *WMK* 8]. As a wordsmith who is determined to render "the air of reality (solidity of specification)," and to "[produce] the illusion of life," James, the novelist, acknowledges how:

it is here in very truth that he competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle.

1

In setting himself his task, determining his form and undertaking its strictures, James knows that "the painter of life has indeed work cut out for him....The effort really to see and really to represent is no idle business" [*WMK* 12]. It is with all of this in mind that the artist renders his subject.

II Maisie

A The Child

His subject is the child-- Maisie Farange: the *Künstlerroman*, which constitutes her initiating journey from innocence into perception, is his mode of presentation. Not

an artist in the usual sense, Maisie nonetheless creates. As a "little wonder-working agent," Maisie will cause light to shine in dark corners and sweet air to freshen morally fetid atmospheres. It has been said that:

No one doubts that in every person existing there is a special aptitude to some divine end if we could only get at it, a special potency for some beautiful function which no other person embodies so highly.

2

So it is that Maisie embodies these tenets. Through the pure, natural instinct of her child's love (albeit baffled), through her impeccable moral sense (consistently assailed on all fronts) and through the "associational magic" of her unquenchable wonder, the child imbues corrupt elders and squalid situations with dignity. As it is the law of her fate to "educate...those elders with whom she [is] concerned" [WMK 194], her own "vivacity of intelligence" enables her to react to the false note and to sound, in return, the true one.

The tools Maisie has at hand to mould the disputants for whom she is a burden are the rare qualities of her quick perceptions, her sensitivity, her passion and the ability to see. From vision, gradually, grows her understanding. From understanding, finally, comes her knowledge. As the still small centre of stressful episodes and shocking experiences, Maisie undergoes epiphanies which bring on "a high quickening of [her] direct perceptions, of her sense of

freedom to make out things for herself" [WMK 78]. These insights initiate her into a fuller awareness of life. It is just exactly the white heat of these cruel fires that tempers her and refines her spirit. This is what forms her as an artist apprentice--this is what allows her artistry to take place.

B Her Name

When the lover asks:

What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet!

and when a poet asserts: "Rose is a rose is a rose," they enunciate two diametrically opposed theories of identity each of which could elicit strong support. Names fascinate James (as his Notebooks attest) and in great part it is through the chosen name of the character that he seeks to portray the exact nicety of his subject's identity. He exchanges, for example, "Hurter" as the proposed name for the divorced parents, as being too blatantly obvious. "Farange" (and they do indeed 'range far' in their sexual depravities, their peregrinations and the psychological abuse of their child) gives a more continental and exotic flavour. As well, "Farange" is more aurally pleasing in conjunction with the short given names, "Ida," and "Beale." "Maisie," however, has her clear little unchanged identity from the start.

Life for James's young heroine, abounding as it does in all manner of "queer confusion," leaves her in a 'maze-y' world where she "[holds] her breath with the sense of picking her steps among the tremendous things of life" [WMK 60]. Lost in this labyrinth as in 'a maze' of passions which are forever at cross purposes, she nevertheless continues to gather in her impressions which, more often than not, are tinged with wonder. "She has simply to wonder, as I say, about them, and they begin to have meanings, aspects, solidities, connexions--connexions with the 'universal!'" [WMK 11]. James, it seems, chooses to have life 'a-maze' his heroine from the start.

He does use Latin as a connotation for Mrs Wix. *Vis*, meaning (among other things) "force" and "compulsion" becomes a character trait of increasing significance in Maisie's life. We remember, for instance, that for Maisie and Sir Claude, "Mrs Wix [proves] more a force to reckon with than either of them had allowed so much room for." Later, "it [is] with a vivid perception for Maisie that [Mrs Wix's] hand [closes] upon her." James similarly uses Latin for Miles, Flora and possibly even Isabel; however, it may be rather to the French that he turns for Maisie.

Although it is speculative, the French language may be able to shed light on the child, Maisie Farange. *L'aïse* means "ease" or "comfort" and by contraction of the personal

possessive pronoun, "my ease," "my comfort," could conceivably be rendered: "*m'aise*." Ironically, she never truly succeeds in providing either one of these conditions regardless of her efforts. Perhaps it is this which James has in mind for he stresses a "deeper depth of irony" as being his truth and "the *full* ironic truth--the most interesting item to be read into the child's situation" [WMK 6]. A further sense of *m'aise* is "my convenience." This is irony of a different sort here, for Maisie is used by each parent to be the ultimate "burden" to the other. She is also made use of, as a convenience, in their games of war:

what was clear to any spectator was that the only link binding her to either parent was this lamentable fact of her being a ready vessel for bitterness, a deep little porcelain cup in which biting acids could be mixed. They had wanted her not for any good they could do her, but for the harm they could, with her unconscious aid, do each other. She should serve their anger and seal their revenge, for husband and wife had been alike crippled by the heavy hand of justice.

[WMK 18]

So it is that "what's in a name," if James is doing the naming, is a great deal. By means of association, the various reverberations not only help to provide an identity for the character in question, but they encourage the reader to look at the names afresh. This 're-viewing' "represents Emerson's wisdom of wondering at the usual."³ James has endowed Maisie with her identity. It is with this identity

that she wonders; it is with this identity that, as an artist, she creates.

C Her Method

Since this young protagonist is an artist by instinct, her actions constitute what may be termed 'happenings.' Motivated solely through her desire to become dear to someone, everything she does occurs through a kind of serendipity. Like Isabel Archer before her, Maisie Farange" [affronts] her destiny." For us, however, it is helpful to have some insight as an aid to understanding her *modus operandi*.

In the New York Preface to *What Maisie Knew* James recreates the light in which he views the heroine. For James:

The child seen as *creating* by the fact of its forlornness a relation between its step-parents, the more intimate the better, dramatically speaking; the child, by the mere appeal of neglectedness and the mere consciousness of relief, *weaving* about, with the best faith in the world, the close web of sophistication; the child *becoming* a centre and pretext for a fresh system of misbehaviour, a system moreover of a nature to spread and ramify: *there* would be the 'full' irony....*bringing* people together who would be at least more correctly separate; *keeping* people separate who would be at least more correctly together; *flourishing*, to a degree, at the cost of many conventions and proprieties, even decencies, really *keeping* the torch of virtue alive in an air *tending* infinitely to smother it; really in short *making*

confusion worse confounded by *drawing* some stray fragrance of an ideal across the scent of selfishness, by *sowing* on barren strands, through the mere fact of presence, the seed of the moral life. [my italics, WMK 7-8]

Within these two sentences, James masses nearly one dozen gerunds to express physical action and to indicate the state of psychological dynamics within the artistic temperament which will have its work set well before it. Visually, the gerund form draws out the verb which enhances the idea of progressive action; teleologically, the elongating gerund signposts the gradual unfolding of the agent's endeavours towards the desired result. The central movement is one of purposeful direction. Truly, the medium is the message when "the idea and the form" become one as they do here.

It may be useful to stress one further point about this emphasis. Each one of these verb forms indicates either a life-enhancing (creating, becoming, bringing, keeping, making) or creative (weaving, flourishing, drawing, sowing) orientation. Nowhere, except perhaps in "keeping people separate who would be at least more correctly together," is there a negative suggestion. However, the fact that everything that is done is done by the child "*with the best faith in the world*" ameliorates whatever degree of harshness that particular clause might connote.

D Her World

In summarizing the myth of initiation, Joseph Campbell says:

Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward....intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of the return....At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir). 4

As one journeying through the experience of evil into a fuller awareness of life, Maisie comes very close to representing the ideal mythological hero. From the beginning, her world is one of "unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten [her]."

Following her parents' divorce" she [is] divided in two and the portions tossed impartially to the disputants" [WMK 17]. Her life, following the legal disposition of her person, may be likened to a merry-go-round on which first one creature then another carries the burden of her weight. The hurdy-gurdy plays, the mounts rise and fall, the whole contraption spins and the world becomes an impressionistic blur for the young rider. She:

[finds] in her mind a collection of images and echoes to which meanings [are] attachable--images and echoes kept for her in the childish dusk, the dim closet, the high drawers, like games she wasn't yet big enough to play. [WMK 23]

Although the child prides herself that in the "domestic labyrinth she always [keeps] the clue" this is not easy when surrounded by deep moral irregularities.⁵ While yet an infant, she experiences the helpless uneasiness and anomie that is associated with disaffection. With the impression left by "troubled glimpses," she comes to the frightening realization that "with two fathers, two mothers and two homes, six protections in all, she shouldn't know 'wherever' to go." The feeling she carries forward into each day is that she is "untutored and unclaimed." In her life of divided households:

she [is] taken into the confidence of passions on which she [fixes] just the stare she might have ...for images bounding across the wall in the slide of a magic lantern. Her little world [is] phantasmagoric--strange shadows dancing on a sheet. It [is] as if the whole performance [has] been given for her--a mite of a half-scared infant in a great dim theatre. [WMK 21]

Her world is turbulent with alarms which assault all of her senses. Since, however it is through her senses that she receives impressions of the extrinsic world, it is in this manner that she attains her knowledge.

In the manner of the late nineteenth-century French Impressionists, Maisie becomes the canvas that supports the strangely juxtaposed dabs of paint which the observer's eye causes to coalesce into a representation of life. Interestingly enough, she is also the artist who uses varied and discrete pigments to create a picture. As colours of the spectrum, which are the constituents of sunlight, shimmer with vibrant luminosity when placed side by side, so Maisie gathers oddments of experience and imposes them, side by side, upon the canvas of her life. From these experiences Maisie gleans all the wonder and beauty she can.

Through her artist's eye, the child Maisie is both a receiver and a sender of impressions. The impressions, which from moment to moment she registers, are the foundation for the epistemology which is, in turn, the basis for her actions. The impressions which she sends out to her elders are creative. Instinctively, the child "[draws] some stray fragrance of an ideal across the scent of selfishness, by sowing on barren strands, through the mere fact of presence, the seed of the moral life."

E Her Sense Impressions

For Maisie, as a very young child, the olfactory sense, "the odour of her [mother's] clothes," rouses memories and reverberations not of her mother's love, but of

her fierceness. This same sense leaves a different impression but an equally negative one when it is her father who is concerned. Beale:

[has] natural decorations, a kind of costume in his vast fair beard, burnished like a gold breastplate, and in the eternal glitter of the teeth that his long moustache [has] been trained not to hide and that [gives] him in every possible situation, the look of the joy of life. [WMK 20]

Cruelly, he "[holds] Maisie off while he [shows] his shining fangs and [lets] her, with a vague affectionate helpless pointless, 'Dear old girl, dear little daughter,' inhale the fragrance of his cherished beard." His sole purpose in such playful demonstration is to ease himself off as he prepares to "bolt." His massive egotism and callous indifference to the growing sensitivity and awareness of his child makes his action the norm by which she must learn about her world.

The sense of taste for Maisie is likewise accompanied by psychological nuances into which she must read the messages that light (or bedim) her path towards knowledge. Since money (or the acute lack of it) is a persistent and strong motivating force for all parties with whom she from time to time lives, lessons become as forbidden for Maisie, as fruit and water to the wretched Tantalus in Hades. Maisie "[is] to feel henceforth as if she were flattening her nose upon the hard window-pane of the sweet-shop of knowledge."

Not all concerned are poor however, for while awaiting Beale's Countess Maisie experiences such a rare respite from danger that it impresses her, although she tastes "neither buns nor ginger-beer, like an extemporized expensive treat." Impecunious as most of Maisie's elders are and without the bizarre success of Beale, Sir Claude meagrely provides the young girl with a modest repast of "cold beef and apollinaris--for he [hints] that they [will] have to save lots of money." This, however, in the setting and with each other for company, is feast enough for Maisie.

As if she is, herself, part of an impressionistic painting and with Sir Claude for her same charming companion, Maisie, on the eve of their departure for France, is conscious that:

everything about her, however--the crowded room, the bedizened banquet, the savour of dishes, the drama of figures--[ministers] to the joy of life. [WMK 162]

Joy like this comes seldom into the young girl's world.

Very soon, worry returns. Now, even the beautifully poured and presented *café au lait* loses its foreign charm.

When Mrs Beale, Maisie's "sole surviving parent, her fourth," dines with herself and Mrs Wix in order, explicitly, "to '[make] love'," to the old governess, the whole question of the "moral sense" quite comes between the child and her appetite for the "*omelette aux rognons* and the *poulet sauté*. The impression that she may become a "victim"

ruins utterly the little happiness she has had the courage to build up with her beloved Sir Claude.

What Maisie hears, hears but in part, or fails to hear at all, furthers the knowledge which leads to the death of her childhood. In fact and in truth, "there's nothing she hasn't heard." The problem she faces, however, is how to interpret the diverse barrage which assaults her consciousness. James:

[is] fascinated by the vision of the child's charm and innocence, which [influences] the relations, often evil, of the other characters, and by the technical problem of presenting the whole through Maisie's consciousness, even when she [is] unable to understand the meaning of what she [sees] and [hears].

6

For James, "the one presented register of the whole complexity would be the play of the child's confused and obscure notation of it" [WMK 9]. Missing innuendo, the child interprets literally from within her small (but all the time growing!) storehouse of meanings. Maisie learns early that "meanings in her world can have different and inaccessible meanings in other worlds."⁷

Accustomed as she is to internecine strife, she is still tender enough in her hopes for love that Sir Claude's blasphemy sends shock waves through her system. Even more frightening, is his vituperative change of tone. "You damned old b--!'"--she [can't] quite hear all. It [is] too much: she [flies] before it." Although she may not have

heard the specific calumny against Ida, her sensitivity registers the vileness of its full import. In repeating it, however, she lightens the intensity, supplying a more acceptable epithet. "'He has called her a damned old brute.' She [can't] help bringiing that out" [WMK 108]. Integrity prevents a lie; love and loyalty require a euphemism. As artist, Maisie distinguishes between these finenesses; she chooses aright.

In this strange society where "everybody [is] always assuring everybody of something very shocking, and nobody would have been jolly if nobody had been outrageous," Maisie serves as the particular instance of the generalization:

Small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them; their vision is at any moment much richer, their apprehension even constantly stonger, than their prompt, their at all producible, vocabulary. [WMK 9]

When she hears such words as "compromise" and "amour" she can "gabble them off" with assurance but her perceptions do not always convey the nicety of exactness which James claims on her behalf. Her impressions are sometimes soft-edged to the point of psychological deafness. "There [are] things Ida [says] that she perhaps [doesn't] hear, and there [are] things she [hears] that Ida perhaps [doesn't] say" [WMK 156]. This is no more than the protective colouring which saves a

small organism from death. The tension between high comedy and tragic pathos in this scene is a metaphor for the confusion of impressions which Maisie receives through her senses and which she attempts to interpret. Furthermore, as artist, this chaos threatens her sense of equilibrium. Her ability to create meaningful form contributes to her knowledge. Her efforts probably save her sanity.

All art is defined by the space which surrounds it. As a frame defines a painting and its setting defines a sculpture, the surrounding space is an integral part of the work of art. So it is when Maisie hears language. Where words prove traitors, the silences which surround them and which 'frame' them, yield a wealth of impressions which Maisie's acuity easily and accurately registers. Although in her life, she has "fewer names than conceptions," the element of silence rarely misdirects her. Very early in her career she is attuned to the impression that:

it [is] in the nature of things to be none of a small child's business, even when a small child [has] from the first been deluded into a fear that she might be only too much initiated. Things, then, [are] in Maisie's experience so true to their nature that questions [are] almost always improper, but she [learns] on the other hand soon to recognize how at last, sometimes, patient little silences and intelligent little looks [can] be rewarded by delightful little glimpses. [WMK 118-19]

As often as silence in her life is ominous with clouds of storm or of war, there sometimes are silences which act as soothing zephyrs. At times "She [has] no need of talk-- there [are] a sense and a sound in everything...and there [is] a sweetness in her step-father's silence" [WMK 162].

Silence is the element in sense communication that links hearing with seeing. Not only does Maisie see (which is the passive act of receiving what is there to be seen), but she looks (which is the deliberate act undertaken in order to take in the impressions of sight). She also sees that; in other words, she perceives and intuitively--thereby gaining awareness. No words are necessary for this sense to function. It can, in fact, replace spoken language and allow communication to proceed in ways that are very effective.

Rejected by her mother, Maisie, in the process of being "sent flying across the room," just has time to see Mrs Wix "exchange a quick queer look" with Sir Claude. Later, Maisie and Mrs Wix share the "public secret" of Mr Perriam "out of the depths of which governess and pupil [look] at each other portentiously." It is during her last time with Beale that she experiences one of her deepest impressions:

She [understands] as well as if he had spoken it that what he [wants], hang it, [is] that she should let him off with all

the honours--with all the appearance of virtue and sacrifice on his side. [WMK 135]

"Their eyes, at this, [meet] again in a long and extraordinary communion" which is a rare enough occurrence to remark upon it.

Instances of communion through and with the eyes take varied forms. There are occasions of looks from Ida's brilliant, painted eyes that awe and amaze the child. She must find a "clue" even in "the hard stare, the stare of some gorgeous idol described in a story-book, that [comes] into [Ida's] eyes in consequence of a curious thickening of their already rich circumference" [WMK 59]. In all of her childhood, however, it is when she mentions the Captain to her mother during their final time together at Folkstone that Maisie receives the most severe jolt from a message received from Ida's eyes:

Her mother [gives] her one of the looks that [slams] the door in her face; never in a career of unsuccessful experiments [has] Maisie had to take such a stare. [WMK 158]

There are, as well, winks, gazes, exchanges, signals, and the ultimate Jamesian interplay between Maisie and Beale of the "mute passage between her vision of this vision of his, his vision of her vision, and her vision of his vision of her vision" [WMK 132]. These visual

impressions form an important part of her journey of initiation into awareness.

Since this is the story of a child, and the viewpoint is largely hers, it must, necessarily, also be ours. From her physical height, it is often a long way up to the faces whose expressions form many of the impressions which educate Maisie into awareness. In the same way, her viewpoint "[reminds] us of Maisie's eye-level: to recall to us what a big part hands play in her life, how large they must bulk to her vision."⁸ It is not only hands that form the fifth sense by means of which Maisie absorbs impressions, but touching of every sort. With each touch, Maisie learns either directly or by seeing the reactions of others as when, for instance, she "[catches] the surprised perception in the white stare of an old lady who [passes] in a victoria" of the "merry little scrimmage" over her own person that her papa and her pretty young governess engage in.

Her mother intersperses her deadly bits of news with "an occasional dumb twitch of the toggery in which Mrs Beale's low domestic [has] had the impudence to serve up Miss Farange." Maisie, significantly the little stoic, registers the psychological import of 'hands' and 'touching' when she "[holds] her breath; she only [wants], by playing into her visitor's hands, to see the thing through." Alert

to Ida's movement towards a hidden purse, Maisie registers that:

"the act [has] a significance for a little person trained, in that relation, from an early age, to keep an eye on manual motions, and its possible bearing [is] not darkened by the memory of the handful of gold that Susan Ash would never, never believe Mrs Beale had sent back." [WMK 157]

Ever a creature of "resource and variety," however, Ida, with a "renewed click of her purse," departs, leaving Maisie with her hand as empty as her heart.

Sir Claude's touch is never without warmth and it usually mitigates Maisie's other less salutary encounters. He "[takes] hold of her and [kisses] her to [make] up for her fallen state," he frequently "[puts] his hand on her arm," or "opens his arms to her" to show his love and support. He also grasps her so that she remains clinging "to his hand, which [is] encased in a pearl-grey glove," a glove which, being within her line of vision, (like Beale's shoes), she is able to describe in minute and intimate detail. He ends by "[rescuing her] and [keeping] hold of her; he [holds] her in front of him, resting his hands very lightly on her shoulders" so "very lightly" in fact that she knows his final answer: "Maisie, with Sir Claude's hands still on her shoulders, [feels] just as she felt the fine surrender in them, that over her head he [looks] in a certain way at Mrs Wix" [WMK 246]. In a world full of swoops, caresses,

pinches, kisses, pushes, pulls tugs and squeezes, a small child must learn to interpret the meaning of each in order to keep her wonder alive and in order to survive. Maisie does both.

III Maisie as Artist

A Her Mission

First, there is James's mission for her. This mission is "the *full* ironic truth...[that] the small expanding consciousness would have to be saved." His use of the passive "be saved" indicates that there will be forces at work to this end. However, there is *no outside agency* to act for her. Maisie, solely through her own artistry and through the agency of *her own* grace must accomplish this. Maisie's world is a merry-go-round of impressions. Sir Claude calls it (ironically enough since he is a part of it) "a pretty bad circus." The further hat trick Maisie must succeed in as the central figure, is "to remain fresh, and still fresh, and to have even a freshness to communicate." For James:

she is not only the extraordinary 'ironic centre' [he has] already noted; she has the wonderful importance of shedding a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension; of lending to poorer persons and things, by the mere fact of their being involved with her and by the special scale she creates for them, a precious element of dignity. [WMK 11]

This statement incorporates the second part of Maisie's mission. This is the part in which she saves others: "by drawing some stray fragrance of an ideal across the scent of selfishness, by sowing on barren strands, through the mere fact of presence, the seed of the moral life"--this will be the task that Maisie must accomplish.

B Her Techniques

To every artist there comes the realization of the necessity for an inner self: some place of safety where no eye can see, where no hand can reach. For Maisie, this "complete vision" occurs as:

literally a moral revolution and [is] accomplished in the depths of her nature....She [has] a new feeling, the feeling of danger; on which a new remedy [rises] to meet it, the idea of an inner self, or in other words, of concealment.

[WMK 25]

Once there is safety, knowledge is possible. By diligently practising "the pacific art of stupidity" Maisie approaches the mysteries of adult relationships. "She [holds] her breath with the sense of picking her steps among the tremendous things of life." Rather than hurt Sir Claude, her sensitivity leads her to mouth inanities with regards to her conference in the park with the Captain. "'Oh I don't know!' It was of the essence of her method not to be silly by halves." It is only at Folkstone, when Ida clicks

shut her purse at Maisie's mention of the Captain, that the young girl, too late, remembers the theory that "she [has] never been safe unless she [has] also been stupid."

It is also the fate of an artist to struggle. Maisie not only struggles to fulfil her artistic imperative but is herself the focus for the stress which other people experience in their attempts to use her as a means to gain their personal ends. She is able to read into the "game" which her elders play:

a fresh incitement to the unformulated fatalism in which her sense of her own career [has] long since taken refuge; and it [is] the beginning for her of a deeper prevision that, in spite of Miss Overmore's brilliancy and Mrs Wix's passion, she should live to see a change in the nature of the struggle she [appears] to have come into the world to produce.

[WMK 45]

While surviving these engagements, Maisie learns to keep many things in her mind at once. The need to see behind as well as before becomes both a necessity and a life-enhancing technique. Her further ability to practise the "art of not thinking singly, so that at [any] instant she [can] both bring out what [is] on her tongue's end and weigh" the relative merits of any object in question, becomes indispensable in her struggle for artistic survival.

C Her Mandate

Her mandate is worth repeating. It is: to "[sow] on

barren strands...the seed of the moral life." For an infant growing through childhood into girlhood in a world of moral claustrophobia, Maisie maintains an innocence "surprisingly unsmirched in the immediate proximity of pitch."⁹ Through the sweet fragrance of her innocence, the "associational magic" of her integrity and her unsinkable faith that someone, somewhere will love and want her, Maisie becomes the "little wonder-working agent" which James promises us in the Preface.

All the adults play games. They play war games and sports such as billiards, shuttlecock or football (in which Maisie senses herself to be in mid air and always the object of contention). There are forfeits, cards and games of sides such as "puss-in-the-corner" or "some wild game of 'going round'." Maisie's function, her fate in the games of her elders, is "to be either much depended on or much missed." Needed to regularize Beale's visits to Miss Overmore she is "no longer required at home as--it [is] Mrs Beale's own amusing word--a little duenna." Maisie's drop can only be in direct proportion to her knowledge of the function, in this particular game, of "a little duenna." Her pleasure will be in direct ratio to the help she believes that has rendered to two people who mean so much to her.

Probably her greatest artistic achievement is in bringing Mrs Beale and Sir Claude together. Since she

accomplishes this unwittingly, she can only claim the palm after the fact. This, as it happens, is not her first inadvertent forray into helping her elders with romantic entanglements. She has already brought her governess, Miss Overmore, into the orbit of her circling father. "'But that is what she does do,' [Mrs Beale continues] to Sir Claude. 'She did it to me and Beale.'"

In ever widening rings, Maisie accomplishes even more:

'Oh yes,' [says] Sir Claude; 'Mrs Wix and I are shoulder to shoulder.'
 Maisie [takes] in a little this strong image; after which she [exclaims]: 'Then I've done it also to you and her--I've brought you together!'
 'Blest if you haven't!' Sir Claude [laughs]...."Now if you [can] --as I suggested, you know, that day--only manage me and your mother!" [WMK 68]

In the combinations and permutations which follow, Maisie is dumbstruck when, after her sense of accomplishment and glory, Mrs Wix informs her that Mrs Beale will hate *them* as a final result. When attempts are made to force her to a choice between the pair of lovers, Mrs Beale and Sir Claude, (each one of whom, individually, stands *in loco parentis* to her) and Mrs Wix, the dilemma seems solved by the magic words, "but don't you remember? I brought you together."

The final act in this particular drama is Sir

Claude's avowal that, "what in the world's our connexion but the love of the child who's our duty and our life and who holds us together as closely as she originally brought us?" Although this particular combination fails, the artistic beauty of the child's efforts, on their behalf, to do her best for them in her innocence and in her earnestness, is unquestionable. It is the perfect example of her "drawing some stray fragrance of an ideal across the scent of selfishness, by sowing on barren strands, through the mere fact of presence, the seed of the moral life."

Throughout her childhood the grace of Maisie's presence provides the only morally sweet air that her elders will know. Although, in her unflagging efforts to "save" them, she sacrifices herself, she never loses her ability to wonder. "She wonders, in other words, to the end, to the death--the death of her childhood" [HMK 10]. At the death of her childhood, Maisie will rise from the ashes of her burnt out hopes into a new life, for, in the end, "she [knows] what she [wants]."

Afterword

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, Pansy, just by being exactly who she is--which is not only a convent bred, European *jeune fille* and daughter to Gilbert Osmond, but a person enriched by love and inner grace--is that strange

paradox: a passive agent. She is the person who completes Isabel Archer, revealing to her the identity which enables her to return to Rome and go forward into new awareness.

About Jamesian characters, Joseph Warren Beach says:

What strikes us most about them is their capacity for renunciation--for giving up any particular gratification in favor of conduct with which it proves incompatibleThey may, like other mortals, long for the realization of some particular desire; but they long still more fervently for the supreme comfort of being right with themselves.

10

Pansy, through the agency of her grace, makes it possible for Isabel to renounce the easy way of returning to America and to undertake, in Europe, a life of tempered duty. Here, Isabel's love of freedom can find fulfilment through other choices.

The governess, in *The Turn of the Screw*, compelled by her sense of duty on behalf of the wards of a man for whom she harbours a hopeless love, succeeds in separating the children from irrevocable damnation. This is a self-imposed undertaking, and not without pain. She sends Flora away from the ever-encroaching evil of the woeful and beckoning Miss Jessel. The boy, Miles, she forces into pronouncing the name of his tormentor, thereby exorcising the maleficent influence. Having awakened, through these experiences, to the existence of palpable evil and having taken the only way she can, the final tragic denouement

nevertheless continues to prey upon her mind and upon her conscience.

Her night journey to the underworld of evil and death leaves her with eyes permanently unsealed. Driven to both spoken and written confession, she attempts to exorcise her own demons. Lifelong anguish is the price which she pays for her awareness.

From the start of the novel, *What Maisie Knew*, Ida and Beale are immune to the magic of Maisie's gifts for wonder and for love. Having successfully jettisoned the burden of their only child, each departs to infect, noxiously, yet other airs and climes. Mrs Beale, who is endowed with outward beauty only, lacks the good, "plain dull charm of character" she scoffs at Maisie for having. Ironically, it is Maisie's inner beauty which attracts Sir Claude. Having lost the battle for possession of the child, Mrs Beale tightly pulls the skirts of her sensuality about her and, with an, "I don't know what to make of you!" full at Maisie, departs to pursue her narrow, joyless way with her morally effete lover, Sir Claude. Sadly, she too will never "know."

Sir Claude, for a while, rises to an ideal relationship with the young girl who, adoringly, would "save" him. He learns enough through her "associational magic" to see life's possibilities--to even, in fact, taste them. Regrettably, however, his basic fears lead to

prevarication. Straddling the truth, he consistently descends on the side of the easy lie. As an irrevocably ingrained habit, fear-engendered lying will continue to trip him up and to erode his worth.

Since Sir Claude will never muster the strength necessary to toughen his inherently weak moral fibre, he will not ever attain full manhood. Unable to go forward with Maisie into maturity, he will again become a "poor sunk slave" mired forever in the quicksand of his sensuality. What Maisie has succeeded in educating him to is awareness of this. By repudiating her gift, he can only serve Maisie by withdrawing from her life. "Their eyes [meet] as the eyes of those who have done for each other what they can. 'Good-bye,' he [repeats]."

Ironically, Sir Claude may be Maisie's only success. Mrs Wix, whose obliquity of vision can only have increasing need of her "straighteners," will forever remain petrified in the stony mausoleum of her by-the-Book "moral sense." Blind to the wondrous world of sensuous possibilities and incapable of absorbing the joyous, authentic moral life which is Maisie's very essence, she will remain as a physical caretaker only. True to her nature, she will myoptically continue to try to inculcate her blinkered, prostituted moral sense into the child, unaware that, in the scales of Maisie's moral superiority, she is "a nobody."

APPENDIX A

TIME FRAMES IN THE PROLOGUE TO *THE TURN OF THE SCREW*

I "The Panoramic view"

I base my first date, the time when the general narrator addresses a present group, quite arbitrarily, as the time of publication of *The Turn of the Screw*," 1898. From this, using the clues in the "Prologue," a schema emerges as follows:

1898:

Let me say *here* distinctly,...that this narrative, from an exact transcript of my own *made much later*, is what I shall presently give. Poor Douglas, before his death--when it was in sight--committed to me the manuscript...[my italics] [TS 5]

If "here" is 1898, and surmising that Douglas lived on for some time following his "outbreak," again arbitrarily, I consider "much later" to be, at the least, one decade.

1888:

'But it's rather nice, his long reticence.'
'Forty years!'. . .
'With this outbreak at last.' [TS 4]

The question is, what happened forty years previous to this? Forty years ago, Douglas who was "at Trinity," met his sister's governess "at home on [his] coming down the second

summer." Assuming a normal academic career, this would make Douglas twenty years old. During the summer he converses intimately with the governess, "a most charming person, but she [is] ten years older than [he]" [TS 3]. She addresses words to him he has been unable to share during these forty years. This summer, Douglas falls in love. In 1888, Douglas is sixty.

1868: Douglas, addressing the Christmas eve party in 1888, says his manuscript is written

'...in the most beautiful hand.' He hung fire again. 'A woman's. She has been dead these twenty years. She sent me the pages in question before she died.' [TS 3]

If Douglas is sixty in 1888 and the governess ten years his senior. Had she lived, she would have been seventy, but she "has been dead these twenty years." The governess, therefore died in 1868 at the age of fifty.

1848: If Douglas is sixty in 1888 and has maintained silence for "forty years!" he is twenty in 1848. This is the "long ago" summer of confidences with "[his] sister's governess who, although she is ten years older than he, is "the most agreeable woman [he's] ever known in her position.

1838: Since, in 1848, Douglas is twenty, and the governess is thirty, and since she:

had, at the age of twenty, on taking service for the first time in the schoolroom, come up to London, in trepidation...

[TS 5]

this would mean that in 1838 the governess is twenty and Douglas is ten, the same age as the child she cares for at Bly and in exactly the same year. By these terms of reckoning, (assuming that the unspecified years represented by the general narrator's words, "much later" with reference to when he made the transcript amount to ten), the events form a comprehensible paradigm.

Anthony J. Mazella in an article entitled, "An Answer to the Mystery of *The Turn of the Screw*,"¹ claims that by "concentrating on the prologue's textual information, we discover that James provides a basis for establishing a time-scheme which illuminates this textual problem."

He says further, "Christmas falling on a Tuesday closest to the story's first publication, according to an almanac's perpetual calendar, places the prologue at Christmastime, 1894." This is ingenious. The problem, however, is not the computation, but the assumption from which it is made,

¹ Anthony J. Mazella, "An Answer to the Mystery of *The Turn of the Screw*," *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol.17, no.1 (Winter, 1980), pp. 327-333.

namely: "Christmas falling on a Tuesday *closest to the story's first publication*,"[my italics]. Mazella argues from a false premise. Nowhere is there evidence to support this assumption. The sole textual clue must rest with the words of the general narrator who says, and I repeat for emphasis:

Let me say here distinctly, to have done with it, that this narrative, from an exact transcript of my own made *much later*, is what I shall presently give. [my italics].

[TS 5]

My reading of the words, "much later" represents a time lapse of considerably more years than the four years of Mazella's time scheme. It also follows, then, that the biographical or other data based on this false premise are immaterial to any argument he presents.

I "The Localized View: Incident from the Past Recalled into the Present"

A. Those in attendance:

The localized view is directed onto the house-party at which, among others, there are present: the general narrator; his close friend, Douglas; Mr Griffin, the teller of "the story [which] had held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless" [TS 1]; and Mrs Griffin, his wife.

B. The place:

The group assemble "in an old house" and foregather

for congeniality "round the fire." As focal point and the heart of the setting, it assumes metaphorical importance (which is a common practice) as part of the light/dark; heat/cold imagery. The ladies withdraw; the men stay. "But that only [makes] his little final auditory more compact and select, [keeps] it round the hearth, subject to a common thrill" [7S 5].

Although James leaves the locale indefinite, the place of his *donnée* is doubtless the mirror which reflects, appropriately, the right spot. He says with regards to the genesis of his tale:

To have handled again this so full-blown flower of high fancy is to be led back by it to easy and happy recognitions. Let the first of these be that of the starting-point itself--the sense, all charming again, of the circle, one winter afternoon, round the hall-fire of a grave old country-house where (for all the world as if to resolve itself promptly and obligingly into convertible, into "literary" stuff) the talk turned, on I forget what homely pretext, to apparitions and night-fears, to the marked and sad drop in the general supply, and still more in the general quality, of such commodities.

2

He iterates this sense of setting in a letter to A. C. Benson three months following the first publication of *The Turn of the Screw* in which he recalls:

2 Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, introd. Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p.169.

On one of those two memorable--never to be obliterated--winter nights that I spent at the sweet Addington, your father, in the drawing-room by the fire, where we were talking a little, in the spirit of recreation, of such things, repeated to me the few meagre elements of a small and gruesome spectral story.

3

It is the Yuletide season and the party is of at least five days duration.

C. The Time:

Year: I have arbitrarily set the year at 1888. [see above].

Monday, December 24: "the story...was gruesome, as, on Christmas eve in an old house, a strange tale should essentially be" [TS 1].

Tuesday, December 25: Christmas Day, and the day on which Douglas sends for the key. "I knew the next day that a letter containing the key had, by the first post, gone off to his London apartments" [TS 4]. This same day, "after dinner," and "before the fire," Douglas gives "a few words of prologue," as the background information which is necessary for a true appreciation of the story.

Wednesday, Boxing Day, December 26: A day of waiting and for increasing the tension through anticipation.

Thursday, December 27: On Christmas Eve, the narrating "I" asks Douglas, "You'll receive the packet

3 Henry James, "To A. C. Benson," in *The Turn of the Screw: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), p.108.

Thursday morning?" (The packet, apparently, may be expected to arrive by the second post). On this night, those present, before retiring "candlestick" to bed, gossip about Douglas. The general narrator offers a comment. "The outbreak," [he returns], "will make a tremendous occasion of Thursday night" [TS 4]. "The manuscript..reached him on the third of these days" [TS 5]. By extrapolating from the only *named* day, Thursday, it is possible to determine that Christmas Eve is Monday. The days of the week follow in sequence.

Friday, December 28: Douglas "with immense effect, [begins] to read to our hushed little circle on the night of the fourth" [TS 5].

Although the general narrator addresses a present group, he recalls these events from a past occasion so vividly that they become, for us, time present. As such, this schema serves to clarify some points which James's successful "process of adumbration" might otherwise have allowed to remain in shadow.

APPENDIX B

DRAMATIS PERSONAE FOR WHAT MAISIE KNEW

Phase I

The characters on the stage, which comprises Maisie's world, are the main elements that shape her reality. The divorced parents, Ida and Beale Farange, who are social equals despise each other. Her papa informs Maisie that, "You know your mother loathes you, loathes you simply" [WMK 135], and her mother advises her that, "your father wishes you were dead--that, my dear, is what your father wishes" [WMK 156].

Each of the parents remarries. Ida marries the handsome (and younger) Sir Claude, thus becoming "her ladyship." For Maisie, "the agreeable wonder of this grand new form of allusion to her mother" [WMK 53], although quite delightful, still does not divert her from her "[catching] at the pleasant possibility, in connexion with herself, of a relation much happier as between Mrs Beale and Sir Claude." This is her own private little *donnée* and the genesis of her later "bringing them together." In Phase I, Ida rises socially, but Beale, who marries Maisie's pretty governess, socially falls. The governess, however, rises socially in the same ratio as Beale falls.

Phase II

Ida's new husband, Sir Claude, and Beale's second wife, Mrs Beale, ("the persons they have each married *en secondes nocés*" [NHJ 134]), attain custody of the child, Maisie. History repeats itself in the skirmishes which ensue. Maisie, as before, is in the middle.

Mrs Beale and Sir Claude become lovers. Since Sir Claude liases with a socially unequal partner, he falls. Mrs Beale in this new relationship, (socially speaking, of course), succeeds in taking another leap upwards.

Phase III

Ida, although still legally married to Sir Claude, takes many lovers. Both socially and morally, she falls "lower than a domestic" [WMK 82]. Beale, for his part, becomes the paid fancy-boy of a wealthy but grotesque American "Countess" thereby sinking to a new moral and social low. She frightens and appals Maisie for:

She literally [strikes] the child more as an animal than as a 'real' lady; she might have been a clever frizzled poodle in a frill or a dreadful human monkey in a spangled petticoat. She had a nose that was far too big and eyes that were far too small and a moustache that was, well, not so happy a feature as Sir Claude's. [WMK 138]

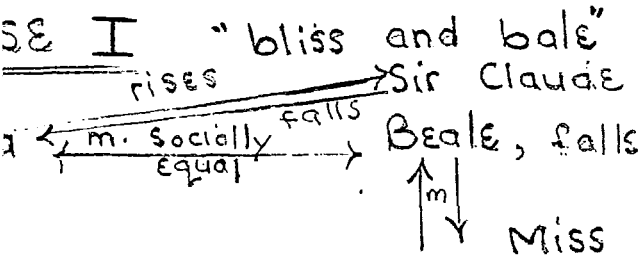
Not all Ida's menagerie of lovers quite equal the social drop in her life that results for Beale with this person who

is not only vulgar, but not even the real thing, both of which qualities are anathema to James. Maisie, at this, experiences an epiphany:

All in a moment too that queer expression [has] leaped into the lovely things--all in a moment she [has] had to accept her father as liking someone whom she was sure neither her mother, nor Mrs Beale, nor Mrs Wix, nor Sir Claude, nor the Captain, nor even Mr Perriam and Lord Eric could possibly have liked. [WMK 140-41]

Throughout, "somewhere in the depths of it the dim straighteners [are] fixed upon her; somewhere out of the troubled little current Mrs Wix intensely [waits]" [WMK 42].

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: A Graph

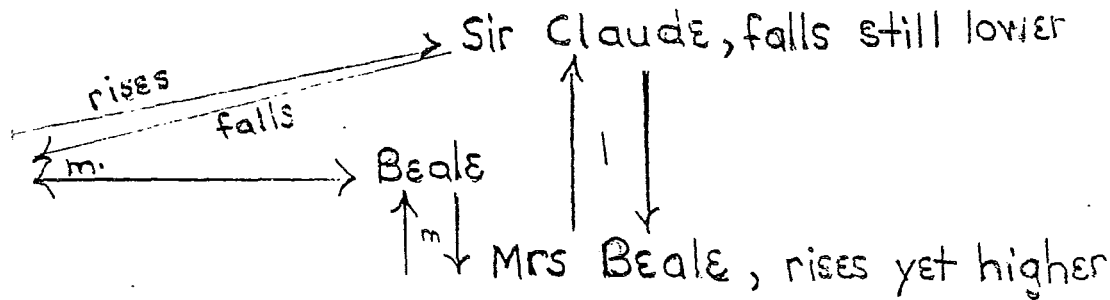


Parents' Remarriages

III

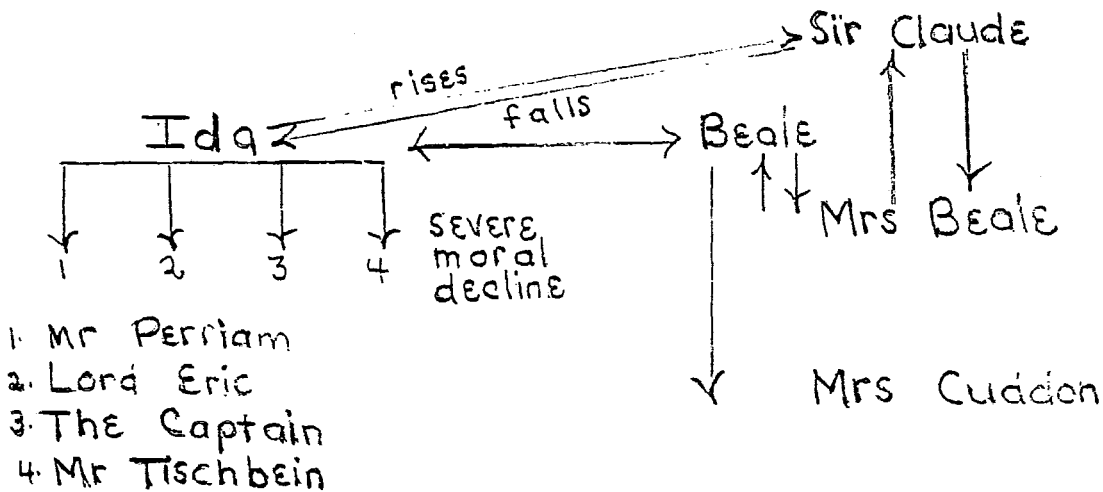
ACT II "confusion worse confounded"

Step-Parent's Liason



ACT III compounding the "gross immoralities"

Parents' Amours



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5 Tony Tanner, *The Reign of Wonder* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965) p. 267.

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4 See also Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, edited by Robert Kimbrough, pp. 97-107 *passim* for other source material for *The Turn of the Screw*.

5 Barbara Bengels, "The Term of the 'Screw': Key to Imagery in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*," *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol.15, no.1, (Winter 1978) pp. 323-327.

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