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'The Role of the Narrator in Henry James's Novels 1896-1901'

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Contents

Introduction

Ever since Joseph Warren Beach's pioneering study of James's work in 1918, a substantial number of James critics have tended to approach his fiction along the lines suggested by the prefaces to the New York Edition. By so doing they almost inevitably limit themselves to James's special formal and compositional concerns at this time (1908-9), and do not adequately recognise the fact that the prefaces were written in retrospect - in some cases as much as 30 years after the first publication of a particular work.

This approach has taken the period from 1890 to 1895 as a turning-point in James's career; after the failure of his plays his fiction is characterized by a greater dramatic economy, condensation and intensity. These critics have summed up this narrative mode by using James's own notion of organic unity, whereby each separate fictional element, be it description, point of view or analysis, fuses into the others so that in the finished work they are indistinguishable.

The particular emphasis varies from critic to critic, but in general they put a double stress on objectivity and scene. Thus from Beach through Percy Lubbock, Francis Fergusson, Oscar Cargill, J.A. Ward and more recently Ronald Wallace, James's later fiction is described as approaching the state of drama whereby the narrative enacts itself without the interruptions of a narrator.[1] Perspective emerges from the internal relation between the different parts of the narrative and not, by implicit contrast, through any persuasive rhetoric directly addressed to the reader.

Now clearly there is considerable evidence within James's fiction, as well as in his notebooks and prefaces that this was the broad direction he wished to take after 1895. Throughout the prefaces runs the refrain 'Dramatize, dramatize!' and his notes on the composition of The Spoils of Poynton and What Maisie Knew are explicitly in terms of act and scene. Less than a month after the failure of 'Guy Domville' (January 1895) he attempted to salvage from his shattered hopes 'the precious lesson....of the singular value for a

narrative plan...of the...divine principle of the scenario'.[2] And in his fiction from 1896 onwards James relied more and more on working out action in dialogue, and on using symmetry, parallelism, scenes of contrast, and other devices taken from the tradition of the 'well-made play'.

The critics described above thus do bring out important formal elements in James's fiction but they consistently neglect the question of the narrator, assuming that his function has been attenuated out of existence. Furthermore the period of James's writings from 1896 to 1901 has all too often been written off as uneven experimentation leading up to the 'Major Phase' - The Golden Bowl, The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove.[3]

As early as 1921 this critical approach had hardened into dogma, in Percy Lubbock's The Craft of Fiction. Here he stipulates that all fiction should aspire to the dramatic, and commends The Ambassadors in a way which reveals his presuppositions:

> The world of silent thought is thrown open, and instead of telling the reader what happened there, the novelist uses the look and behaviour of thought as the vehicle by which the story is rendered. Just as the writer of a play embodies his subject in visible action and audible speech, so the novelist, dealing with a situation like Strether's, represents it by means of the movement that flickers over the surface of his mind.[4]

Lubbock has taken the dramatic analogy to such an extreme that he gives the impression of James somehow granting us direct access to Strether's mind without the medium of verbal expression. The predictable converse of his argument is that if the author does not maintain his objectivity then he is a 'showman' and a sheer nuisance to the reader. Lubbock's critical position rests on the analogy with drama already mentioned and also on certain visual metaphors (key terms throughout The Craft of Fiction are 'window' and 'mirror') plainly intended to suggest a condition of total objectivity. Beach similarly developed some implications of his study of James into the doctrinaire proposition that the twentieth-century novel has progressively eliminated the narrator (or author - Beach does not really distinguish between the two).[5]

Even with the novel which Lubbock singles out for special praise, a cursory glance at a typical passage shows that his description is fundamentally inadequate. The following lines from the beginning of Book Three of The Ambassadors are representative of the novel's technique:

> Strether told Waymarsh all about it that very evening, on their dining together at the hotel; which needn't have happened, he was all the while aware, hadn't he chosen to sacrifice to this occasion a rarer opportunity.[6]

The passage opens with quite traditional narrative summary and shades into Lambert Strether's thoughts partly with the help of the phrase in parenthesis. But the use of 'free indirect speech' (a flexible form of reported speech) of its very nature implies the existence of a narrator organizing Strether's reflections and selecting information for the reader. Lubbock's description would apply more closely to Stream of Consciousness fiction than to James's novels.

More recently, perhaps as a reaction against the New Critics' insistence on objectivity, some James critics have begun to focus attention on the narrators in the late novels. Articles by J.E. Tilford, Leo Bersani and W.B. Thomas have dealt with this aspect of The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove, suggesting that James retains some traditional prerogatives of the Victorian narrator as well as considering some innovatory functions in these novels.[7] In his monograph on James's late style Seymour Chatman has shown how the very grammar and syntax of his prose suggests the presence of an authoritative narrator guiding the reader through his fiction.[8]

Behind these writings lies one critical work which has played an important part in defining my approach in this thesis - Wayne C. Booth's The Rhetoric of Fiction.[9] Partly by detailed textual analysis and partly by considering questions of point of view and perspective, Booth replaces the dramatic analogy with one of discourse or argument. He discusses fiction as an encounter between the author and reader whereby the author attempts to persuade the reader to see an action in a certain way. In one of his early articles he summarizes this as: 'In any reading experience there is an implied dialogue

among author, narrator, and other characters, and the reader'.[10] Booth gives the general name of 'rhetoric' to the various forms of persuasion which the author exerts on the reader and indeed for him a narrator is fundamentally necessary to give a frame of reference to the action. Instead of being an unwelcome interference with the reader, the narrator becomes indispensable to the fiction's intelligibility.[11]

Booth has been largely responsible for refocusing critical attention on the narrator and also for suggesting useful distinctions within that notion, distinctions which Roger Fowler has recently summarized as:

> [The narrator] may be the author speaking 'in his own voice'; the author, adopting some role towards the reader...or a 'character' or 'characters' introduced to 'tell a story'.[12]

The concept of voice is central here and with it Booth has insisted on a close attention to the details of verbal texture. Together these offer an alternative complementary approach to that which stresses the dramatic qualities in James's fiction, and also to a second critical tendency which involves abstracting moral issues in the plot or discussing the morality of the main character separate from the novel as a whole.[13] This is not to suggest that the moral element is not important in James's fiction. As Booth and Mark Spilka have argued, the narrator plays a vital role in discussing values within the novels.[14]

There are however certain dangers in Booth's method. Firstly he expands the notion of rhetoric to become a catch-all term for the fictional techniques addressed to the reader.[15] So in a retrospective article on The Rhetoric of Fiction he attempted to take the term even further, using the phrase 'rhetoric of event' to cover those shaping and selecting activities whereby the author organizes a novel's scenes. An example of this would presumably be James's blatantly theatrical arrest of Owen Gereth's declaration of love to Fleda at the end of Chapter 14 of The Spoils of Poynton. But if this is accepted it becomes difficult to see what formal elements of fiction are not rhetoric; and so the term loses all explanatory power. Secondly Booth takes his analogy between fiction and argument so far that he comes to insist on a novel having moral finality; that is, it must conclude its 'argument' explicitly. But

this again is not useful for James's fiction which is typically open-ended, and especially in his later work the narrator's voice plays around characters and events without necessarily giving a conclusive perspective.

Although the first chapter will clarify some of the theoretical issues involved in this discussion by considering James's own critical writings on the narrator, it is necessary to make an initial distinction between some key terms. 'Author' is distinct from 'narrator' since the latter refers to the voice which unfolds the narrative. The narrator, in other words, is a role which the author adopts for the duration of a novel, and may or may not coincide with his actual views. In her survey of the narrators in Victorian fiction Kathleen Tillotson briefly considers the notion of the author's 'second self' or projection in the novel.[17] But either this is identical with the narrator or it raises philosophical problems of whether it refers to our cumulative impression of the author within the novel, the author's general literary reputation, or to some aspect of the author's biography. Lastly the narrator must be distinguished from the 'reflector' which denotes the character through whose eyes we see the fiction. This last distinction is especially important in James's fiction after 1896.

The critical vocabulary relating to the narrator sometimes carries veiled value judgements. Thus he 'intrudes' in the fiction or 'violates' a character's consciousness. Generally such terms imply an overly rigid notion of fictive illusion. Throughout my discussion of James's novels then I have taken as a premiss that the experience of reading fiction is a voluntary collusion between author and reader, and that, while the illusion may vary in intensity, it is never total.[18]

As suggested above, the critics who stress James's dramatic objectivity concentrate on his later works. But dictates of length make it impracticable to attempt to cover all his fiction after 1896 in order to show that the narrator still plays a very important role. Accordingly, since the Major Phase trilogy have received enormous critical attention, my discussion will limit itself to the period from The Other House (serialized in 1896) up to

The Sacred Fount (1901). This period has clear boundaries, beginning with the combined crisis of James's theatrical failure and poor sales, and ending immediately before the publication of The Wings of the Dove.

There are only two book-length studies of this period, Walter Isle's Experiments in Form and Joseph Wiesenfarth's Henry James and the Dramatic Analogy.[19] Of these Isle discusses the structural aspects of the fiction, concentrating on James's innovations in plot, dialogue, etc. His survey is quite general and pays a little attention to the narrators in What Maisie Knew and The Sacred Fount, but only as a minor part of his overall study. As his title suggests, Wiesenfarth focuses exclusively on James's attempts to apply theatrical techniques to his fiction and considers such aspects as its intensity and objectivity.

Recent research on the period has similarly neglected the narrator. S.B. Meltzer thus discusses the novels purely in terms of how to relate a divided self to reality.[20] And, despite raising the question of James's theoretical attitude to the narrator in his introductory section, John Tytell has confined his discussion mainly to questions of scene, condensation and structure.[21]

The first chapter of this thesis surveys James's theoretical writings on the narrator which gives important preliminary information for considering the novels themselves and which also clarifies some of the critical issues involved. Thereafter the chapters deal with each novel in turn, following their chronological sequence. I have included 'The Turn of the Screw' since James originally intended to publish it separately;[22] and also In the Cage since this too is of novel length and was published individually. With each novel the role of the narrator will be examined, particularly in defining the relation between the main and subsidiary characters and also the overall perspective. The thesis will concentrate mainly on those sections of the novels which are not in dialogue since here the narrator's voice is most

important. Also cross-reference between the novels will be made so that the themes and concerns running throughout the period can emerge clearly.

Chapter 1

The Narrator in James's Criticism

It will be a useful introduction to a study of the series of novels in question to survey the comments which Henry James made about the nature of the narrator in his own criticism. This serves a double purpose. Firstly it will begin to answer those critics who give primacy to James's prefaces when they are deciding what his critical tenets were. These prefaces deal mainly with the gestation of the works which he selected for the New York Edition and are only secondarily general essays on the nature of fiction. Also they were written retrospectively at a particular stage in James's career and are concerned with problems of structure, the representation of consciousness, etc. Since he did in fact change his critical emphases quite radically in the course of his career, it would be unjustifiable and arbitrary to confine a discussion of his theories to only two years (1908-9).

Secondly a consideration of James's criticism will help to crystallize some of the questions which will be put to his fiction. It will clarify the relevant theoretical issues; and brief reference will be made to James's fiction outside the period in order to show what his actual practice was.

One important proviso must be made right from the start. On the whole James tended to construct his critical arguments in such a way that different features blended into each other. Questions of plot merge into questions of character; the morality of fiction shades into the nature of its structure, and so on. This method finds particularly clear expression, 'The Art of Fiction' essay of 1884, for example. So, although it is vital to separate out particular topics for discussion, a total avoidance of overlap might run the risk of misrepresenting and distorting James's criticism.

(i)

If we consider firstly the narrator's relation to the characters in a novel, one of James's prime requirements was that the latter should be fully created. He returned to this question again and again in his early criticism. In his review of Harriet Prescott's Azarian (1864), for example, he states the following:

> When a very little girl becomes the happy possessor of a wax-doll, she testifies her affection for it by a fond manipulation of its rosy visage. If the nose, for instance, is unusually shapely and pretty, the fact is made patent by a constant friction of the finger-tips; so that poor dolly is rapidly smutted out of recognition. In a certain sense we would compare Miss Prescott to such a little girl. She fingers her puppets to death.[1]

This passage is quite typical of James's early reviews in its rather self-conscious cleverness and magisterial tone. Immediately before it he had been making a real attempt to take the novel seriously, but the figure quoted is so vivid that it undermines these efforts and makes the book seem utterly ridiculous. For James Miss Prescott smothers and distorts her heroine by her wilful refusal to allow her any independence. She is constantly tampering with her just as she interferes with the descriptive passages. The analogy with the doll of course goes even further and suggests that the whole novel is naïve and childish. Bearing in mind the criticisms which James made of Thackeray elsewhere, it is interesting in this context that he cites Becky Sharp as a real 'breathing person, and Thackeray's relationship with her as a prime example of fictional success'.[2]

James's grounds for criticism here are primarily ones of realism. Because Miss Prescott is constantly adding extra touches to her characters they never take on any separate existence. Here this is the result of sheer amateurishness, but it can also be related to the sentimental purpose of some popular fiction. So, in reviewing Mrs. R.H. Davis's Waiting for the Verdict (1867) James has this to say:

> In her desire to impart such reality to her characters as shall make them appeal successfully to our feelings, she emphasizes their movements and gestures to that degree that all vocal sounds, all human accents, are lost to the ear, and nothing is left but a crowd of ghastly, frowning, grinning automatons.[3]

Once again he is objecting that the characters are distorted by the sheer weight of emphasis which is put on them. Mrs. Davis is all too eager to enlist the reader's sympathies on their behalf and the very fact that she is so importunate makes her characters seem grotesque and lifeless. On the one hand James related this tendency to an overall sentimentality which was at odds with any clear vision, and on the other he saw it as a reversal of the correct fictional procedure. First the characters should be created, and then the author can look for the reader's sympathies.[4]

In these and other reviews James is attacking a habit of mind which tries to telescope the arduous task of creating characters by insistence on their qualities or by assembling a series of attributes. For him this was a fatal weakness. It was either just lazy or wrong-headed. More seriously, it was an evasion of the novelist's creative responsibility. James pointed this out explicitly in an unpublished review of Elizabeth Stoddard's Two Men (1865). There he discusses her habit of making crude violent comments on her characters. Because they have not been adequately created the reader does not understand them and is forced back into the position of having to create them for himself. James continues:

> It is Mrs. Stoddard's practice to shift all her responsibility as story-teller upon the reader's shoulders, and to give herself up at the critical moment to the delight of manufacturing incoherent dialogue or of uttering grim impertinences about her characters.[5]

In other words the author expects the reader to do half her work for her.

The author's desire to make a moral point too quickly could also severely damage the characters' realism. This was one of the main charges which James made against the novels of Mrs. Humphry Ward. His 1891 essay on her (included in Essays in London and Elsewhere) centres around Robert Elsemere (1888). James muted his criticisms no doubt because Mrs. Ward was a close friend, and

so he praised the novel's intellectual energy and comprehensive moral scope.[6] But in private he evidently felt he could be a little more frank. So, in the following comments on her hero (made in a letter to Mrs. Ward), his praise shades urbanely into criticism:

> You never touch him but he lives; and much as you tell about him you never kill him with it - though perhaps one fears a little sometimes that he may suffer a sunstroke, damaging if not fatal, from the high, oblique light of your admiration for him.[7]

Although the result is not destructive, James clearly sees a tension between the independent movement of the hero and Mrs. Ward's narrative comments on him. Strictly speaking she has not completely separated her hero from herself; and this is partly because she is shaping her novel to an explicit moral end and partly because of her admiration for the qualities he represents.

In the lecture which James gave on Balzac when he visited the United States in 1904, he explained the failure described above to give characters an independent life in national terms. In a contrast between Balzac and Thackeray James argued the French writer would create his subject and allow it to generate its own value; whereas Thackeray tended to smother the identity of his characters with moralistic or reflective comment. The comparison is specifically between Becky Sharp and Valérie Marneffe (in Les Parents Pauvres). James describes the latter and then makes the contrast in no uncertain terms:

> All his [Balzac's] impulse was to la faire valoir, to give her all her value, just as Thackeray's attitude was the opposite one, a desire positively to expose and desecrate poor Becky - to follow her up, catch her in the act and bring her to shame: though with a mitigation, an admiration, an inconsequence, now and then wrested from him by an instinct finer, in his mind, than the so-called 'moral' eagerness.[8]

He concludes with a rather sentimental comment about Blanche Amory (in Pendennis) 'with the author's lash about her little bare white back from the first'. One important difference between this lecture and the early reviews is that here James is tending to identify moral and formal criteria. The fundamental question - 'the respect for the liberty of the subject' - is discussed in terms of one person's relation to another and James gives the

impression (as he sometimes does in the prefaces) that the characters had a life somehow apart from the novels themselves.[9] Also, as an account of Becky Sharp's portrayal, the lecture is grossly one-sided. Throughout long sections of Vanity Fair (especially in the first half) Thackeray's commentary attacks social hypocrisy and shows respect for Becky's skill at turning situations to her own advantage. James's broad contrast however sets an English tendency to moralism against a French respect for detachment from the subject.

When James found examples of this detachment in English fiction, he did not hesitate to do them full justice. One such was Cynthia Kirkpatrick in Mrs. Gaskell's Wives and Daughters, which James reviewed in 1866. She (Cynthia) was all the more surprising because she was so different from the other characters in the novel:

> She [Mrs. Gaskell] contents herself with a simple record of innumerable small facts of the young girl's daily life, and leaves the reader to draw his conclusions. He draws them as he proceeds, and yet he leaves them always subject to revision; and he derives from the author's own marked abdication of the authoritative generalizing tone which, when the other characters are concerned, she has used as a right, a very delightful sense of the mystery of Cynthia's nature and of those large proportions which mystery always suggests.[10]

This passage suggests quite clearly what kind of imaginative engagement James valued between the reader and the characters of a novel. The main reason why Cynthia Kirkpatrick is more interesting than the other characters is because Mrs. Gaskell has curbed her narrative voice. Instead of surrounding her with generalizing comment she unfolds Cynthia's character step by step. Thus for James there was a very close link between fullness of characterization and authorial interference. The two were quite incompatible with each other. In James's view the narrative voice should play around the characters as if they were real. It should on no account usurp their 'reality' or attempt to replace their autonomy. Of course a character like Cynthia Kirkpatrick literally does not need a lot of explanatory comment simply because she has been so well composed.

In the review quoted above James also emphasizes how provisional the reader's judgement is, subject to constant change and revision in the light of succeeding events in the novel. This is a more total and heuristic engagement of the imagination than that demanded by the more popular fiction he reviewed. There the reader was only expected to assent or 'feel' - to yield to the general emotional drift of the narrative.

As can be seen from the essays and reviews discussed so far, James did not make any notional distinction between the author and narrator of a novel. In general he took the narrator to be a particular expression of the author's personality (just as his choice of subject, for instance, would be another) although he did recognize the changes in narrative voice from novel to novel. He noted with dismay, for example, George Eliot's growing intellectualism. But in approaching the question of character James constantly attacked the Victorian notion that the author's personality could give a novel unity. This was not because he wished the author to be excluded for he thought this was impossible. But he very often regarded an obtrusive narrative voice as evidence that a writer was trying to avoid the full labour of composition. He made this explicit in a letter of 1899 to Mrs. Ward during the course of a brief exchange on the theory of fictional composition:

> I am afraid I do differ from you if you mean that the picture can get any objective unity from any other source than that [a disciplined subject]; can get it from, e.g., the 'personality of the author' [11]

For James then the question of characterization was just part of a general need for detachment by the author which runs as an insistent central theme throughout his criticism. And his use of metaphors of painting is similarly part of his reaction against what he took to be an indulgence in the narrative voice. This did not prevent him however from approving of an overall unifying voice in some writers, but this will be discussed in the second part of the chapter.

Quite early in his career James seems to have found an aversion to obtrusive narrative commentary on characters and nowhere does he admit that this could be completely beneficial. He never recognized, as did Percy Lubbock, that Thackeray's method of reminiscence in Vanity Fair whereby the narrator claims to have known the characters in the past, could be a source of realism.[12] Instead James praised the self-restraint above all of Ivan Turgenev. In his 1874 essay on that writer James admires the interpenetration of meaning and form so that the one gives life to the other. In Turgenev's best works he saw a perfect dramatization of ideas, and here James introduced the analogy which has functioned so prominently in subsequent criticism. During his discussion of Lisa he states:

> In this tale, as always with our author, the drama is quite uncommented; the poet never plays chorus; situations speak for themselves.

And earlier in the same essay James stresses a different aspect of this technique:

> Everything, with him, takes the dramatic form; he is apparently unable to conceive anything independently of it, he has no recognition of unembodied ideas; an idea, with him, is such and such an individual...[13]

In view of the fact that later criticism has placed so much emphasis on James's scenic sense it is important here that these passages do not make up his only reason for valuing Turgenev. He places at least as much stress on his breadth of moral perspective. James is not suggesting here that all fiction should aspire to be like drama, but is rather using the analogy with the theatre to frame his praise for the Russian's situational sense and objective characterization. He returned to the latter point in his 1896 article on Turgenev, where he commended his characters' freedom and 'absoluteness'.[14]

Whereas the example from Wives and Daughters discussed above was only a rare exception to much Victorian fiction, James clearly found in Turgenev a consistent alternative method to that involving cumbersome narrative commentary. He found especially congenial the Russian's detached and analytic stance, and

his tactful refusal to force the reader's reactions. But even in the same 1874 essay he held important reservations about Turgenev's work. At times he was if anything too detached and this gave an impression of coldness (James made quite similar - and stronger - charges against Flaubert on this account). So there could be liabilities in the absence of commentary as well as gains. But it remained Turgenev's intelligently disinterested capacity to see different aspects of characters and situations which James admired most of all:

> If his manner is that of a searching realist, his temper is that of an earnestly attentive observer, and the result of this temper is to make him take a view of the great spectacle of human life more general, more impartial, more unreservedly intelligent, than that of any novelist we know.[15]

There was more involved in James's admiration for Turgenev than detachment in itself. Behind it lay a notion of what the relationship between author and reader should be. And in a review of Adam Bede (1866) which predated his discovery of the Russian by several years James gave one of his rare theoretical statements on this subject:

> The assurance of this possibility [of future events befalling Adam Bede] is what I should have desired the author to place the sympathetic reader at a stand-point to deduce for himself. In every novel the work is divided between the writer and the reader; but the writer makes the reader very much as he makes his characters. When he makes him ill, that is, makes him different, he does no work; the writer does all. When he makes him well, that is, makes him interested, then the reader does quite half the labour.[16]

This is James's most explicit summary of the best relation between author and reader, and clearly it is one which demands tact, reticence and a strict limitation on the narrator's functions. James also puts a surprisingly modernistic stress on the projected reader almost as if he were another fictive character.[17] But this is really a matter of specific emphasis for a particular purpose. By suggesting that a novelist can create the reader in the same way as he can construct a character, James is drawing attention to the element of craftsmanship which must go into establishing the reader-writer relationship. By his self-restraint as well as by his shaping skills he should put the reader in a position where he can see enough to be interested, but not so much that he has nothing to discover.

This suggests in turn that James is stressing intellectual engagement as against moral or emotional appeal in the experience of reading. He wants, in other words, to stimulate the reader's thoughts and to do this the narrator must inevitably function on a more limited scale. His role, to judge by the review of Adam Bede and the essay on Turgenev, will be typically to clarify, explain and imply different aspects of a situation without preventing the reader from earning the particular novel.

It is not however true to say that James never explains his characters. In chapter 12 of The Portrait of a Lady, shortly after Lord Warburton's proposal to Isabel Archer, James directly explains her desire not to form an attachment to him:

> It may appear to some readers that the young lady was both precipitate and unduly fastidious; but the latter of these facts, if the charge be true, may serve to exonerate her from the discredit of the former.[18]

James is here trying to counter an impression which the reader may be getting of Isabel's egotism and coldness. He argues that instead we should defer condemning her in order to see what she subsequently does. But strictly speaking James does not explain her in the sense of giving the reader further information. Instead he tries to outwit hypothetical criticisms of her and only refers to possibilities ('if the charge be true') through the legal terminology of charge and rebuttal.

James makes a similar direct comment on Eugenia in The Europeans as she becomes progressively excluded from the action. The New England setting gives her no opportunity to show the good qualities which James has suggested she possesses. Accordingly he is forced to apologize for this, pleading shortage of space:

> It is my misfortune that in attempting to describe in a short compass the deportment of this remarkable woman I am obliged to express things rather brutally.[19]

In neither of these cases, which are in any case rare, does James revert to an older more omniscient mode of commentary. He claims no special privileged

knowledge, makes no reference to moral absolutes, and even though he addresses the reader directly, he does not undermine the realism of the characters he is describing.

A far more typical example of how the Jamesian narrator is interwoven with the subject can be seen in the following passage from 'Daisy Miller'. The subject of the description is Winterbourne who gives us our angle of vision towards Daisy herself. Apart from necessary information we are given no direct assessment of him, and yet the narrator's ironies about his forays into romance are clear to see:

> ....when his friends spoke of him, they usually said that he was at Geneva, 'studying'. When his enemies spoke of him they said - but, after all, he had no enemies; he was an extremely amiable fellow, and universally liked. What I should say is, simply, that when certain persons spoke of him they affirmed that he was extremely devoted to a lady who lived there - a foreign lady - a person older than himself.[20]

The inflections of this passage are brilliantly economical. The narrator suggests that Winterbourne is both likeable and rather conventional, which is an important hint not to accept his estimate of Daisy too readily. The narrator in fact adopts the role of a member of Winterbourne's expatriate community, but one with a great deal of savoir-faire. Richard Poirier's comment on the connexion between the narrator of The Portrait and Ralph Touchett could equally well apply here:

> While James's voice at the opening is not identical with Ralph's, it expresses an equally amused and undefensive urbanity of mind.[21]

The narrative voice in the extract from 'Daisy Miller' sets the social context of the tale and simultaneously captures the reader's interest by hinting at gossip relating to Winterbourne. It perfectly exemplifies the method of deduction which James had described in the review of Adam Bede; and it enacts the detached stance which James had admired in Turgenev. For the reader must decide for himself on Winterbourne's character after he has seen the whole of his situation. This point is worth stressing because James wrote all his criticism with a practitioner's interest in fiction. When he

condemns abuses of characterization he is by implication ruling out possible methods for himself. Lastly, in 'Daisy Miller' James never relaxes his perspective to give us direct access to Daisy herself. So when his brother William objected to the last paragraph in the tale, Henry replied 'the teller is but a more developed reader'.[22] For the narrator seems to be 'reading' the situation in a way similar to Winterbourne and the reader himself. The only difference is, as James said, that he is more developed and more aware of social nuance.

In his later works James evolved an even more complex method of relating the narrator to the main character by 'free indirect speech', where the narrator's organizing activities and a character's thoughts are interwoven in the details of phrase and inflexion. This kind of reported speech is the logical stylistic outcome of James's earlier attitudes towards the narrative voice and it will be considered as it manifests itself in The Spoils of Poynton in chapter 3.

(ii)

The second broad aspect of the narrator to be considered is his relation to the reader. This question received scant attention from René Wellek in his summary of James's criticism for he stresses objectivity above all else:

> ...in the novel James, while granting an ultimate personal quality, insists on extreme objectivity, an illusion even to the degree of delusion. The novel must not appear to be a novel; the author must not interfere.[23]

And he goes on to mention briefly James's praise of Turgenev and criticisms of Harriet Prescott. But this is a one-sided account. James did in fact set great store by the 'ultimate personal quality' of a novel and throughout his criticism stressed that fiction was the expression of the author's personality.

He attempted to steer a middle course between what he saw as a Victorian indulgence in the latter and an equally pernicious insistence by the French Naturalists on extreme objectivity. He criticized Maupassant, for instance, on these grounds, arguing that it was impossible to escape an author's personality since it must inevitably come out in his novels.[24]

Despite the importance which James attached to fictive illusion, he also recognized that in the act of apprehending a novel the reader builds a picture of the author from the way in which his style plays around his material. And the former is in practice very often his style of expression and the inflexions of the narrative voice.

When writing about English fiction James frequently praised the narrative commentary, that unifying reflective voice which draws together the different scenes in a novel and suggests their general significance. In a review of 1864 he described Tom Jones as a fictionalized sermon:

> The story is like a vast episode in a sermon preached by a grandly humorous divine; and however we may be entertained by the way, we must not forget that our ultimate duty is to be instructed.[25]

Although he finds interest and value in the novel, James is really locating Fielding in an old-fashioned mode and later in the review praises Waverley for being the first 'irresponsible' novel; by which he means the first novel written to entertain and not instruct. Similarly when he referred in later years to 'Fielding's fine old moralism' James was paying respect to a classic rather than admitting a possible method for fiction of his time.[26]

Partly because of her connexion with the English Nonconformist tradition of moral earnestness and even more because of her undoubted stature in Victorian fiction, George Eliot presents one of the key figures in James's discussion of narrative stance. As early as 1866 he praised her combination of the qualities of humorist, satirist and philosopher, the latter giving her an advantage over Dickens and Thackeray:

> The constant play of lively and vigorous thought about the objects furnished by her observation animates these latter with a surprising

> richness of colour and a truly human interest, It gives to the author's style, moreover, that lingering, affectionate, comprehensive quality which is its chief distinction; and perhaps occasionally it makes her tedious.[27]

Her commentary in other words suggests a rich experience on the author's part, and then in turn enriches the narrative itself. So, ten years later, James praised the fullness of George Eliot's style in Daniel Deronda; it was 'so charged with reflexion and intellectual experience'.[28] Interestingly James reversed this opinion in a letter of the same year where he stated that the novel's style was excessive:

> It disappoints me as it goes on - the analysing and the sapience - to say nothing of the tortuosity of the style - are overdone.[29]

In view of his own late syntax there is a certain irony about James criticizing another novelist for having an involuted style.

His most extensive praise for George Eliot however comes in his review of Felix Holt (1866):

> It [her style] is not bold, nor passionate, nor aggressive, nor uncompromising - it is constant, genial, and discreet. It is apparently the fruit of a great deal of culture, experience, and resignation. It carries with it that charm and that authority which will always attend the assertions of a mind enriched by researches, when it declares that wisdom and affection are better than science.

Then James turns specifically to the first chapter of the novel:

> On this subject [Midland country life] the author writes from a full mind, with a wealth of fancy, of suggestion, of illustration, at the command of no other English writer, bearing you along on the broad and placid rise of her speech, with a kind of retarding persuasiveness which allows her conjured images to sink slowly into your very brain.[30]

George Eliot's voice suggests firstly her quality of mind and she demonstrates a verbal equivalent of Turgenev's detachment - a comprehensive over-view of humanity which both supports the fiction and grows out of her intellectual breadth. James further suggests that her narrative voice is nationally symbolic and reflects the rich diversity of English social life.

But above all James stresses the importance of discourse in her fiction. Her narrative voice addresses the reader directly but discreetly, working by persuasion and not compulsion. It is authoritative but operates on the

reader with a humane warmth which reflects the experience that lies behind it. By contrast James found coldness in the exotic stylistic finish of, for instance, Théophile Gautier, especially in what he termed the latter's 'fantaisisme' - his tendency to surround his material with elaborate verbal detail.[31]

When he describes the opening of Felix Holt, James pinpoints another important effect of George Eliot's narrative voice: it determines the pace of the novel. The reader is carried forward by its general authoritative tone, but still has enough leisure to digest the material. James summarized all these qualities in the notion of intelligence and although he had constant doubts about George Eliot's sense of form he never denied her intellectual scope. He admired the way in which she drew the reader into what W.J. Harvey has described as an intelligent and sympathetic contemplation. Harvey adds that George Eliot's moral comments on her characters do not usually refer to any particular system of metaphysics and thereby take the reader out of the fiction:

> ...they are, in the main, the sober, unemphatic, and mature statement of those great commonplaces of human nature, those basic facts of life, which underlie all human situations, real or imaginary.[32]

Whether we say that George Eliot's narrators bring divers information to bear on the narrative and suggest different aspects of it (James); or that they bring out the moral generalities implicit in the action (Harvey), they certainly function on a much more generalizing level than do James's. Even in The Tragic Muse he could not capture her density of reference to English life; but his constant fear of moralizing and his distrust of the discursive meant that James never really attempted to imitate George Eliot's style.

Indeed from the very beginning James had some doubts about her method. With the publication of Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda his respect for her grew, but so did his reservations. A danger which had been more or less latent was now coming to the fore. So, in his review of Middlemarch, he returns to the question of narrative voice:

> The constant pressure of thought, of generalizing instinct, of brain, in a word, behind her observation, gives the latter its great value and her whole manner its high superiority.

This sounds as if James is really just repeating his earlier praises of her comprehensive scope, but he has shifted the emphasis to put it more singly on intellect. And he continues:

> Many of the discursive portions of Middlemarch are, as we may say, too clever by half. The author wishes to say too many things, and to say them too well; to recommend herself to a scientific audience.[33]

Here James is raising two distinct issues. In her early fiction he had praised the unifying effect of the narrative voice, but here he relates her expansiveness to a redundancy and over-abundance of fictional material. Throughout the review he gives the impression that the novel can only just contain its subject-matter, which seems to be constantly on the verge of bursting out into formlessness. Then secondly James is objecting that George Eliot is becoming too importunate. This obviously grows out of her desire to be comprehensive and inclusive, but here the commentary is both excessive and too theoretical. In effect James suggests that George Eliot is putting too much of herself into the narrative voice; it is becoming too direct an expression of one aspect of her personality and the result is an ungainly intellectualism which swamps the action. Looking back on her career in 1885, James concluded that 'the fault of most of her work is the absence of spontaneity, the excess of reflection', and stated that in her eagerness to instruct the reader she constantly moved from the general to the particular, instead of vice versa.[34] So what he had originally seen as a source of strength had got out of hand and eventually became a damaging liability.

One reason why James came to distrust George Eliot's narrative voice was that it began to force the reader's reactions, and he had the same objection to Kingsley's eagerness to preach. When, in Hereward (1866), he for once forgot this tendency the gain in ease and energy was immense:

> He writes in all seriousness, and yet with a most grateful suppression of that aggressively earnest tone which has hitherto formed his chief point of contact with Mr. Carlyle.[35]

Kingsley's moralizing is both fatiguing to the reader and quite out of place in the novel. Although this is not an example from fiction, James caricatured Ruskin's method of writing about Italian Art as that of an irritable schoolmaster constantly lecturing the reader to take a morally correct view.[36] In both cases the writer's stance towards the reader is false because it is superior and insulting to the latter's intelligence.

James's attacks on the 'novel with a purpose' and his criticisms of George Eliot do not constitute attacks on narrative commentary as such. He was quite willing to admit its enlivening effects when successful. Instead he is criticizing a lack of discretion on the author's part because he either tries to force certain reactions on him, or fails to respect the fictional subject. Similarly James attacked an excessive or self-indulgent style of expression because of its obscuring effects for the reader. He variously criticized Victor Hugo for being too grandiloquent and verbose; Carlyle for being self-regarding; Our Mutual Friend for being over-written; and the style of George Eliot's 'Brother Jacob' for being self-consciously epigrammatic.[37] Again and again James returned to the point that the relation between the reader and the narrative voice required the exercise of tact and a sense of proportion.

James gives the name of 'objectivity' to this desired self-restraint, but it is an approximate term and one which refers to degree, not to a total self-effacement by the author. The 'objective' novelists then were those who did not moralize excessively, at least according to the distinction which James made in a review of 1865:

> Richardson, whom the world is coming back to after a long desertion, is valued as the great inventor and supreme master of 'realism', but his moralism hangs about him as a dead weight. The same may be said ....of Thackeray's trivial and shallow system of sermonizing. As a story-teller he is well-nigh everything - as a preacher and teacher he is nothing. On the other hand, the great 'objective' novelists, from Scott to Trollope, are almost innumerable.[38]

It is ironic that James singled out Trollope for praise as an 'objective' novelist because he later attacked him quite strongly for making frivolous asides in his novels. This attack comprises James's most famous statement on the narrator's correct position in a novel. It begins during a long survey of Trollope's works which James made in 1883. Having paid due respect to Trollope's social breadth, he then turns to the question of the fictive illusion:

> He took a suicidal satisfaction in reminding the reader that the story he was telling was only, after all, a make-believe. He habitually referred to the work in hand (in the course of that work) as a novel, and to himself as a novelist, and was fond of letting the reader know that this novelist could direct the course of events according to his pleasure.[39]

One example which James cites is the opening sentence of the last chapter of Barchester Towers ('The end of a novel, like the end of a children's dinner party, must be made up of sweet-meats and sugar-plums'). Such comments as these are 'suicidal' because they appear to attack the novel's illusion for no purpose at all. They trivialize the whole enterprise by reducing it to a game of make-believe and reminding the reader that the plot is totally arbitrary. They also contradict Trollope's plea for a more mature pleasure in novel-reading which he makes at the end of Chapter 15 of the same novel.

Immediately following his attack on Trollope James makes his famous defence of the seriousness of novel-writing:

> It is impossible to imagine what a novelist takes himself to be unless he regard himself as a historian and his narrative as history. It is only as a historian that he has the smallest locus standi. As a narrator of fictitious events he is nowhere; to insert into his attempt a back-bone of logic, he must relate events that are assumed to be real.[40]

The analogy with the historian gives James a means of insisting on the responsibility (and respectability) of the novelist's craft. The context of these passages shows that he really has considerable respect for Trollope's works, much more than he showed in his early reviews, for example.[41] James returned to these criticisms however, one year later in 'The Art of Fiction'

essay (1884), where he condemned Trollope's 'attitude of apology' towards the reader.[42] Again James reverts to the historian analogy because he wants to counter Trollope's lack of confidence in the novel form. By making such self-denigrating asides the latter is really trying to anticipate and evade possible criticism from the reader. Once again James is not attacking the notion of overt commentary as such but is using Trollope's weakness as a symptom of a more general distrust of the novel in England. His theoretical statements then should be read in that light. They refer beyond Trollope himself and do not necessarily imply an 'illusionist' notion of fiction such as that lying behind W.D. Howells's strictures of 1891. Comparing Trollope with Jane Austen, he concludes:

> ...but he was so warped from a wholesome ideal as to wish at times to be like the caricaturist Thackeray, and to stand about in his scene, talking it over with his hands in his pockets, interrupting the action, and spoiling the illusion in which alone the truth of art resides.[43]

James does not go as far as Howells although the latter's view of Thackeray would be congenial to him. In fact he leaves unstated the best relation to operate between narrator and reader.[44] His criticisms cut in two directions by implication: against Trollope's lack of courage in his craft, and against the reader whose prejudices might create these fears.

To put James's criticisms of Trollope in their proper perspective we should recognize that he himself put comments in his novels which drew attention to their fictiveness. When he introduces Catherine Sloper in Washington Square (1881), the narrator pretends to be embarrassed by the fact that she has a weakness for cream cakes: '...though it is an awkward confession to make about one's heroine, I must add that she was something of a glutton'.[45] Here James is adopting the persona of Catherine's biographer, a traditional ploy to introduce material which the reader might find uncomfortably realistic. But unlike Trollope's comments, this is a mock-apology and does not damage or disrupt the fiction. Indeed by referring to Catherine as his 'heroine' the narrator draws attention to the differences between her and the conventional heroines of romance.

A second example can be found in 'Pandora', a tale published in the same year as 'The Art of Fiction'. Here a certain Count Vogelstein, a grotesquely serious German, is sitting on a transatlantic steamer reading a Tauchnitz edition of a tale by a 'young American writer'. As the narrator describes it to us (over the Count's shoulder, as it were), it becomes obvious that the tale is 'Daisy Miller' (Tauchnitz was James's only continental publishers) and this joke provides entry into the later tale.[46] There is a multiple irony in the fact that the narrator apparently does not know America at all and so does not overtly satirize the Count's preconceptions. But of course the author of this tale is identical with the author of the book the Count is reading, and American to boot. Here James is exploiting the difference between the narrator and the author himself in order to give a richness to the tale's texture.

These examples are not as rare in James's fiction as his comments on Trollope would lead us to imagine, and a recurring function of his narrators is to alert the reader to different levels of fictiveness within a particular work. One important difference from Trollope and George Eliot is that James, as author, never comes directly into the fiction to comment. His narrators are generally limited to a particular dramatic role and play against the illusion instead of disrupting it (as does Trollope) or overloading it with extraneous material (as does the later George Eliot).

(iii)

As I have been suggesting, James held no doctrinaire theories of impersonality in fiction and believed that style always expressed an author's personality. So he admired George Eliot's tone, which certainly isn't 'objective', for the mind which lay behind it. This is a further important aspect of the narrative voice - its quality of expressiveness.

One British writer who did exemplify a fully achieved style was R.L. Stevenson. It was particularly his finely-wrought prose which stimulated James's admiration:

> Before all things he is a writer with a style - a model with a complexity of curious and picturesque garments. It is by the cut and the colour of this rich and becoming frippery - I use the term endearingly, as a painter might - that he arrests the eye and solicits the brush.[47]

He is significantly wary here in commending Stevenson's style because it shows care and labour, but tends to excess. James praised a narrative style if it was personal and highly worked. He had no respect for naive sincerity as such. So for instance in 1902 he testified to the sheer quality of Conrad's prose, all the more astonishing because English was not his native language.[48] James set great store by a narrative style which showed evidence of labour and in his article on Stevenson he was on his guard against over-praising the latter's bookishness ('the tone of letters') which appealed to James temperamentally but which he saw could be a danger.

In his review of Felix Holt James had demonstrated an admiration for the sociable way in which George Eliot addressed the reader. Her narrative voice was 'genial', in other words attempting to please the reader; and this was a value which James also found in Alphonse Daudet. Daudet, for him, was really outside the body of Naturalists proper because of the qualities of warmth and conversation in his narrative voice:

> The wish to please is the quality by which Daudet persuades his readers most; it is this that elicits from them that friendliness, that confession that they are charmed....It gives a sociability to his manner, in spite of the fact that he describes all sorts of painful and odious things.

Or again:

> He tells his stories as a talker; they have always something of the flexibility and familiarity of conversation.[49]

What James admires here is Daudet's capacity to establish a social context between narrator and reader. And he similarly praised Pierre Loti for achieving an intimate and anecdotal style.[50] If both these writers expressed

their personalities, it meant that reading their works was almost like meeting the writers themselves and allowing them to speak to the reader, to convince him verbally.

James however recognized that Daudet could narrate in such an effortless discursive way because of the high value attached to conversation in French culture.[51] Daudet and George Sand were thus examples for him of a technique of expression which he could not hope to imitate himself. The latter he termed an 'improvisatrice' because she could articulate her narrative spontaneously without sacrificing form.[52] But George Sand was a special case. James came to have reservations about Daudet's method and finally decided that he expressed too much personality in his style.[53] He envied both French writers for their ease and fluency but could never really get away from niggling doubts that they were glossing over formal difficulties.

Kathleen Tillotson has characterized one difference between Victorian and twentieth-century fiction in the following way:

> [In modern fiction] one character is missing: the narrator in person. There is no one there who stands outside the story and says 'I', who explains how he knows what he is telling us, who addresses the reader, who discourses, confides, cajoles, and exhorts. We are unbidden guests, there is no welcome, no hospitality - the social context embracing us as readers has gone.[54]

James had far too rigorous a sense of form to rely on his narrative voice to unify his fiction. Although, as I have been suggesting, he valued the personal and sociable qualities of some narrative styles in others he did not take them as stylistic models for his own practice.

There were several reasons for this. Firstly James had too strong a sense of privacy to give his personality unrestrained expression in his narrative styles. As he admits in the preface to The Golden Bowl, his preference was always for oblique narrative, partly to mask his inner self and partly to give added intensity to his fiction.[55] Then again, James did not want a narrator to speak from outside the story since this might damage its unity or even its illusion. He did however retain the notion of intimacy

between the narrator and reader. Their transaction is still social in his novels but in a restricted way. So when the narrator describes the English 'ceremony' of afternoon tea at the beginning of The Portrait of a Lady, he reassures the reader by his confident tone and suggestion of social sophistication. The reader accepts his guidance because he seems authoritative. But in general the difference between Jamesian narrators and Victorian ones emerges in two ways. The former are limited personae and give us a more tenuous sense of a person; and also they are less conclusive, suggesting rather than stating interpretations.

James's narrators frequently speak directly to the reader and adopt a confidential tone, but on the other hand he deliberately constructed a style that would select his readers. When in 1872 his family suggested that James's essays were over-refined, he replied:

> The multitude, I am more and more convinced, has absolutely no taste - none at least that a thinking man is bound to defer to. Au point où nous en sommes all writing not really leavened with thought...is terribly unprofitable, and to try and work one's own material closely is the only way to form a manner on which one can keep afloat - without intellectual bankruptcy at least.[56]

He was realistic enough to see that he could never achieve a popular case of expression. A formality and elegance of style were to be a buffer to him against the pressures of popular taste. In stressing thought so much here James in effect explains the style of his narrators. If they explained too much and in too simple an idiom then the reader's mind would not be engaged. And the further implication is (from the opposition between public and private, moral and financial value) that only readers with certain mental capacities will be engaged anyway.

James's conception of the narrator then was transitional. He was moving away from the broad and discursive commentary of the Victorians towards a more limited function, closely woven into the narrative proper. He did retain some prerogatives such as direct address and informative summary, but on a much reduced scale. And above all he retained the ultimate function of the narrative voice, namely to set dialogue in a context and show its illustrative

significance:

> There is always, at the best, the author's voice to be kept out. It can be kept out for occasions; it cannot be kept out always. The solution, therefore, is to leave it its function, for it has the supreme one. This function, properly exercised, averts the disaster of the blight of the colloquy really in place - illustrative and indispensable.[57]

(iv)

Throughout his career James held a constant distrust of first-person narrative and with the exception of 'The Aspern Papers', 'The Turn of the Screw' and The Sacred Fount confined his use of this special mode to short stories.

In the preface to The Ambassadors James gives some indication of why he disliked this method. Its unique combination of subject and object, hero and narrator he describes as 'romantic' and 'a form foredoomed to looseness'. The particular occasion is of course the composition of The Ambassadors and James is discussing the various options open to him. In doing so he sets the terminology of formal discipline ('rigour', 'pattern', etc.) against 'the terrible fluidity of self-revelation' which comes from what he calls the 'autobiography' (and he cites Gil Blas and David Copperfield as two prime examples).[58]

James's objections here centre around the question of form. He constantly links the use of first-person narration with a casual disregard for form and relates its popularity to the English reading public's disregard for carefully constructed fiction. Its use implies that the author can make the hero's character the principle of the book's unity and James denied the efficacy of this as hotly as he had denied that the author's personality could unify. It was anyway an outmoded practice. This is the pejorative weight of a term like 'romantic' as James uses it, referring to the apprenticeship of the novel

rather than its formal maturity. And earlier he had described Kidnapped and Henry Esmond as fictive autobiographies in an 'archaic form'.[59] James made his attitude plain also when he wrote to H.G. Wells in 1911 about The New Machiavelli. He professed (rather vaguely) to admire Wells's sense of life but then his language suddenly takes on a hard critical edge when he complains of Wells using

> that accurst autobiographic form which puts a premium on the loose, the improvised, the cheap and the easy. Save in the fantastic and the romantic (Copperfield, Jane Eyre, that charming thing of Stevenson's with the bad title - 'Kidnapped'?) it has no authority, no persuasive or convincing force - its grasp of reality and truth isn't strong and disinterested.[60]

James then goes on to say that for him a novel lacks authenticity and beauty unless detachment has operated and unless there has been some artistic transmutation of the material. In other words another reason for disliking the first-person form is that its material is not properly digested.

These statements were made quite late in James's career and they virtually dismiss any possible value which first-person narration may have. But in an early unpublished review James gives a more balanced account. He mentions the looseness which can come from retrospective 'autobiography', but then describes its own special technical difficulty:

> ....it has the prime disadvantage of being the most dramatic form possible. The author not only puts off his own personality, but he assumes that of another, and in proportion as the imaginary hero is different from himself, his task becomes difficult. Hence the merit of most fictitious autobiographies is that they give you a tolerably fair reflection of the writer's character. To project yourself into the consciousness of a person essentially your opposite requires the audacity of great genius; and even men of genius are cautious in approaching the problem.[61]

Here James is being far less wholesale in his rejection of the form and acknowledging the strong imagination and sense of drama which it requires. In fact because it is so difficult it can only be used briefly as Browning did in his dramatic monologues (James takes Browning to be its great exponent at the time of the review - 1865). James demonstrates the same alertness to formal discipline as he does in the later strictures on the first-person, and

suggests by his ironic use of 'merit' that many extended fictive autobiographies fail. But at least he gives another possible reason why he himself tended not to use that form, because of its sheer imaginative difficulty. As we shall see, when he uses it in 'The Turn of the Screw' and The Sacred Fount he reduces the reliance placed on the personality of the narrator and minimizes the element of autobiography by using only a brief time-span.

Chapter 2

The Other House

(i)

There is abundant evidence that The Tragic Muse (1890) marked for James a turning-point in his career. Partly because of bad sales and partly because of his growing interest in the theatre, it was the last of a series. So in May 1890 he wrote to his brother William: 'The Tragic Muse is to be my last long novel. For the rest of my life I hope to do lots of short things with irresponsible spaces between'.[1]

At first sight The Tragic Muse seems to come nearer to the 'omniscient author' convention than its successor The Other House, but James does not give us direct access to the characters' thoughts indiscriminately. The novel is concerned, as D.J. Gordon and John Stokes have demonstrated at length, very much with ideas.[2] In other words the characters tend to embody attitudes to art or to social and family position; and the narrator performs an important function in clarifying these attitudes.

For example, early in the novel, the Dormer family are visiting the sights of Paris. Lady Agnes begins to show some anxiety for her son Nick because he doesn't seem as interested in his parliamentary seat as he should be. This signals the beginning of the conflict between Nick's artistic leanings and the obligations of family tradition, which is to run throughout the novel. At this point however we are given direct insight into his mother's worries:

> .....and Lady Agnes noticed that the 'lots of things' to which he proposed to give precedence over an urgent duty,.....were implied somehow in the friendly glance with which he covered the great square [the Place de la Concorde], the opposite bank of the Seine, the steep blue roofs of the quay, the bright immensity of Paris. What in the world could be more important than making sure of his seat? - so quickly did the good lady's imagination travel.[3]

By giving us her thoughts directly James makes Lady Agnes's standpoint appear more sympathetic, and counteracts the impression of her coldness in disapproving of Parisian art. The narrator thus hints at the emotional substance in her feelings of helplessness which might not emerge sufficiently from the action.

In the passage quoted we never lose our sense of the narrator gently ironizing Lady Agnes. By juxtaposing the features of the Paris scene with her question to herself, he implies that Paris also is important and beautiful; 'bright immensity' belongs to the phraseology of the narrator rather than Lady Agnes. Such comments are typically oblique and a matter of nuance.

But one of the main differences between The Tragic Muse and The Other House is that in the earlier novel the narrator makes frequent reference to national and social types. The Dormers, in the opening scene, belong to the 'tweed-and-waterproof class' of English tourists and are 'finished productions' in their way.[4] In adopting the persona of the cosmopolitan tourist, James directs the reader towards a detached stance where he can appreciate both sides of a question - here balancing the serious pull of family obligation against the physical attractions of Paris. It is a glancing irony that the narrator should describe the Dormers as if they themselves were art-objects (in the New York text they are 'finished creations'), but he introduces a fundamental theme of the novel: namely, how much a person is shaped by his society and its institutions.

In underlining characters' generic, representative qualities the narrator helps to define their historical identities. Throughout The Tragic Muse characters are seen in their social and historical relations, and this explains in turn why the narrator must supply considerable background material on them. So when Nick Dormer, just after his election to Parliament, goes to visit Mr. Carteret (an old friend of his father's), we apprehend the latter through his setting. The background information of his connexions with the Dormer family and the physical details of his house and its village must all be conveyed before the two people actually meet. And although James presents some of this information through Nick's point of view there is very little practical difference from conventional direct narrative. The village, Beauclere, with its narrow cobbled streets and ruined abbey, is representative of all that is best in conservative English politics; and, despite such interpolated

phrases as 'Nick thought', its description and symbolism is really the work of the narrator. So, as well as clarifying the ideas discussed by the novel, the narrator serves a basic function of conveying information to the reader, information which is used to see the characters in their settings.

Lastly the narrator rarely makes direct comments on the characters in The Tragic Muse, and that usually to show their generic nature. Typically the comments are oblique and tentative, but occasionally there is a passage of consciously heightened rhetoric to mark a particularly dramatic moment. So when Nick decides to resign from Parliament his confrontation with his mother is even more tense than the decision itself since it makes the collapse of all her hopes for him:

> He measured, in the look that she gave him when the full truth loomed upon her, the mortal cruelty of her discomfiture: her face was like that of a passenger on a ship who sees the huge bows of another vessel towering close out of the fog. There are visions of dismay before which the best conscience recoils....[5]

Here we see a characteristic Jamesian strategy - the use of a vivid concrete metaphor to render physically an emotional reaction, in this case introduced by the verb 'loomed'. The narrator draws back from the immediate scene in order to make the comparison because it is generalizing as well as vivifying. And this is taken one step further in the explicit generalization which concludes the passage. Such comments are more frequent in the works of George Eliot, but James is really laying claim, as she does, to a broader wisdom than his characters possess in order to measure their actions. In James's fiction these comparisons are rare, but fundamentally similar to the earlier practice of George Eliot.

(ii)

By contrast The Other House has a much reduced scale of action. Indeed it was not originally planned as a novel at all. James first conceived of the

idea as a possible subject for either a short story or a play in December 1893.[6] Deciding on the theatre he wrote a scenario for a three-act play called 'The Promise' to be performed by Edward Compton.[7] This scenario, which is now lost, was completed probably in the summer of 1895 and then converted into novel form during the second half of 1896. It was subsequently reconverted into a play in 1909 and performed under the same title as the novel. The novel displays its origins in retaining a three-act (or three-book) structure with chapters conforming rigidly to theatrical convention in that they begin with entries by characters and conclude either with exits or a climax.

The first chapter of The Other House is an explicit introduction to the action. It contains virtually all the preliminary information which we need to identify the characters, and James recognized this when he wrote to his translator Auguste Monod in 1907. 'The 3 or 4 opening pages', he stated, formed his only 'departure from the scenic form'.[8] In other words the first chapter really stood outside the novel's method. This makes one clear difference from The Tragic Muse where background information emerges throughout the novel. In The Other House this is reduced to the absolute minimum and the action focuses on the character of Mrs. Beever, the proprietor of Eastmead, a house on the edge of the town of Wilverley. Being a shrewd (but not 'cruel', as the narrator points out) observer, she misses little of what goes on at Bounds, the eponymous other house and thus makes it plausible for a description of her to shade into an outline of the situation where the novel's action begins.

Because Mrs. Beever demonstrates much of the alert detached interest typically shown by the Jamesian narrator, the latter balances a recognition of her intelligence against ironizing her middle-class social pretensions. Mrs. Beever for instance clearly prides herself on organizing her own situation, as well as arranging her son Paul's life for him. She particularly wants to marry him off as soon as possible. The narrator, in the course of his summary, gently satirizes this quality of deliberation:

> There would have been difficulty in saying whether it was a feeling for peace or for war, but her constant habit was to lay the ground bare for complications that as yet at least had never taken place. Her life was like a room prepared for a dance: the furniture was all against the walls.[9]

Because the sheer bulk of narrative comment has been reduced in this novel, the narrator's style constantly approaches the epigrammatic. Here he stresses Mrs. Beever's exaggerated tendency to take precautions, so exaggerated that it comes to seem a performance. Similes such as these also establish a tone of social comedy since the inhabitants of the two houses are the leading lights in the world of Wilverley and both depend for their financial status on the bank.

In the hierarchy of characters in the novel Mrs. Beever holds a special position. Because of her capacity to see all round a situation, the narrator's insights at times merge with hers and he points this out, again through a theatrical metaphor. She thus has the advantage 'of always seeing, in any relation or discussion, the other party become the spectacle, while, sitting back in her stall, she remained the spectator and even the critic' (pp.132-133). This passage comes at a rather awkward point in her attempts to arrange an engagement between her son and Joan Martle, a guest at the other house. She feels bound to justify her actions to him and, in so doing, reverses the usual comfortable relation between observer and spectacle which she enjoys. Instead she feels like a circus performer, going through various acrobatics for her son's benefit. But her determination does not flag ('She would have to leap through a hoop, but she would land on her charger's back.') And here she demonstrates an intelligent awareness of herself which is directly comparable to the narrator's own perspective on her.

Each of the two later books of the novel open with passages of satirical description centred on Mrs. Beever, just as in Book One. The second section introduces a new note of social competition between Mrs. Beever and Tony Broom (the owner of Bounds). He might have a more modern, well-equipped house, but the garden at Eastmead cannot be surpassed. The narrator summarizes Mrs. Beever's pride that her grounds are the most beautiful in Wilverley and then

adds the following mock-serious reflexion:

> Such degrees and dimensions, I hasten to add, had to do altogether with short relations and small things; but it was just the good lady's reduced scale that held her little world together. So true it is that from strong compression the elements of drama spring and that there are conditions in which they seem to invite not so much the opera-glass as the microscope (pp.104-105).

Immediately after this we are given a visual expression of this tendency when we see Mrs. Beever surrounded by the paraphernalia for afternoon tea and boxes of birthday presents for little Effie (Tony Bream's baby). Clearly the narrator adopts a comically portentous tone of voice in order to state a general rule about the kind of drama Mrs. Beever imagines, when really he is making fun of her preoccupation with minute details.

The narrator's explanation that he is only dealing with 'short relations and small things' underlines one difference between this novel and The Tragic Muse. Here we encounter only details of social ambition, personal idiosyncracies rather than large public issues. The narrator's language, for all its poise, raises problems within the novel however. The whole description of the rivalry between the two houses stands outside the action of the novel. We never see any of this competitiveness and in fact it seems to be a pretext for James supplying further description of the 'set'. The same irrelevancy marks the account of Mrs. Beever's taste in furniture at the beginning of the third book. She inherits a house full of mahogany furniture only to find that rosewood comes into fashion; but at the time of the action she is gratified to see that mahogany is once again coming back into style. Now the narrator's concentration on social niceties at this point is grotesquely out of place because Tony's baby has just been murdered. To revert to an urbane social voice directly undermines the tension which James has been building up in the preceding chapter.

Indeed the subject of the novel is not really social at all after the first book, which James described as a 'prologue'.[10] Tony's wife dies after giving birth to Effie and, because of painful experiences she has had with a

stepmother, she extorts a promise from her husband never to marry while Effie is alive. Book Two then presents the conflict in him between love and obligation, and between Jean Martle and Rose Armiger who are both attracted to Tony. The climax (at the end of the second book) comes with Rose's murder of the baby. Strictly speaking then the action consists of a moral or psychological drama and narrative references to fashion, social status, etc. only dissipate the intensity of the action instead of helping it. Throughout the last two books there is this growing disparity between the narrative voice and the novel's true subject.

What might be termed the narrator's 'social voice' emerges also in the miniature sketches which he gives of characters, and this is a method which looks forward to The Awkward Age. So of Dr. Ramage, with Mrs. Beever the other raisonneur-figure in the novel, we learn that

> He was a little man who moved, with a warning air, on tiptoe, as if he were playing some drawing-room game of surprises, and who had a face so candid and circular that it suggested a large white pill (p.23).

or of Tony Bream we learn the following:

> To look at him was immediately to see that he was a collection of gifts, which presented themselves as such precisely by having in each case slightly overflowed the measure.....His dress was just too fine, his colour just too high, his moustache just too long....But the result of it all was a presence that was in itself a close contact, the immediate, unconscious, unstinted life, and of his doing what he liked and liking to please (p.30).

These are not as satirical as the miniature portraits in The Awkward Age, but, particularly in view of the minimal description in The Other House, such passages stand out as rhetorical set-pieces. They display an excess, a virtuosity which sets them apart from the general language of the novel. Both accounts begin as descriptions and proceed to define the characters as if by inference from their appearance not by reference to their social type. With Tony Bream especially we do not really get a complete visual sense of his person so much as a series of aspects which all imply one dominant characteristic - generosity. Also both accounts have a rounded finality because of the comic analogy in one case, and the concluding chiasmus in the other.

Apart from their rhetorical flourish these descriptions are unlike those in The Tragic Muse because they introduce no new material, and make no reference to the characters' past history or social background. In The Other House characters are presented dramatically. They are only important as they interact during the novel, and not as they grow out of different cultural or social contexts. This means firstly that the narrator has far less information to convey, and then also that he must refer above all to the visual in order to convey what spectators might see for themselves in the theatre. One contemporary reviewer saw this as a great loss:

> ...there is room for very little of the daintily whimsical commentary upon his characters, their looks and thoughts and motives and amiable absurdities, which he knows how to make so delightful. When he is not putting dialogue into the mouths of these characters, he is engaged almost wholly in providing that necessary description of their movements, their smiles and sighs and general stage-business, which in the theatre the spectator would see with his own eyes.[11]

The writer, who incidentally recognizes James's new method in this novel, charges him with raising unnecessary difficulties in trying to imitate a play. But he gives the impression that the descriptions are simply neutral and informative, when really this is not true. The passages quoted above show how the narrator can merge description with analysis, partly for comic effect and partly to highlight the good qualities in the characters.

When we finally see Paul Beever, for example, the description begins with purely visual aspects, and none of them flattering. He is 'tall and fat, and his eyes, like his mother's, were very small' (p.127); his bulk is massive, grotesquely so and 'his great tastes were for cigarettes and silence'. But then the narrator consciously restrains his tendency to rhetoric in order to counteract the cumulative effect of these details. Paul may be fat but he is also active in the town social life and popular. By implication the narrator is doing more justice to Paul's good qualities than his mother who thinks he is just stupid and lethargic. The narrator is practising James's own principle that an author must allow his characters some independence.[12] By leaving his account of Paul's open he allows his good qualities to come out in his actions. And these qualities are subsequently demonstrated when he

proposes to Jean Martle and accepts her refusal with a good grace. In this particular instance there is a direct continuity between the narrator's interpretation of a character and his actions.

In his account of fiction which attempts to imitate the methods of the theatre Norman Friedman has written that the reader is put into the position of 'the fixed front (third row center)'.[13] He suggests that the reader's perspective does not change in any significant way. But the narrator's selection of descriptive detail does alter the perspective in The Other House and plays an important part in determining the tone of scenes. Quite early in the novel Rose Armiger meets her fiancé Denis Vidal who has just returned from several years in China. Understandably they are rather tense with each other and the narrator brings this out in his general comments ('.. a good deal more passed between this pair than they uttered' - p.42). Then he moves in to describe Vidal fingering a piece of his lover's dress (suggesting agitation), only to draw back in order to see the two figures together on the sofa. These variations in focus show a technique which could not be achieved on the stage. By selecting certain details for description the narrator achieves cinematic effects of close-up, for instance, and suggests an atmosphere of intimacy in the scene outlined above.

Similarly the description of the 'set' is more dynamic than would be the effect of a curtain rising on a stage. When Jean Martle first enters the hall at Bounds James avoids the awkwardness of having an objective third-person description by presenting the setting through Jean's eyes. We follow her as if she looked all round the hall noting the decorations, one or two furnishings and then suddenly stopped upon spotting Rose Armiger at the far end of the room. Or again at the close of Book One the characters group themselves around Tony Bream in what on the stage would be a static tableau. But the narrator follows his line of vision to Mrs. Beever and then Mrs. Beever's towards Rose Armiger in one of the other entrances. Thereby we gain a sense of movement and also of the smothered antagonism between the two women.

James was to make more use of this visual technique in 'The Turn of the Screw'.

In 'Covering End' the description is rather cruder. This tale was converted from a one-act play which James wrote in 1895 called 'Summersoft'. It formed the companion tale for 'The Turn of the Screw' in The Two Magics. Because their origins were almost identical James frequently linked this tale with The Other House in his letters. It opens with a description of the house which gives it its title, but in a way more direct and explicit than in the novel:

> This is the central hall, high and square, brown and grey, flagged beneath and timbered above, of an old English country-house; an apartment in which a single survey is a perception of long and lucky continuities.[14]

Then follows a broad-ranging survey which demonstrates the categorical statement at the end of the passage. The narrator has momentarily adopted the guise of a visitor to the house (and the reader with him), and explains that the butler's temporary absence from the hall gives him the time he needs for this description. It is quite consistent with the tale itself since it deals partly with tourists going round the house examining its details. But also, beginning as it does in the present tense, this description sets the scene as if it were at the beginning of a playscript.

'Covering End' and The Other House both contain narrative comment which becomes quite similar to stage-directions and James's attitude to both works was usually dismissive because he thought that their conversion into fictional form was all too obvious and crude. When Edmund Gosse praised the novel in 1896, James was rather embarrassed and insisted that The Other House was merely

> a little thrifty pot-boiling turning-to acct. of the scheme of a chucked-away 3 act play - an old relinquished scenario turned into a little story on exactly the same scenic lines.[15]

And Theodora Bosanquet, one of James's secretaries, quotes him describing the reworking of both tale and novel as a process which involved 'embedding the dialogue of the plays in a certain amount of descriptive commentary'.[16] His poor opinion of these works stemmed from the lack of unity between dialogue and 'commentary'. The two did not gell together and anyway they were only

reworked for commercial reasons.

But although there are marked disparities between the narrative voice and action in The Other House, James is not really doing the novel justice by these blanket dismissals and in a letter to H.G. Wells of December, 1898 he explained more fully what kind of narrative commentary he was using. He is describing 'Covering End' but the comments apply equally well to the novel:

> The B[ritish] P[ublic] won't read a play with the mere names of the speakers - so I simply paraphrased these and added such indications as might be the equivalent of decent acting - a history and an evolution that seems to me moreover explicatively and sufficiently smeared all over the thing.[17]

According to James here the narrator has been used for expediency, simply to explain and make clear what cannot be seen. In 'Covering End' and The Other House however the narrator's role goes beyond the purely functional.

Throughout much of the novel the narrator acts as an alert observer, conveying the expressions and movements of the characters and making his commentary only implicitly analytical. So, in the course of a conversation between Tony Bream and Mrs. Beever, the former is accused of being wrong-headed because he has allowed Jean Martle to stay in his house as a guardian for his child. Mrs. Beever's charge is serious because it suggests that Tony might have been encouraging feelings in the girl which he could not requite. His reaction is described visually: 'Tony lifted his shoulders; with his hands in his pockets he had begun to fidget about the lawn...' (p.186). His very movements suggest anxiety and deep thought, especially as they are not typical of Tony. But the movements themselves convey his feelings without the need to spell them out explicitly. Or again when Dennis Vidal is talking to Mrs. Beever about Rose Armiger (his fiancée, in theory), he asks Mrs. Beever if the girl is really in love with Tony. Her scruples prevent her answering this question and she turns away from him momentarily, enacting her refusal before she actually articulates it. And in the novel generally description of gesture and expression tends to replace analytical commentary. In this sense the description approaches the nature of 'good acting' and also makes

the narrative more objective. The narrator guides the reader as to how he should read appearancesrather than taking him directly beneath their surface. This is a technique which James used extensively in The Spoils and The Awkward Age, and one which Jacques Barzun recognized when he was discussing The Other House: 'James has systematically translated love, fear, hatred, suspicion, envy and the premeditation of crime into bodily gesture...'[18]

This method can be a way of understating emotion which blends in appropriately with the characters' own sense of decorum, particularly of not expressing all their feelings directly. When Paul Beever, quite late in the second book, realizes that his love for Rose Armiger is hopeless, only Jean Nartle and (by implication) the narrator see the depth of feeling behind his comparatively awkward gesture: '..he covered, for an instant, working it clumsily, one of his little eyes with the base of one of his big thumbs' (p.235). In a sense the narrator displays the same tact as some of the characters by not actually naming Paul's feelings.

The narrative comments, however, have a particular style of expression which in The Awkward Age is used so much that it becomes an irritating mannerism. The following two sentences are representative:

> This exclamation made her meet his eyes with a turn of her own that might have struck him....Then she shook her head - seemed to shake out,...her generous gaiety (p.37). [my emphasis]

James is so concerned not to go beyond his self-imposed formal restrictions (ruling out direct interpretation) that these comments are studiously tentative. They offer hypotheses of what an intelligent spectator would understand from the scene, but carefully avoid being final. Accordingly the narrator's comments very often contain phrases beginning with 'as if', or references to a hypothetical observer. At times this can be exaggeratedly tentative:

> He [Dennis Vidal] evidently felt that he had been almost violently abrupt; but it would have been equally evident to a spectator that he was a man of cool courage (p.62).

This sentence begins to display one of the idiosyncracies of James's late style; namely that he uses physically expressive vocabulary to convey emotion ('violently abrupt') and then smothers its vigour by elaborate conditioning.

The explicit references to a spectator (which occur also in 'Covering End' and particularly The Awkward Age) are anyway irrelevant because they are implicit within the technique itself - in, for example, the use of conditional verb-tenses. The result is that James seems to be drawing attention to his method which unnecessarily distracts the reader from the action. Also the cumulative descriptive effect of these and the more direct accounts of movement gives an answer to the writer in the Saturday Review who stated that the novel

> ..divides itself into three parts, each of which has a set scene provided for its action, so finite and circumscribed that the reader has a sense of missing the stage directions.[19]

In fact when James rewrote The Other House as a play he retained almost verbatim several of the longer explanatory descriptions as stage-directions. Thus the novel has:

> He [Dennis Vidal] looked at her as over a flood; then he thrust his hand behind him and glanced about for his hat. He moved blindly, like a man picking himself up from a violent fall - flung indeed suddenly from a smooth, swift vehicle (p.73).

In the play this becomes:

> Vidal (who looks at her an instant as over a flood; and then, while he thrusts his hand behind him and looks about for the hat he has somewhere put down, moves blindly, like a man picking himself up from a violent fall).[20]

James has removed the rhetorical addition to the second simile, but otherwise he kept the passage virtually intact and thereby demonstrated that the comments can serve as stage-directions even though they go beyond the immediately visual.

As the novel progresses there is a steady reduction in the amount of commentary given. The narrator's 'social voice' recedes through the second book, though still lingering for instance over the comic analogy between Tony Bream's servants and soldiers, and by book three has virtually disappeared. There is however a noticeable increase in the fineness with which characters' reactions are conveyed. When Dennis Vidal reenters the novel in the second book Tony insists that he should stay at his house and not a hotel. This comparatively simple point is explained thus:

> Dennis Vidal assented to this arrangement without qualifications and indeed almost without expression: there evidently lingered in him an operative sense that there were compensations Mr. Bream might be allowed the luxurious consciousness of owing him (pp.205-206).

This is doubly oblique. It presents the probable sense which one character (Vidal) has of the probable sense of another (Bream). And its complexity is not a matter of psychological depth so much as nuance. The passage is not typical but certainly in The Other House we can see some beginnings of James's later style. And although the actual bulk of description is reduced, the narrator's rhetoric is at times so consciously intricate that it becomes very obtrusive.

Despite the new and at times stringent techniques which James uses in this novel he still retains the basic functions and prerogatives of the narrator, albeit on a much reduced scale. The narrative is 'objective' in the sense that characters work out the action with comparatively little explanation outside their dialogue. But nevertheless we see into the minds of the main characters as and when the subject requires, particularly into the minds of Mrs. Beever, Jean Martle and Tony Bream since these are either the most intelligently alert or emotionally full characters. Also, as I have been suggesting, James retains direct comment, analysis, description and even supplies information in retrospect. But in all these functions, except visual description, the narrator divides his work with the characters themselves. He can summarize the growth of Tony Bream's relationship with Jean Martle; but we learn of his wife's painful experiences with her step-mother entirely through dialogue. And even though The Awkward Age makes a far more thorough-going attempt to imitate the theatre, we shall see that James keeps these same narrative privileges.

(iii)

The Other House contains a second kind of narrative rhetoric which is quite different from the lightly ironic, social voice described earlier. To understand why James should use it we have to consider the novel's subject a little more closely.

It is clear from the earliest outline of the plot in the notebooks that James saw the action in terms of an opposition between a 'good heroine' and a 'bad heroine' for the love of Tony Bream.[21] In view of the fact that Bream might marry the good heroine, the bad heroine decides to poison his child. In the event however the child was to recover. James rejected this happy ending in the novel, got rid of the melodramatic device of the poison, and had Rose Armiger murder little Effie by deliberate drowning. His intention seems to have been to present her as a person of very strong will, consumed by frustrated passion. And in this, as well as other thematic aspects, critics have seen the influence of Ibsen, as if James was trying to create a character similar to Hedda Gabler for instance.[22]

The contrast then between Rose and Jean Martle is rather schematic since they are such total opposites. Rose is more aggressive, and more sinister because we do not really see into her thoughts. Jean however is warm, affectionate and a logical second mother for the little child. The importance of the murder is that - again theoretically - Rose can contain her passion no longer and it breaks out into violent action. But the cumulative effect of the narrative comments discussed up to this point is to hold the action on a social level and to prevent this kind of intensity from growing. Even in the last book, where James experiments with Ibsenesque symbolism (the backcloth is of a gloomy storm, following the murder), he opens the section with quite inappropriate social comment on Mrs. Beever.

Throughout the novel there is a kind of rhetoric used to depict Rose Armiger which constantly hints at deep feeling which we never actually see. And so one recurring figure applied to her is that of a mask. When Jean Martle first sees her at Bounds she is sitting as if she has abandoned herself to

intense misery; but as soon as she realizes that she is being observed, she pretends to be cheerful. And later, following an outburst of sobbing in front of Tony Bream, her regained composure is described in terms of acting: 'She had stopped before a mirror, still dealing like an actress in the wing, with her appearance, her make-up' (p.84). The recurring contrast in such descriptions is between surface and depth, appearance and inner intensity, but her intensity is rigidly controlled so as not to break the decorum which all the characters observe. So when her fiancé shows her a letter from his father promising him financial help, this makes it possible for them to go ahead and marry. Really Rose does not want to marry him and reveals her sense of being trapped - but only for an instant:

> If there had been anyone at that moment to see her face, such an observer would have found it strangely, tragically convulsed: she had the appearance of holding in with extraordinary force some passionate sob or cry, some smothered impulse of anguish. This appearance vanished miraculously as Dennis turned... (p.65).

Theoretically this gives us a glimpse of the emotional forces which will burst through social restraint and result in the murder. But the momentary intensity seems grotesque because it is too much at odds with the general social level of the scene. James has been too chary of spelling out the reasons for Rose's apparent anguish, and so it comes to be intensity without adequate explanation or demonstration. When he is describing Rose, the narrator's language becomes too insistent, especially in a novel where so much importance is given to gesture.

Rose's so-called 'passion' for Tony figures too fundamentally in the plot to be left to verbal insistence or hypothesis by the narrator. And one reason for this difficulty may be that James was attempting to do two mutually incompatible things at once: to stay as close as possible to what the reader could see and to suggest forces and motives too far below the surface. The result is that the narrator's language becomes literally meaningless at one point or melodramatic at another. When Tony and Rose sense some feeling between them,

> It [their glance] represented something that no lapse could long quench - something that gave out the measureless white ray of a light steadily revolving (p.150).

Or again, after Effie's dead body has been found, she meets Dennis Vidal who is shocked at her changed appearance:

> ...in a single hour she had so altered as to be ugly, without a trace of the charm that had haunted him;...thus ravaged and disfigured, wrecked in the gust that had come and gone (p.270).

Even the second of these passages evades direct description. Rose's change is named not described in the detail which might make such a rapid transformation possible. Once again the intensity is purely verbal and not enacted. And similarly the comparison of Rose with the Medusa is brief and not developed, although Oscar Cargill has attached considerable importance to it.[23]

For all the narrator's insistence, the 'gust' which sweeps Rose to murder is never seen nor any force which would make it plausible. And in fact, in the course of the second book, there is a narrative comment on her which directly contradicts the possibility of the murder:

> Rose was capable of astonishment, as she was capable of other kinds of emotion; but she was as little capable of giving way to it as she was of giving way to other kinds (p.199).

Apart from the one time when she bursts into tears before Tony, Rose lives up to this comment completely. She displays a rigid self-control. At no point does her social mask slip enough to make murder believable. So when Jacques Barzun writes that 'we know from the start that we face the diabolical and the real in one embodiment' he is reading her actions on a very superficial level.[24] And Michael Egan similarly describes the murder as 'an act of calm deliberation built on a foundation of seething emotion'.[25] Neither critic is attaching enough importance to what the novel actually demonstrates.

If Rose Armiger represents destructive passion Jean Martle embodies emotional warmth. We see into her thoughts considerably and witness her kind treatment of Paul Beever, and so her prime qualities emerge far more convincingly, although Walter Isle has complained that she is 'made to carry the weight of too many undemonstrated qualities'.[26] Jean too is supposed to feel

a passion for Tony but we only witness affection between them. She displays compassion towards him and her selfless devotion to his child is 'exquisite' but nowhere do we see a more powerful feeling. The reason for this would seem to be that James was far more interested in presenting the moral dilemma of affection conflicting with honour (witness the original title of 'The Promise') than in depicting violent passion. This is partly why the language describing Rose becomes melodramatic, and why Jean demonstrates affection specifically.

This means also that when, after the murder of the child, Jean and Tony finally come together, the intensity of the scene does not seem consistent with their earlier relationship:

> He held her and she yielded with a passion no bliss could have given; ...This long embrace was the extinction of all limits and questions - swept away in a flood which tossed them over the years and in which nothing remained erect but the sense and the need of each other (p.298).

Although the rhetoric here is quite powerful it is literally misleading. This scene is directly comparable with the love-scene between Owen Gereth and Fleda in The Spoils. In both cases the rhetoric is heightened and concentrates on the characters' sense of emotional release. But here the restraints have not been swept away by passion because immediately after the passage quoted Tony Bream demonstrates that it is more important for him to have moral self-respect (in not seeming to profit by his child's murder) than to have Jean. Their legalistic conversation about the ethics of their position effectively arrests the vague current of feeling which the narrator's description conveys. As in the passages describing Rose Armiger, there is a qualitative difference between this passage's language and the visual or ironic precision which characterizes most of the narrator's comments. Here the physical act of embracing shades rapidly into metaphor which is vague as well as contradicting the two characters' actual words. In what sense, for instance, are they 'tossed over the years'? It seems here, as in parts of The Spoils, that James is making gestures towards sexual passion without substantiating them.

A possible explanation of why the narrative voice becomes so unconvincing when it refers to Rose Armiger and Jean Martle may lie in the fact that the novel was originally serialized in the Illustrated London News from July to September 1896. In February of that year James wrote to Clement Shorter, the editor, to say that he would be glad to write 'a story energetically designed to meet your requirements of a "love-story"'. And two days later he added, 'I shall endeavour to be thrilling, and my material is such that I think I shall succeed.' Lastly, when James was discussing the details of serialization, he assured Shorter that he would do thirteen parts and that each one would be 'so unmistakably defined'.[27] These letters suggest that James was deliberately injecting elements of sensationalism and romance into the novel in order to cater more for the journal's readership. And indeed the serial carried a title illustration by Walter Paget showing a woman holding a cup - presumably poisoned - at arm's length while a devil leers at her behind her left shoulder. This picture harks back to James's earlier melodramatic idea of making the crime an attempted poisoning, an idea which he subsequently abandoned. Also when he told Shorter that the installments would be clearly defined he was perhaps making a tongue-in-cheek glance at those readers who would want everything made obvious for them. Perhaps this in turn was why James had a poor opinion of the novel and did not include it in the New York Edition.

At any rate the narrator's references to hidden passion are rhetorically unconvincing and try to evoke intensities which the reader is not given access to. Instead of complementing the novel's action they stand outside it and do not blend in with the overall social tone at least of the first two books.

Chapter 3

The Spoils of Poynton

(i)

Unlike The Other House, The Spoils of Poynton presents a narrative reflected through a character's consciousness. This means that the reader comes to the events indirectly instead of through the direct explanatory comments of a fictionalized producer, as in the earlier novel. Certainly James thought that this was one of the main distinguishing features of his fiction. Looking back on his career in the preface to The Golden Bowl, it was the only consistent characteristic which he singled out for comment.[1] And partly because Fleda Vetch stands at the centre of The Spoils, it achieves a natural compactness whereas The Other House seems limited in order to conform to non-novelistic conventions.

With Fleda at the centre of the novel it follows that the critical questions relate mainly to her, and they could be summarized as: firstly, if Fleda is the 'reflector', does she totally determine the perspective of the novel, or do we see beyond her? And secondly, can Fleda bear the weight of narrative put on her? The latter question in practice has emerged in the debate about whether Fleda is admirable or not. Clear expression of the two basic viewpoints possible here was given in an exchange between A.W. Bellringer and John Lucas in Essays in Criticism from 1966 to 1968. Bellringer's position was that the reader has no standard to measure Fleda by and so we must accept events at her own evaluation.[2] Lucas however argued that there were many cases of Fleda reading more into events than they warranted, that the reader could see this clearly, and that Fleda was in fact quite corrupt.[3] Neither critic refers to any narrative voice as a factor in this debate although Lucas implies that James is clearly shaping the narrative in order to highlight Fleda's weaknesses.

The majority of critics on The Spoils have tended to take one of the two alternatives outlined above, sometimes with the result that critical argument

has shaded into the moral questions of obligation, responsibility, etc. To some extent James himself was responsible for this since in his preface to The Spoils he made his famous distinction between the 'free spirit' (Fleda) and the 'fools' (specifically Mrs. Gereth and Mona Brigstock).[4] Here the 'free spirit' refers to the reflecting consciousness of the novel, which is less committed, more intelligent and so superior to the other characters in the fiction. When considering this distinction in the preface to The Princess Casamassima James explicitly identified himself with the free spirits, and when discussing Fleda's position in The Spoils it is as if she were in a position of power over Mrs. Gereth:

> ...thanks to the 'value' represented by Fleda, and to the position to which the elder woman is confined by that irradiation, the latter is at the best a 'false' character, floundering as she does in the dusk of a disproportionate passion.[5]

In the preface James's formal and moral concerns constantly shade into each other but here they are virtually identified. Fleda is superior to Mrs. Gereth because she is not confined to a passion and is capable of seeing different sides of their situation; but also she is superior because she is the central consciousness revealing the other characters. The very fact that James has singled her out to construct the novel's perspective gives her a special importance and authority. Furthermore James's repeated use of the word 'fine' in the preface leaves us in no doubt as to his estimate of Fleda.

The passage quoted above exemplifies what Leo Bersani has seen as a general tendency in James's prefaces: that 'he tends to discuss character and situation almost entirely as functions of technical ingenuities'. And so in The Golden Bowl (although this could equally well apply to his other fiction, according to the prefaces) 'James's characters enact the psychological adequacy of their creator's compositional motives'.[6] The value which James claims for Fleda in the preface has nothing to do with any strength of character or what she actually does, since he explicitly contrasts her success with any worldly notion of it. James's attempted identification of her structural value with

her moral stature leads directly to the kind of critical stance adopted by Bellringer since it implies no reserve towards her at all and makes no mention of any elements of comedy in the novel.

One further reason why this should be so is that when James was planning out The Spoils in his notebooks he was thinking in terms of the theatre; he discusses the narrative in terms of acts and scenes, and in the middle of an entry for August 1895 noted:

> ...what I have gathered from it [James's theatrical experiment] will perhaps have been exactly some such mastery of fundamental statement - of the art and secret of it, of expression, of the sacred mystery of structure.[7]

This could stand as a comment on all of James's fiction from the late nineties, but for The Spoils in particular it suggests that he was deliberately placing more importance on the arrangement of scenes than on the discursive, rhetorical aspects of fiction. In other words his comments on The Spoils both in the notebooks and in the preface are heavily coloured by the fact that James was attempting to apply theatrical techniques to the novel. Taking his lead from the prefaces, Joseph Warren Beach could write as early as 1918 that The Spoils represented 'the type and classic instance of the "scenic" method in fiction'.[8] If this is true, what role is left for the narrator, since the extensive use of scene must inevitably reduce his importance?

(ii)

The opening scenes of the novel force on the reader one element which was conspicuously absent in both the notebooks and the preface, namely irony. Without any preamble James establishes an energetic pace from the outset, focusing his satire on Mrs. Gereth which catches the reader's curiosity and is full of humour. Her exaggerated sensitivity is burlesqued particularly:

> It was hard for her to believe that a woman could look presentable who had been kept awake for hours by the wall-paper in her room; yet none the less, as in her fresh widow's weeds she rustled across the hall, she was sustained by the consciousness, which always added to the unction of her social Sundays, that she was, as usual, the only person in the house incapable of wearing in her preparation the horrible stamp of the same exceptional smartness that would be conspicuous in a grocer's wife. She would rather have perished than have looked endimanchée.[9]

Superficially the narrator might appear to be presenting her thoughts in a neutral, non-committal way, but this is in fact a method of understatement. He drily follows her series of discriminations (mimed out in the syntax) and then inserts the information that she is a recent widow as if it were an unimportant detail - certainly not as important as her Sunday dress. Her culminating shudder of horror presses home what is evident throughout the passage, that Mrs. Gereth has an exaggerated sense of decency which has atrophied more human feelings (such as grief for her deceased husband). This proves to be central to her character and typical that her distaste should be provoked initially by a house - Waterbath.

Of the novel's critics only T.G. Hunt has noted that The Spoils begins through Mrs. Gereth's perspective.[10] This concentrates the narrative since we are introduced to the house and its grotesque inhabitants (the Brigstocks), and simultaneously take in those features of Mrs. Gereth's character which James has strategically underlined. In the early part of the chapter Mrs. Gereth is more the object of the perspective than the perspective itself. Then there is a gradual shift from her to the Brigstocks and the details of their house, which gives James an opportunity for indulging in more direct satire at their vulgarity. There is yet another shift in perspective towards Fleda at the end of the chapter. For the bulk of the novel James keeps either her perspective or that of the narrator (although they are not always different) and very rarely returns to Mrs. Gereth's. However, her tone and critical attitude are very close indeed to the narrator's own social satire, which persists through the novel.

Apart from giving us an oblique point of access to the fiction, these

opening strategies can be explained by the process of the novel's composition. Although James wrote to Horace Scudder as early as June 1895 that The Spoils was 'half finished', the novel did in fact grow, much to his embarrassment.[11] In the course of constructing it Fleda Vetch emerged from a minor foil to Mrs. Gereth, to the central character.[12] Initially James had planned a straight contrast between the two houses (Waterbath and Poynton) with himself as the explaining intermediary. But as he wrote the installments for the Atlantic Monthly Fleda grew more and more in stature. This is reflected in the shift of subject from the spoils themselves to the relationship between Fleda and Owen Gereth. But certainly in the first chapter James's original idea of a social comedy is still quite evident.

This social contrast is expressed partly through the ironic comments discussed above; but also it emerges visually as a contrast between the houses in the novel. Throughout The Spoils of Poynton the narrator shows a constant concern with the visual and with objects and places as revealing character. The very title of the novel - originally planned to be 'The House Beautiful' and then 'The Old Things' - might lead us to expect what is in fact the case; that things literally dominate the whole texture of the narrative. In his preface James acknowledged the influence of Balzac in this, and one critic has narrowed the debt down even more to one particular novel.[13]

Compared with the dense and exhaustive detail with which Balzac describes the Maison Vauquer in Le Père Goriot however, James's depiction of Waterbath is selective and economical:

> ...they [the Brigstocks] had smothered it with trumpery ornament and scrapbook art, with strange excrescences and bunchy draperies, with gimcracks that might have been keepsakes for maid-servants and nondescript conveniences that might have been prizes for the blind. (p.5)

This is an overall impression rather than a systematic description, and shot through with grotesque metaphors. Waterbath comes to seem a rag-bag of disconnected and vulgar objects. The details stick out but do not cohere into any kind of a whole. Indeed the house presents a massive joke as if the

Brigstocks had consistently gone out of their way to avoid taste or proportion. There is absolutely no sense of domestic comfort, only of ugliness run riot; and the crowning touch is the varnish which seems to cover everything, as if the Brigstocks smeared it on with their hands.

With the Maison Vauquer, Balzac builds up a very strong impression of mass by painstakingly cataloguing its details, so that the inhabitants seem literally buried in objects. And the squalour and discomfort of the house form a physical correlative of the inhabitants' emotional sterility. But the house has a tangible physical existence. In The Spoils the houses verge constantly on being metaphorical extensions of their owners.

In the description of Waterbath the narrator's metaphors pull the individual details even farther apart and divert them more from any possible unity. But when Fleda first sees Poynton the tone and arrangement of the description is totally different.

> ...Poynton was the record of a life. It was written in great syllables of colour and form, the tongues of other countries and the hands of rare artists. It was all France and Italy with their ages composed to rest...There were not many pictures - the panels and the stuffs were themselves the picture; and in all the great wainscoted house there was not an inch of pasted paper. (p.22).

Whereas the narrator had 'stood behind' Mrs. Gereth in depicting Waterbath, here the presentation is direct and it is only after the description proper that the narrator emphasizes Fleda's reactions. Initially his main concern is to render Poynton in such a way that its beauty stands out clearly. For the house is such a total expression of Mrs. Gereth's personality that it has drawn her humanity into itself. The narrator thus emphasizes the unity of its parts as if it were an actual organism (reflected in Fleda's caressing touches). Once again the details are very sparingly chosen and in his description the narrator retraces the process of composition which Mrs. Gereth herself had originally followed in assembling the spoils. Throughout the passage runs an analogy between verbal and painterly composition whereby the very cadences of the syntax function as brush-strokes, evoking a sense of space and harmony. This analogy is quite familiar in James's writings about

the novel (in 'The Art of Fiction' for example), and blends in closely with the whole texture of The Spoils which places a consistent emphasis on the visual. Laurence Holland has discussed a similar theme which he sees in the method of The Portrait of a Lady and points out that the novel's images contain evaluations within their structure.[14]

The description of Poynton may also owe a specific debt to the technique of the painter J.S. Sargent. In an article of 1887 surveying his work James praised Sargent's lightness of touch, unity of impression and natural selectivity of detail, all qualities which he practised in The Spoils.[15] And one year before he started that novel (1894) James explicitly modelled 'The Coxon Fund' on Sargent's method.[16]

The description of Poynton was evidently recognized as important by James because he took particular pains to revise it for the first book edition. The passage in the Atlantic text begins:

> ...Poynton was the history of a devotion. The devotion had been jealous, but it had not been narrow; there reigned a splendid rigor, but it rested on a deep curiosity.[17]

In the revised version the religious metaphors are far more subdued and the house is rendered visually rather than through abstractions.

After the first sight of Poynton, the tone is lowered so that the narrator can comment on Fleda's poverty of experience:

> Such were the emotions of a hungry girl whose sensibility was almost as great as her opportunities for comparison had been small. (p.23)

He is not here denigrating Fleda's responses because that would involve casting doubt on the beauty of Poynton, but simply underlining the sheer physical pleasure she feels on first seeing the house (exactly like Hyacinth Robinson's raptures when he visits Medley). Taking his lead from Fleda's position as a 'reflector', Oscar Cargill has argued that the value of the spoils is purely relative and that they are only valuable at Poynton not at Ricks - the third country house in the novel.[18] But this is to confuse the issue. The narrator's careful rhetoric makes it clear that the whole of Poynton is beautiful, not just the objects in the house and thereby implies that Mrs. Gereth is betraying

her original conception when she removes them. Poynton is a focus of value, commenting on the other characters as well as on the other houses. Of course the ironic connexion with Mrs. Gereth is that the house has been finished - it is a static art-object; whereas her situation has been rudely disrupted by the English law of inheritance.

The narrator then describes the three main houses in the novel in order to imply a hierarchical disposition of the characters. The descriptions are certainly not neutral and with Ricks, as with Waterbath, he builds upon Mrs. Gereth's critical reactions. Unlike the first house Ricks calls forth no grotesque metaphors. It is suburban and the noted details (the geraniums in white pots, for instance) are both typical and fragmented. However the classification of the house is not final and this emerges in the contrast between Mrs. Gereth's view of it and Fleda's. Mrs. Gereth merely sees vulgar objects, but Fleda 'reads' the house metaphorically, and sees the character of the maiden-aunt which lies behind it. In other words she shows the same kind of intelligence as the narrator himself has already demonstrated in his presentation of Poynton.

This theme reappears towards the end of the novel when Mrs. Gereth finally acknowledges defeat and arranges Ricks as best she can. When Fleda sees the result - and this time she gives us the perspective - she is amazed at the beauty of the place. Ricks is 'recomposed' and in the process the maiden-aunt is revived. The scene gives our important visual resolution to the novel because it suggests a softening of Mrs. Gereth's rigour, a humanizing capacity to compromise. After that the destruction of Poynton is not so important.

In these scenes James is tending to move away from overt narrative comment to a more physical or visual method of implication. Thus when Fleda spends a night at Ricks after the spoils have been moved there, the narrator stresses the beauty of her bedroom but also the reduction in size. The things seem to crowd in on Fleda giving a claustrophobic expression to her own sense of being put under moral pressure. The objects themselves seem to complain to her and

Fleda even feels guilty of extreme violence ('The maiden-aunt had been exterminated - no trace of her to tell her tale' - p.83). The narrator is here articulating an effect which originates in Fleda's state of mind, and indeed virtually renders it in terms of dialogue (between the girl and her surroundings). Thus one structural implication of Fleda being a 'reflector' is that the narrator is closely behind her angle of vision, clarifying her thoughts and reactions. It will be seen however that the control of perspective is more complex and variable than this might at first appear.

As I suggested above, James uses Mrs. Gereth's point of view in order to satirize Waterbath and the Brigstocks. And it is largely from this voice that the novel's humour grows. M.E. Hartsock is the only critic of The Spoils who has begun to do justice to this aspect of the novel. In the first sections of the novel, she argues, the tone of social comedy comes from verbal exaggeration and from the mock-epic references.[19] And obviously this comic rhetoric forms part of the narrator's voice. She tends to overstate her case however, by suggesting that the comedy is uniformly strong throughout the novel. In fact it recedes as the relationship between Owen and Fleda comes to the foreground.

This satirical voice - analogous to that of the narrators in The Other House, What Maisie Knew and The Awkward Age - relates Mrs. Gereth to the narrator, because it is psychologically consistent for her to describe Mona, for instance, as being comically mystifying:

> She belonged to the type in which speech is an unaided emission of sound, and the secret of being is impenetrably and incorruptibly kept. (p.8)

Such rhetorical precision and flourish would be right out of character for Fleda, who shows no capacity for irony at all. Ostensibly it is Mrs. Gereth who frames this view of Mona and yet the element of bravura in its phrasing is closer to the metaphorical exuberance of the narrator than herself. However if we take these as Mrs. Gereth's words, she is classifying Mona just as James himself does in the preface and in the novel when he compares her to a doll with blue eyes - a recurring figure which in no way diminishes her silent force

in the novel. In the preface James compared Mona to a personification of will, just as he saw Mrs. Gereth purely in terms of a monomania (her passion for collecting).[20] They are both in other words type-characters, having one tendency in grotesque excess. So although Mrs. Gereth caricatures Mona just like James, she is ironically unconscious of her own comic type-quality.

Similarly Mrs. Gereth sees with the eyes of an artist, again like the narrator. The analogy between assembling Poynton and the narrator's description of it has already been mentioned. But when at Waterbath, she reflects 'she had seen Mona in her appropriate setting...' (p.6), which summarizes the technique of James's visual presentation in that section. And painting, or more generally composition, forms the subject as well as the method of The Spoils. As Adeline Tintner has written,

> The Spoils of Poynton shows the plastic sense diverted by a mother from her son to her furniture, producing a beautiful house and a boorish son. The spoils and Owen are respectively the formed and unformed results of a mother's attention....[21]

The thematic link between the spoils and Owen is central to the novel. But there is a further connexion this time between Mrs. Gereth and James himself. She constantly prides herself on her skill at composition but mistakenly assumes that her success with Poynton authorizes her to arrange the other characters in whatever settings she chooses - and this is the prerogative only of the novelist himself. The narrator hints at this tendency by constantly stressing her arrogance and in one of her rare bursts of defiance Fleda accuses Mrs. Gereth of trying to play destiny with people. In other words the narrator, through these apparently unobtrusive metaphors, uses the analogy with an artist or novelist to suggest a character's self-deceived sense of power; a sense which the narrative itself destroys. And this is a feature common to most of James's novels in this period.

At some points in the novel the narrator's perspective is virtually identical with Mrs. Gereth's; at others they are quite separate - when, for instance, she is the object and not the medium of irony. James manages these shifts with great ease because of the similarity between her sharply critical

sense and the narrator's ironic voice. And roughly the same is true of Fleda.

(iii)

Like Mrs. Gereth and the Jamesian narrator, Fleda too uses the language of art-appreciation to refer to Poynton, as has already been mentioned, but also to Owen Gereth. She describes him variously as 'beautiful' and 'exquisite', but this in the face of appearances which suggest the contrary - that he is a rather stupid, passive, over-grown child. The implications of this disparity properly belong to the discussion of the rhetoric the narrator uses to depict their relationship. Suffice it here simply to point out this element in Fleda's language.

Secondly Fleda sees more in characters and in the central situation than Mrs. Gereth. She attributes dignity and even intelligence to Owen and finds more warmth and companionship in Mrs. Gereth than does the narrator, who tends to emphasize the latter's obsession and arrogance. Indeed at times Fleda seems constitutionally incapable of seeing a bad side to anyone.

When it comes to understanding the novel's basic situation Fleda once again uses a Jamesian method of inference - of probing beneath the surface to find implicit motives and relations. One particularly clear example of this comes when she receives Owen's final letter offering her any object from Poynton which she likes. Fleda cannot accept this offer at face value - especially after she has become so involved personally. And so she racks her brains to discover what Owen 'really' means:

> What did it mean, what did it represent, to what did it correspond in his imagination or his soul? What was behind it, what was before it, what was, in the deepest depth, within it? (p.278).

At this late stage in events Fleda is realistic enough to realize that she can't and has no need to answer these questions. For this reason (and she shows a persistent sense of realism throughout the novel) she avoids the morbid love of intricacy and complexity which bedevils the protagonists in

James's other fiction of this period, and which culminates in The Sacred Fount.

Throughout The Spoils the narrator hints at the waste involved in Fleda's assessment of the situation, as if it was not really worth it. And this reserve, this suggestion that Fleda's excess of scruple is humorous, shows that James is keeping one of his dominant tendencies under control in this novel: namely, a desire to over-elaborate situations. During the composition of The Spoils James wrote to Horace Scudder:

> I find, in my old age, that I have too much manner & style, too great & invincible an instinct of completeness & of seeing things in all their relations, so that development, however squeezed down, becomes inevitable - too much of all this to be able to turn round in the small corners I used to. I select very small ideas to help this - but even the very small ideas creep high up into the teens.[22]

James's wry admission refers specifically to The Spoils and 'Glasses' which both first appeared in the Atlantic but in fact it gives an important gloss on all of his fiction written in this period. It describes quite adequately Fleda's own efforts to chart out the implications of different courses of action and to see 'all round' the situation. Indeed she sees so many aspects and relations that she comes to feel tangled in their web, immobilized by their sheer diversity.

The similarities between Fleda and James have been noted by several critics, particularly J.C. Broderick. He argues that she approaches James's ideal in that her sensibility loses nothing and in her 'artistic' handling of Owen, among other reasons.[23] And J.W. Gargano implies more or less the same position when he suggests that Fleda is the only character in the novel to possess a truly comprehensive vision.[24] These critical arguments point to an important aspect of Fleda's status, but go too far in ignoring the reservations which the narrator demonstrates towards her at frequent intervals.

Although the narrator does not use an extensive rhetoric to persuade the reader to take Fleda's sensibility seriously, nevertheless he inserts unobtrusive comments to bolster her position. When we first see her she is described as being 'dressed with an idea' (p.3) and as a young lady 'whose

only treasure was her subtle mind' (p.13). These recur quite frequently and contrast Fleda with the other characters who are defined by their homes or possessions. Unlike them Fleda has nothing, but the narrator is anxious that she should not appear strange or ridiculous simply because of that. One side-effect of Fleda's absence of possessions is that she seems to have no place in the fiction, to be an intelligence at large rather than another of the characters.

Apart from the two similarities in approach between Fleda and the narrator discussed above, she also performs some of the functions which we might expect of the author himself. Thus she imagines the scene between Owen and Mona when they first visit Poynton together as a hearty but short-sighted romp. And later Fleda constructs Owen's words to her when he is explaining the difference between herself and Mona. These cases are actually articulated in dialogue and, because they are quite consistent with what we know of their general characters, they exemplify Fleda's alertness.

Similarly when Fleda and Mrs. Gereth are first at Ricks a maid comes to announce that Owen has arrived. At this point Fleda dramatizes her sense of suspense by momentarily composing the scene as pure theatre:

> 'Poynton - Poynton!' said the morsels of muslin [on the maid's cap]; so that the parlourmaid became on the instant an actress in the drama, and Fleda, assuming pusillanimously that she herself was only a spectator, looked across the footlights at the exponent of the principal part. (pp.86-87)

Fleda organizes the scene in this way because Mrs. Gereth has just removed the spoils to Ricks and the girl is agog to see what will happen next. It is only a brief effect and yet shot through with irony because Fleda later imagines herself as the heroine in a private romantic drama where she and Owen are married. Partly from this wishful dream and partly from her rigid sense of honour comes a line of vocabulary comprising such terms as 'danger', 'betrayal', etc. which provides a further strand in the novel's drama.

Since Fleda is one of our main means of access to Mrs. Gereth ('reflected' through her) it is fitting also that she should articulate the disastrous

effects which the removal of the spoils will have:

> The mind's eye could indeed see Mrs. Gereth only in her thick, coloured air; it took all the light of her treasures to make her concrete and distinct. She loomed for a moment, in any mere house, gaunt and unnatural, then she vanished as if she had suddenly sunk into a quicksand. (pp.155-156)

(The New York text reads '...mere house of compartments and angles,...').

Once again we have returned to the language of pigments and composition, and Fleda's impression simply clarifies the implication already latent in the description of Poynton - that Mrs. Gereth depends on that place for her very existence. There is a comic grotesque element in this passage from the mannered rhetoric but Fleda registers the impression without recognizing its comic aspect.

In these instances Fleda imitates the techniques of the narrator himself, just as in many cases their insights overlap. Her interest in her situation is frequently so detached that she seems to be a spectator watching herself, as well as her surrounding circumstances. Thus, as T.G. Hunt notes, 'her sensitivity and perception allow James almost complete freedom of description and analysis while maintaining this attitude'.[25] By making Fleda's method of scrutiny similar to his own James has in effect retained many of the prerogatives which he seems to have abandoned by making her a reflector.

Throughout The Spoils the relation between Fleda and the narrator is constantly shifting. The whole narrative texture of The Spoils is in fact extremely intricate and a clear example of this can be seen at the conclusion of Chapter 12. Fleda is being pushed at Owen more and more strongly by Mrs. Gereth, and both are waiting for an announcement in the newspaper that his engagement is off. James summarizes Fleda's sense of being forced to act as if she were chasing Owen ('lending herself to this low appearance'); then he turns to metaphors of siege diplomacy to express her role as go-between. This is followed by direct narrative summary ('Mrs. Gereth every morning looked publicly into The Morning Post...') and a passage from Mrs. Gereth's point of view, accusing Fleda of being too passive. The perspective then reverts to Fleda's by way of more direct narrative comment ('Fleda was not only a brilliant

creature, but she heard herself commended in these days for attractions new and strange'). Finally her impression of being beautified for Owen's benefit concludes thus:

> She had the sense not only of being advertised and offered, but of being counselled, enlightened, initiated in ways she scarcely understood - arts obscure even to a poor girl who had had, in good society and motherless poverty, to look straight at realities and fill out blanks. (p.149)

Here the phrases in parenthesis demonstrate the narrator drawing out Fleda's thoughts by explanatory comment. He briefly stresses her sexual ignorance and reminds the reader of her early background, but in a tone which is humorous and tinged with irony. There is no attempt to make Fleda seem a pathetic or deprived figure.

In this section and throughout The Spoils the narrator weaves in and out of Mrs. Gereth's and Fleda's perspectives, clarifying and adding comment but always briefly. These constant shifts force the reader to see different sides of the central situation and, even in the sections of summary or analysis, they retain some quality of dialogue. In the section discussed above it is as if Fleda complained to Mrs. Gereth, who in turn answered her; and then Fleda expressed her bewilderment at how she is being treated. If there is a continuity between the three perspectives, the various elements of narrative also merge into one fluid process. Generally description, analysis, comment, etc. blur into each other in The Spoils giving the narrative a very unified texture. This technique has been summarized by Kenneth Graham as follows:

> It [The Spoils] is an extraordinary mixture of meditative authorial monologue and dramatized action and dialogue, both of the latter being nevertheless essentially within the former, and never entirely detached from that one presiding, intelligent voice - though detached enough for variety and dramatic conviction.[26]

The continuity which James achieved in The Spoils was not possible in The Other House since there he had to flesh out an already existing play. The narrator there comments on the action from the wings, as it were. In The Spoils however the narrator very often stands closely behind Fleda in her efforts to work out her situation, thereby giving a new effect of intimacy.

The following lines are typical of this process. Fleda is now suspecting that Owen loves her and tries to smother her pleasure by tortuous rationalization:

> Even in the ardour of her meditation Fleda remained in sight of the truth that it would be an odd result of her magnanimity to prevent her friend's shaking off a woman he disliked. If he didn't dislike Mona what was the matter with him? And if he did, Fleda asked, what was the matter with her own silly self? (pp.114-115)

Here the narrator hints ironically that Fleda is in danger of being carried away by her own tendency towards meditation, and gradually shifts the rhetoric from comment towards direct representation of her thoughts.

At the opening of his study of modern fiction, The Twentieth-Century Novel, Joseph Warren Beach quotes the following lines (slightly abbreviated) from Barchester Towers which make an instructive comparison with The Spoils. They describe Mr. Arabin's feelings when he learns that Eleanor Bold is probably going to marry Obadiah Slope, a sycophantic fellow-clergyman. Up to that point Mr. Arabin had never thought of her as wife for himself, and even then did not do so

> ...but he experienced an inward indefinable feeling of deep regret, a gnawing sorrow, an unconquerable depression of spirits, and also a species of self-abasement, that he - he, Mr. Arabin - had not done something to prevent that other he, that vile he, whom he so thoroughly despised, from carrying off this sweet prize.[27]

Beach patronizingly admits that this passage is 'precise, succinct, orderly, complete' but then goes on to state: 'it seems an empty and perfunctory substitute for the real thing. It is as arid and superficial as an algebraic formula'.[28] His argument is that Trollope is deficient in imagination because he 'talks about' his characters instead of dramatizing their feelings. Beach's study is one of the most extreme (and cogent) statements of the belief that fiction should be objective and dramatic; and his theoretical vocabulary and standpoint both grow out of a study of James's fiction. Basically Beach sees the presence of a narrator as incompatible with this aim.

It is not possible here to answer all the issues which Beach raises or to do justice to the historical scope of his argument. But it would be possible to turn his criticisms of Trollope against many passages in The Spoils similar

to that quoted. What he does not adequately recognize is that Trollope's rhetoric enacts the slow rise in Mr. Arabin's indignation, just as James's reflects Fleda's inner debate. Both passages deal with love but not passion - love muffled by old habits or by exaggerated scruple. In the Trollope Mr. Arabin's feelings rise through accumulated phrases to a dramatic peak, equally combining love and anger. The passage from The Spoils concludes a lengthy meditation by a contrasting realization that Fleda is acting paradoxically. The final questions to herself, in their simplicity, comically undermine her earlier complex syntax. And in both passages we see rhetorical summary shading into enactment.

If we take Barchester Towers as one of the classic examples of the Victorian 'omniscient' author convention, the similarity between the two passages suggests that despite his references to theatrical technique, James is still retaining some traditional uses of the narrator in The Spoils. By keeping to the third-person he still holds the final authority and one of the main differences in practice between the narrators of The Spoils and Barchester Towers is that the former maintains a more thorough and consistent intimacy with the main character. The above comparison also shows the total inadequacy of a crude opposition between 'talking about' a character and dramatizing his thoughts, because the rhetoric of description can contain a strong element of drama within itself.

James also retained other traditional functions of the narrator in The Spoils. He uses the 'referential narrative' he professed to despise in giving the background to the central dispute;[29] he directly explains Mrs. Gereth's character and - as will be seen - directly comments on Fleda, whether to criticize or to explain. He objectively describes Fleda's father (in Chapter 13) without recourse to any character-perspective. He inserts the traditional comments to mark off developments in the narrative. And finally he introduces Fleda to the reader directly as 'that member of the party in whose intenser consciousness we shall most profitably seek a reflexion of the little drama with which we are concerned' (pp.8-9), thereby summarizing his fictional method within the narrative itself.

(iv)

One source of comedy in The Spoils is the difference between Fleda's perspective and that established by James through the narrator. Although at times these overlap and have concerns in common, nevertheless James maintains a definite (if not constant) reserve towards her view of events. Critics like A.W. Bellringer rule out any possible perspective other than Fleda's but in fact James sometimes makes the most overt comments within the narrative that Fleda is self-deceived.

In his study of Jamesian irony J.A. Clair has usefully defined the necessary conditions for its success as the knowledge required to enable the reader to distinguish between what a character knows and what he thinks he knows.[30] We can apply this directly to Fleda, but before we see her self-deception in action the narrator prepares the way by giving the reader a series of strategic hints.

He emphasizes for instance the poverty of Fleda's experience; as the novel begins she has recently returned from Paris where she has been 'arming herself for the battle of life by a course with an impressionist painter' (p.13). Secondly Fleda has a strong impulse towards melodrama. Unlike the narrator she reacts to events in an excessively emotional way, and is constantly looking for a crisis: '..Fleda had an imagination of a drama, of a "great scene", a thing, somehow, of indignity and misery, of wounds inflicted and received...' (p.59). Within this grand confrontation the position of Owen remains unsatisfactorily vague. Fleda cannot quite locate his role but she knows enough to sense that he wouldn't have the insolent poise of a young man in a novel. These ironic comments on Fleda generally stay within the lines of reference to battle and painting, and also look forward to the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw' and the young telegraphist in In the Cage. Both see their situations in comparable melodramatic terms.

The narrator is also at pains to point out two further aspects of Fleda's character - her unwillingness to admit to herself that she loves Owen; and

her inability to take any positive action. So when she is considering the possibility of Mona and Owen separating she does not face directly the personal benefit she could gain from this, even though it affects her thoughts ('This was a calculation that Fleda wouldn't have committed to paper, but it affected the total of her sentiments' - p.116). Or earlier, when first confronted by a conflict of loyalties between Owen and his mother, Fleda makes no effort to find a solution:

> She dodged and dreamed and romanced away the time. Instead of inventing a remedy or a compromise, instead of preparing a plan by which a scandal might be averted, she gave herself, in her sentient solitude, up to a mere fairy-tale, up to the very taste of the beautiful peace she would have scattered on the air if only something might have been that could never have been. (p.47)
> (The New York text reads '...dreamed and fabled and trifled away...'; and '...in her sacred solitude...').

Here we have quite unequivocal criticism of Fleda. She evades decisions and even facing up to the actual state of things. James glances at her indulgent love of privacy (in the New York text, her 'sacred solitude') and indeed makes his comment as rhetorically obtrusive as possible by accumulating so many verbs in the initial sentence.

Broadly speaking such passages occur more frequently in the first half of the novel and alert the reader to possible discrepancies which might occur in the dialogue-scenes, between Fleda's perspective and a more objective one. Here, as throughout the bulk of the novel, the narrator functions as a voice which goes beyond straight-forward description. He constantly hints at value-judgements without crudely 'categorizing' characters and without claiming any special knowledge. His <u>tone</u> however carries great weight and authority.

Several critics have noted discrepancies between what Fleda sees and what the reader sees but the most thorough examination of them has been made by R.C. McLean.[31] Through a close reading of the four meetings between herself and Owen he shows how Fleda constantly reads more into words and events than they actually warrant, and almost always colours them in a way which is romantically flattering to her. Not only does McLean's argument contradict James's apparent intentions but it also brings out an element of situational

comedy in the novel; whereas other critics argue that Fleda is a monster of egotism as if a moral evaluation of her character was identical with a criticism of the novel.[32] In the scene where Owen and Fleda walk into Hyde Park (the second half of Chapter 6) James uses the fluidity of perspective in order to understate Fleda's arbitrary assumptions. By moving rapidly from description ('Even in the Park the autumn air was thick') to reported thought ('He wanted to stay with her - he wanted not to leave her'), James deliberately gives the latter a spurious authority. Owen's 'approaches' to Fleda assume the status of facts unless we follow the inflexions of perspective very carefully.

In fact in this particular scene Fleda emerges as tremulously romantic and then positively grotesque; and McLean shows what a crucial effect even the variation in pronouns can have in the dialogue. But he assumes that James's perspective towards Fleda is constant - ironic throughout the novel. This is not the case. It shifts as does the novel's subject. The narrator becomes more solicitous towards Fleda as her relationship with Owen replaces the question of what will happen to the spoils.

In contrast with McLean, P.L. Greene has argued that the fact that James moves in and out of Fleda's perspective, or - as he rather dramatically puts it - 'violates' her consciousness, gives her authority and renders her reliable:

> ...the implied author of The Spoils is totally committed to the reliability of Fleda Vetch and...Fleda's actions, including her secrets and deceptions, are supported by the author as serving a heroic purpose.[33]

Greene's argument is influenced by a desire not to contradict James's apparent intentions, but significantly he infers Fleda's reliability by James's closing of the distance between her and the narrator's perspective. And he supports this position by reference to Wayne C. Booth's proposition that the deeper we go into the mind of a central character the more unreliability we are prepared to accept.[34]

There are two weaknesses here. Firstly it is impossible to see how Greene could take passages such as that quoted above as an endorsement of Fleda's

thoughts. The irony is far too direct. And secondly we do not see deeply into Fleda's psychology. Her love for Owen grows just beneath the level of her conscious articulation and then comes out into the open. It could hardly be described as subconscious, and beyond that we do not see any other of Fleda's concealed desires. Once again Greene discusses the overall perspective as if it were constant.

We have then two contradictory arguments which seem irreconcilable. Either Fleda's self-deception is dramatized ironically by James or he underwrites her heroism by controlling the perspective. Both positions bring out important formal aspects of the novel but can hardly both be tenable. One way out of this impasse can be found if we examine the different kinds of language which the narrator uses.

(v)

James underlines the comic aspects of the dispute over the spoils by using several lines of imagery. One of these is of siege and battle. He compares Mrs. Gereth to a latter-day Helen of Troy in the preface and the narrator takes this up within the novel by depicting Mona and Owen as barbarians.[35] Owen's servants are his 'myrmidons' and yet the comparison is patently absurd because it would be difficult to imagine anyone less like Achilles than Owen.

This line of battle imagery spreads in two directions; to Fleda who is caught between two figurative armies and is desperately trying to avoid taking sides. It shades into her own sense of the melodramatic also because the battle never actually materializes. In the other direction we see Mrs. Gereth as a plunderer. The spoils are constantly compared to booty, as here where Fleda is imagining herself in her companion's position:

> She would have returned from her campaign with her baggage-train and her loot, and the palace would unbar its shutters and the morning flash back from its halls. (p.156)

Such comparisons contrast violently with the actual events. They are not glamorous and remind the reader of the materialistic origins of the dispute. The spoils are after all only things. And so, as M.E. Hartsock points out, the result is mock-heroic.[36]

Another important line of imagery which the narrator introduces is that of religion. Poynton is constantly compared to the temple of a private cult of which Mrs. Gereth is the high priestess. Fleda undergoes her initiation, is accepted as a devotee and then later is promoted to a priestess herself. But Fleda diverts the religious references to apply them to Owen; she feels she has 'profaned' his mystery by trying to come between himself and Mona. And finally, when she realizes she has lost everything she falls back on Mrs. Gereth, accepting the role the other has prepared for her and accepting also the narrator's metaphor: 'She equally, she felt, was of the religion, and like any other of the passionately pious she could worship now even in the desert.' (p.252).

These figurative continuities constantly shade into others, and imply different attitudes to the main situation. The religious comparisons stress Mrs. Gereth's rigour, just as comparisons between the two women and a judge and accused underline Fleda's guilt-feelings and rebound on Mrs. Gereth since she is trying to circumvent the law of inheritance. The cumulative effect is comic and indeed throughout the novel the narrator displays an exuberant inventiveness in selecting astonishingly diverse metaphors which all tend to have an element of rhetorical excess about them. Thus Fleda is compared to a dancing gypsy when Mrs. Gereth is trying to force her to pursue Owen; here the main contrast is between the glamour of the figure and Fleda's actual discomfort and hesitancy. Or again Mrs. Gereth's abandonment of the spoils is likened to an amputation:

> Her leg had come off - she had now begun to stump along with the lovely wooden substitute; she would stump for life, and what her young friend was to come and admire was the beauty of her movement and the noise she made about the house. (p.74)

In the absence of very much sustained description these metaphors stand out all the more, here as a grotesquely physical rendering of a feeling of loss. And at times the sequence of images can be extremely rapid. At one point, within 30 lines, Mrs. Gereth is compared variously to Marie Antoinette, a tropical bird and a female warrior; and Fleda to the custodian of a museum. Because they are generally hyperbolic they build up an ironic sense of the narrator expending energy on material which will not support it.

In some of the revisions he made for the New York Edition, James strengthened many of these metaphors, transforming unclear or abstract expressions. Thus when Fleda is speculating on the possibility of taking care of Poynton for Owen and his wife, she imagines herself as

> ...a custodian who was a walking catalogue and who understood beyond any one in England the hygiene and temperament of rare pieces. (p.156)

In the New York text this becomes:

> a custodian equal to a walking catalogue, a custodian versed beyond any one anywhere in the mysteries of ministration to rare pieces.[37]

Here the awkward personification of the spoils has been removed and James retains the museum image while tying it in closely with the hieratic notion of a rare cult. Such changes strengthen existing patterns of imagery but do not, as S.P. Rosenbaum points out, add new ones.[38]

Irony likewise dominates the sequence of references to illicit love and rape between Fleda and Owen, as Arnold Edelstein has pointed out.[39] When Fleda spends time alone with Owen in London she feels 'as frightened as some thoughtless girl who finds herself the object of an overture from a married man' (p.71). Later she sentimentally pictures Owen as a glamorous peasant and sees him as a personification of 'all potent nature' and at the beginning of their love-scene imagines herself as (morally) stripped naked:

> He had cleared the high wall at a bound; they were together without a veil. She had not a shred of a secret left... (p.201)

One way in which we can rationalize this vocabulary is to suggest that James is once again satirizing Fleda's desire for Owen and the theatrical way in

which she tries to stifle it. But the tone of the above passage is not ironic. Of this scene A.W. Bellringer stated that 'there is a complete absence of qualification from the author'.[40] More seriously these references suggest that Fleda's feelings for Owen are a mixture of desire and fear (she speaks in the love-scene of his approach being an 'attack'); and that suggests by implication that her renunciation of Owen is a rationalization of these fears. It should however be emphasized that the references to Fleda's submission and 'fall' to Owen only operate on the level of suggestion. But this suggestion runs against taking her moral scruples seriously - which we are clearly intended to do.

The bulk of the narrator's language, as I have been suggesting, is controlled, witty and vivid; but in the love-scene we find an example of quite a different style. When Fleda and Owen first embrace the sentences are short and dramatic; the metaphors express the surge of pent-up emotion. But then in the middle of scene James suddenly veers into sentimentality:

> He clasped his hands before her as he might have clasped them at an altar;...He assisted this effort [by Fleda to regain her composure], soothing her into a seat with a touch as light as if she had been really something sacred. (p.201)

In the absence of the narrator's qualifying voice the two characters fall into the stylized gestures of melodrama. As W.B. Stein comments, here Owen 'becomes an actor in Fleda's illusionary drama of chivalry'.[41] He plays his part with a delicacy that is quite out of character and the metaphors which earlier had been used with ironic purpose here appear quite solemn, with a disastrous loss of authenticity.

In fact whenever the narrator is insisting on Fleda's moral status his language loses its hard edge and becomes vague and insistent. So during one of Fleda's conversations with Owen she is described as follows: 'She was wound up to such a height that there might be a light in her pale, fine little face....' (p.105). James is attempting to give Fleda a pseudo-religious status and his constant references to her taste as being 'sublime' and 'fine', as well as to her 'heroism' are purely adjectival. They gather no force because they

are incapable of resisting the accumulated ironic weight of the narrator's other idiom. And after all the narrator does justice to Fleda's qualities of loyalty, etc. and offsets Mrs. Gereth's criticisms of her by his satire.

The pivotal issue in this strand of The Spoils is that James is attempting to demonstrate Fleda's love for Owen in peculiarly selfless terms. There is even an awkwardness in the narrator's summary of her proposed action:

> Of a different manner of loving she was herself ready to give an instance, an instance of which the beauty indeed would not be generally known. It would not perhaps if revealed be generally understood.... (p.114)

The narrator is rather defensive here and chary of spelling out exactly why Fleda's act would be 'beautiful'. The root cause of all this awkwardness lies in James's desire not to make the relationship between Fleda and Owen conventionally romantic. This, he stated in his notebooks, would be 'banal'.[42] And in fact his insistence on Fleda's fineness in the novel echoes the vocabulary of the notebooks:

> The fineness is the fineness of Fleda....Fleda's aveux are all qualified - saddened and refined, and made beautiful, by the sense of the IMPOSSIBLE....[43]

There is then an unresolved contradiction between two quite different types of rhetoric from the narrator of The Spoils. One idiom is exuberant and guiding the reader to view the novel's central situation from different angles. This ironic voice undermines for instance the materialistic notion of possession which all the characters have except Fleda. But the other voice, lacking the quality of irony, insists on an alternative value (selfless loyalty) instead of merely implying it. The result is that The Spoils ultimately lacks unity despite its closely woven texture, and this grows out of a contradiction within the voice of the narrator.

(vi)

In Volume 10 of the New York Edition, James included one short story ('The Chaperon') and one nouvelle ('A London Life') with The Spoils because they were all three reflected through the consciousness of 'very young women, ...affected with a certain high lucidity'.[44] A brief comparison between these tales and The Spoils shows, in conclusion how varied can be James's control over the narrative forms.

In the preface his over-riding concern is with structure and reflecting consciousness, and he expresses his pride in 'The Chaperon' (1891) because it is consistently presented through Rose Tramore.[45] She is the daughter of a woman who has fallen into social disgrace because she was involved in a divorce. After years in the wilderness Rose undertakes (successfully) to bring her mother back into favour and in the process becomes her chaperon. In other words the tale turns partly on the reversed situation between chaperon and ward. But there is a second interest growing out of the narrative voice itself. The narrator throughout shows an interest in social types and the politics of regaining society's acceptance. He shows, in other words, a broader knowledge of society than does Rose whose experience of its procedures is, as we might expect, limited. This difference underlines the difficulty of her action since it is made with such imperfect knowledge.

But there is far greater divergence between the narrator and heroine in 'A London Life' (1888). Laura Wing, a young American girl, has come to England to visit her married sister Selena. She has only been there a short time before she discovers that her sister is having an affair and that a divorce is pending. Her sympathies swing to the husband and then back to Selena when Laura discovers that he too seems to be having an affair. The situation is thus similar in some respects to that of The Spoils. Like Fleda, Laura is really an outsider caught in the middle of a distressing situation which is beyond her control and where she is enlisted as a go-between. Once again we see a difference between the narrator's social awareness and that of Laura.

For instance, in describing her interest in museums we are told:

> Besides her idea that such places were sources of knowledge (it is to be feared that the poor girl's notions of knowledge were at once conventional and crude) they were also occasions for detachment, an escape from worrying thoughts.[46]

The aside reinforces many other hints James makes about the girl's limited experience and, in the light of the whole tale, Laura's desire for escape also comes to mean that she constantly tries to evade the truth of her sister's situation.

The critical edge in the passage above is clear enough and comes directly from the narrator since Laura shows a total incapacity for self-criticism. Once again we would not suspect this ironic interplay between narrator and 'heroine' from James's comments on the tale in his preface. There Laura is described as a 'candid outsider' who measures the social values revealed in the tale.[47] James's tone is not as commendatory as it is when he is describing Fleda, but favourable nonetheless, as if Laura represented qualities of freshness and honesty.

In the tale this is not so. Laura is too ignorant of English society to act as a narrative focus and the tale enacts her mounting hysteria as she gropes for understanding and at the same time paradoxically tries to shut her eyes to the immorality around her. Her language gradually diverges from that of the narrator and consists almost entirely of melodramatic vocabulary such as 'ghastly', 'hideous' and 'horrors'. She constantly imagines that a violent catastrophe will take place, totally underestimating the capacity of social forms to absorb shock. And she sees her sister's behaviour as evil and horrifying, whereas the narrator's calm understatements imply that it is immoral perhaps, but certainly not unusual. Laura's reactions are constantly exaggerated but, as Tony Tanner has noted,

> It is not that Laura Wing is wrong as to her facts....but rather that she is excessive as to her response to the facts, misguided as to the light she sees them in.[48]

The narrator, by his implicit acceptance of their kind of social behaviour, moves closer morally to Selena and her husband than to Laura herself. And his frequent critical comments reinforce their charges that Laura is a prig and a hypocrite. Her evasiveness and ignorance thus offset her hypersensitive reactions and the climax of the tale comes as no surprise - Laura suffers a nervous collapse and then leaves the country. Indeed at times she appears so ridiculous and unpleasant that James interrupts the narrative to plead for her. Thus soon after she discovers her sister's affair she deliberately puts off making any decision:

> She drifted on, shutting her eyes, averting her head and, as it seemed to herself, hardening her heart. This admission will doubtless suggest to the reader that she was a weak inconsequent, spasmodic young person, with a standard not really, or at any rate not continuously, high; and I have no desire that she shall appear anything but what she was. It must even be related of her that since she could not escape and live in lodgings and paint fans (there were reasons why this combination was impossible) she determined to try and be happy in the given circumstances - to float in shallow, turbid water.[49]

Unlike the similar interruptions where James explains Isabel Archer and the Countess Eugenia,[50] this could hardly be called a defence at all. Here James does nothing to mitigate the weakness evident in Laura's inaction and even adds a gratuitous ironic gibe at her pathetic ideal under the traditional guise of narrative honesty ('it must even be related...'). Unlike The Spoils where James softens the 'common-sense' criticisms levelled at Fleda by Mrs. Gereth, in 'A London Life' the narrative voice reinforces the mocking effect of events and highlights the personal weaknesses of the central character.

Chapter 4

What Maisie Knew

(i)

When What Maisie Knew was published in 1897 it brought forth complimentary reviews. One of these in the Academy praised its psychological skill and summarized its method thus:

> You follow the story through the mind of Maisie; you see and hear only what Maisie saw and heard; and yet such is the combined humour and pathos of the presentment, you know so much more than Maisie could possibly know...[1]

Here we have stated, though in a vague way, an all-important distinction in the novel's structure: namely, that between what Maisie experiences and what the reader knows. This difference is fundamental to an understanding of the novel and can be explained to a large extent through the nature of the narrator's voice.

Several critics have noted this distinction, but without going into its exact source. J.A. Hynes has treated the novel's main problem in showing not what Maisie knows but what her impressions add up to; while Glauco Cambon has argued that we see the action through Maisie's wonderment although there is an objectified writer's voice interposed between her and the reader. J.W. Gargano has rephrased basically the same notion when he states that the reader must, with James's help, supply the normative terms which Maisie lacks. And J.C. McCloskey finds that James is the 'conductor of the narrative', and because he intrudes so often the novel is not truly psychological.[2] In general these and other critics give only a perfunctory recognition to the presence of a guiding narrative voice and of the two exceptions (A.E. Dyson and Rosemary Sweetaple) only Dyson discusses the general importance for the novel of the narrator's humour.[3]

James himself recognized an important function of the narrator in the preface to Maisie where he admitted that without his presence the action would have gaps and would perhaps lack intelligibility. Accordingly he decided to present the narrative with Maisie as a witness rather than a reflector. This

in turn would put both reader and narrator in basically similar positions. They too would be witnesses but simply more expert ones than Maisie.[4] But then there was a further problem - a child's lack of vocabulary. So instead of attempting to let Maisie speak for herself James reserved for the narrator the full power of articulation:

> Maisie's terms accordingly play their part - since her simple conclusions quite depend on them; but our own commentary constantly attends and amplifies. This it is that on occasion, doubtless, seems to represent us as going so 'behind' the facts of her spectacle as to exaggerate the activity of her relation to them.[5]

This statement is quite in keeping with James's practice in The Other House and The Spoils, since he claims a superior awareness but not privileged knowledge. The narrator is present in order to clarify and explain what Maisie experiences. And when in 1899 James wrote that he went behind 'singly' in this novel he meant that he limited himself to access to her mind only, as part of this explanatory procedure.[6] In the preface then, he distinguished between Maisie's experiences and the narrator's commentary on them as well as between her vocabulary and the narrator's.

During the detailed composition of Maisie in the notebooks - with The Spoils the most thorough plan of any of James's novels - he made no mention of the narrator. This was partly because he was constructing the novel - again like The Spoils - in terms of scene. As such they are concerned largely with development and plot. But he does give some indication of the structural role to be played by Maisie. So at several points he insists that she must be the witness of all the action: 'EVERYTHING TAKES PLACE BEFORE MAISIE' and 'Everything is formulated and formulatable to the child'.[7] In view of the importance of the question how much does Maisie actually know, it is important to stress that James is viewing her in structural not moral terms here. She will be the 'ironic centre' or the mirror of the action reflecting it and creating its symmetry. Inevitably this means that she can only play a passive part in the novel. But her compositional value emerges in the vividness with which she sees things, as James acknowledged in the preface.[8] Because she is a child

her vision is both fresh and clear and so she gives James a way of rendering her situation.

The necessary explanations of Maisie's experience could pose a threat to the novel's realism and James recognizes as much at the end of the passage quoted. He glances at the objection that he is imputing too much to Maisie, crediting her with too much intelligence; but then dismisses it by stating that the difference between her perceptions and the reader's understanding is 'but of a shade'. This is rather disingenuous of James because in fact that difference generates most of the novel's comedy. And secondly, the problem of his 'over-working' Maisie's interpretation of her situation is one which he by no means managed to avoid.

(ii)

Like The Other House and The Spoils, What Maisie Knew opens with a prefatory section which establishes a perspective over a large part of the novel. But this introduction differs significantly from the earlier novels in referring outward to society and in being bitingly satirical.

The divorce proceedings are surveyed, apparently in a non-committal way, as if the narrator was a witness himself or even a member of the Faranges' social set. His account stresses the parents' preoccupation with money and casually mentions that it was impossible to find a third party (a friend or relative) who could take care of Maisie. Right from the start the narrator adopts a method of under-statement. He does not spell out the degraded family life the Faranges must lead or the dubious nature of their friends because the assumption is that this is not necessary. In other words he is crediting the reader with enough moral and social intelligence to draw the conclusions which he is implying. So, when in the preface James refers to 'our own commentary',

he is here including the reader's silent commentary, his inferences which the narrator raises but does not actually make.

We can see this procedure at work in the very language used to describe Maisie's situation:

> She was abandoned to her fate. 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.[9]

As with all James's fiction in the late 1890's, the narrator professes to be interpreting appearances, and summarizing his interpretation in a concrete metaphor. But we have to follow the tone of this interpretation very carefully because it is shot through with ironies. Maisie's fate is apparent to any spectator except, by implication, her parents who seem to be unconscious of how blatantly cynical their use of her is. And yet at no point does the narrator invite the reader to pity Maisie. He makes no explicit statement of sympathy for her beyond shaking his head over the 'lamentable fact' of her position. It is only the metaphor which mitigates the comparative austerity of his description for there we see the violence and possible danger in her position - delicate beauty harshly juxtaposed with corrosion.

Throughout the novel the narrator tends to direct irony against those who exploit Maisie rather than linger over the pathos of her situation. Wayne Booth has pointed out how irony replaces pity as the dominant feeling in the course of James's composition of the novel.[10] Although in his notebook entry for August 26th, 1893 James was still trying to balance the ironic interest with the pathetic, his rejection of the latter was latent really in the original idea of the novel where he wanted the child to be a 'source of dramatic situations'.[11] Similarly in the preface James rejected the sadness of Maisie's plight as a main source of interest and stated that instead he was fascinated by the complicating and transforming effects she would have on a sordid situation.[12] The ironies in the passage quoted above then lead us beyond Maisie herself to the behaviour of those around her, and secondarily to their

whole society. This is why W.S. Worden is largely correct when he states that:

> The conflict here is almost wholly in the way of external action. There is little suggestion of any arduous inner contest between love and right in Sir Claude, Maisie, or Mrs. Wix.[13]

If the conflict is external, it does not of course imply that Maisie's inner life does not develop.

James concludes the introduction with a brief account of how 'society' (by which he means the society of the Faranges) received the divorce. In this way he summarizes the hinterland of vulgarity and superficiality which lies behind the immediate action of the novel. Once again the narrator adopts the persona of a member of that social group in order to satirize its assumptions and values. The divorce and conflict between Maisie's parents is 'jolly' in the sense that it gives people something to talk about over their tea, and the narrator professes mock-sympathy for 'poor Ida' (Maisie's mother) because she has hardly any money left, although this is the end result of her constant extravagance. In the introduction and through the first half of the novel James makes use of this traditional ironic stragegy - of stating one thing and really implying its opposite. The general quality which he is attacking in the Faranges is their moral blindness.

James had already commented on the corruption of the English upper class in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton. The Dilke divorce case of 1886 was the immediate cause but James took his criticisms much further:

> The condition of that body [the upper class] seems to me to be in many ways very much the same rotten and collapsible one as that of the French aristocracy before the revolution - minus clerness and conversation.[14]

They are, he states, grossly materialistic and this is another of the failings of the people who surround Maisie: they constantly try to replace affection or moral obligations with money. The most direct and biting sarcasm from the narrator comes when, at Folkestone, her mother tries to buy her way out of Maisie's life. Maisie puts an abrupt stop to her pretentious declarations of concern by mentioning one of her discarded lovers. This spoils Ida's pose,

for that is all her fine words amount to:

> She turned this way and that in the predicament she had sought and from which she could neither retreat with grace nor emerge with credit: she draped herself in the tatters of her impudence, postured to her utmost before the last little triangle of cracked glass to which so many fractures had reduced the polished plate of filial superstition. (p.182)

This passage is unique in expressing such strong sarcasm. And in it the narrator brings together the physical details of her dress and manner to transform them into metaphors for her cynical vanity. Ida seems like a grotesquely self-regarding actress, performing purely for her own benefit. Her moral emptiness comes out in her 'tatters' (contrasting with her actual dress) and in the reduction of motherly feeling to a mere fragmentary 'superstition'. One tangible expression of her cynicism is the money which she almost offers Maisie, thereby exactly complementing the narrator's description of her.

Such an example demonstrates that C.O. Kaston is only partly correct to argue that 'the various voices of society in Maisie forge a species of talk remote from the work's sources of feeling'.[15] If by 'voices of society' he means the voices of the other characters then his statement can stand. If however he includes the narrator's voice within his category then it cannot, since it represents a powerful source of irony and indignation, especially throughout the first half of the novel.

So great is the narrator's irony against Maisie's parents and governesses that we frequently perceive two totally different interpretations of the same event without losing any clarity at all. So when Miss Overmore, a beautiful but impoverished 'lady', is hired by Mrs. Farange as Maisie's governess, a proviso of her post is that she should not see Maisie's father. However, as she puts it, she conceives such a deep affection for her charge that she finally comes to his house. Because the prevailing tone of the narrator has been so consistently ironic it only required the slightest hints to show that she is lying and in fact is attracted to Beale Farange. So she explains her reasons 'frankly' to Maisie and then is described as a 'martyr' to her affection (p.17). Even the literal summarizing of her words by the narrator

makes them seem rehearsed and - what they in fact are - a blatant pretext.

Irony then is one of the main characteristics of the narrator's voice, and behind it lies a deep-rooted resistance to the casual immorality and cynicism in the novel's society. In his preface to The Lesson of the Master James explained that irony was constructive because it implies alternative values to those under attack, and for it to be worth-while these alternatives must be better:

> How can one consent to make a picture of the preponderant futilities and vulgarities and miseries of life without the impulse to exhibit as well from time to time, in its place, some fine example of the reaction, the opposition or the escape?[16]

James is in fact noticeably vague here about what the alternatives might be; they might even involve evasion. But at any rate we can take the irony in Maisie as a prolonged gesture of criticism against a society where even the fundamental values of honesty, loyalty, affection, etc. seem to be totally absent.

If the narrator places himself at times within this society it is an ironic stance which associates him by implication with Maisie's fate. Until she becomes fond of Sir Claude she seems alone. The narrator is evidently the only one who can see the cynicism of others in its true light, but, because he is not a character within the fiction, he can only come to her rescue through the tone of his voice. So when he summarizes Maisie's perplexity at her strange situation, he conveys a puzzlement which is comic rather than moving:

> She...recognized the hour when - the phrase for it came back to her from Mrs. Beale - with two fathers, two mothers and two homes, six protections in all, she shouldn't know 'wherever' to go (p.82).

This realization does not seriously distrust either Maisie or the reader and this is because the narrator's absolute lucidity reduces her plight to a question of numbers and diverts it from pathos into comedy. His voice constantly buttresses Maisie against the possible bad effects of her surrounding circumstances. This is very important for the novel's perspective because Maisie seems extraordinarily vulnerable. It was no doubt to add extra

reassurance to the reader that James included in the opening section the unobtrusive detail that Maisie had inherited a secure regular allowance from a godmother.

Although the narrator constantly hints at meanings which are beyond Maisie's reach, there is a strong continuity between her experience and the kind of language he uses. So when Mrs. Wix tells Maisie stories instead of giving her lessons her conversation takes on a superficial glamour:

> Her conversation was practically an endless narrative, a great garden of romance, with sudden vistas into her own life and gushing fountains of homeliness. These were the parts where they most lingered.(p.23)

These romances have been culled from cheap fiction and put Mrs. Wix into the company of James's other female characters in this period who compensate for limited experience by romantic longing - Fleda Vetch, the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw' and the telegraphist of In the Cage. But more important here is that the narrator takes material from these romances and converts it into a metaphor of Mrs. Wix's emotional indulgence. Maisie actually experiences her gushes again and again when she seizes the child in sudden hugs. The phrase 'garden of romance' also predicts the later scenes (at Earl's Court, in Hyde Park and in France) where Maisie literally does seem to be moving in a romantic idyll.

The verbal texture of the first half of Maisie then contains an intricate and close-knit alternation between the metaphorical and the actual. In order to convey Maisie's sense of confusion or her first tentative efforts to form connections between things the narrator takes the materials of her limited experience (toys, story-books, visits, etc.) and uses them as metaphors for her reaction. Her first parting from Mrs. Wix comes soon after a visit to the dentist and the latter provides an analogy for their separation. Maisie is 'embedded in Mrs. Wix's nature as her tooth had been socketed in her gum' (p.24). This comparison is simple enough to be psychologically realistic. Maisie herself could have made it. And it renders her feelings in terms of immediate

physical sensation. In fact the analogy is rather ambiguous because Maisie's visit to the dentist was painful but necessary (and so perhaps is her parting from Mrs Wix). And secondly it could refer to Mrs. Wix as well as Maisie, since her governess has demonstrated an extreme possessiveness towards the girl from the outset.

Of course Maisie's attempts to understand what goes on around her are halting and very limited at first but they generate most of the novel's comedy. She constantly compares the actions of adults to games but games whose rules are frustratingly obscure to her. But the adults' 'games' are most seriously irresponsible than she realizes. By strategically hinting at the gaps between her knowledge and the real state of things the narrator drains off the possible solemnity which might surround a child in such a position. This is why F.R. Leavis was right to state that the novel's tone and mode were those 'of an extraordinarily high-spirited comedy'.[17] The tone is not constant however and as the satire recedes in the second half of the novel, so does this broad comedy. Lastly, although Maisie compares adult behaviour to games, at times this seems to be literally true, because they change their liaisons with routine frequency and in a compulsive superficial way. The metaphors for Maisie's perception thus point in two directions: inward, to her growing mental faculties; and outward to the actions of those around her. So Peter Coveney misunderstands the nature of the action when he objects that the changes in adult relationships never have adequate psychological motivation.[18] It is faithful to the child's-eye perspective and also true to the nature of the society that there should not be any deep reason for these changes.

At some points the explanations of Maisie's responses become charged with a significance which goes beyond her immediate situation. For instance when she is going to Hyde Park with Sir Claude, Maisie reflects with satisfaction that he (and Mrs. Wix) are the only ones who explain anything to her. But even this brings back memories of past disappointments:

> It all came back - all the plans that always failed, all the rewards and bribes that she was perpetually paying for in advance and perpetually out of pocket by afterwards - the whole great stress to be dealt with introduced her on each occasion afresh to the question of money. (p.113)

Here the carefully balanced rhetoric makes little attempt to enact the process of Maisie's realization. It is much more of a direct comment and, although occasioned by a meeting with Sir Claude, it could apply much more strongly to Maisie's parents. In this particular context it signifies that Maisie always feels somehow 'out of pocket' when she is given promises or explanations. They always seem inadequate. But the references to money set up resonances which extend outwards to the novel's society in general. For its members constantly attempt to replace obligations or emotional transactions by financial ones. Shortly after the Hyde Park scene the American 'countess' buys Maisie off on behalf of her father by giving her a handful of sovereigns, which are then taken from her by Mrs. Beale. These financial and commercial metaphors in this passage extend throughout the first half of the novel, and always carry connotations of cynical calculation and materialism in the characters they refer to.

Since our point of access to this society is through Maisie it follows that her perspective must affect the reality of the characters she encounters. Except in the introduction to the novel the narrator does not supply descriptions which are not mediated through Maisie. But the fact that his ironic and humorous tone shades easily into Maisie's own impressions does not mean that the irony is more important than the psychological realism. The one nourishes the other and enriches the texture of the novel's style, as Walter Isle has noted.[19]

Because Maisie can scarcely understand the adults she meets, her world comes to seem a phantasmagoria of vivid disconnected pictures. Martha Banta has compared this effect with the Alice books but a specific comparison is scarcely necessary.[20] This fantastic quality emerges from the kind of figurative language which the narrator uses and from the speed and fragmentation

of some descriptions. One particularly clear example of this technique comes in Chapter 18. Maisie is being taken to the Earl's Court Exhibition by Mrs. Beale and this comes shortly after their experiment at going to educational lectures together. Both are adventures to Maisie, but the Exhibition gives a visual metaphorical summary of Maisie's experience up to that point. It is composed of side-shows, each one costing a small sum. The narrator carefully underlines the metaphorical importance of these payments ('small coin dropped from her as half-heartedly as answers from bad children to lessons that had not been looked at'). This is no mere rhetorical decoration because the outing will form part of Maisie's education - in more ways than one.

The scene at Earl's Court depends for much of its effect on vivid visual details. Indeed throughout the whole novel there is a constant emphasis on the act of seeing, firstly to take in sense-data and then more and more on the act of perception. So Maisie stops before a side-show (the Flowers of the Forest) which has the brightly coloured surface of a picture-book scene. Mrs. Beale tells her that Sir Claude is not <u>definitely</u> coming which makes Maisie's vision blur with tears which are carefully left un-named:

> ...a remark that caused the child to gaze at the Flowers through a blur in which they become more magnificent, yet oddly more confused, and by which, moreover, confusion was imparted to the aspect of a gentleman who at that moment, in the company of a lady, came out of the brilliant booth. The lady was so brown that Maisie at first took her for one of the Flowers... (p.143)

By sticking to physical facts the narrator understates Maisie's disappointment and also mimes out her shifts in vision. Her momentary rise of tears gives a natural transition from the description of the side-shows to that of the 'gentleman' (who is in fact Maisie's father) and the brown lady (who is his latest mistress). Maisie's vision here defines their reality because they appear to grow out of the exhibits, appear to <u>be</u> exhibits in a sense. Exactly the same thing happens when Maisie's mother disappears into the dusk at the Folkestone hotel, and when Maisie meets other adults. They move rapidly in and out of her vision as if they were bewilderingly unreal and in each case the narrator unobtrusively relates this effect of fantasy to the characters' moral nature.

In the scene at Earl's Court the narrator also emphasizes that Maisie feels as if she had stepped into a romance ('The child had been in thousands of stories - ...but she had never been in such a story as this': p.146). And part of this romance is the way one scene shades rapidly into another. Her father takes Maisie to Mrs. Cuddon's (the brown lady) where once again the narrator makes implicit comment through the visual details of her drawing-room. Everything dazzles Maisie with its meretricious brightness, and, just like at the Exhibition, the objects noted in the description seem strangely unrelated to each other. Similarly when Maisie is finally sent home the short phrases underline the speed of events:

> The next moment they were in the street together, and the next the child was in the cab, with the Countess...quickly taking money from a purse whisked out of a pocket. Her father had vanished....the cab rattled off. Maisie sat there with her hand full of coin (p.164).

Once more connectives are noticeably absent and explanation reduced to a minimum. Maisie is bewildered rather than upset, and reassured by the handful of sovereigns that she is still in the Arabian Nights. But the reader knows better and is well aware of what kind of relationship there is between the Countess (Mrs. Cuddon) and Beale. Just as in The Spoils place reflects a character's nature but what is new in Maisie is the insistent conversion of immorality into grotesque humour.

In scenes such as that just described Maisie functions partly as a mask through which the narrator can caricature the people she meets. Perhaps the most grotesque description in the whole novel is that of the brown lady:

> She literally struck 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. (p.161)

This caricature is only a more extreme form of the technique James uses in The Other House and The Awkward Age since the narrator only claims to be offering a possible interpretation ('might have been') of appearances. But there is a stronger rhetorical flourish here, a more conscious display of comic virtuosity which reduces the woman to a circus animal; and that in turn suggests her corruption, which is beyond the reach of Maisie's understanding.

Similarly when Mr. Perriam, one of Ida Farange's lovers, visits the schoolroom his features are comically displaced so that we receive no visual sense of his person as a whole. He seems to have moustaches over his eyes and his eyes ('these polished little globes') roll around the room as if they were billiard-balls. Billiards is Ida's one undisputed skill and, since Maisie would probably have no way of knowing this, it is the narrator who through this comparison suggests that Perriam is just an appendage of her mother.

This descriptive technique of reducing characters to absurdity probably draws on Dickens, and especially on the early chapters of Oliver Twist and David Copperfield (Mrs. Beale at one point compares Mrs. Wix with Mrs. Micawber). In all three cases a hallucinatory effect of distortion is gained through the child's-eye perspective by focusing on disembodied features which define the characters in question. The main difference between Maisie and Dickens's novels however, is that in the latter the child hero is usually the victim of those he encounters. So their magnified features are both grotesque and full of threat to the child. In Maisie these minor characters never come into close enough contact with the girl to be any danger to her. And the confident rhetorical control which the narrator exercises over them further reassures the reader that they are simply ridiculous.

H.R. Wolf has argued, rather perversely, that this tonal reassurance is just one of the many censoring devices that James uses in order to avoid facing the unpleasantness of what goes on around Maisie, and that the reader never worries about her moral safety because everything is under such firm control.[21] Strictly speaking Wolf is raising two points here. Firstly he suggests that Maisie is protected in various ways from the surrounding corruption. This is certainly true and, as I have been suggesting, the result partly of the narrator's rhetoric. Secondly he seems to suggest that James is evading the corruption around Maisie. But in fact What Maisie Knew has an air of frankness in dealing with promiscuity which James rarely achieves, and this is because it is only important in so far as it impinges on Maisie herself. James was quite

categorical in denying that explicit sexual love was a fit subject for fiction.[22] But on the other hand in the preface to Maisie he firmly rejected the conventional moralism which might surround the portrayal of a child in such sordid circumstances. Instead, resorting to his traditional analogy between the novelist and the 'painter of life', James put forward a different morality - that of seeing, of painting such a situation frankly and honestly, and not hiding behind vague epithets like 'disgusting'.[23] So the emphasis on the visual forms an integral part of the novel's whole moral purpose.

Furthermore Maisie's ignorance and wonderment supplies a further defence for her against the immorality of the adults. This is stressed several times in the preface and made explicit in the novel itself:

> ...the sharpened sense of spectatorship was the child's main support... It gave her often an odd air of being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass.[24] (pp.88-89)

This comment makes it plain that Maisie has enough difficulties trying to understand her own experience without making sense of the behaviour of adults as well. And throughout the first half of the novel the narrator stresses how the connections she does make only carry her a short distance towards understanding. As William Walsh points out, James is far more concerned to capture the absolute, present quality of the girl's limited experience.[25]

Of all the characters who are presented through visual caricature Maisie's parents receive the most extended attention, and the implicit reason for this is that they have shown the most irresponsibility in their treatment of her. Ida is defined by her huge staring eyes, her red hair and the dazzling array of jewelry she wears. When she remarries it literally changes her appearance, a startling effect which Maisie puts down to her being 'in love':

> ...she was able to make allowance for her ladyship's remarkable appearance, her violent splendour, the wonderful colour of her lips and even the hard stare, the stare of some gorgeous idol described in a story-book, that had come into her eyes in consequence of a curious thickening of their already rich circumference. (p.57)

Of course phrases like 'violent splendour' and 'rich circumference' carry us a considerable distance beyond Maisie's reaction since she could not articulate

it in this way. But Ida's actions are just as grotesque as her features. She changes moods at the bat of an eyelid and constantly indulges in sudden physical gestures - whether to clasp Maisie to her ample bosom or to thrust her away. Similarly Beale Farange is defined mainly by his gleaming array of teeth and large glossy beard. Now although these are further examples of composing characters through Maisie, the narrator describes the parents in this way before we begin to see events through Maisie's eyes. Her father appears in the introduction as an ostensibly attractive man:

> Beale Farange had 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 had been trained not to hide and that gave him, in every possible situation, the look of the joy of life. (p.5)

In both Beale and Ida the narrator stresses the element of theatre but because we never see beyond their surface, their costumes seem to cover a void. Particularly ironic here is the suggestion that Beale has a feeling for the 'joy of life' because what this boils down to in practice is promiscuity and then financial dependence on his mistress. The depiction of Maisie's parents then follows on logically from these initial thumb-nail sketches in the introduction, and constantly hints at a notion of performance and of the social or sexual purposes of their dress which Maisie could not even begin to realize.

Although the narrator very rarely makes an overt condemnation of Ida or Beale Farange, his descriptions of them have a tone of finality which rule out the possibility of their even showing real kindness to Maisie. This is not the case with the descriptions of Mrs. Beale or Sir Claude. Both of them are generally attractive. They do not have any grotesque reductive peculiarities of appearance. And so the fact that they escape the narrator's tendency to caricature suggests that they may form a more genuinely affectionate relationship with Maisie. This they both do at times, but not a constant or reliable one. The simple fact that they are physically attractive is important but ultimately guarantees nothing.

The last important character to consider in connexion with the technique of caricature is Maisie's governess, Mrs. Wix. In a recent study of her role,

L.A. Johnson has argued that the narrator performs the function of pointing out that she is more grotesque than any of the other characters realize.[26] But Juliet Mitchell sees in the portrayal of Mrs. Wix 'one of James's nastiest characterizations' because he indulges in ridiculing everything about her.[27] The constant reductive irony which plays around Mrs. Wix is more explicit than towards any other character, but it is not necessarily self-indulgent just for this reason.

From the very beginning, even before he gave her a name, James clearly had in mind a ridiculous character. In the early notebook entries he calls her 'the frump', and when she first appears in the novel James breaks his normal practice of presenting a purely visual portrait and gives a little information about her past life - in particular that she had had a daughter who had been knocked down in the Harrow Road 'by the cruellest of hansoms' and killed (p.20). This information seems merely comic, not because of James's self-indulgence, but because Mrs. Wix keeps thrusting it on Maisie and nowhere shows any capacity for deep feeling.

She too is described through grotesquely individualized details, but each one suggests some weakness in her character. She wears, for instance, a dingy rosette on her neck, hinting at a comically wrong-headed vanity. And above all she wears glasses which correct her sight. Bearing in mind the importance of the notion of seeing in Maisie, these glasses (her 'straighteners' as she calls them) give concrete physical expression to the blinkered conventional standards of morality which she displays later in the novel. James makes his caricature quite unequivocal when she is summarized as being 'passively comical - a person whom people, to make talk lively, described to each other and imitated' (p.21). In the New York Edition this becomes even stronger. Mrs. Wix is 'as droll as a charade or an animal towards the end of the "natural history"'.[28] The revision makes her absurdity all the stronger for being more concrete.

The kind of vocabulary used by the narrator towards Mrs. Wix is full of metaphors - of animals, of attack and defence (as if she was really defending

Maisie from immorality); and he describes her scruples in exactly the same way as her dress. She has a 'dingy decency' just as if her morals were an extension of her clothes, which in a sense they are. And even Mrs. Wix is self-publicizing also:

> Everyone knew the straighteners; everyone knew the diadem and the button, the scallops and satin bands; everyone, though Maisie had never betrayed her, knew even Clara Matilda. (p.21)

This is all under-stated, but the implications are clear. Mrs. Wix is recognizable from her grotesquely inappropriate dress and also from constantly repeating the story of her daughter (Clara Matilda). So when the narrator calls her 'poor Mrs. Wix' his mock-sympathy is actually ironizing her way of parading her misfortune. She even takes this to the extreme of trying to make Maisie a substitute for her lost girl. So the heavily sarcastic rhetoric which the narrator uses towards her is only borne out by her actual behaviour. It is neither excessive nor indulgent.

Commenting on the novel's descriptive detail, Cicely Havely has written that 'what Maisie needs is precisely that solidity of detail with which James describes Mrs. Wix'.[29] This is to misunderstand the effect of the descriptions in the novel. The narrator places Mrs. Wix, morally speaking, by evaluative comments embedded within the physical details of her description. As in most of the novels of this period, the characters are arranged hierarchically, those at the bottom being the most caricatured. Maisie is by implication at the opposite extreme to Mrs. Wix, and anyway her structural role (as a reflector of events) tends to rule out a physical description of her.

In fact, as several critics have noted, Mrs. Wix gains considerably in stature when she reappears in the second half of the novel.[30] The ironic caricaturing comments from the narrator are muted, and she takes a far more positive part in the action. It is she who raises the question of whether Maisie has any moral sense or not, but, not surprisingly, the girl fails to understand the meaning of the term 'moral'. This suggests another reason why James should have been so intent on ridiculing Mrs. Wix's attitudes, apart from her conventionality and hypocrisy. In an early review of Mrs. E. R. Charles's

Winifred Bertram (1866) he had insisted that children should not be made precociously good in fiction.[31] Instead they should be allowed to grow naturally and from their own moral sense. Mrs. Wix comes in for ironic assault because she is constantly interfering with Maisie and reminding her of right or wrong. By contrast it seems to be only the narrator who is capable of disinterested concern for Maisie.

In order to avoid overt moralism about Maisie's treatment the narrator frequently summarizes others' comments on particular events, and in so doing generates a strong element of verbal humour. So when Maisie is separated from Mrs. Wix for the first time, Mrs. Beale (or Miss Overmore as she is at this stage) protests that it is a shame. And Maisie reflects fatalistically that 'there seemed almost to be "shames" connected in one way or another with her migrations' (p.25). This is yet another device for deflecting the pathos into a comic general rule which Maisie half-formulates to herself. But there is a further point to her misunderstanding of the word 'bad' or misapplication of the word 'love'. They are an important comment on the society around her where such terms have become displaced from their moral realities. This is yet another example of the narrator making a veiled comment on the adults through a mistake which is psychologically appropriate to a child of Maisie's age. Again and again in the first half of the novel her mistakes prove to have an element of literal truth about them.

(iii)

So far I have been suggesting that the narrative voice in the first half of What Maisie Knew achieves two main results. Firstly by concentrating on the grotesque aspects of those adults Maisie meets, the narrator reduces her liability to moral or emotional injury from them. And secondly he establishes an ironic perspective which directs the reader towards implications which Maisie

cannot see, and hints at hidden meanings in the scenes presented mainly through dialogue. In this way James, as Rosemary Sweetaple points out, combines two methods - that of dramatic presentation through point of view, and that of 'authorial comment' (by which she means comment through the narrator).[32]

However James's use of the narrator here raises a critical problem, one located by A.E. Dyson in virtually the only extended discussion of the novel's narrator. Dyson argues that the narrator shows a constant sense of amusement, not at Maisie's expense (like some of the adults), but because he enjoys his own absolute lucidity in depicting hidden motives, etc. The narrator shows the pleasure of an artist wrestling with an artefact rather than the tone of the moralist and thereby glosses over the moral issues which the narrative raises in relation to Maisie.[33] The comic tone, in other words, is ultimately evasive. Dyson, like Rosemary Sweetaple, wants to resist the novel's comedy because it seems to be at odds with accepting the seriousness of Maisie's position.[34]

This argument is closely related to one by Paul Fahey where he accuses James of not facing the emotional realities of Maisie's situation. So, instead of having an effect on her (as they realistically ought to do), her experiences only define her essential needs by contrast.[35]

If the narrator's voice established the total perspective these objections would have a lot more weight than they in fact do. But the narrator's humour constantly invites the reader to step back and see Maisie's plight as a whole. It is the logical end result of James's situational interest during the composition of the novel, where he noted that the subject formed a 'melancholy comedy' or an 'ugly little comedy'.[36] The narrative voice does not exclude deep feeling on Maisie's part. It simply understates it and refused to linger over it. And comedy is by no means the only tone the narrator adopts. When Maisie is being fought over in the last scene, between Mrs. Wix and Mrs. Beale, her governess insists that she has brought Maisie's moral sense. But Maisie cannot answer:

> ...as if she were sinking with a slip from a foothold, her arms made a short jerk. What this jerk represented was the spasm within her of something still deeper than a moral sense. She looked at her examiner; she looked at the visitors; she felt the rising of the tears she had kept down at the station. (p.296)

With brilliant economy James translates Maisie's feelings into one physical gesture. And then the narrator follows this up with an explanation which implies that now only he can fully understand her feelings. The other have in their various ways let her down and so deserve their relegation to the anonymity of 'examiner' and 'visitors'. Implicitly the narrator contrasts his concern for Maisie with Mrs. Wix's and James heightened this contrast by adding a further comment after the passage quoted, in the New York Edition ('They had nothing - no, distinctly nothing - to do with her moral sense'). This is one of several places where the narrator suspends his comic tone and depicts Maisie's deep feeling. And even in the early chapters where the comedy is at its broadest, his voice plays against Maisie's actions which are sometimes more moving than his tone would suggest.

Around the middle of What Maisie Knew there is a decisive shift in the texture and concerns of the narrative. After the exits of Maisie's parents the narrator's tone of ironic humour recedes and a much stronger emphasis is placed on interpretation and analysis. Significantly also, there is a marked change in the scenes at Boulogne. There Maisie's sensibility feels to expand and this is rendered visually by the coherence, brightness and sense of space which the pictures of Boulogne contain. Of these Peter Coveney suggests that James is importing an element from his own sensibility and that Maisie's thrills for 'life' are irrelevant.[37] This is however a carping criticism because Maisie's trip to France marks a point in her psychological growth where such a capacity for appreciation is plausible. Of course an unspoken irony behind these descriptions is that Maisie should only feel this sense of release after she has left her parents.

Dyson's argument outlined above bridges both halves of the novel and relates to the portrayal of Maisie in the last chapters. One of the narrator's

main concerns throughout is to make plain Maisie's situation and clearly as her capacity for understanding grows, so their interests converge (since she too is trying to make sense of her situation). From around Chapter 17 onwards the style of her thought and the narrator's idiom tend to overlap and merge so that at times it becomes difficult to identify the voice. The early example of this comes when Sir Claude spends more time with Maisie because his wife is occupied with other men:

> It threw him more and more at last into the schoolroom, where he had plainly begun to recognize that if he was to have the credit of perverting the innocent child he might also at least have the amusement. (p.80)

The tone of this passage suggests that the narrator is attributing these thoughts to someone - but who? It is uncertain who is doing the recognizing; it could be Mrs. Wix, or the reader (as hypothetical observer) or even Maisie, though the latter seems scarcely conceivable. This is an important detail here because Sir Claude forms the close relationship with Maisie of all the adults and never seems as cynical as this description suggests.

The most noticeable result of the interest shifting towards analysis is an increase in the complexity of the syntax. So for instance we learn of Mrs. Beale's agitation when her relationship with Sir Claude does not run smoothly:

> ...she wept now with passion, professing loudly that it did her good and saying remarkable things to the child, for whom the occasion was an equal benefit, an addition to all the fine reasons stored up for not making anything worse. It somehow hadn't made anything worse, Maisie felt, for her to have told Mrs. Beale what she had not told Sir Claude, inasmuch as the greatest strain, to her sense, was between Sir Claude and Sir Claude's wife, and his wife was just what Mrs. Beale was unfortunately not. (pp.132-3)

This is the free indirect speech which James came to use more and more from 1897 onwards, whereby a character's mental processes are dovetailed into the narrator's explanations of them. Here the narrator insists that Maisie is doing the analyzing but he credits her with understanding the difference between a marital and extra-marital relationship which is beginning to strain plausibility. From chapter 17 onwards it seems in fact as if James was less interested in distinguishing between Maisie's perceptions and the narrator's, than in conveying finer

and finer shades of variation in her situation; and this is one reason why the language becomes more complex.

A second and external reason for increasing complexity was that James changed his method of composition to dictation in the middle of What Maisie Knew. Indeed one of James's oldest friends, Thomas Sergeant Perry, claimed that he could locate the very sentence in Chapter 18 where this method began.[38] The implication was that it affected his style and made it more diffuse, and this is confirmed by Theodora Bosanquet, one of James's later stenographers, who wrote that James openly acknowledged this tendency.[39] Perry's claim is belied by the existence of one of the original type-scripts of the novel which begins with Chapter 17 and finishes in the middle of Chapter 18. The corrections which James inked in and the subsequent revisions which he made for the novel text all testify to his scrupulous care to achieve precision and nuance in Maisie's interpretations. The lines immediately preceding the passage quoted above have been corrected in some detail and suggest that James went to some lengths to counteract any looseness of expression which might have come from dictation.[40] The central phrases of the passage quoted were again revised for the New York Edition where they read: '...an addition to all the fine precautionary wisdom stored away. It somehow hadn't violated that wisdom, Maisie felt...'[41] The later version is less cumbersome and more compact, without being more explanatory. The narrator is making little attempt to enact the process of Maisie's interpretation directly.

The use of such complex syntax to present Maisie's thoughts suggests that she is quite detached from her own experience, but in fact she can only achieve this detachment intermittently. As she develops a sense of her inner self and as the pace of the action slows down, she becomes more concerned with the symmetry of her situation and with a total understanding of it. In her concern with pattern (how the characters are arranged around her) she comes to resemble James in the notebooks and preface as well as the narrator. It is towards this area of the novel that changes about Maisie's realism are directed. Thus

M.G. Shine argues that her perceptions are dissociated from her emotional development, and Tony Tanner that her reflexions become more complex but not her knowledge.[42]

These and other comments point to a growing insistence on one aspect of Maisie's character (her perceptiveness) at the expense of others, and in fact it was a danger which James himself recognized. He admitted that great demands were made on Maisie's sensibility but that she must remain probable, which Donald Pizer argues that James achieved.[43] But James did admit that the telegraphist in In the Cage (included in the same volume of the New York Edition as Maisie) was unrealistic because she was over-intelligent.[44]

The culmination of this tendency comes in Chapter 20 of Maisie. By this point Maisie has had her final parting with her father and is preparing for the move to Folkestone and France. She has such an upsurge of perceptions about the implications in Sir Claude's non-appearance that the narrator has to apologize and admit that he cannot possibly hope to trace them all:

> ...I must be content to say that the fullest expression we may give to Sir Claude's conduct is a poor and pale copy of the picture it presented to his young friend. (p.168)

Despite the reference to 'picture' Maisie's perceptions are now rendered abstractly and more through the inflections of the syntax than through concrete metaphors. The latter preserve a strong continuity between Maisie's actual experience and her attempts to organize it, in the earlier chapters of the novel. Here however the cadencing, the hypothetical questions and conditional verb-tenses all tend to smother the facts of her experience and to focus mainly on charting out relations between the four characters involved - Mrs. Wix, Mrs. Beale, Sir Claude and Maisie herself.

In the paragraphs following this passage the narrator's defensive insistence that Maisie really did see all these connexions runs like a refrain. The notion of 'seeing' has by now become completely internalized and the key verbs denote analysis rather than emotional reaction. Indeed it seems as if Maisie's exhileration at making all these inferences coincides with the narrator's

delighted helplessness before these complexities:

> If Mrs. Wix, however, ultimately appalled, had now set her heart on strong measures, Maisie, as I have intimated, could also work round both to the reasons for them and to the quite other reasons for that lady's not, as yet at least, appearing in them at first hand.
>
> Oh decidedly I shall never get you to believe the number of things she saw and the number of secrets she discovered! (p.171)

Despite the gestures towards realism ('She had ever of course in her mind fewer names than conceptions': p.170), the narrator claims more knowledge for Maisie than she could reasonably have. For instance she apparently understands the difference between Sir Claude's sexual interest in Mrs. Beale and his care for herself. Now this is implausible because Maisie has no conception of sexuality and does not understand the term 'lover' although she uses it (mentally). We can say that the impulse behind this complexity and analysis - the desire to make sense of her situation - is quite realistic. But James exploits the overlap between her perceptions and the narrator's voice in order to claim for her a greater knowledge than she can have. The impressive array of analytical vocabulary, the syntactical balancing of one hypothesis against another, here smothers the fact that she is a child; and indeed to all practical intents and purposes she could be an adult. The style, the sheer complexity of her thoughts, is ultimately the most unrealistic thing about this section. Although Seymour Chatman has argued that in James's later style the use of logical analytical vocabulary is the hallmark of a narrator interpreting a character instead of letting him interpret himself, it is here carried to an extreme because the character is a child.[45]

It would seem that James recognized that he had let his desire to see as many interpretations as possible run away with itself because the concluding chapters of Maisie are presented largely through dialogue. And when Paul Bourget's wife told him that she liked the novel, James perhaps had this particular section in mind when he replied:

> It is a volume the merit of which is that the subject - and there is a subject - is, I think, exhaustively treated - over-treated I dare say.[46]

This tendency towards over-treatment, to pile refinement on refinement, runs through all the fiction of this period and finds its logical conclusion in the obsessed narrator of The Sacred Fount.

Chapter 5

In the Cage

(1)

In What Maisie Knew complex variations in a satirical narrative voice ensure a measure of freedom for Maisie herself. But James's next novel lacks this broader social scope. The action is comparatively static and focuses mainly on the inter-relation between the narrator's voice and the protagonist's imagination. In fact the telegraphist heroine of In the Cage proves to have an inventive energy similar to that of Fleda Vetch although more excessive.

In the Cage has attracted comparatively little critical attention and the main direction of existing criticism can be outlined quite clearly. Apart from contemporary reviews, the earliest extended discussion of the novel is by L.C. Knights in his famous article 'Henry James and the Trapped Spectator'.[1] Knights's general contrast is between 'observer-figures' and those characters who exploit others in the novels. He argues that, although circumstances often thwart characters, in fact their apparent failure is offset by an increase in moral life. So he stresses very heavily the moral positives inherent in a work like In the Cage. Here he suggests that the telegraphist's progression is towards recognizing the 'bleakness of reality'.[2] In other words the narrative presents a moral parable of enlightenment whereby the telegraphist gains in awareness although she has little tangible to show.

This argument has persisted in a fundamentally unchanged way in more recent articles. A.C. Friend for instance has unconsciously developed its dangers of sentimentality by taking the telegraphist on her own terms as if she were really heroic, selfless and admirable. The novel, he proposes, dramatizes her 'awakening' so that by the end

> She has attained a state of awareness which represents 'her own return to reality'. Capable of a sort of sublimity, she is liberated by her love for Everard and made alive, and she carries within her the germ of hope.[3]

Friend's account is both fulsome and vague, and he constantly yields to a current of exaltation. The telegraphist emerges as not simply admirable, but

a positive saint, resigning herself ultimately to her marriage with mystical calm. Once again she has attained an over-view of human destiny - 'the depths and heights which mark man's lot'.[4]

There is no suggestion of any possible discrepancy between the telegraphist's perspective and the overall direction of the tale which is strange because Friend has introduced material which could be used to demonstrate this. He discusses James's preface and his use of the Danae legend, but in a perversely literal way.

In his introduction to In the Cage M.D. Zabel explicitly rehearses Knights's argument.[5] The telegraphist experiences a disillusionment from her dreams, 'yet it is something more'. Zabel is less eager than Friend to spell out what the saving grace in her recognition is, but both (and Knights) concentrate very much on the novel's ending. This is crucial to their search for moral positives because, without any private enlightenment, In the Cage might seem intensely bleak and pessimistic. What is common to all three critics is an assumption that the moral perspective should be deduced from the contours of the plot rather than from any interplay between the telegraphist's viewpoint and the narrator's.

Important qualifications to this approach were introduced by J.F. Blackall's survey of the novel's figurative language. The novel, she argues, contains a strong element of humour, and this originates

> in the discrepancy between the thing observed....and the insights that a limited observer has to bring to bear on this material.[6]

The telegraphist's interpretation of events may be comically inadequate, but Miss Blackall does not go on to explain what sort of alternative perspective we can have on 'the thing observed'. This can come, I shall argue, from the inflexions in the narrator's voice which alert the reader to how fanciful the girl's imagination is. Miss Blackall recognizes a disparity in perspective but it still does not seem to her a central critical issue since she subordinates it to her examination of the figurative language (as if the two were quite separate). And, although she makes passing references to James's ironic

comments on the telegraphist, she summarizes them rather blandly: 'He [James] is indulgently sympathetic towards his heroine but conceives of her in comic terms'.[7]

It is only with A.D. Aswell that a really powerful dissenting note from all these accounts is introduced. Aswell's article uses the analogy between the telegraphist and the artist - specifically the novelist. Since I shall have occasion to refer to it during my discussion of the novel, suffice it here to indicate the main thrust of Aswell's argument. He sees the telegraphist as egotistical and sums up her pretentions to superiority as follows:

> The girl believes that her lively imagination and intuition authorize her to dominate the sluggish minds of her associates. In her view these faculties entitle her to the prerogatives of the artist, to treat human beings as her own creations, to place them in appropriate artistic settings, and then to make them react in response to her intellectual and emotional needs. James's nouvelle is the story of the failure of these attempts to impose 'artistic' control upon autonomous lives.[8]

This is doubly incisive because it questions the moral status of the telegraphist and at the same time - through the artist analogy - locates the level on which her imagination works.

Aswell's article is all the more cogent because it manoeuvres skilfully through the ambiguities of James's preface to _In the Cage_, which may have been responsible in part for the rather moralistic interpretations put on the work by Knights, Friend and Zabel. As usual he attempts to retrace the genesis of the novel from its obscure origins in the London scene, and he describes the process almost as if he had elevated the figure of the telegraphist to a position of stature. The great danger, however, in taking such a comparatively humble subject is 'inevitably of imputing to too many others, right and left, the critical impulse and the acuter vision'.[9] This acknowledgement is pointedly relevant to James's fiction of the late 1890's since in this period he shows a constant tendency to over-burden his leading characters with too great an awareness.

Immediately after the passage quoted James makes his famous pronouncement on the nature of criticism ('to criticise is to appreciate, to appropriate, to

take intellectual possession...'). On one level this could refer to the mental activities of his heroines; on another it could refer to James's own relation to his subject-matter in general. Interestingly neither are conventional examples of 'criticism', except in an oblique or analogous way. On balance the second significance seems the more probable in the immediate context of the preface since James is presenting himself as a 'student of great cities', abstracting his material from the texture of their social life. He points in the first passage then to the danger of projecting too much critical intelligence on to the telegraphist for the novel to bear. It is a question partly of form, in fully objectifying his heroine; and partly of realism, since a person in her social position would not be likely to have an elaborate intelligence. In fact James grudgingly admits that the telegraphist is 'too ardent a focus of divination' to be completely realistic.[10] But he makes this admission in a tone which implies that he is rather impatient with 'verisimilitude' anyway, and all the average expectations of what is probable that it carries.

The second main point which James makes in the preface relates to perspective. The telegraphist is so much at the novel's centre that in a sense the narrative <u>is</u> her character. She is both the focus of events and also one source of the perspective on them. James states that 'the action of the drama is simply the girl's "subjective" adventure' and links her sensibility with that of Morgan Moreen in 'The Pupil' and Hyacinth Robinson.[11] Common to all three is an excessive sensitivity, but this becomes a demonstration of their value rather than a possible weakness. For James defines character here almost exclusively in terms of mind which suggests in turn that the action of <u>In the Cage</u> takes place to a large extent within the telegraphist's mind.

There is a slight evaluative ambiguity when James refers to the telegraphist's 'range of wonderment' since he seems to be simultaneously hinting at the naivete of her reactions <u>and</u> their admirable qualities. In effect his argument came down to this: given the premiss that mind is the main constituent of character, the telegraphist is admirable as a type because she exercises her

mental faculties so fully. And, as in the description of Fleda in the preface to The Spoils, the telegraphist's formal or structural value does not appear to be distinguished from the moral qualities she demonstrates as a character. In both instances the qualifying ironies in the novels themselves are completely absent in the prefaces. And it may be for this reason that early criticism of In the Cage concentrated on supposedly moral qualities in the protagonist.

If the latter is an inadequate approach, the critical question has to be asked, how far do we take the telegraphist as she sees herself? Two lines of explanation present themselves. Firstly, using Aswell's analogy, the girl imagines her situation in specifically fictive terms and thereby becomes her own narrator. Secondly what sort of role does the actual narrator play in preserving a realistic perspective throughout the novel? Although the first question does not literally centre on the narrator, it is nevertheless important to understand the nature of the telegraphist's imagination. And it is also important for showing the continuity between In the Cage, 'The Turn of the Screw' and The Sacred Fount.

(ii)

When the novel opens we learn that the telegraphist is subject to odd freaks of curiosity, capricious periods of interest in her customers which come and go intermittently. Right from the start we see a contrast between her imaginative energy and the physically static nature of her work. Her interest takes the form, as Aswell suggests, of composing imaginary contexts and settings for them; so that when her friend Mrs. Jordan boasts of her skill at arranging flowers in the homes of the rich, her friend superciliously exclaims to herself:

> Combinations of flowers and green-stuff, forsooth! What she could handle freely, she said to herself, was combinations of men and women.[12]

Already we see her supreme confidence in these mental exercises, a confidence which springs from her knowledge that they cost her nothing and are completely private. Indeed she relishes their privacy much more than Aswell suggests. They are her inner entertainment which compensates both for her former poverty and also for her present demeaning occupation. Her life is thus split between her imagination and her day-to-day experience, and her desire to indulge in a 'play of mind' (in a far more irresponsible sense than this phrase carries in the preface) demonstrates her reluctance to accept her social situation which will culminate in marrying Mr. Mudge, a grocer.

Because the narrative emerges 'through' the telegraphist we are drawn into a particularly close relation with her. Even though the narrative is third-person, it has an intimacy and immediacy which we tend to expect from more confessional first-person fiction like 'The Turn of the Screw' which was written before In the Cage although it was published in book form after it. James had finished writing 'The Turn of the Screw' by December 1897 and it began its serialization the following month; In the Cage was finished in July 1898 and published in August; The Two Magics appeared in October.[13]

The following lines give an example of the sort of effect which has become typical by the middle of the novel. Captain Everard has appeared in Cocker's telegraph office just long enough to fascinate the girl, and thereafter becomes a regular customer. Her response (at the opening of Chapter 11) is:

> She would have admitted indeed that it consisted of little more than the fact that his absences, however frequent and however long, always ended with his turning up again. It was nobody's business in the world but her own if that fact continued to be enough for her. (p.62)

The first of these sentences gives us a rather tortuous self-justification. The pronoun 'it' refers to what she has called ('without words') her 'relation' with the Captain, and trails over from the preceding chapter. It is as if she were engaging in a private dialogue, alternately criticizing and defending herself, and throughout most of the novel she displays a novelist's interest in her own experience, and in the organizing and rationalizing of it. Of course the irony in this self-absorption is that she cannot be detached enough from her

experience; but on the other hand she does have a freshness of discovery in examining her own impulses.

The telegraphist then is divided between acting out her experience and scrutinizing it - just like the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw'. For the reader this helps to create the 'double vision' which operates in the novel - seeing what the telegraphist sees, and seeing beyond her. So when the narrator hints at hidden meanings he is in fact building on an important aspect of the girl's own character, and simply taking her self-examination one step further.

The telegraphist's adventure begins with an 'expansion of her consciousness' (p.9). The height of the social season puts her into a state of nervous receptivity. Her sensibility is called into play by the impressions which offer themselves in the office and the vicarious life which they suggest. When a lady of impressive bearing (an associate of Captain Everard) comes into Cocker's she releases the telegraphist's pent-up energy:

> To Cissy, to Mary, whichever it was, she found her curiosity going out with a rush, a mute effusion that floated back to her, like a returning tide, the living colour and splendour of the beautiful head, the light of eyes that seemed to reflect such utterly other things than the mean things actually before them;... (pp.13-14)

Although the girl's curiosity is the first faculty to be engaged, the passage also hints at her extreme idealization of the lady and of her self-denigration (she is one of the 'mean things' before her). The syntax enacts the girl's burst of feeling, losing its initial impetus in accumulated descriptive phrases. This suggests in turn how unconscious and spontaneous her reaction is.

Since the telegraphist is our only means of access to the narrative she, like Maisie, determines the actuality of the other characters. There is very little direct description in the novel and what there is tends to be impressions coloured by the girl's reactions. In the passage quoted above for example the lady seems to consist of beautiful parts, blurred into an 'apparition' by the intensity of the girl's feelings.

It is sometimes difficult to pinpoint where the telegraphist's interpretation of her experience shades into the narrator's, but there is nevertheless

a difference in their styles of expression. Hers is typically full of superlatives, either rising on a wave of emotion or sinking to her own kind of rigorous logic. Her initial emotion commits her to forming a sort of relation with Captain Everard and her logic (which she had previously confined to inventing connections and settings from the cryptic evidence of the telegrams) rationalizes it to a certain extent. But even here she hesitates. During her self-examination she hunts for the best words to express this relation, not always with success. Indeed it becomes apparent that she does not really want to find a word because to call it 'friendship' would fix and define their connexion too precisely. Instead she prefers to keep a margin of vagueness, of unexpressed thought which she can turn to at will. This margin is in fact a metaphorical conversion from the counter behind which she serves her customers. The physical margin thus functions as a kind of defence against them just as her mental margin gives her room for manoeuvering her imagined relationship.[14]

Paradoxically then the telegraphist displays two contradictory impulses. One is towards vagueness and the other works towards complete analysis. A particularly clear example of the latter comes when she is trying to convince herself that the Captain really does like her. The actual occasions of their contact come partly from the fact that he writes some of his letters in a curious way, and that she then has to ask him to explain them. With typical wishful ingenuity she hypothesizes that he knows she is only pretending to be puzzled, and she concludes: 'If he knew it, therefore, he tolerated it; if he tolerated it he came back; and if he came back he liked her.' (p.67). She comes to the desired conclusion through a series of moves which have all the superficially impeccable logic of the narrator in The Sacred Fount and the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw'; but unlike those two works we are given hints from the actual narrator that the telegraphist is deluding herself. These will be considered later, but the style of the girl's imaginative activity also gives us a hint that it is less logical than it might appear.

She constantly refashions her 'romance' as the narrative proceeds although when she first sees the Captain she is pleased because he fits into the role she has already assigned to him. She claims privately to know all about his situation, but 'knowing' for her consists of wish-fulfilment and rejecting inconvenient alternatives. Although she has indulged her curiosity towards customers before, the Captain and the lady are special and ideal figures; they embody the 'high reality, the bristling truth that she had hitherto only patched up and eked out' (p.14), perhaps because they fit into her novelettish romance so neatly.

Once under way, this romance generates an impetus of its own and more and more new elements slide in unobtrusively. The girl's dealings with the Captain edge towards the sexual. The gap between her day-to-day life and her imaginative life becomes more acute. She cultivates the images of the Captain and Lady Bradeen as assiduously as James guarded the 'germs' of his fiction. As his notebooks and prefaces show, he would typically seize on a chance anecdote, detach it from its context and gradually fashion in into fiction. During this process he would exclude any information which might damage the shape of his first idea.[15] This is exactly what the telegraphist does. Other impressions come thick and fast after the first appearance of the Captain and Lady Bradeen but she lets them go:

> Most of the elements swam straight away, lost themselves in the bottomless common, and by so doing really kept the page clear. On the clearness, therefore, what she did retain stood sharply out; she nipped and caught it, turned it over and interwove it. (pp.32-33)

The terminology here is specifically artistic. The girl is composing her images with the same relish of private power as James himself displays in his prefaces.

Since her romance is built, as she thinks, out of privileged knowledge, the telegraphist can confidently patronize her friend Mrs. Jordan and her fiancé Mr. Mudge. She is however rather uneasy that Mrs. Jordan might marry a wealthy man and is both relieved and nastily snobbish when she discovers that her friend is going to marry a man-servant after all. She polarizes things

into opposite extremes. The actual in her life is 'low' and 'vulgar'; the imagined is 'high' and beautiful. And she sneers at Mrs. Jordan for not making this separation and for compromising her ideals.

The telegraphist shows a similar condescension towards Mr. Mudge, a former employee of Cocker's and now a prospering grocer. Mudge annoys her because he will not fit decorously into her mental life, and when they go on holiday to Bournemouth (immediately after the climactic episode in Hyde Park) she more and more ignores him, becoming completely absorbed in her own 'secret conversations' (p.166). Aswell describes her scenes with Mudge as 'dress rehearsals for the full-scale performances she puts on before the more glamorous Everard'.[16] This is true in the sense that she uses Mudge as a sounding-board for her new-found knowledge, but Aswell implies that there is a clear separation between the telegraphist's view of Mudge and James's own. In fact this is not so and the references to Mudge constantly suggest a blurring together of the two perspectives.

Just as the telegraphist tends to caricature Mrs. Jordan by concentrating on her big teeth (compare the depiction of Beale in Maisie), so she reduces Mudge to the point where he is indistinguishable from his own merchandise. Again and again she mocks his dingy respectability. To her he is the 'perfection of a type' of the genus 'grocer' and when revising the novel for the New York Edition James reinforced the comforting solidity which he had for her. Originally (in the 1898 text) we are told

> ...perfection of anything was much for a person who, out of early troubles, had just escaped with her life. (p.53)

In the New York text this has become

> ...almost anything square and smooth and whole had its weight for a person still conscious herself of being a mere bruised fragment of wreckage.[17]

The revision renders the contrast between the two characters in far more concrete terms, but the rhetoric is reductive and ironic towards the grocer rather than towards the girl. She is 'conscious' of that view of herself

whereas he is not, and partly for that reason he becomes comic.

If the ironies in the passage above come mainly from the narrator proper, the girl's own comments on Mudge are framed in the same idiom. When he decides on Bournemouth for their holiday, she satirizes his ponderous way of examining a problem from every possible side, because it falls so far behind her own speed and ingenuity.

> He had announced at the earliest day - characterizing the whole business....as their 'plans', under which name he handled it as a syndicate handles a Chinese, or other, loan... (p.84)

The metaphors relating to Mudge are typically fixed or static, whereas those referring to the girl's adventure (of sea or wind) suggest swift exhilerating movement.

The rhetoric surrounding Mudge, whether direct from the narrator or rehearsing the girl's reactions, is usually formal in a way which guarantees an ironic aloofness. Mudge, we are told, selected Bournemouth

> by a process consisting, it seemed, exclusively of innumerable pages of the neatest arithmetic in a very greasy but most orderly little pocket-book. (p.111)

The narrator's surprise that his book is 'most orderly' parallels the telegraphist's own surprise at his single-minded purpose in waiting for her. Both are surprised because both assume he is basically ridiculous. As Mudge's very name suggests, he belongs to that class of minor Jamesian characters who hold inferior positions and who are comic because of their conventional attitudes - like Mrs. Grose and Mrs. Wix. Furthermore there is some evidence in the preface of James's viewpoint overlapping with the telegraphist's. He makes it clear that both she and Maisie have a luxurious life and then adds the proviso: 'The luxury is that of the number of their moral vibrations, well-nigh unrestricted - not that of an account at the grocer's'.[18] James is clearly comparing two notions of life here - that of the sensibility and that of physical amenity. The telegraphist is an example of one, and the grocer placed at the opposite extreme. This offers a theoretical reason why the telegraphist's ironic attitude towards Mudge is usually endorsed by the

narrator of In the Cage. But the fact that this is so creates an obstacle, albeit not a major one, to knowing how to take her. In this particular case it hardly seems relevant that her attitude to Mudge rests on self-delusion and fantasy.

One important factual detail which is apt to be overlooked by present-day readers is that Cocker's is both a post office and a grocer's. As the frontispiece for Volume 11 of the New York Edition James chose a photograph of a post office whose window is full of advertisements for tea and similar goods. This fact sheds an ironic light on the telegraphist's feelings of superiority over Mr. Mudge since in a sense they both work in the same kind of shop.

The telegraphist's general bearing towards Mudge and Mrs. Jordan stems of course from the romance she weaves around herself. They usually have a functional significance for her because she can try out her ideas on them. And such is her over-weening confidence that their puzzlement never retards the thrust of her imagination. At first she is content with a passive spectatorial role. But then she begins to invent dialogue to fit her fiction. Thus when the Captain gives her new telegrams he is adding to her knowledge of his situation; and in her conceit she imagines that he knows this and admits it to her:

> 'Oh yes, you have me by this time so completely at your mercy that it doesn't in the least matter what I give you now. You've become a comfort, I assure you!' (p.63)

This fragment is actually unspoken, only imagined. But it sets the tone for the other dialogue which the girl invents, in that it shifts her into a position of power. She thereby manoeuvres herself imaginatively from a position of observer to that of participant, moving as it were from the wings to the stage itself.

It scarcely needs underlining that creation of dialogue is one of the prerogatives of a novelist. And the telegraphist follows James's own practice of making it economical and illustrative. This procedure is however shot through with irony because the girl's point of departure is the actual words

which the Captain uses. His pleasant banalities when she is serving him first of all tantalize her with a suggestion of hidden meaning, and then furnish her with a pretext for whole-hearted invention. The speech which she invents is more articulate and interesting than the Captain's actual words, but the reader becomes more and more aware of the gap between what he says and what she imagines he says. This is a gap between the ordinary and the romantic, and indeed the whole thrust of the telegraphist's imagination is to lift her out of the ordinary and the mundane.

One aspect of the girl's hyper-active imagination is that she constantly probes beneath the surface. Like the morbid narrators of The Sacred Fount and 'The Turn of the Screw' she displays a perverse ingenuity in wringing meaning from the merest detail. At the end of her talk with the Captain in Hyde Park, he says, rather ineffectually, 'See here - see here!' But, instead of taking these words at their face value (they are simply a vague expression of surprise), the telegraphist turns them over and over in her mind, hunting for the emotional significance she is convinced lies below their surface. But in a sense his words do not matter since 'these were on the mere awkward surface, and their relation was beautiful behind and below them'.[19]

How can we explain the effect which such ordinary words have on the girl? One answer would be in terms of character - psychology. We can read the novel as a gradual unfolding of her hidden desires and hopes; indeed one reviewer commented on just this aspect of plot and praised its novelty.[20] In these terms we can take the telegraphist's 'subjective adventure' as an exercise in wish-fulfilment and compensation. But this focuses very much on cause and does not explain the style and method of her imagination. I am suggesting that she invents a romance in specifically novelistic terms. She is literally her own narrator because must alternately create roles and settings for herself, and then justify these creations to herself ('explain' them). And this she does without ever becoming aware that this procedure is logically circular. So even the smallest utterance by the Captain becomes a latent threat to her romance

because it might not fit in. Her ingenuity then could be seen as partly protective.

This of course is paradoxical but then so is the telegraphist's imagination in general. For example appearances are simultaneously very important and irrelevant to her. She composes dialogue when the Captain is not even present; at other times she works from appearance alone - details of manner, expression, etc.

The imagination of a passive role is, as I suggested above, not satisfying enough for the telegraphist. So she imagines a role for herself as participator in the Captain's affairs. The next step is to act out these roles and this the girl proceeds to do. Firstly she calls at Park Chambers where Captain Everard lives, and then flees in panic because she fears he might see her there. But the step has been taken and this paves the way for the crucial scene where she does meet him, where her chosen role seems to come true at last.

Immediately before the scene proper much emphasis is placed on the girl's high aspirations and the setting (the street outside the chambers) seems to come into focus out of her thoughts. Just as Lambert Strether feels to step into a Lambinet painting in the river-side scene of The Ambassadors, so the telegraphist sees the street as an area of light 'like a vista painted in a picture', (p.86). Once she moves towards Everard however the analogy shifts to that of a stage where the girl is of course playing the female lead.

It is important that the mode of narrative switches between Chapters 14 and 15 from direct presentation to retrospection since this makes it practically possible for the telegraphist to colour it from her own imagination. The atmosphere, literally obscure as night falls, has a dream-like quality where the conversation is extended to unnatural length as if each person was carefully calculating what to say to the other. On one level then we are given a scenic projection of the girl's frame of mind. Now she can perform her dreams instead of just thinking them. This is not to suggest however that she feels to be in control of the scene, and in fact she wavers between confidence in her imaginary role and a background fear that she is after all just a public servant.

Aswell has commented pointedly on the mixture of realism and fantasy which runs through the girl's whole fiction of herself:

> With the curious blend of fantasy and reality that characterizes her attitude towards her customers, she wants Everard to recognize her importance in his life, and yet by imagining herself as a character in a novel she carefully protects herself from personal involvement in that life.[21]

This is finely put because it begins to suggest how the girl's psychological contradictions find their expression in fictive terms. She longs to penetrate Everard's life because it is glamorously remote from hers (she is fascinated for instance by the term 'boudoir') and yet she still retains a residual awareness of what is real. So the social gulf between 'his sort' and 'her sort' comes to be articulated as the difference between the ideal or fictive and the real.

The girl and the Captain go to sit in Hyde Park and in the course of their conversation she makes her confession to him that she will do anything for him. This is the nearest she comes to direct sexual overture and she at the same time takes pride in her own style:

> 'I'd do anything for you. I'd do anything for you.' Never in her life had she known anything so high and fine as this, just letting him have it and bravely and magnificently leaving it. Didn't the place, the associations and circumstances, perfectly make it sound what it was not? and wasn't that exactly the beauty? (pp.100-101)

The telegraphist is carried away by the theoretical selflessness of her action - what she describes as a 'heroism of sympathy' - as if she were her own best audience. But once we try to pin down how it is 'fine' and language conceals definite meaning from us. The passage quoted returns once more to the paradox of her thought and in fact the concluding questions are double-edged. The narrator (and by implication the reader) would, because of his detached stance, give a negative answer to them. And the scene's 'nobility' and 'beauty' emerge as really the inappropriate and highly subjective colourings of a romantic girl's imagination.

After the meeting with the Captain, which forms the centrol event of the novel, the girl tries to hypostatize her memory into a 'picture that she should keep' (p.119). She clings desperately to this memory which soon begins

to fade, but at the same time retreats into her cage as a nervously defensive gesture against the Captain's agitation when he reappears in Cockers. So strong is her egotism that she imagines he is going to make some sort of direct proposal to her. But she has performed her desired role and now only wants to cling on to the image of Hyde Park before it passes away.

Everard now becomes an alarming figure, even an 'alternate self' to the girl, who turns more and more to the defensive. One reason for this is that something has obviously gone wrong with the Captain's female relationships and that events speed up to the point where the telegraphist can no longer comfortably assimilate them into her fiction. The girl tries to counteract this by transforming his situation into an absurd guessing game; and tries to imagine what he is doing in Cocker's without actually looking at him, in just the same way as the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw' tries to work out who the woman is the first time she sees Miss Jessel.

In the last scene between Everard and the girl, when he asks her to find an old telegram for him, the girl's romantic fiction begins to fragment but she imagines alternative roles for herself. He is like 'a frightened child coming to its mother' (p.147). Then the girl begins to act as a telegraphist, adopting the tone of Paddington (when presumably in her imagination her real tone is of Mayfair). This performance is for Everard's benefit just as much as the one in Hyde Park but this time it is sadistic in reality. She pretends to hesitate and go through official motions when all the time she knows the information which he wants from her. And all the time she is relishing her sense of power ('this made her feel like the very fountain of fate': p.150). Similarities with the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw' have already been noted, but one metaphor brings out the sadistic connexion particularly clearly: 'There were twists and turns, there were places where the screw drew blood, that she couldn't guess' (p.155). Of course the suggestion of torture is relatively brief here but it grows predictably out of the girl's self-absorption.

The later sections of the novel mark the telegraphist's gradual return to reality which is signalled by her agreement to marry Mudge. But before she finally relinquishes her interest in the Captain she imagines that he is heading towards a public scandal:

> He was at any rate in the strong grip of a dizzy, splendid fate; the wild wind of his life blew him straight before it....She literally fancied once or twice that, projected as he was towards his doom, her own eyes struck him, while the air roared in his ears, as the one pitying pair in the crowd. (p.70)

Even at this late stage she still clings to a hope that she stands in some privileged relation to him, but it is a relation which has returned to the passive one of spectator. She feels herself to be on the verge of some climactic event where she might still be able to play an important part, if not the heroine's. But her part will still be heroic:

> Deep down in his [the Captain's] eyes was a picture, the vision of a great place like a chamber of justice, where, before a watching crowd, a poor girl, exposed but heroic, swore with a quavering voice to a document, proved an <u>alibi</u>, supplied a link. (p.156)

This vision gives her a similarly selfless role, but it is only momentary. The hoped-for climax never comes. She gives the information to the Captain. He walks out without even thanking her. And the girl is left with her memories, and of course with Mudge.

Sacrifice has proved to be one of the key-notes of the telegraphist's 'subjective adventure'. And the critic Peter Brooks has commented on this general theme in James's work in a way directly relevant to <u>In the Cage</u>:

> The theme of renunciation which sounds through James's novels...is incomprehensible and unjustifiable except as a victory within the realm of a moral occult which may be so inward and personal that it appears restricted to the individual's consciousness, predicated on the individual's 'sacrifice to the ideal'.[22]

He also argues that James's heightening of the moral alternatives means that characters' crucial choices seem to have little to do with the practical realities of their situation. In <u>In the Cage</u> the telegraphist creates an imaginary context inside which she can make her chosen gestures of selflessness, but the context is made in such a contradictory subjective way that it is difficult to locate her values. They are every bit as private and inaccessible

as Brooks suggests and this is because she is more interested in the style of her gestures than in their meaning.

Throughout this discussion I have been suggesting that the telegraphist imagines her role in fictive terms and what distinguishes her imagination from say James's own is that she thinks in melodramatic terms. Although she never makes it explicit she clearly acts in Hyde Park as if she were the Captain's lover. Throughout the novel she is constantly searching for a quintessential meaning below the surface of appearance and the spoken word. She tends to see her experience in polarized absolutes and imagines a heightened style of action and gesture which is grotesquely at odds with her actual situation. Similarly her imagined settings are variations on melodramatic stereotypes (the 'bad girl' seduced by the glamorous hero; the hero publicly disgraced, and so on). And the rapid transformation of these roles and settings testifies both to the agility of her imagination and to her radical uncertainty about her own position. In contrasting her view of events with the narrator's James is exploiting the difference between two narrative modes - melodrama and realism. It now remains to be shown how this difference is demonstrated.

(iii)

The telegraphist's imagination is so energetic and fascinating in its perversity that there might seem to be no place in the novel for an orthodox narrator. But this is not so. In Chapter 26 the narrator describes the failure of the telegraphist's dreams as a 'return to reality'. And it is precisely this reality which the narrator keeps in the reader's view. His voice is ironic and normative, and for the most part throws the girl's imaginings into relief. As is typically the case with James's fiction of the late 1890's, the narrator conveys a minimum of additional information and exists more as a tone of coice. Predictably then for the contrast lying at the centre of

In the Cage, his tone must be dry, under-stated and ironic in order to counteract the girl's flights of fancy.

One source of the narrator's irony lies in the variety of labels given to the girl. She is variously 'our young woman', 'the betrothed of Mr. Mudge' and even 'our heroine', to name the three commonest ones. This feature of the novel was noted by the reviewer for Literature when it was first published, but only as another irritating mannerism in a general context of vagueness.[23] However the title 'the betrothed of Mr. Mudge' is pointedly ironic because it reduces the girl to an appendage of Mudge, when she sees herself as both independent and strong-willed. 'The young person from Cocker's' has exactly the same effect, and runs counter to the girl's own strenuous efforts to resist being classified by her job.

These titles occur in two main areas of the novel: firstly, when she is just embarking on her 'romance' (when her strangeness begins to make itself felt to the reader), and secondly in its closing stages. In the late scenes with Mrs. Jordan the label 'our heroine' has become grotesquely inappropriate, since her egotistical romance has demonstrated that she is no one's heroine but her own. The phrase implies the kind of intimate relationship between narrator and protagonist that we might expect in earlier Victorian fiction, but in fact the whole direction of In the Cage is to deny this possibility.

This is not to suggest that the narrator performs no traditional functions. He describes the telegraphist's previous tendencies to fitful imagination before the narrative proper begins, thereby giving us crucial information towards establishing a perspective on her. He also gives us glimpses of her early life, but glimpses only. They are the barest minimum for sketching in her origins. One of the relevant passages explains that the girl's early poverty has left painful memories and concludes:

> ....as conscious, incredulous ladies [the girl and her mother], suddenly bereaved, betrayed, overwhelmed, they had slipped faster and faster down the steep slope at the bottom of which she alone had rebounded. Her mother had never rebounded any more at the bottom than on the way; had only rumbled and grumbled down and down, making, in respect of caps and conversation, no effort whatever, and too often, alas! smelling of whiskey. (p.5)

Immediately before these lines James seems to have been describing the girl's thoughts, but what immediately strikes us here is that the passage displays a humour which would be quite out of place as far as her reactions are concerned. The family's descent to poverty sounds more like a ride on a helter-skelter than a financial catastrophe. And the narrator's mock-dismay in exclaiming 'alas!' reduces the mother's drinking to comic anecdote.

The humour in the passage is broadly reductive since it diminishes the emotional force of the events it is presenting. The irony here is more or less identical with that occasioned by the strange contradiction between the girl's pretensions and her actual circumstances. And that in turn means that the narrator is hinting to the reader that the girl is egotistical and self-deceived. There is also a secondary purpose to such irony. As in Maisie it prevents the girl from becoming a figure of pathos. The narrator is trying to stimulate a detached curiosity on the reader's part rather than an emotional engagement, and it is a sentimental misreading of the overall tone to suggest, as does J.F. Blackall, that the girl's situation is pathetic.[24]

The accounts of the girl's poverty and of the ways in which she and Mrs. Jordan try to cope with it might seem rather remote from the urgency of poverty because of the descriptions' ironic tone. But they only function as corroborative evidence over and above the telegraphist's obvious desire to escape from her hum-drum circumstances.

It is the narrator who gives us our first sense of place in the novel - of Cocker's telegraph office. The following is the nearest we get to a visual impression:

> This transparent screen fenced out or fenced in, according to the side of the narrow counter on which the human lot was cast, the duskiest corner of the shop pervaded not a little, in winter, by the poison of perpetual gas, and at all times by the presence of hams, cheese, dried fish, soap, varnish, paraffin, and other solids and fluids that she came to know perfectly by their smells without consenting to know by their names. (p.2)

This description is brilliant in its concentration on essentials. The cage is a lattice, transparent so that it is a physical obstacle, but not a visual one. Then, in an apparently incidental aside, the narrator hints at the

social gulf which the barrier symbolizes, and at the possibility of there being two alternate perspectives - one from within the cage (the girl's), and one from outside (the narrator's and reader's). In effect the narrator demonstrates his awareness of both perspectives.

Naturally enough the description rests on a notion of 'seeing' which is developed into an important theme in the body of the novel. For there is a constant equivocation between seeing as visual registration and seeing as comprehension in the telegraphist's activity, as in that of the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw'. In the account of Cocker's the narrator gives the place a solidity of texture by itemizing some of the commodities and then shades the list into generalities ('other solids and fluids'), just as the objects would shade visually into obscurity in the dark corners. This is accurate in visual terms, but it also gives a metaphorical hint of the way the telegraphist's mind will work since it too has a margin of obscurity. Although we only see one activity at Cocker's, it combines the functions of a telegraph office with those of a grocery. And this is highly strategic since it encapsulates both the girl's present situation and her future with Mudge. In other words the description does not simply give information. It functions (as do the descriptions in The Spoils) on an intricate metaphorical level and suggests important aspects of the telegraphist's character. One small but clear example of this comes in the concluding comment which hints at how futile are the girl's gestures of refusal to accept her situation.

The description of Cocker's, as I have been suggesting, shades into metaphor; and immediately after the passage quoted James goes on to spell out the social symbolism of the cage. This is a hint as to how we should read the novel in general, but here the metaphors are made explicit. Later they are not. Towards the end of the book Mrs. Jordan and the girl go to a High Church service 'among chants and incense and wonderful music' (p.163). The narrator makes no comment on this but it is clearly another visual reflection of the girl's dreams. If the telegraphist's cage becomes a metaphor, so also does

her 'margin' which is literally the counter behind which she serves her customers. E.D. Aswell has examined how many different meanings the term carries, from imaginative space to financial leeway.[25] These variations in meaning are enacted by the telegraphist, but articulated by the narrator.

The repetition of the term 'margin' is one of a number of hints to the reader that the girl is concerned to create an area within which she can build up her romance about Everard. As Tzvetan Todorov points out, she is far more interested in her own imaginative manoeuvres than in finding out the truth.[26] And the former is dictated mainly by her psychological needs.

If the narrator's main role is to keep reality in sight, even at the height of the girl's 'romance', one way of doing this is to suggest alternative possible interpretations of scenes from those which she offers. This can be done through the rhetoric of the narrative, and here again James often displays an astonishing economy of expression. The following example comes during the first stages of the relationship between the girl and the Captain. He has become a regular customer and has even - to her tremulous delight - started exchanging pleasantries with her. With comical care she chooses the word 'ages' and states that she has not seen him for 'ages':

> To this he replied in terms doubtless less anxiously selected, but perhaps on this account not the less remarkable, 'Oh yes, hasn't it been awfully wet?' That was a specimen of their give and take; it fed her fancy that no form of intercourse so transcendent and distilled had ever been established on earth. Everything, so far as they chose to consider it so, might mean almost anything.
> (pp.62-63)

The narrative comments here are typical of this period in James's writings in that the narrator does not appear to be vouching for anything. They seem veiled and tentative. But in fact the narrator pretends not to make categorical conclusions precisely because he assumes that those conclusions are obvious. So he understates the gap (or 'margin') between Captain Everard's words (which are mere banalities) and the exalted interpretation put on them by the telegraphist because the gap is so wide. The disparity is blatantly grotesque. The narrator displays his authority by vouching for the representative quality

of his example and then appears to return to the girl's perspective. But her conclusion brings her reassurance whereas, thanks to the narrator's guidance, we can see it for what it is - a license for giving free rein to her imagination.

This passage is typical of the ingenious way in which James dovetails the narrator's comments into the girl's own reactions. Without recourse to any new information which might be unavailable to the telegraphist, the narrator makes it clear what sort of a stance the reader should take towards her. This is achieved by detailed variations in tone and nuance, which in turn gives the narrative its richness of texture. There is certainly no doubt at all about the narrator's authority which rhetorically over-shadows the girl's thoughts. And the comedy of the novel is generated by the gap between the two. This gap is of course constant and persists throughout the conversations with Mudge, Mrs. Jordan and the Captain. These are the more 'scenic' sections of the novel where narrative comment seems virtually non-existent. But James can only present these conversations without overt comment, not because he is trying to practise a doctrinaire objectivity, but because the narrator has <u>already</u> established the kind of ironic scrutiny which he would like the reader to adopt. So in the Hyde Park scene Captain Everard thanks the girl for taking so much trouble on his behalf. She replies that she knew he wanted to thank her, then sees his surprise but draws no conclusion ('She immediately saw that he was surprised and even a little puzzled at her frank assent': p.93). This is all we have by way of narrative comment but it is ample to alert us to the fact that the girl sees an intention which is not there. Apparently James is only presenting what can be seen. But the ironies present originate in non-visual rhetoric which, as Seymour Chatman has argued, moves away from the dramatic ('showing') towards discursive analysis.[27]

The narrator's early comments either confirm the unattractive aspects of the telegraphist's character or clarify features of her situation which might otherwise be missed. In her cage the girl leads 'the life of a guinea-pig or a magpie' (p.1) just as in 'The Great Condition' (1899) a hotel receptionist

is figured as a priestess in her 'inner sanctuary'.[28] In both cases the narrator is contrasting his freedom of mind (in the comic invention of metaphor) with their physical confinement. Or again the comments might be more explicit. Of the telegraphist's aspirations the narrator states 'her conceit, her baffled vanity were possibly monstrous' (p.30), where the 'possibly' does little to soften the criticism. And when she tries to picture to herself the Captain's arrival at home in the early hours of the morning, the narrator reflects:

> But if nothing was more impossible than the fact, nothing was more intense than the vision. What may not, we can only moralise, take place in the quickened, muffled perception of a girl of a certain kind of soul? (pp.73-74)

The narrator here is not overtly condemnatory, but directs us towards an understanding of how the girl's mind works by indicating that she belongs to a certain psychological type. So in the New York text he made this even clearer by revising the end of the question to 'a young person with an ardent soul'. It is significant that even in the passage above, when the narrator is speaking explicitly, he is not actually evaluating the girl.

One last method used by the narrator to throw the girl's imagination into an ironic light is through the references to the myth of Danaë. When she first sees Lady Bradeen in Cocker's the telegraphist compares her to Juno and the Captain similarly seems 'Olympian' in his bearing. Now these can be explained as features of her general tendency to idealize the rich. But the narrator develops these references to Greek mythology in a more thorough and consistently ironic way than the girl herself could possibly do. According to the myth Danae was imprisoned in a tower where she was visited in a shower of gold by Jupiter. From this visit Perseus was born. This mythological analogy was spotted by A.C. Friend but he mistakenly assumes that the girl creates it and thereby misses its ironic point.[29] For the myth is directly sexual but the only shower of gold (and the actual phrase is used) which the girl is destined to see is the money given in payment for the telegrams. The phrase recurs in the Hyde Park scene. This time she has a shower of gold in

her lap - and it is at this point that her yearning becomes the most sexual. She hopes (and fears) that he will ask her up to his room. But Captain Everard proves to be an unsatisfactory Jupiter indeed and only gives her vague pats on her hand. The mythic parallel is doubly inappropriate and exposes the telegraphist's vanity as well as pointing an ironic finger at how ungodly Everard and his set really are. These mythological references then are a device used by the narrator to expose the girl's waste of imaginative effort. Exactly the same device occurs in The Ivory Tower where the narrator compares characters associated with Rosanna Gaw, the heroine, to Mercury and Juno and then explains that they are 'mythological comparisons, which we make for her under no hint that she could herself have dreamed of one'.[30] The same gloss could be made on In the Cage.

Earlier I was suggesting that the telegraphist's imagination was melodramatic and the narrator insists at several points that this tendency finds its root cause in the cheap fiction she reads. This preference she has in common with Fleda Vetch and the governess of 'The Turn of the Screw'. The telegraphist's romances give her tangible models for her mental histrionics. One critic has seen Saintine's Picciola as standing behind her dreams because this is named in the text.[31] But the recurring references are to pulp fiction in general, because James wishes to suggest a type of imagination. So it would be irrelevant to be more specific in this novel. And secondly these references heighten the reflexivity of the narrative, for one richness in its texture is the way in which different levels of artifice exist, the one inside the other.

When In the Cage was first published James sent a copy to his friend Paul Bourget and in the covering letter he described it as

> ...a poor little pot-boiling study of nothing at all qui ne tire pas à conséquence. It is but a monument to my technical passion.[32]

This flatly contradicts the valuation he put on the novel in its preface, and it should also be borne in mind that James regularly denigrated his own works when describing them to friends. But even so these comments suggest that he

had doubts about the thinness of the subject and the possibility that it had been overworked.

These fears were justified in one respect. Although the narrative voice keeps the telegraphist's imaginings under ironic control, this is not consistently true for the novel as a whole, despite S.B. Meltzer's statement to the contrary.[33] In practice the telegraphist comes to show so much cleverness in analyzing her experience that it blurs into the narrator himself. This is a question partly of her capacities and partly also of idiom in that the style of her thoughts approaches the style of the narrator's rhetoric. And this was spotted by one discerning reviewer (in the Athenaeum) when the novel was first published:

> ...the girl has to use the most extraordinary ingenuity to discover what she does of the story, and in her efforts she almost gets to talk and split logic as if she were the author himself.[34]

Although this attribution of analytical capacity never reaches the proportions of the central chapters of Maisie, it is nevertheless an obstacle to the ironic clarity of the narrative. The humour of In the Cage is the best guarantee that James has kept the two perspectives firmly differentiated.

Chapter 6

'The Turn of the Screw'

(1)

With the exceptions of 'The Aspern Papers' (1888) and The Sacred Fount (1901), 'The Turn of the Screw' was the only fiction of any length which James wrote in the first person. His reservations about this method received their most famous expression in the preface to The Ambassadors where he roundly declared that 'the first person, in the long piece is a form foredoomed to looseness'.[1] It was associated inevitably for James with a casual disregard for formal rigour and a blurring of the necessary distinction between the author and his main character.

I have already discussed James's theoretical objections to first-person narration, and so it might seem paradoxical that he used the method at all.[2] If we look briefly at 'The Aspern Papers' we can see that this paradox is only apparent not actual. Broadly speaking the irony of that nouvelle grows out of a consistent tension between the narrator's view of scenes and scenes themselves. He projects one view but the scenes are so structured that they imply quite a different perspective on the same situations. This difference creates the work's comedy, and again and again brings the narrator's motives and methods into question. He appeals to the abstraction 'history' to justify his probing into the private life of Miss Bordereau and yet the narrative emerges in personal terms. So, although the narrator constantly tries to maintain what he sees as the correct intellectual detachment, in fact he slides into a relationship with Miss Bordereau's niece, Tina. This in turn becomes a debased re-enactment of Miss Bordereau's romance with Geoffrey Aspern.

In neither the preface nor his notes on 'The Aspern Papers' did James go into details about the narrator. He was to be a 'fanatic' simply.[3] And in the work itself there is a more or less even balance between the narrator's account of events and a direct presentation through dialogue. This suggests that James's main focus of attention was on the situation. One example will

demonstrate this - the first meeting between the narrator and Juliana Bordereau. He has entered her house full of confidence that she is just an awkward senile old woman who can be manoeuvered into giving up the Aspern papers without too much difficulty. To his chagrin he discovers that she is really very sharp-witted but his first actual sight of her comes as a shock:

> Then came a check, with the perception that we were not really face to face, inasmuch as she had over her eyes a horrible green shade which, for her, served almost as a mask.....it increased the presumption that there was a ghastly death's-head lurking behind it. The divine Juliana as a grinning skull...[4]

These startling and momentary visual impressions set up reverberations throughout the whole nouvelle. It is ironic that the narrator sees a mask before him because he too is trying to keep up a mask of disinterestedness. And the whole work has been seen quite rightly by one critic as a comic interplay between various forms of mask and disguise.[5] The only character who has no mask is the ingenuous Miss Tina and she stands significantly outside the comedy proper.

The grotesque references to death in the passage above question the very possibility of recapturing the past and imply that the narrator is on one level a desecrator, a grave-robber. And he does literally become a thief when Miss Bordereau catches him in the act of trying to force open her desk. In this way the narrator's ideals are gradually eroded so that by the end he has become completely discredited. This suggests that the character of the narrator is one important aspect of 'The Aspern Papers', albeit not the main one.

In criticizing first-person narration James names examples of picaresque fiction (Gil Blas), chronicle (Robinson Crusoe) and 'autobiography' (Jane Eyre, David Copperfield and Kidnapped).[6] What all these works have in common is that they document long stretches of time. They have in other words a historical scope. And this is entirely absent in 'The Aspern Papers' (which discusses the notion of history but does not present it), 'The Turn of the Screw' and The Sacred Fount. In these three works the interest is either dramatic - in working out a situation; or psychological in bending back our attention to the narrator. They cover relatively short time-spans, and only give us minimal information about the past lives of characters.

We can make similar comments about two possible sources which have been suggested as sources for 'The Turn of the Screw'. Two critics have located debts to Jane Eyre and Miriam Allott has proposed a specific source in Mrs. Gaskell's 'The Old Nurse's Story'.[7] The element of horror in both these works grows out of their preoccupation with the past working itself out in the present. In Jane Eyre this emerges as past responsibility undertaken (Rochester's first marriage) and in 'The Old Nurse's Story' ghosts appear as a direct result of the Lord's cruelty in driving away one of his daughters and her child. Indeed the tale ends with his surviving daughter pointing the moral: '"Alas! alas! what is done in youth can never be undone in age! What is done in youth can never be undone in age!"'.[8]

In 'The Turn of the Screw' by contrast James is far more preoccupied with the psychology of the present and our uncertainty about what Quint and Miss Jessel have actually done is a necessary result of this shift in attention. Their past misdeeds do not bring about melodramatic consequences in the present, but instead they act as triggers for the governess's imagination.

These contrasts are quite consistent with James's theoretical statements about first-person narration since he does not condemn the method outright, only for certain bad results which he has seen in past literature. And although he included 'The Aspern Papers' and 'The Turn of the Screw' in the same volume of the New York Edition, the later work differs from its predecessor in two main aspects. Firstly it concentrates much more on the psychology of the narrator. And secondly it self-consciously refers to old-fashioned modes of fiction within the text.

This is why the introductory section deserves more critical attention than it has hitherto received. Superficially like Wuthering Heights (and Miriam Allott argues that this novel is the ultimate source both for James's work and Mrs. Gaskell's tale), 'The Turn of the Screw' is a story within a story. We really come at the action from three removes. Firstly there is the governess giving her account from some retrospective point after she has left Bly. This

is mediated through Douglas who takes an editorial role, and then through the 'I' of the introduction who is another member of Douglas's fireside group. To enter the fiction through a series of narrators, each within the other, distances us right from the start. And yet paradoxically the immediacy of the governess's story to a certain extent betrays this detachment.

The interplay between the 'I' and Douglas is particularly important in the introduction. The fireside setting is, as the first narrator recognizes, a conventional occasion for telling ghost stories. Griffin has just finished a tale about a boy seeing an apparition, which the narrator describes as a 'case'. And in fact he takes an interest, not in ghosts, but in the techniques of telling a ghost-story. So he pays a very close professional interest in Douglas's performance. In an interesting comparison between the framing narrators of 'The Turn of the Screw' and 'Heart of Darkness' Roger Ramsey states of James's narrator that 'even in his very first sentence... [he] evokes the mood of chilling mystery'.[9] But this is completely misleading because the first sentence in fact demonstrates the narrator's rather condescending detachment:

> The story held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless, but except the obvious remark that it was gruesome, as on Christmas Eve in an old house a strange tale should essentially be, I remember no comment uttered...[10]

Despite the inclusive 'us', he holds back from the group to criticize the routine reactions caused by Griffin's tale, and the conventional situation of its delivery.

Similarly he shrewdly observes that Douglas deliberately delays his tale in order to tantalize the group and to stress his privilege of being the only one the governess took into her confidence. The narrator's impatience with what he clearly thinks to be a rather hackneyed technique of delivery makes him interrupt Douglas with the facetious declaration that he has a title for the story. And he evidently thinks that the situation which Douglas is outlining is so stereotyped that the governess must of course be seduced by the owner of the house. But much to his surprise Douglas turns the tables on him and insists that the governess only saw her employer twice.

In his general tone and attitude the narrator displays a critical scepticism towards the whole notion of a Christmas ghost-story. There is one brief moment of mutual respect, as between two professionals, when he guesses that Douglas's governess was in love with her patron. But for the most part he comes very near to James's own position in the preface when he refers to 'the time-honoured Christmas-tide toy'.[11] Indeed there is an approximate correspondence between the situation of the introduction and the actual circumstances under which James composed 'The Turn of the Screw'. He states in the preface that it was to be one in a series of Christmas tales for Collier's Weekly. Although A.E. Jones has argued that the reader is drawn into the fireside circle and that no one is placed outside as the ultimate authority, the narrator's detached attention to methods of narration does carry considerable weight, and it suggests that the reader should take the same critical stance towards the governess's story.[12] One of James's reasons for disliking first-person narration was that it seemed to encourage uncritical reading:

> The 'first-person' then...is addressed by the author directly to ourselves, his possible readers, whom he has to reckon with, at the best, by our English tradition, so loosely and vaguely after all, so little respectfully, on so scant a presumption of exposure to criticism.[13]

The introductory frame to 'The Turn of the Screw' stresses, by its multiple narrators, that James is not speaking directly to his audience. And it guides the reader towards just the critical stance which he feels to be lacking in the passage above.

In effect it divides possible readers into two categories. One is represented by Douglas and the narrator, especially the latter. The second type of reader comprises the majority of those present, who are gullible, uncritical and all too eager to yield to 'a common thrill'. The narrator glances sarcastically at the women who exclaim with delight at the tale's dreadfulness or with disappointment at the governess's lack of romantic success. These are comically punctual reactions and the reader draws a sense of superior amusement from the narrator's perspective. But there is a sting in the tail,

because, as Everett Zimmerman has noted, this detachment can scarcely be maintained in the narrative proper:

> The introductory section of James's tale has a function similar to the literary references of the governess's account: it helps to create a sense of horror by providing a viewpoint too limited for succeeding events.[14]

And indeed, although the introduction appears to ironize heavy-handed narration, the work itself imitates Douglas's delaying tactics; for the first instalment ends where he is waiting for the manuscript to be sent from London.

Douglas acts, as I suggested, in an editorial capacity. The hint of a romantic attachment between him and the governess has led Louis D. Rubin to argue that he is Miles, which leaves the rather inconvenient fact of Miles's death to be explained away.[15] But any attachment between the two is simply a device to explain how Douglas came into possession of her record. He functions like Mr. Lockwood in Wuthering Heights, and when he stresses that he has copied out the story in 'an exact transcript' (p.8) this is yet another traditional device. Douglas in effect disclaims responsibility for the narrative and puts its full burden on the governess.

(ii)

In considering the governess as a narrator it is important to make an initial distinction between her role as agent (in recounting events) and her role as subject. James himself makes a related distinction in the 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.[16]

The compositional problem which James is articulating here means that on the one hand he wants to ensure the visual clarity of her descriptions whilst on the other he does not want to vouch for the reliability of her assessments.

Notionally it would seem quite easy to differentiate between the two and yet the whole direction of his fiction through the 1890's is away from 'neutral' description. We have already seen examples in The Spoils and In the Cage of how he dovetails assessment or evaluation into description - whether of the protagonist or of the narrator. And so typically we receive a personal view simultaneously with the description. There is a further complication in 'The Turn of the Screw' because the protagonist is also the narrator and has to speak for herself without any external authority.

In the event the distinction which James proposes in his preface does not hold up to scrutiny. For example when the governess first sees Quint, this is before she knows that he is dead. So we might expect her account to be relatively objective. Such is not the case. One afternoon she is wandering in the grounds of Bly and indulging in a romantic day-dream of meeting a man (the owner?) there. Rounding a corner she suddenly sees a man standing at the top of one of the towers. But instead of describing him she diverts attention away from the man to survey the architecture of the house. This tones down the shock of the event but also it avoids any direct visual presentation of Quint. Beyond the fact that he is not wearing a hat we know nothing about him at this point. It is only later, during a conversation with Mrs. Grose, that the governess says he has red hair and gives other details. In fact the governess hesitates to say what she saw and concentrates much more on her reactions:

> It was as if, while I took in - what I did take in - all the rest of the scene had been stricken with death...[and then rejecting an easy use of the pathetic fallacy]. The gold was still in the sky, the clearness in the air, and the man who looked at me over the battlements was as definite as a picture in a frame. (p.31)

Her concluding analogy vouches for clarity but does not actually give it. By no stretch of the imagination could this account be called 'crystalline'. Instead, through carefully rehearsed hesitations and shifts in focus the governess tries to recreate for the reader the immediacy of her reactions.

This procedure is not constant but it can appear quite authoritative. When she first sees Miss Jessel across the little lake at Bly she notices that she and Flora have 'an interested spectator' (p.55). And once again she swings our attention away from the figure itself while she tries to fathom out who it could possibly be. In neither of these examples does she betray any horror - only surprise. And her rational search for an explanation of their presence minimizes the strangeness of the events. It arouses curiosity in the reader and a certain amount of suspense but makes no use at all of the conventional trappings of Gothic melodrama - disused wings of the house, eerie nocturnal settings, and so on.

James gives a theoretical comment on this kind of technique in his review of M.E. Braddon's Aurora Floyd (1865) where he praises Wilkie Collins for having initiated a new school of fiction - the domestic mystery. He attacks The Mysteries of Udolpho for being impossibly exotic and concludes:

> A good ghost-story, to be half as terrible as a good murder-story, must be connected at a hundred points with the common objects of life.[17]

James clearly sees Aurora Floyd as an advance on older more sensational fiction because it has attached less weight to the ghost-element. And in a letter to Edmund Gosse about 'The Turn of the Screw' he made it plain that ghosts were not an acceptable ingredient of fiction - at least in their traditional form:

> The difficulty, the problem was of course to add, organically, the element of beauty to a thing so foully ugly - the success is in that if I have done it. But I despise bogies, anyway. [18]

The review quoted above is directly relevant to 'The Turn of the Screw' because the governess herself rejects the sensational possibilities of an insane relative at Bly (as in Jane Eyre) or a 'mystery of Udolpho'. These references seem a reversal of James's usual practice in this period of suggesting a romantic tendency in his heroines from the novels they have read (as in the cases of Fleda Vetch and the telegraphist of In the Cage). By contrast the governess seems more aware and less romantically susceptible. Indeed she explicitly denies that Bly is mysterious:-

> I had the view of a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite, such a place as would somehow...take all colour out of story-books and fairy-tales. Wasn't it just a story-book over which I had fallen a-doze and a-dream? No; it was a big, ugly, antique, but convenient house, embodying a few features of a building still older, half-replaced and half-utilised... (p.19)

The governess's recognition of how Bly really is adds to the superficial reassurance created by her tendency to reduce the mysterious. But it also continues the hints thrown out in the introduction that 'The Turn of the Screw' consists of different levels of artifice. The governess sets her feelings about Bly against the sort of thing which happens in story-books as if what she experiences is more real. And in the opening stages of her narrative she yields - but with conscious fancy - to a feeling that her life with the two children is a 'romance' in order to contrast with subsequent events which are 'real' for her.[19] This is a stratagem every bit as calculated as her manipulation of the reader's reactions in her accounts of Quint and Miss Jessel.

There is a further possible explanation of the governess's rational tone. James was probably trying to counteract the conventional emotional responses associated with governess-novels. In an article of 1906 on American women he thinks back to

> those Early-Victorian and Mid-Victorian governesses of English girlhood, daughters of country parsons and half-pay officers, heroines (while their fashion lasted) of sleepy three-volume novels, whose meagre erudition, whose melancholy music, whose painting on velvet, it was so easy and so usual to deride.[20]

'The Turn of the Screw' amalgamates aspects from two genres - the ghost-story and the governess-narrative (its protagonist is also the daughter of a parson). Both were old-fashioned to James, although the ghost-story less so because of contemporary interest in psychical research.[21] And, as the quotation above suggests, James saw the governess as a conventional figure of pathos. Accordingly he reduced the possible melancholy which could surround her by stressing her analytical rigour, and by minimizing any references to her past.

In her narration the governess constantly uses forensic terms such as 'proof' and 'evidence' as if she were building up a case against possible objections rather than simply recounting events. Indeed she strives throughout

for a total understanding of the situation at Bly, and Miles's death rounds off this search for her because it seems to give final confirmation to her view of things. It becomes clear that she has never been in a situation comparable to her present one - with such freedom, respect and responsibility. Accordingly her desire to understand Bly is a direct expression of her urge to broaden her experience. She is so eager not to miss any 'clues' that she constantly retires to her room to ransack the day's events for their hidden meaning. This provides 'The Turn of the Screw' with one of its main rhythms - the governess's periods of solitary speculation alternating with the more 'scenic' passages, either of dialogue or where she encounters the ghosts.[22]

The governess comes more and more to distrust appearances or the surface significance of events. Throughout 'The Turn of the Screw' she refers to her activities as a kind of exposure and articulates her hunt for knowledge through the metaphor of a system of corridors. The labyrinth of corridors however has an actual as well as a figurative existence so that when the governess is looking for the children she is in a sense trapped within her own metaphor.[23] As with the obsessive narrator in The Sacred Fount, the governess displays a fascination with intellectual pattern. She hesitates, for instance, when she discovers that Flora used to spend much of her time in Miss Jessel's company because it seems too symmetrical, coming as it does just after Mrs. Grose's admission that Miles was with Quint. The governess's scruple is more apparent than real however, and she only hesitates briefly.

Right to the very end of 'The Turn of the Screw' she shows a pride in her skilful reasoning. With amused condescension she imagines that her lucidity impresses and terrifies the housekeeper, and constantly uses Mrs. Grose to boost her own vanity. So, after 'convincing' her that Flora really can see Miss Jessel, the governess interjects a patronizing aside: '...the chain of my logic was ever too much for her. It dragged her at my heels even now', (p.133). James heightened this metaphor of bondage when he revised the first sentence into 'ever too strong for her' in the New York Edition. There is an

irony in this confidence because Mrs. Grose in fact throws a rather questionable light on the governess's reasoning.

At several points the governess seems to show an awareness of how wrapped up she is becoming in her own theorizing. She speaks of her 'prodigious private commentary' (p.74) as if it was perhaps in excess of the facts; and she confesses to the reader that she hasn't the space to express all the implications she saw in the children's behaviour. In her references to her search for knowledge as an 'obsession', and in her spells of panic (she considers running away from Bly at one point), the governess implies that her capacity to draw inferences is a liability and even an illness which she can barely control. Such moments of self-knowledge are however sporadic and retrospective. Because the time of her narration and the time of the events are blurred together so as to give more immediacy the governess demonstrates self-knowledge and unconsciousness in a paradoxical combination. She recognizes her own failings but at the time continues to act on them. In that sense she could be said to combine the role of deluded protagonist with that of an ironic narrator viewing herself. A considerable amount of the criticism which 'The Turn of the Screw' has received consists of detailed diagnoses which, the sexual element apart, only fill out the comments which the governess makes about herself.

When the governess corners Mrs. Grose and attempts to make her admit that she (or possibly Flora) sees Miss Jessel, the latter materializes in the grounds. The governess states that she felt a perverse joy 'at having brought on a proof' (p.136), and this is typical of the steps in her argument. Whenever she moves nearer to total understanding she experiences a sense of joy, exaltation and power. When on the verge of such discoveries her reactions are described in physical, almost sexual terms; she is typically 'hungry' or 'panting' for confirmation of her inferences.

Despite her apparent logic, the governess in fact makes quite arbitrary assumptions about the children and Mrs. Grose. She leaps to the conclusion that the children can both see the ghosts on the evidence of a very ambiguous

change in their behaviour. And she imagines that there is some kind of communication between herself and Quint; on the fourth meeting she reports 'he knew me as well as I knew him' (p.77). But in fact such shifts in verbs from 'feel' to 'know', or in syntax from hypothesis ('as if' - clauses) to fact are all stylistic details which demonstrate that the governess's rationality is a mask for extreme subjectivity. There has been a certain amount of critical dispute about whether James increased the subjectivity of the governess in his textual revisions.[24] The evidence is debatable and anyway hardly crucial, because there are numerous examples of how arbitrary a course her thoughts follow.

Her thoughts do not only become more and more subjective, but also progressively more convoluted. So the governess's language becomes richer in metaphors and more complex syntactically. Witness the following after her first sight of Quint:

> This was not so good a thing, I admit, as not to leave me to judge that what, essentially, made nothing else much signify was simply my charming work. (p.36)

In its false starts, triple negatives, parenthesis and pseudo-conversational tone, the passage shows an exaggerated attention to nuance. Such complexities reflect the governess's self-absorption. And indeed she becomes so absurdly careful about what she says to the children that she actually rehearses her behaviour in the privacy of her room, trying out possible approaches. She constantly shows a desire to justify herself to the reader.[25] And yet, as her sensibility becomes finer, her treatment of the children becomes worse not better. This is hardly surprising if we accept that the governess is becoming more and more preoccupied with her own reactions.

The peculiarity of the governess's way of thought suggests that she is as much the subject of 'The Turn of the Screw' as the ghosts, especially once allowance has been made for a cultural shift away from belief in the supernatural. Contemporary reviews of 'The Turn of the Screw' were heavily moralistic, balancing distaste for the subject against a grudging respect for James's

skill.[26] By contrast the greater bulk of modern criticism has been taken up with disputes about the existence of the ghosts. Although absolute certainty is not possible, the bulk of the evidence suggests that they are only important in revealing the governess's character. In the two possible sources referred to earlier - Jane Eyre and 'The Old Nurse's Story' - the sources of horror are never in question. Rochester's first wife is inescapably real and several people see the ghosts in Mrs. Gaskell's story. So the very existence of ambiguity in 'The Turn of the Screw' suggests that the interest is now located in the governess's psychology. And, as C.B. Ives has pointed out, the ghosts are really minimal. They appear silently, do virtually nothing, and then disappear.[27]

In fact the ghosts appear with great psychological punctuality. So the governess sees Quint for the second time just after she has begun to worry about Miles's expulsion from school; she first sees Miss Jessel just after discovering how Quint died; and so on. Although she describes them as objectively there, they always appear when she is in a tense state of mind. The figures then seem to function as externalizations of her own impulses and fears. As John Lydenberg has argued, -

> The apparitions satisfy a deep-lying need; they permit her to objectify her fears, to project her uncertainties onto something external...[28]

One of the earliest psychological explanations of the ghosts was given in 1918 by Virginia Woolf:

> The governess is not so much frightened of [the apparitions] as of the sudden extension of her own field of perception, which in this case widens to reveal to her the presence all about her of an unmentionable evil.[29]

The virtue of these very similar approaches is that they avoid the trap of arguing about whether the ghosts are 'internal' or 'external', and they also avoid the diagnostic extremities of some Freudian criticism.[30] The governess herself even considers the possibility that the ghosts are just private hallucinations, but soon dismisses that consideration.

In other words the ghosts play a structural role in the governess's gradual self-exposure. She 'acts herself out', to use Leon Edel's phrase.[31] And the character which emerges is a strange mixture of contradictory elements. She shows a certain intense rigour in rationalizing her experiences, but on the other hand an extreme subjectivity in drawing inferences. She has conventional attitudes to class and morality, and this is why she is so horrified to learn of a liaison between Quint and Miss Jessel. She tends to yield to romantic day-dream, and pours out her emotions on Miles and Flora far in excess of the demands of her job. She displays on the one hand a single-minded persistence in pursuing her ideas, and on the other a liability to panic and a susceptibility to 'impressions'.

As events unfold so the governess reveals herself more and more to the reader. Despite the immediacy which her narrative creates she does also at times perform the function of an impersonal narrator when she comments on herself and gives the reader hints of her tendencies. As in 'The Aspern Papers' however, the governess 'gives herself away' unconsciously for the most part. And in this James is using the first-person mode to unfold character, in basically the same way as does Browning in his dramatic monologues.[32] In order for this self-exposure to be successful James has to establish a perspective which is quite different from the governess's. This he does in several ways. Firstly the introductory section alerts the reader to a professional scrutiny of her method of narration. Secondly we can see for ourselves how much truth lies in the governess's criticisms of herself. Thirdly - and this is a very extensive source of irony - we observe the contradictions and paradoxes within the governess's account, and asdess the general style of her imaginings. More will be said about this last point in the next section.

The fourth main source of our second perspective is through dialogue, and particularly through Mrs. Grose. The governess of course patronizes her throughout.

> She offered her mind to my disclosures as, had I wished to mix a witch's broth and proposed it with assurance, she would have held out a large clean saucepan. (p.86)

The poise of this comparison and its confident superiority echo James's own ironies against for instance Mrs. Wix. Mrs. Grose's mind is as comically concrete and homely as a saucepan only in comparison with the intellectual skill of the governess. So this kind of rhetoric would appear to enhance the latter's authority. But not so. Mrs. Grose functions as particularly effective foil to the governess's changeable and obsessive theorizing. The housekeeper lags behind her mental leaps and by so doing creates the grotesque humour of the nouvelle. For the governess always assumes that Mrs. Grose is simply dense - never that she might be mistaken. So, for instance, just before the apparition by the lake the two are talking together and the governess mentions Miles's 'divine' way of diverting attention:

> 'Divine?' Mrs. Grose bewilderedly echoed.
> 'Infernal then!' I almost cheerfully rejoined. (p.129)

This unobtrusive exchange demonstrates the arbitrary way in which the governess can shift from one extreme to the other.

The governess's tendency to act out chosen roles and to be oblivious to the impression she makes on the others (she doesn't see how frightening she is to the children, for example), prevents her from gaining access to the alternative perspective I have been outlining. And even when she takes the place of Quint after his second appearance, she does not really register how alarmed Mrs. Grose is when she sees the governess peering in at her through the dining-room window. At this point she has put herself into the position of the ghost, and Juliet McMaster has suggested that she constantly tries to act out the ghosts.[33] This momentary reversal, where the governess becomes the object and not the perspective of the scene, is however yet another scenic hint that we should question her authority.

In view of the very extensive evidence for an alternative perspective to the governess's, it is all the more surprising to find critics arguing that

hers is the final authority. So A.E. Stone has asserted that 'this naive girl is the only conscience, the sole moral imagination in the tale'.[34] And F.R. Leavis has been even more forthright:

> As for the governess's 'authority', I contended - and contend - that James clearly means by it, not that she has the power of making the reader, or the housekeeper, 'helpless', but that we are to accept her in unquestioning good faith as a wholly credible witness - a final authority.[35]

The governess is in fact extremely unreliable as a narrator - even when she is purporting to give us appearances directly.

Although I have been emphasizing that the governess's character is central to 'The Turn of the Screw', James himself wrote (in a letter to H.G. Wells) that he had ruled out 'subjective complications of her own', by which it appears he meant distracting aspects of character which would blur his desired effect.[36] In all his comments on 'The Turn of the Screw' however James consistently underrates the complexity of the governess's character. This was perhaps because he was attempting to build up a suggestion of evil in the reader's mind through the psychological perspective created by the governess. So in his letters he describes the work as if it was a matter of manipulation or ingenuity - a 'fantaisie absolue dans le genre recherche du frisson'.[37] And in his preface he insisted that he wanted his reader ideally to 'think the evil', a purpose he echoed in his preface to the other ghost stories included in the New York Edition.[38]

Such comments imply that James wanted to recreate the governess's experience (re-create because it is retrospective for her) with considerable immediacy so as to generate identical emotional responses in the reader. But the whole direction of the book's irony and of present-day interest in psychology is to re-focus our attention on the workings of the governess's mind. Margaret Lane has argued that 'The Turn of the Screw' has dated very badly because we no longer believe in ghosts, absolute evil, etc.[39] But what is lost in that area is gained in psychology and in the fictive richness of the work. It now remains to be shown how the governess's imagination develops and how she does try to generate a sense of evil.

(iii)

Throughout 'The Turn of the Screw' the governess uses many of the conventional stratagems of a first-person narrator. She says she cannot put her feelings into words; she gropes for terms; she hesitates before crucial sections ('I find that I really hang back; but I must take my plunge' - p.75). And she comments on the difference between the time of narration and the time of events, as for instance just after the first sighting of Quint: 'I call it time, but how long was it? I can't speak to the purpose to-day of the duration of these things.' (p.40). Such remarks help to build up the governess's credibility as a narrator because they suggest that she can do no more than give an approximate account of events. But such disclaimers of ability are only half-sincere because she really demonstrates great skill in orchestrating scenes so as to gain the maximum impact on her reader. So, for instance, she returns to her room one night to find Flora's bed empty. She immediately jumps to the conclusion that the girl has been with Miss Jessel and this suspicion begins a long series of night-time vigils when the governess is watching for some sign to confirm that the children are having contact with the ghosts. Once again she finds Flora's bed empty and she sees her looking out through one of the windows down into the grounds. This is described in the most matter of fact way as if there were no doubts about Flora's activity (or for that matter about the governess's). She tip-toes towards Miles' door but then hesitates scrupulously before it. After all, he might be innocent and she might be wronging him. Here the pace of the narrative quickens and builds up to a climax. The governess moves to another window and looks down onto the lawn. The climax is expressed through lines of vision. The governess looks down on to a moonlit figure (Quint?), paralleling Flora's own perspective. But the figure on the lawn is looking up at the wall of Bly above the governess, at a person in the tower she assumes. Not until the last sentence of the chapter (Chapter 10) is the person on the lawn named, thereby giving it a maximum dramatic impact. It is of course Miles. By stage-managing her narration so

efficiently the governess deflects us (at first) from realizing how ambiguous her account really is. The episode is crucial to her because it seems to confirm that Miles is corrupt and yet really the manipulation of pace and suspense conceal quite arbitrary assumptions of purpose in the children. This is all a matter of skill on the governess's part, but the sinister aspects of 'The Turn of the Screw' grew out of a different tendency. Like the telegraphist of In the Cage the governess sees her situation in melodramatic terms. She invents a drama embracing herself, the children and the ghosts. And the growth and changes in this projected drama articulate the shifts in the governess's psychology.

The second time that she sees Quint the governess imputes a purpose to his appearances, a purpose that is directed at the children. Her reaction is first a 'sudden vibration of duty and courage' (pp.39-40) and second a desire for self-sacrifice:

> ...something within me said that by offering myself bravely as the sole subject of such experience [the visitations], by accepting, by inviting, by surmounting it all, I should serve as an expiatory victim and guard the tranquillity of my companions. (p.50)

The status of the governess's new post was exhilerating for her. But that is nothing compared with the excitement of casting herself as heroine within her melodrama. This relieves the possible boredom of routine teaching in a lovely old house, and, as E.D. Aswell notes, externalizes her feelings about the children:

> The governess is motivated to identify the sinister embodiments of her own impulses with the previous servant at Bly by the need to explain her ambivalent and troubling fears about Miles and to justify her own role as a fierce and possessive protector of his and Flora's innocence.[40]

Possible psychological origins for this melodrama are, in other words, obviously not lacking. But the governess's romance generates a momentum of its own. She first imagines a transaction between herself and the ghosts, and that is quite exciting. But then she begins to suspect that the ghosts have direct access to the children, and she fears that they may be contaminated.

Torn between her emotional need of the children's beauty and innocence and her desire to rationalize her experience, the governess's 'reason' nevertheless pulls her inexorably towards the conclusion that the children have been corrupted. As this conviction grows her vocabulary polarizes towards melodramatic extremes: the apparitions are 'fiends'; the children are 'angels' and 'saints'. In this way the drama for the salvation of the souls is formed. And verbal extremism parallels the governess's increasingly excessive reactions.

Again as in the case of the telegraphist and of the obsessed narrator of The Sacred Fount, the governess puts less and less trust in appearances. Under the impact of her new-found 'knowledge' about the children, what had previously seemed irresponsible play now is transformed into deliberate deception. The governess declares roundly to Mrs. Grose: '...even while they pretend to be lost in their fairy-tale they're steeped in their vision of the dead restored to them' (pp.92-92). The grim irony of such a comment is that, whereas the governess is accusing Miles and Flora of putting on a special manner to deceive her, that is what she is doing. For her behaviour towards the children gradually changes into a professional manner behind which she can look for evidence of their corruption.

It is a predictable result of the governess becoming more and more engrossed in her theories that she begins to construct hypothetical scenes between the children and the ghosts. This reaches an extreme when she interprets Miles's extreme politeness at dinner as sophisticated magnanimity, and projects the following words on to him:

> The true knights we love to read about never push an advantage too far. I know what you mean now: you mean that - to be let alone yourself - and not followed up - you'll cease to worry and spy upon me... (p.127)

The tone and syntax here are those of an adult not a child, and it reflects the governess's weakening grasp on reality that she doesn't notice the difference between these imagined words and the way Miles actually speaks. One reason for this is perhaps that by including the children in a mutual game of cat-and-

mouse the governess counteracts the isolation which has come with her fears that they have been corrupted.

However her scepticism towards the children's manner deprives her of a definite measure. She loses any sense of proportion and wavers between extreme alternatives. So, at one point where her confidence is flagging, she imagines that the children have her under their power instead of vice versa. She also begins to impose her own ideas on appearances. When Flora understandably shows fear at the governess's intense questioning, the latter explains it to Mrs. Grose in terms of Miss Jessel's influence. When the girl is communicating with Miss Jessel, the governess insists, '"she's not a child: she's an old, old woman"' (p.133).

As her romance develops, the governess varies her imaginary roles toward the children. From expiatory victim she shifts to guardian or, more precisely, guard: 'I was like a gaoler with an eye to possible surprises and escapes' - (p.103). All these roles have one thing in common. They go beyond having a merely tutorial responsibility to the children to a position where the governess has absolute power over them. Even when she figures herself as a nurse for Miles this is one of the attractions:

> His clear listening face, framed in its smooth whiteness, made him for the minute as appealing as some wistful patient in a children's hospital; and I would have given, as the resemblance came to me, all I possessed on earth really to be the nurse or the sister of charity who might have helped to cure him. (pp.120-121)

She demonstrates here a morbid fascination with illness together with an ostensible desire for selfless service. And yet of course the whole notion of illness is suspect. Even though in the passage the governess professes to want to help Miles, her ultimate aim is really to be proved right. And so, as E.D. Aswell points out, her treatment of the children is really cruder than before:

> The coarsening of the governess's imagination and sensibility is dramatically revealed by her no longer caring that the acknowledgement of evil was to be only a means toward the end of salvation. It has become the end in itself...[41]

It is only her increasing subtlety of hypothesis which masks this important shift in her attitude towards the children.

Her suspicion that they have communication with the ghosts leads her to put more and more pressure on them to conform to their roles in the melodrama she has created. Two peaks in the drama occur when she thinks that first Flora and second Miles is on the verge of admitting what she wants to know.[42] In the first of these scenes Miss Jessel appears when Flora and Mrs. Grose are both present, but Flora does not admit to seeing her. Under the pressure of the governess's interrogation she falls ill. The incorrigible woman persists in believing that Flora is being influenced - without once considering that it might be by her: 'The wretched child has spoken exactly as if she had got from some outside source each of her stabbing little words...' (p.140). Initially the governess's figurative language was full of religious references. But it is an index of the huge change which has taken place in her attitudes that now the terminology of weaponry and conflict is dominant.

The final climax, where Miles dies, brings together the verbal extremism, the melodrama and the heightened physical gesture which gives the book its title. Quite in keeping with the metaphors of torture, the governess is still trying to wring a confession from Miles as to his behaviour at school when Quint appears. She clutches Miles to her, exclaiming in her record that 'it was like fighting with a demon for a human soul' (pp.162-163). But really her violence is directed towards Miles, not against Quint; and when Miles - as she thinks - admits his guilt her joy is expressed as triumph over Quint when it is in fact the satisfaction of being proved right.

The governess has no doubts at all about the significance of this event, but, as Muriel West has noted, the scene is full of ambiguities.[43] The boy utters 'the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss' (p.168), but the governess tries to soften his fall. In thus acting as a saviour she literally squeezes the life from him. Ironically it is she who is a creature since she 'springs' (twice) on Miles while the baffled Quint can only 'prowl' outside. This ending

is of course violent and sensational, but it does resolve the governess's melodrama. The whole direction of her responses has been leading her towards a point where she has total power over the children. Ironically at the very moment when she gains this Miles dies - ironically because this demonstrates his independence of the governess's imagination in the most unanswerable way.

Just like the telegraphist of In the Cage the governess has created a melodramatic fiction which compensates for her hum-drum existence by offering her imaginative freedom. She exploits this freedom by assuming the privileges of a novelist, particularly in arranging her characters as she desires. In all the critical writings on 'The Turn of the Screw' only John Goode has acknowledged this. He argues that she models Quint on the stereotyped villain of Victorian melodrama and Miss Jessel on the stereotyped fallen woman. Whenever the ghosts appear they give her a 'joy of proof', and Goode continues:

> This is the joy of the do-it-yourself novelist. The governess has created her own Udolpho. The imprecisely realized expansion of her experience grants freedom to her imagination and, according to her primitive lights, she is able to create an artefact in which she is both creator and heroine.[44]

The analogy used here is precise because it helps to explain the governess's sense of power in a way which does not exclude a psychological account of its origins. However Goode is slightly misleading in that he gives the impression that the governess is always in control of her situation. This is not the case. From the very beginning there is a certain vagueness about her roles, partly from the very fact that her metaphors are so varied. She wants to be an expiatory victim but is unsure what action this will involve. The notion of sacrifice is temperamentally appealing to her but mainly for the emotional and histrionic satisfactions it carries. To her dismay the children do not fit neatly into the roles which would support the goveness's stance. Their play disrupts her early faith in their innocence; Flora takes herself out of her reach by falling ill; and Mrs. Grose stolidly resists the wilder flights of the governess's imagination. These facts, together with her own background fears of obsessiveness, delusion and even madness, all point to the governess's unreliability as a narrator.

In *In the Cage* the narrator made it clear that the telegraphist's romance must ultimately give way to a reality where relationships have reduced proportions. In 'The Turn of the Screw' we are denied such resolving finality. The climax gives us intensity but leaves important questions deliberately unanswered. Undeterred critics have attempted to give the work a moral weight which it cannot bear, Marius Bewley for instance seeing in it the 'siege of innocence' we all experience in childhood.[45] In fact James exploits different levels of narration to draw us into the governess's psychology. The continually varied ironies in 'The Turn of the Screw' make us question the nature of her activities without however giving us the alternative information which would resolve these disparities once and for all.

Chapter 7

The Awkward Age

(i)

Throughout the period under discussion there is a steady progression in James's work towards psychological detail. More and more the workings of a particular mind come to the forefront of the fiction, whether it is Maisie's, the governess's or the narrator's in The Sacred Fount. The Awkward Age is the one exception in this development and is a test case in this thesis, since here James was, by his own acknowledgement, experimenting with a technique that was stringently objective. He organized a structure which was positively hermetic in its complexity, so much so that, as he wryly admitted in retrospect, few people could understand it.[1] According to his account in the preface James saw the novel's meaning as emerging out of its structure, out of the inter-relation between scenes, particularly as they referred to Nanda Brookenham. It would seem then that in The Awkward Age James's application of dramatic techniques must rule out the presence of a narrator.

Soon after the novel's publication James wrote to Henrietta Reubell to explain its method and anticipated the preface in his pride at its stringency and consistency. The form was, he wrote, 'all dramatic and scenic'

> ...with no going behind, no telling about the figures save by their own appearance and action and with explanations reduced to the explanation of everything by all the other things in the picture.[2]

James here conflates two analogies, the theatrical and the pictorial, without giving theoretical recognition to one important practical problem - how is the reader to see appearances if he is reading a novel instead of sitting in a theatre? This is only one of the difficulties that the main dramatic analogy raises.

However by far the great bulk of the criticism which The Awkward Age has received, takes this analogy at its face value and has concentrated on the novel's internal structure. One of the most extreme 'objectivist' statements on the novel was made by Percy Lubbock in his The Craft of Fiction:

> In The Awkward Age everything is immediate and particular; there is no insight into anybody's thought, no survey of the scene from a height, no resumption of the past in retrospect. The whole of the book passes scenically before the reader, and nothing is offered but the look and the speech of the characters on a series of chosen occasions. It might indeed be printed as a play; whatever is not dialogue is simply a kind of amplified stage-direction...[3]

This passage has the virtue of making explicit the assumptions which most subsequent critics have made. The consensus of opinion has been that the novel's values grow out of the dialogue between the characters; that the characters reveal themselves as having little moral substance; and that moral and emotional terms become very fluid and shifting.[4]

At the end of the passage quoted above Lubbock warily adds a proviso that there is an element in the novel which cannot be included under the heading of 'dialogue', but dismisses it as stage-directions. Once again he is quite representative. Most critics of The Awkward Age have recognized in passing that there are such guiding statements in the novel, but they are only taken to be minimal and anyway functional.[5] We have already met the notion of stage-directions in The Other House and indeed they were recognized as a mannerism in The Europeans in Constance Fenimore Woolson's review of that novel.[6] But stage-directions, by their very nature, operate on the most practical level and could hardly qualify as a 'narrator'.

The number of critics who have seen a narrator in The Awkward Age is understandably small, and once again recognition has only been given in passing as if it were a minor concern. So Margaret Walters points out that the hesitations of the narrating voice remind us that he is only offering plausible interpretations of appearances and that 'this ghostly figure, tireless in his ingenuity, sometimes seems to be the novel's main character'.[7] And Wayne Booth and A.E. Davidson have both also pointed out that the narrator conjectures about appearances without claiming any privileged knowledge or awareness.[8] Davidson particularly insists that these conjectures are explanatory but not evaluative. Only two critics have argued that the narrator plays an important part in the novel and the various issues they raise will be dealt with in turn

in the bulk of this chapter.[9] The initial task here then is to demonstrate that a narrator does exist in The Awkward Age; and secondly to show that he plays a more important role than most critics have admitted. This argument will complement the discussion of the novel's scenic structure and put it in a wider context of James's general practice in the 1890's.

Before considering the novel itself however it is important to ascertain what James's attitudes were towards dialogue literature in general. For in his preface James writes that the objectivity of The Awkward Age came from

> the imposed absence of that 'going behind', to compass explanations and amplifications, to doag out odds and ends from the 'mere' story-teller's great property-shop of aids to illusion.[10]

And in achieving this objectivity he acknowledges a debt to Gyp, the nom de plume of the Countess Martell de Janville (1849-1932), a French writer who was the leading exponent of the roman dialogué.

But this debt is ambiguous. James clearly admired Gyp but at the same time he disapproved intensely of the formlessness inherent in her work. So later in the preface he refers to 'the genius of Gyp herself, muse of general looseness' and launches into a polemical attack on the over-use of dialogue in contemporary fiction.[11] Within this diatribe dialogue becomes the sauce which makes a 'slice of life' easy to digest by the undiscriminating public. And in one of his 'London' articles for Harper's Weekly (the journal which also serialized The Awkward Age) James had made a similar attack on Gissing in particular, and contemporary fiction in general. Dialogue for James must be illustrative and organic, and he commented: 'there is always, at the best, the author's voice to be kept out. It can be kept out for occasions; it cannot be kept out always'.[12] Here the phrase 'author's voice' really means 'narrator's voice'. On the few rare occasions when he refers to the narrator in his fiction, James regularly speaks of it as a projection of his own voice. In his notebook entry for June 4, 1895, for instance, he mulls over the possibilities of method for his tale 'The Next Time'. First he considers making the narrator a character within the tale ('a deluded vulgarian') but then rejects that strategy in favour of a greater objectivity: 'I become the

narrator, either impersonally or in my unnamed, unspecified personality'.[13] In other words an anonymous narrator (a 'real ironic painter') was regularly seen by James as a persona for himself without in any way compromising the work's objectivity. In fact it was really one guarantee of that objectivity, so much taken for granted that he scarcely needed to refer to it in his notes at all.[14]

Elizabeth Owen has demonstrated that dialogue fiction was a popular minor genre in the 1890's in Britain as well as in France.[15] And in fact, when E.F. Benson sent James the manuscript of his dialogue novel Dodo, James criticized it once again for lacking formal rigour, and admonished the young Benson to the effect that - 'only remember that a story, is essentially, a form, and that if it fails of that, it fails of its mission'.[16] Formlessness then was one of the liabilities of such an indulgence in dialogue and although James might stretch his criteria for Gyp because she was writing within a French tradition his criticism of her work is substantially the same as that made by Frederick Wedmore in a survey of the short story of 1898. Referring explicitly to Gyp, Wedmore declares that 'pure dialogue, under the conditions of the modern writer, leaves....the work a fragment'.[17] Similarly, in a general article on French dialogue literature, Henri Pellissier stated (less pejoratively) that it tended to be episodic and inevitably fragmented:

> Quant à la littérature dialoguée, elle a ses aises. Aucune règle ne la gêne. Chaque saynete, prise à part, n'est qu'une conversation; et, quand nos dialogu*istes en réunissent plusieurs sous le même titre, nous pouvons aussi bien commencer le volume par la dernière. Il n'y a de l'une à l'autre rien de continu ni même de progressif.[18]

Pellissier in fact makes higher claims for the genre than this passage might suggest, particularly in the sardonic opening lines. But he agrees with both Wedmore and James that the mode inevitably courts superficiality and fragmentation.

Given these theoretical objections, we next need to ask how James avoided such dangers in The Awkward Age. His own description in the preface of a compositional diagram whereby scenes are grouped in a circle around the central

character of Nanda, suggests that he was deliberately trying to avoid shapelessness by assembling a complex structure. And the expositions of subsequent criticism have borne out this complexity. Indeed the novel may have been met with bewilderment when it was published because James was over-reacting against the absence of form which he had seen in Gyp and her follower Henri Lavedan (both named in the preface). It will be the burden of this chapter to show that the narrator offered James a second supplementary formal resource, and that, although it is a relatively minor one, it is none the less important for that.

(ii)

Wayne Booth has commented that one immediately becomes aware of a narrating presence in The Awkward Age despite its apparent objectivity.[19] And in fact we can distinguish between four main roles in the narrator - to give practical indications of gesture, etc.; to refer interpretation to a hypothetical observer; to describe characters, especially on their first entries; and to control the perspective of the novel.

Firstly then James clearly had to find a substitute for spectator's direct vision of an action on a stage, and he does this by having the narrator indicate the position of a character. So in a conversation between various members of Mrs. Brookenham's Buckingham Crescent circle we learn that 'Brookenham had placed himself, side by side with the child [Aggie], on a distant little settee'.[20] Similarly the narrator must convey movement and tone of voice ('Vanderbank soothingly dropped': p.7); the physical appearance of characters (to be considered below); and a description of the action's setting. All these functions could be termed as roughly analogous to stage-directions. But they go further. The narrator, despite James's boasts in his letters and

preface, enters into characters' thoughts ('Vanderbank saw in this too many deep things not to follow them up': p.18); he gives reported speech (pp.82-83) and even hypothetical speech which didn't actually take place (p.71). He uses defining metaphors ('The Duchess watched her as from a box at the play' - p.76); summarizes information about the characters' past, or even summarizes narrative as a whole (cf. the opening of Chapter 33). And lastly he underlines the conscious looks which characters exchange without speaking (e.g. between Vanderbank and Mrs. Brookenham, p.137).

This is by no means an exhaustive list but it does show that Lubbock is literally wrong on every single count when he enumerates the resources which James has denied himself in this novel. The objectivity of The Awkward Age then is a matter of degree, not of kind. James has in fact retained most of the traditional resources of a novelist, but has reduced their scope rather than ruled them out completely. Francis Gillen has called many of these devices 'performance-indication lines' which limits them to the purely functional level.[21] But they go beyond this to have important effects on the perspective of the novel as a whole.

Throughout The Awkward Age the narrator pays particular attention to appearances, and his comments typically purport to offer possible interpretations of what lies behind them. In making these interpretations he constantly refers to an imaginary or hypothetical spectator. So in the scene where Nanda first meets Mitchy and Mr. Longdon, her manner is described in the following way:

> She made no difference for them, speaking to the elder, whom she had not yet seen, as if they were already acquainted. There was, moreover, in the air of that personage at this juncture little to invite such a confidence....An observer disposed to interpret the scene might have fancied him a trifle put off by the girl's familiarity, or even, as by a singular effect of her self-possession, stricken into deeper diffidence. (p.98)

This first meeting is crucial because the relationship between Nanda and Mr. Longdon offers the girl the nearest thing to self-fulfilment. Attention to the characters' expressions and general disposition is thus obviously

important. In the passage the narrator begins by describing the girl's manner, particularly her informality. Then he swings away to Longdon to suggest that his manner is not at all encouraging. He hints at stiffness ('that personage') and by offering hypotheses mimics through understatement Longdon's own tendency to conceal his reactions. The reference to 'an observer' is strictly speaking irrelevant because the narrator has already begun to interpret the scene before that phrase is introduced.

The narrator here, and elsewhere in the novel, is the intelligent observer which he refers to. The deductions which he draws are those which any intelligent observer may draw, but he is actually unique because he is the only one to have access to the characters' appearance. And this marks his privilege and distinction from the reader. The references to an observer do not however in themselves guarantee any objectivity. For instance Silvana Colognesi discusses the way in which characters reveal themselves and then comments of the novel's descriptions:

> La guaranzia dell' obiettività di queste descrizioni è il continuo referirsi ad un ipotetico spettatore, sicché quello che James ci presenta è solo quanto può essere osservato o dedotto da tale spettatore.[22]

This is rather naive because the narrator is not just describing appearances. He is selecting what details are important. And he hints at Longdon's rather perplexed reaction to Nanda because he knows that he comes from outside the Buckingham Crescent set and is really rather shocked by the girl's self-confidence. The dry humour of the passage quoted suggests a perspective whereby the reader (like the narrator) is capable of doing justice to Longdon, and of seeing the manners of Buckingham Crescent from the outside. In other words the narrator's interpretative comments - whether referred to an observer or not - demand an alert detachment of the reader. And A.E. Davidson has made a similar though more narrow suggestion that the references to an observer suggest a deductive role for the reader.[23]

These references are, as I have already proposed, irrelevant and unnecessary,

since much of the time the narrator is dealing with appearances. And, although James does make some effort to vary them, they finally become a distracting mannerism, as they were in The Other House.[24] Even the variations are sometimes inappropriate as when the narrator calls himself 'Mr. Longdon's historian' (p.148). It is precisely a historical or chronicling role which the narrator does not have here, or in any of James's fiction of this period. And if we take the attention to appearance at face value, James is occasionally guilty of paradox. During a conversation between Nanda and Longdon at Mertle (Mitchy's country house) we are told that

> [Nanda's expression] would not have been diminished for him, moreover, by her successful suppression of every sign that she felt his inquiry a little of a snub. (p.162)

If Nanda hides all visible expression of this reaction then theoretically the narrator can have no knowledge of it. This detail gives a particularly clear demonstration that in fact at times the narrator is claiming more knowledge than mere appearances.

Indeed the references to gesture or facial expression are frequently a thin disguise for substantial narrative comment. During a conversation between Longdon and Mrs. Brookenham, Longdon is torn between an impulse of propriety and a dislike of the way she rides rough-shod over the relationship between himself and her mother:

> Mr. Longdon's face reflected for a minute something he could scarcely have supposed her acute enough to make out, the struggle between his real mistrust of her, founded on the unconscious violence offered by her nature to his every memory of her mother, and his sense, on the other hand, of the high propriety of his liking her... (p.141)

Ostensibly this conflict of feeling is reflected in Mr. Longdon's face, but it would be an impossibly adept observer who could deduce it from his expression alone. In effect James has 'gone behind' Mr. Longdon to explain exactly what two senses are in tension here. The narrator has adopted two simultaneous stances - one of an observer within the scene, and one explaining Mr. Longdon's reactions from an external position. The latter of course is not far from traditional 'omniscience'.

The passage above reveals how much weight James tries to attach to appearances in The Awkward Age. Since the bulk of narratorial activity has been greatly reduced we can assume that the narrator only describes gesture and expression when they are important. These descriptions give significance even to the slightest movement and the merest nuance of expression. But the narrator is not indulging in refined speculation for its own sake. His careful explanation of selective visual detail is a technical counterpart of the Buckingham Crescent set's own care to preserve an unruffled social surface and to reduce demonstration of their feelings to a minimum. The narrator is only doing (with some exceptions) what Mrs. Brookenham's inner circle do when they read below other characters' manners. And although his explanations are often phrased as hypotheses, in practice we tend to take them as facts, especially as they are consistent with the action as a whole.

Rarely the narrator's comments can become an intrusion, but this is not from the simple fact that he is making a comment. During their conversation at Mertle Nanda tells Vanderbank that she is 'true'. Since the question has been hanging in the air as to whether or not the two will marry, this declaration causes him some embarrassment. The narrator scrupulously avoids saying too much:

> As Mr. Van himself could not have expressed at any subsequent time to any interested friend the particular effect upon him of the tone of these words his chronicler takes advantage of the fact not to pretend to a greater intelligence... (p.159)

This is an intrusion in the real sense of the word because here James is giving himself a cue in the course of writing. He is reminding himself of how limited a role the narrator has. Such a comment is however particularly rare in this novel. And once again the title of 'chronicler' is anachronistic at this point in James's career.

Apart from furnishing description in general, one of the most important functions of the narrator is to give brief introductory portraits of the characters, usually on their first entrance. The following description of

Mr. Brookenham is representative:

> Lean moreover and stiff, and with the air of having here and there in his person a bone or two more than his share, he had once or twice, at fancy-balls, been thought striking in a dress copied from one of Holbein's English portraits...So dry and decent and even distinguished did he look, as if he had positively been created to meet a propriety and match some other piece... (pp.49-50)

Clearly this could not be called a neutral description. The narrator concentrates firstly on his rather grotesque manner and suggests ironically that Brookenham can only begin to look impressive in fancy dress. The comparison with the Holbein expresses a primarily visual effect but later in the passage the narrator reduces Brookenham to one of his wife's ornaments, purely decorative and literally useless. This defines his role in the novel since he functions mainly as a passive sounding-board for his wife's ideas, much like Mr. Assingham in The Golden Bowl. Brookenham then appears like an artefact and the narrator unobtrusively reminds us of this later in the novel by repeating that his eyes are 'dead'.

Almost all the descriptions of Book Two follow this pattern. In a sense Mr. Brookenham is all manner (or 'finish') and no character. Similarly his son has a sophisticated appearance oddly beyond his years. The Duchess's manner is one of muffled conflict between the aristocratic and the bourgeois. And Carrie Donner has an appearance which is askew of her manner: 'Irregularly pretty and painfully shy, she was retouched, from brow to chin, like a suburban photograph' (p.75). These caricatures fix the characters in a moral hierarchy. The more grotesque they are, the more they are passive products of their society and incapable of independent moral action. The narrator manoeuvres them into ridicule by fastening on key details of their appearance and this is a method quite common to the minor characters in James's fiction (compare Mrs. Wix, for example). In The Awkward Age characters are compared to paintings, artefacts and theatrical performers. And once again the method turns an aspect of the novel's society to technical account. Manners in Buckingham Crescent have become hypertrophied so that they become an end in themselves. This is why it is so appropriate to apply caricature to its inmates.

But these miniature portraits are sometimes more complex than this discussion might suggest. For instance the narrator introduces Mitchy (Mr. Mitchett) and points to his apparent lack of features and his chaotic dress:

> There was comedy therefore in the form of his pot-hat and the colour of his spotted shirt, in the systematic disagreement, above all, of his coat, waistcoat and trousers.

So far Mitchy approaches the other caricatures except that he seems droll rather than ridiculous, because his dress appears to be a perversely methodical exercise in bad taste. But then the description continues away from the visual:

> It was only on long acquaintance that his so many ingenious ways of showing that he recognized his commonness could present him as secretly rare. (p.59)

From his appearance Mitchy looks a clown and at times is treated like one by Mrs. Brook or the Duchess. But the narrator carefully hints at hidden qualities, as if he was one who had known Mitchy for a long time. And in fact Mitchy's role in the novel is quite a sympathetic one. He loves Nanda but is forced by the intricate social rules of Buckingham Crescent into being a performer, tolerated above all for his money.

The narrator's descriptions then move away from caricature as the characters become more important. Indeed the two most central figures - Mr. Longdon and Nanda - are hardly seen at all. Mrs. Brookenham retains some element of disguise, but it is an impressive one:

> She had about her the pure light of youth - would always have it; her head, her figure, her flexibility, her flickering colour, her lovely, silly eyes, her natural, quavering tone all played together toward this effect by some trick that had never yet been exposed. (p.31)

Here we receive impressions rather than visual details. Mrs. Brook's beauty is asserted and then itemized in a less and less flattering way, until by the end of the passage it has been reduced to some kind of confidence trick. So although she is beautiful, her beauty is in some way deceptive. The narrator however is careful not to specify how this effect is gained. What sets this description quite apart from say the portrait of her husband is that Mrs. Brook seems far less fixed and far less caricatured. Also she seems less passive as

if she were her own artist rather than some external agency.

These descriptions are applied to all the characters in varying degrees and arrange them in an evaluative way. The narrator shows no impartiality. His veiled judgements carry a generally authoritative tone and also they precede the characters' actions. In other words they suggest how the reader should view the characters and subsequent events demonstrate and confirm these suggestions. Francis Gillen has been the only critic to recognize that these descriptions are important:

> James...has used a form of description which, in its close resemblance at times to stage melodrama and at times to simple old-fashioned character description, evokes, at first appearance, an emotive response toward the characters and gives a preliminary and, at times, omniscient, indication of the role that they are to play in the drama.[25]

There is also a social dimension to this method which Gillen does not recognize. By his use of ironic description James builds up a cumulative indictment of a society where manners may distort or atrophy the self. In his preface to The Lesson of the Master James makes it clear that irony should imply 'the possible other case':-

> How can one consent to make a picture of the preponderant futilities and vulgarities and miseries of life without the impulse to exhibit as well from time to time, in its place, some fine example of the reaction, the opposition or the escape?[26]

Irony then was James's vehicle for social protest, a function which it performs in The Awkward Age without suggesting a specific alternative. The same method of description is used in The Outcry, a novel which James re-worked from a play-script. The subject is American art-collecting and the narrator makes a very clear evaluative contrast between the appearance of the English characters and that of Breckenridge Bender, the American. The former are like portraits because their society has historical and moral substance; but Bender's face is just a 'featureless disc', suggesting the impoverishment of a life based solely on money.[27] Approximately the same narrative conventions operate in this novel as in The Awkward Age.

One other important point needs to be made about the effect of the narrator's descriptions on the reader. In discussing the point of view created by

dramatic fiction (and he names The Awkward Age), as I noted earlier, Norman Friedman comments:

> ...the reader apparently listens to no one but the characters themselves, who move as it were upon a stage; his angle of view is that of the fixed front (third row center), and the distance must always be near (since the presentation is wholly scenic).[28]

In so far as the novel consists largely of dialogue, Friedman's proposition holds good. The use of dialogue tends to prevent the reader from identifying with any one character and pushes him back into the position of a spectator. But there are at least three exceptions to this in The Awkward Age. Firstly some scenes are presented from character's points of view - the opening scene, for instance, is seen through Vanderbank's eyes. Secondly a description of expression or gestures often functions like a cinematic 'close-up' and draws the reader close to the character. Thirdly in the portraits of characters described above the narrator's rhetoric persuades the reader by a skilful use of irony and metaphor which have nothing at all to do with the dramatic analogy.

So far I have been implying that James used thumb-nail portraits to supplement his dramatic technique. But in fact he could have found a precedent for them in the writings of Gyp. In Le Mariage de Chiffon (1894), a novel which is very close in subject to The Awkward Age, Chiffon is a young girl who has just reached marriagable age. As in the case of Nanda she experiences a conflict between her affection (for her Uncle Marc) and the social requirements of marriage. Again just like The Awkward Age, the narrator demonstrates sympathy for Chiffon (because she is so vulnerable) and condemns her mother's selfishness:

> Entichée de noblesse - et d'argent aussi, depuis qu'elle en avait, - aimant pardessus tout le panache et la pose, elle ne pardonnait pas à la petite Coryse [Chiffon] une simplicité et une rondeur qu'elle ne comprenait point. N'ayant pas, à proprement parler, de type déterminé, la marquise s'en était créé un à beaucoup d'images diverses et banales. Elle avait appris à parler au théâtre et à penser dans les romans. Et comme elle n'avait, au fond, nulle finesse de sentiments ni de sensations, elle appliquait mal ce qu'elle ne comprenait pas très bien, et arrivait - lorsqu'elle voulait se montrer tragique, par exemple - à des effets d'un comique intense qui provoquaient chez Chiffon des crises de folle gaieté.[29]

Her mother is a poseuse, demonstrating as consciously theatrical a manner as the

as the characters in The Awkward Age. She is confused about her values (muddling 'noblesse' with 'argent') and crudely comic in assembling her public manner from miscellaneous theatrical and fictional images. The narrator is quite categorical that she lacks 'finesse de sentiments' and implies, as does the narrator in The Awkward Age, that manner must demonstrate inner substance. Henri Pellissier argues that the French 'dialoguistes' were moralists in exposing the superficiality of their characters and that 'toute leur psychologie consiste dans le noeud de leur cravate et dans la nuance de leur gilet'.[30] Although the irony is at times muted, this comment can be applied directly to the descriptions in The Awkward Age.

If the descriptions of characters are evaluative, so also are the descriptions of place in the novel. From Mrs. Brookenham's windows we gain a back view of the Crescent: '...a medley of smoky brick and spotty stucco, of other undressed backs, of glass invidiously opaque, of roofs and chimney-pots and stables unnaturally near' (p.29). In this brief evocation the narrator half-personifies the houses to give a metaphorical summary of the London characters. They have a discontinuity between their beautiful frontage (the social surface) and their sordid backs (the real moral substance).

By contrast the composition of Mertle (at the opening of Book Five) is more solidly specific and so, by implication, the place is morally superior to the Crescent. The narrator's view-point ranges slowly and absorbedly over the grounds and then breaks out into a rhapsodic notation of 'old rooms, with old decorations that gleamed and gloomed through the high windows, of old gardens that squared themselves in the wide angles of old walls' (p.152). Similarly Mr. Longdon's country house at Beccles is picturesque and idyllic, an enclosed product of 'the mild ages' (p.253). The stress on age is partly nostalgic but also asserts the values of continuity, ease and general amenity. In these country houses Nanda feels free and independent for the first time in her life, an important index of their symbolism. As in The Spoils the narrator contrasts different values topographically, setting the country houses against the typical London interior of Tishy Grendon's home, for example, which looks

foreign (its style is French) and lurid. Beccles by contrast is natural in the sense that it has grown out of the past without being forcibly modernized. Mitchy recognizes that to a certain extent Mr. Longdon *is* his house, thereby making explicit what the description has already suggested. There are perhaps biographical undertones in James's location of value in the country house because in June 1898 he moved out of London to Lamb House, Rye, and began dictating *The Awkward Age* later that summer.[31] The novel was the first major work to be written at his new home, and James used a photograph of Lamb House as the frontispiece for the New York Edition. In all the descriptive examples so far considered the narrator suggests a perspective for the reader to adopt. James's original idea for the novel was as a 'picture of contempoary manners' contrasting continental and English ways of bringing up girls, although initially he only planned it to be a short story in the *Athenaeum*.[32] In the finished novel however this contrast is secondary to that between the exaggerated sophistication of Buckingham Crescent and the values personified in Mr. Longdon.

In his notes for *The Awkward Age* James refers to Nanda in proprietary terms as 'my little lady' and the narrator develops this implicit to the English way of upbringing.[33] When we first see Aggie, the Duchess's daughter, she is described as a beautiful object, distinctive but unnaturally childish. She is literally an accessory to her mother, a 'little ivory princess' (p.72) decorative to behold but not a real person. And it is important for the narrator to describe Mertle directly when Aggie is present in order to underline her total lack of responsiveness to the *place*. By contrast Nanda has a strong personality and a genuine simplicity since, unlike the other more theatrical members of Buckingham Crescent, she is unable to play any part. Once again these descriptive details suggest that the preference for Nanda has been made right from the beginning and that the novel demonstrates the consequences of the two social practices, rather than speculating as to which is the best one.

At times the narrator imitates the perspectives of Buckingham Crescent, but with an ultimately ironic purpose. In Book One we encounter Longdon through Vanderbank's eyes:

> He wore neither whisker nor moustache, and seemed to carry in the flicker of his quick brown eyes and the positive sun-play of his smile even more than the equivalent of what might, superficially or stupidly, elsewhere be missed in him; which was mass, substance, presence - what is vulgarly called importance. He had indeed no presence, but he had somehow an effect. He might almost have been a priest... (p.3)

Here the narrator uses Vanderbank's perspective as a mask to attack conventional social expectations that Longdon should have a presence. The description is rather vague and forced because the narrator is attempting to bring out special elusive qualities in him. In the event Longdon tends to be treated by Buckingham Crescent as if he were a fascinating and novel phenomenon, a different reaction from that under attack but an equally superficial one. Vanderbank's perspective is used here because he is one of the most intelligent members of his set. Indeed in the preface to The Princess Casamassima James surprisingly included him in his élite of sensitive 'perceivers'.[34]

Several of the Buckingham Crescent set have blatantly mercenary relationships with each other. Harold Brookenham (Mrs. Brookenham's elder son) receives regular financial backing from Mr. Cashmore. And to ironize this connexion the narrator briefly imitates his (Harold's) euphemistic manner:

> Experience was to be taken as showing that one might get a five-pound note as one got a light for a cigarette; but one had to check the friendly impulse to ask for it in the same way. (p.118)

Here the sarcasm cuts two ways. On the one hand Cashmore, weak despite his large size, has made himself a convenience by being so ready to give. On the other hand Harold has become so used to 'borrowing' that he sees it as good manners. The narrator displays mock-admiration for his skill and urbanity, imitating the very flexions of his speech.

In his survey of Victorian fiction J. Hillis Miller argues that the typical Victorian narrator expresses the author's collective notion of society:

> [the narrators of Dickens, George Eliot and Trollope] move within the community. They identify themselves with a human awareness which is everywhere at all times within the world of the novel. This awareness surrounds and permeates each individual human mind and therefore is able to know it perfectly from the inside, to live its life.[35]

By contrast the narrator in The Awkward Age imitates the perspectives of members of the novel's society for ironic and parodic effect. The narrator comes close to Longdon in representing a dying and embattled set of values which are becoming more and more difficult to sustain. He is not so much a spokesman as a diagnostician of what is wrong with contemporary sophistication.

While the latter proposition is largely true, at times it is questionable and a consideration of why this is the case will conclude this section. The narrator's comments are not unique to him. They are taken over by characters in discussing themselves. So his theatrical references are echoed by Mrs. Brook when she declares '"I often feel as if I were a circus-woman, in pink tights and no particular skirts, riding half a dozen horses at once"' (p.141). The Buckingham Crescent set are described at one point as the 'votaries of that temple of analysis' (p.265). This raises a serious critical problem. In so far as they go in for analysis they display the same kind of mental alertness as the narrator and it becomes proportionately more difficult to distinguish between them.

Similarly terms like 'beautiful' and 'wonderful' are used throughout the novel by the characters.[36] But during an exchange between Mitchy and Mrs. Brook the narrator borrows this terminology. The subject under discussion is the relationship between Vanderbank and Nanda:

> 'Have you charged her with it?' Mitchy demanded with a courage that amounted to high gallantry. It inspired, on the spot, his interlocutress; and her own, of as fine a quality now as her diplomacy... (p.70)

The two characters are competing with each other as to who can be the most generous towards Vanderbank and it seems here that the narrator is dazzled by their style. There is no hard ironic edge to his comments. On the contrary he appears to commend their scruple, and elsewhere, particularly in connexion

with Mrs. Brookenham, the narrator appears to find urbanity an end in itself. The moral forms of the action then becomes seriously blurred.

Perhaps because of such details Carl Nelson has argued that the narrator is a kind of showman who sets out to dupe the reader:

> In The Awkward Age, the measure of intelligence is not in the narrator, who damns himself with his participatory fervor, but in James's irony that reveals his spokesman's inadequacy through the various modes of rhetorical revelation sketched above.[37]

The narrator, he suggests, is unreliable because he suggests possibilities only to confuse the reader, not to clarify events. What disqualifies Nelson's argument is a fundamental inability to identify the narrator's rhetoric. His examples of narratorial activity are virtually all taken from the novel's dialogue and, although he makes interesting points about recurring phraseology, he fails to bring forward any evidence to show that the narrator is in fact unreliable. It is extremely rare to find examples where dialogue contradicts narrative comment. One comes during a discussion between Longdon and Vanderbank when they are considering whether the latter might marry Nanda. Longdon probes

> 'You've no strong enough impulse - ?' His friend met him with admirable candour. 'Wouldn't it seem that if I had I would by this time have taken the jump?' (p.206)

The elliptical tenses which Vanderbank uses show that he is being far from candid. He is extremely defensive and careful not to let his marriage to Nanda materialize beyond hypothesis. But this is only a detail and an unusual one. For the most part the narrator's comments are reliable and authoritative, even though they are ostensibly tentative.

(iii)

Eban Bass has pointed out that the scenes which centre on Longdon are far less objectified than those dealing with the Buckingham Crescent set.[38] And

the same can be said for most of the scenes which focus on Nanda. Both are special characters. Nanda is the protagonist and Longdon the representative of alternative (and preferable) values. But also neither of them is as adept socially as any of Mrs. Brook's circle, and so for these two reasons they receive more narrative comment than the other characters.

Despite his importance in the novel, Longdon is not mentioned at all in James's notebooks. Leon Edel argues that there are strong autobiographical features in Longdon over and above the similarity between Beccles and Lamb House already discussed.[39] And Tony Tanner sees him as a kind of deus ex machina whereby James could rescue Nanda from undervaluation.[40] One of the qualities which Longdon represents is romantic idealism and his main testimonial in this direction is his love for Lady Julia, Mrs. Brook's mother. But we have to take this information on trust from the characters' dialogue, not from the narrator. The latter bolsters his stature by suggesting different roles for him in the novel. So he has a priestly manner, which hints at his piety and celibacy. When discussing marriage with Vanderbank he performs the function of a judge ('Mr. Longdon...had mounted to the high bench and sat there as if the judge were now in his proper place': pp.202-203). He is a judge because, by trying to make Vanderbank decide one way or the other about Nanda, he is in effect accusing his companion of temporizing and evasion. When referring to Longdon's relationship with Lady Julia the narrator displays a solicitude which at times becomes cloying. So when Longdon sees a photograph of Nanda who bears a strong resemblance to her grandmother, the narrator comments 'he moved about...gently, as if with a sacred awe' (p.109), thereby echoing the religiose language of the other characters.

Because Longdon is an outsider he has some of Nanda's simplicity, and tends to take a wide-eyed view of the metropolitan morality he encounters. The narrator turns this to comedy by emphasizing Longdon's use of his 'nippers' (his pince-nez) which invariably suggests either surprise or disapproval. And when the Duchess unashamedly proclaims that she would do anything for her

child, the narrator conveys Longdon's reaction through comically concrete metaphors:

> Mr. Longdon's impenetrability crashed like glass at the elbow-touch of this large, handsome, practised woman, who walked for him, like some brazen pagan goddess, in a cloud of queer legend. (p.177)

This comparison, unfortunately rare, helps to counter-act the exaggerated air of portentousness which surrounds Longdon. It suggests that the Duchess appears like a figure out of a story-book and is very reminiscent of similar images in What Maisie Knew. The main source of the humour in this instance is that although Longdon carefully cultivates a manner, he still retains some child-like qualities of wonderment.

Both Longdon and Nanda tacitly recognize that the kind of sophisticated dialogue which takes place at Buckingham Crescent is an inadequate vehicle for expressing their feelings. So the moments of greatest warmth between them come through non-verbal communication, through a look or a gesture. Obviously this cannot be expressed through dialogue and so the narrator takes particular care to describe their expressions. During their first conversation together Nanda makes the following impression on him:

> It was really reflected in his quick brown eyes that she alternately drew him on and warned him off, but also that what they were beginning more and more to make out was an emotion of her own trembling there beneath her tension. (pp.116-117)

The narrator hints at Longdon's kindness (in his eyes), but, even more importantly, points out that Longdon is now beginning to see the emotion which lies beneath the girl's superficially self-confident manner. Longdon then performs a crucial function in giving the reader access to hidden areas of Nanda's personality through the mediation of the narrator. Or alternatively he sometimes supplies a perspective for giving a summary of her situation. Both Aggie and Nanda strike Longdon as lambs going to the 'great shambles of life'. But whereas Aggie is totally unconscious, 'the other struggled with instincts and forebodings, with the suspicion of its doom and the far-borne scent, in the flowery fields, of blood' (p.180). This excerpt comes from a long passage

where the narrator unambiguously 'goes behind' Longdon in order to summarize the situation of two girls. In his dealings with Nanda, Longdon increases the reader's engagement with her as a character. But here his attempt to inject a note of urgency about her fate is unsuccessful because the expression is so vague and melodramatic.

There are, to conclude, two pivotal scenes in the novel, both centering on Nanda, where the narrator describes the setting in considerable detail. One is when she is at Beccles. The garden is a 'nurse to reverie' (p.253) and has a protective and timeless quality about it, as if Nanda were somehow outside the transience of life. But the house's attractions are severely limited. Nanda sees many of Longdon's possessions (as if the house were a beautiful museum) and they give her pleasure, partly from the novelty. The fact that her main activity is with things, however, underlines her isolation. And this is brought out even more clearly in the last book where she bids Vanderbank farewell. The narrator here once again uses description as a kind of comment. He notes her books, her ornaments, the details of her furniture and the row of photographs in order to contrast her material prosperity with her emotional impoverishment. With the one exception of Longdon her friendships have now become reduced to memories encapsulated in souvenirs (the photographs).

Similarly when Vanderbank is present with her, their exchange is not presented in scenic terms, because as Carl Nelson has noted, what is not said is far more important than what is.[41] Hence the narrator concentrates our attention on posture and movement:

> He continued to talk; he took things up and put them down; Nanda sat in her place, where her stillness, fixed and colourless, contrasted with his rather flushed freedom... (p.374)

By this stage in the novel the narrator can draw on our ability to interpret appearances. He does not need to spell out that Vanderbank uses small-talk and pointless movement to gloss over his embarrassment that he has not asked

Nanda to marry him. She by contrast, bitterly disappointed in her love, sits in silence, pale and immobile almost as if she herself has become a photograph. The narrator's descriptions in this scene are thus important to round off the novel on a negative note of absence and loss, contrasting ironically with Vanderbank's 'freedom'. By concentrating on the visual the narrator understates Nanda's ultimate plight.

Despite the fact then that James was using a method in The Awkward Age which seems to exclude a narrator, in fact he performs important functions in defining our attitudes to characters, in describing locations, gesture, expression, etc. Although the scale of his activities is reduced, he retains many conventional narrative functions, concentrating above all on the visual. The Awkward Age is an extreme example of James's technical rigour at work, but his next novel, The Sacred Fount, makes an absolute contrast in its tortuous subjectivity.

Chapter 8

'The Sacred Fount'

(i)

If The Awkward Age was striving for a scenic objectivity, The Sacred Fount seems at times to go to the opposite extreme. Planned originally as a short story, it grew during composition and is unique among James's works in being the only full-length novel he wrote in the first-person.[1] Its peculiarity of subject and the nature of the narrator have baffled critics and divided them more or less evenly between taking the novel at face value and taking it as a portrayal of obsession.

Certainly it would seem strange that James cast the novel in the first person when we bear in mind his vociferous criticisms of that mode.[2] But the contradiction is more apparent than real since James attacked extended autobiographical fiction like David Copperfield. The Sacred Fount, by contrast, gives us minimal information about the narrator. We know nothing of his past, occupation, etc.; and, like the narrators of 'The Aspern Papers' and 'The Turn of the Screw', he has no name. Again like the two earlier works, The Sacred Fount shows the narrator progressively revealing himself in an unconscious way so that he is as much the novel's subject as the events which unfold before the reader. The fact that the narrator has no name or past to speak of suggests that James is not concerned in this novel with character in the conventional sense of antecedents, economic position, etc. The narrator's 'character' as such is rigidly limited to certain intellectual propensities and to his procedures during the novel. In 'The Turn of the Screw' the workings of the governess's mind come to dominate the action and this is even more true of The Sacred Fount because events are reduced to a minimum. Also the time-span of the novel is severelylimited. It only covers a weekend gathering at Newmarch, a country house.

One of the novel's earliest critics, Wilson Follett, argues rightly

that the narrator's sensibility dominates the action, but then jumps to the conclusion that he is James himself, examining his own practice as a writer: 'It is Henry James deliberately turning a searchlight on Henry James.' He suggests that the novel is a parable which dramatizes in summary James's philosophy of fiction. Hence the fact that the narrator is not named should be a warning to the reader:

> The warning is emphasized by the further circumstance that the 'I' of the story is patently Henry James in propria persona, undisguised and unashamed - another flatly impossible breach of his basic principles as an artist.[3]

In his efforts to work out a pattern in the events he observes, Follett argues, the narrator is being James's perfect novelist. Follett concedes that there is an element of farce in the narrator's exaggeration but pays little attention to it.

His assessment is explicitly followed six years later by R.P. Blackmur who sees the novel as the culmination of a series of ghost stories, and who praises its unique intensity -

> ....in The Sacred Fount there is a relish of detail, a passion of attentiveness, a specific pride of free achievement, which together give a tone of independent, unassailable mastery to all but the last pages of the book.[4]

Blackmur is less definite than Follett in identifying the narrator with James, but he locates the novel's intensity in the prehensile quality of the imagination, in its effort of 'unmitigated attention'.

Both Blackmur and Follett refer to James's prefaces in their discussions to corroborate their interpretations of the narrator's overall tone, but their identification of him with James - whether explicit or implicit - raises serious critical obstacles. In the first place Follett tries paradoxically to combine two notions - one of James speaking out directly, and the other of him scrutinizing himself. The latter makes very little sense without positing a persona, a dramatic projection of himself which can be the object of James's scrutiny. Follett implicitly offers one when he describes the narrator as James's 'perfect novelist', but he never really recognizes the

distinction.

Blackmur's article is considerably more complex although he follows the basic lines of Follett's argument. Its main weakness can be seen from the passage quoted. He gives no acknowledgement to the fact that the novel is a first-person narrative, and so his discussion constantly leaves us uncertain whether he is talking about the quality of the narrator's mind or of James's. By blurring the two together he suggests that James's views can be deduced from part of the novel (the narrator) instead of from the whole work (dialogue, irony, etc.).[5] When Blackmur states that The Sacred Fount anticipates much modern fiction in its formal innovations he appears to have in mind a work such as Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.[6] In fact James's novel, I shall argue, is by no means as objectively achieved as this comparison would suggest.

The first chapters of The Sacred Fount consist of dramatically realized scenes which control the narrator's eager curiosity about the other characters. On his way to Newmarch by train he meets two other guests, Gilbert Long and Lady John. Long strikes him as remarkably changed (partly because he recognizes the narrator in a flattering way), and in the course of their conversation the narrator learns that Mrs. Brissenden, their host, is also improved. This information is reliable since it emerges through dialogue, and is balanced by two further conversations which confirm that Mr. Brissenden ('poor Briss') and May Server (another guest) have both aged surprisingly. These facts provide the narrator with the raw material for propounding his theory of the sacred fount: namely, that in any relationship one partner dominates the other and draws his vital energy from him. This is the 'law' which the narrator tries to confirm once and for all in the course of the novel.

But the opening chapters do more than provide information. They suggest a none too flattering perspective on the narrator himself. For instance he explains the sacred fount theory to Ford Obert, a painter, in

the following way:-

> 'But the sacred fount is like the greedy man's description of the turkey as an "awkward" dinner dish. It may be sometimes too much for a single share, but it's not enough to go round.'[7]

The analogy makes his theory sound grotesque to the point of absurdity, but the narrator never imagines what sort of reactions he might cause in other people. Gilbert Long shows considerably less patience than Obert, especially when they are discussing Brissenden. The narrator leads Long on, coyly refusing to state anything explicitly. Instead of being illuminated however, Long becomes annoyed:-

> [the narrator] 'You don't see anything?'
> 'Nothing.'
> 'Not what everyone else must?'
> 'No, confound you!'
> I already felt that, to be so tortuous, he must have had a reason.... (p.25)

The comedy here grows out of the narrator's refusal to accept that Long simply doesn't see anything. He is already so wrapped up in his theory that he imputes his own hyper-subtlety to other characters, and he ironically accuses Long of his own failing - of being tortuous.

Scenes such as these put the reader in a superior position where he can see the narrator's weaknesses. Pointedly ironic comments from Lady John and Briss make it clear that the narrator has a reputation for cleverness and suggest that May Server, one of the 'victims' who he is trying to scrutinize, is actually afraid of him. Although he laughs this off, these two details give the reader important hints not to accept the narrator's version of events. Since he is our main access to these events the only avenue by which we could receive alternative information is through dialogue.

Initially then we are led to suspect the narrator's self-confidence, and this links The Sacred Fount with earlier tales cast in the first-person. D.H. Reiman has shown, for instance, that the narrator in 'The Author of Beltraffio' (1884) attributes the 'aesthetic gospel' to the writer Mark

Ambient when really he himself is far more committed to the notion of art for art's sake.[8] And the sources of our distrust towards the narrators of 'The Aspern Papers' and 'The Turn of the Screw' have been discussed earlier. Similarly in The Sacred Fount the narrator persists in thinking that the other characters are out-doing him in cleverness and calculation. This takes him ultimately to the point where he is no longer capable of recognizing normal utterances for what they are. Everything, even the most trivial details, becomes evidence for his theory.

The suggestions that the narrator is engrossed in his own cleverness are borne out by his patronizing attitude towards the other characters. Long is described as a 'fine piece of human furniture' (p.2); and Lady John is submitted to a medley of ironic metaphors:

> She was like a hat - with one of Mrs. Briss's hat-pins - askew on the bust of Virgil. Her ornamental information - as strong as a coat of furniture-polish - almost knocked you down....She cracked, for my benefit, as many jokes and turned as many somersaults as might have been expected; (pp.16-17)

We have already met this kind of reductive satire in The Spoils, Maisie and The Awkward Age. The narrator here ridicules Lady John's social manner as inept. She is too consciously trying to gain effect and so reminds him of a circus performer. But his egotism comes out in assuming that she is performing just for his benefit. Throughout the novel he takes a disparaging and aloof attitude towards the other characters' behaviour.

This confidence in his own superiority is however offset by the need to get confirmation that his enterprise (to prove his theory) is not 'ignoble'. Ford Obert obligingly states that such a search is a 'high application of intelligence' providing that it is limited to 'psychologic evidence' (p.64). And when he talks to Grace Brissenden about his theory, she shows almost as much excitement as himself about it. Since she is certainly the most intelligent character after the narrator, her interest reinforces the plausibility of his hypothesis. So, although there are suggestions that the

narrator is too clever this should not be taken to discount his search for evidence that will prove the theory of the sacred fount.

During the course of the first day at Newmarch the narrator, Mrs. Server, Long and Obert gather in front of a painting in the gallery. As in The Wings of the Dove, their conversation is ostensibly about the painting but in fact serves to reveal their characters, including the narrator's. The painting is described in the present tense and with a directness which is not at all typical of the narrator:-

> The figure represented is a young man in black - a quaint, tight black dress, fashioned in years long past; with a pale, lean, livid face and a stare, from eyes without eyebrows, like that of some whitened old-world clown. In his hand he holds an object that strikes the spectator at first simply as some obscure, some ambiguous work of art, but that on a second view becomes a representation of a human face, modelled and coloured, in wax, in enamelled metal, in some substance not human. The object thus appears a complete mask, such as might have been fantastically fitted and worn. (p.54).

Mrs. Server insists that the mask represents death whereas the narrator takes it to represent life. By crystallizing such contrasts the painting focuses many later metaphors of disguise and artifice in the novel. In her exhaustive study of The Sacred Fount J.F. Blackall argues that this scene is the novel's symbolic centre but then concludes that 'Brissenden and May [Server] are simply the emblems of two kinds of death'.[9] Once again it is not clear if she means that they are emblems to the narrator or from the novel as a whole. The proposition is anyway irrelevant to the scene's centrality since the latter depends partly on the painting focusing the many comparisons of characters to artefacts.

The painting also reflects ironically on the narrator himself since he more than any other character observes from behind a mask. There may also be a glancing contemporary reference to Deburan, the French pierrot who became totally obsessed with his role, as the narrator does with his theory. Indeed at once point he compares himself to a pantaloon. Lastly the painting is extremely enigmatic. It invites speculation but seems to deny any final

interpretation. And this, to his chagrin, is the narrator's experience with the other characters. He is constantly trying to classify them according to his 'law', but they never quite fit. In this way the portrait comments ironically on subsequent events in a way that the reader recognizes retrospectively, but the narrator never does.

Virtually all the critics of The Sacred Fount have described the novel as if it was uniform in texture. But such is not the case. The first chapters and the concluding scenes frame the central body of the novel with passages of dialogue which enforce a detached perspective on the narrator. In the central chapters this is very difficult to maintain and the very mode of the narrative changes.

(ii)

In Chapter 6 and from Chapter 8 onwards there is an important shift in the novel's method. Instead of unfolding in a situation the action now takes place in the narrator's mind. He becomes the subject as well as the vehicle of the narrative. And this is quite consistent with the rush of impressions he received when first seeing the changes in Long. His perceptions generate a momentum of their own as well as an increasing finesse, and they come to dominate the speed of the narrative.

His desire to examine others is acted upon without any thought for the emotional implications of what he does, either for himself or for others. So the possibility that he is in love with May Server is not rejected, but accepted as a 'decent working hypothesis' (p.94); he never considers that her agitation may be caused by his close observation of her; and similarly he

does not recognize the intimacy he achieves with Mrs. Briss, an intimacy that could be misconstrued.

The theory of the sacred fount authorizes the narrator, as he thinks, to treat other characters as counters in an abstract pattern which he can arrange at will. His attitude to them is comparable with that of a novelist to his raw material. And this is an analogy which many critics have recognized. The anonymous reviewer of The Sacred Fount for The Academy suggested that the novel was James's 'elaborate satire on himself' and that the narrator embodied, in exaggerated form, most of James's own mannerisms.[10] Subsequently both Miriam Allott and Parker Tyler have compared the narrator's relation to Newmarch with the artist's relation to society, and Tony Tanner has suggested that 'the narrator certainly epitomizes the artistic instinct for James'.[11]

Newmarch is described by the narrator as 'the great asylum of the finer wit' (p.97). But if the party gathered for the weekend represents an elite of sensibility the narrator is by implication in the god-like position of having the most privileged knowledge. He is the only one who really understands the principle of the fount and this consciousness bolsters his detachment from the other characters, especially as he has no moral stake in the action. So, in a distorted way, he practises James's often-repeated dictum that an author must be detached from his materials.

One of the narrator's self-imposed rules is that he must not ask characters for direct confirmation of his theory. This is because the participants in the sacred fount are unconscious of its process; but it is also a way of drawing out the delights of investigation. And, although he agrees with Obert that he must not play the detective, he nevertheless uses the vocabulary of detection. He constantly figures himself as being 'on the scent' of more evidence, and hunting for 'clues'. The act of observation rapidly becomes a pleasurable end in itself:-

> In resisted observation that was vivid thought, in inevitable thought that was vivid observation, through a succession, in short, of phases in which I shall not pretend to distinguish one of these elements from the other, I found myself cherishing the fruit of the seed dropped equally by Ford Obert and by Mrs. Briss. (pp.92-93)

The very neatness of the opening chiasmus points to the narrator's fascination with his own mental processes. Indeed the steps in his argument ('phases') are so numerous that he rather conveniently abandons hope of describing them all to the reader. Despite his confidence, even in this passage there are undertones of tautology and evasion in the narrator's account. As P.M. Weinstein points out, he is constantly aware of the possible discrepancy between his hypotheses and reality, but he protects himself against such contradictions by insisting on the privacy of his perceptions.[12]

From his detached vantage-point other characters seem unreal to the narrator. They are seen as if through glass, or fixed as a series of portraits in a mental gallery. May Server is described as 'an old dead pastel under glass' (p.50); and later the characters are described as 'mere human beings' (p.155) as if his theory were super-human. Even the very atmosphere of Newmarch is fluid and dense, a matter of shifting colours and tones, which the narrator feels he can compose and re-compose at will.

Whenever he sees characters in postures which appear to confirm his theory the narrator experiences an intellectual joy, a dizzying surge of power. This becomes so strong that he even imagines he has positioned the characters himself. So when he sees May Server at the end of one of the garden walks, he revels in his 'wizardry': 'It was exactly as if she had been there by the operation of my intelligence.' (p.128). At this same point he compares Newmarch to a fairy-tale world which fills him with wonderment and delight. By implication this gives him added licence to indulge in his speculations. A similar sense of power is experienced by the protagonists of <u>In the Cage</u> and 'The Turn of the Screw'. Both enjoy the temporary illusion of dominating events and try to impose this sense on the other characters.

The fairy-tale references are however ambiguous. They hint at possible transformations (comparable say to the accelerated aging of 'poor Briss') which might be taking place. But at the same time they raise the possibility for the reader that the narrator might be indulging in make-believe. Walter Isle argues that he becomes more and more 'romantic' (taking his terms from James's preface to The American) as he loses touch with reality.[13] The narrator's pleasure in walking inside a fairy-tale could then rebound ironically on himself because it could be a fairy-tale of his own invention.

Again as in the two earlier works, the narrator experiences silent communication with Mrs. Server, and also projects imaginary speech on to other characters. In all three works this projected speech conforms absolutely to the protagonist's wishes. The narrator imagines a tragic speech by Mrs. Server where she tacitly admits to him that she is doomed to be the victim of her partner. And later, during the concluding scene with Mrs. Briss, he imagines an exchange between her and Gilbert Long, the dominant partners of the two couples in question. In the case of Mrs. Server he introduces the speech by stating: '...here follows something of the sense that I should have made them form' (p.140). The arrogance of the word 'made' testifies to the aggrandizing direction of the narrator's activity. He is not content merely to observe. He must dominate and in a sense stage-manage the characters under scrutiny - especially May Server.

Weinstein argues that the narrator wishes to uncover the truth and at the same time protect the victims, and suggests that this desire to protect is an essential link with James himself:-

> ...they both seek a relation through which they can give and protect, rather than merely take and expose. The limited point of view, increased stress on surfaces, and a greater ability to suggest depths of significance through judicious details - these are among the formal techniques by which protection is achieved.[14]

Weinstein's argument is that the narrator wishes to protect May Server once he has satisfied himself that she is a victim just as James protects his own

characters. This chimes in with the narrator's stated attitude, but doesn't explain the contradictions within it. His notion of 'protection' is totally artificial because his real interest in May Server is in penetrating to her most private feelings. To this end he resolutely dogs her footsteps throughout the whole weekend. And he is only willing to extend to her his sympathy, for what that is worth, providing that she conforms to the role which he has chosen for her. In an ironic sense his very descriptions of her drain off her vitality as if the narrator himself was participating in the sacred fount process.

At the same time as he is pitying Mrs. Server, he recognizes that he must engage in her 'providential supervision' (p.153). And he refers to himself as Brissenden's 'providence, his effective omniscience' (p.169). So what the narrator describes as his 'sympathy' for the victims is really the culmination of his sense of power. Even when Lady John attacks him for acting as a false providence, he shrugs off her criticism as mere ignorance on her part. L.C. Burns, perhaps taking his lead from this episode, sees the narrator as defeated by life in the person of Mrs. Briss when she dismisses his theories as nonsense.[15] In these terms the novel becomes partly a cautionary tale against the adoption of such a providential role.

The narrator's ultimate egotism can be seen in his references to the play of his intelligence. In James's own critical writings the term 'play' connotes the avoidance of prescription, but to the narrator his activity is simply a game. 'Play' for him suggests irresponsibility. Indeed he himself states that his obsession began at Newmarch and will be left behind at the close of the weekend. His pursuit of characters down the garden alleys becomes a game of cat-and-mouse and during dinner he indulges in guessing Mrs. Brissenden's movements without looking at her. This once again is repeating the actions of the telegraphist of In the Cage and the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw'. Quite consistent with his delusion of having arranged the characters, the narrator even imagines that they are performing a play for his private

amusement:-

> ...every actor in the play that had so unexpectedly insisted on constituting itself for me sat forth as with an intimation that they were not to be so easily disposed of. It was as if there were some last act to be performed before the curtain could fall. (p.167).

In effect this impression converts Mrs. Brissenden's party into something specifically directed towards the narrator. The theatre analogy then is far from being simply decorative. It displays his egotism and points also to his suspense. He is constantly expecting a climax, an ultimate exposure or confrontation, which never comes. Mrs. Brissenden's final dismissal of his theory is the cruellest irony of all because it is pure bathos.

Once again the narrator's egotism is not unique to James's fiction of this period. In 'Broken Wings', a tale of 1900 also dealing with a weekend party, the protagonist is just as passive and contemplative as the narrator of The Sacred Fount. He too imagines the scene as a stage set just for him. And in 'The Coxon Fund' (1894), the narrator professes sympathy for Frank Saltram's failure as a writer but converts the spectacle into a private entertainment.[16] These examples suggest that the narrator in The Sacred Fount displays, in an exaggerated form, an egotism common to other protagonists of James's work in the 1890's.

One possible reason why the fount theory attracts the narrator so much is that it relieves the monotony of the weekend party. He shows a restlessness at the social restrictions to which they are all subjected:-

> We were all so fine and formal, and the ladies in particular at once so little and so much clothed, so beflounced yet so denuded, that the summer stars called to us in vain. We had ignored them in our crystal cage, among our tinkling lamps; no more free really to alight than if we had been clashing in a locked railway-train across a lovely land. (p.199)

He yearns briefly for a romantic simplicity but tacitly acknowledges that it is as inaccessible to him as to the other guests. His attitude towards their heightened social decorum is of course ironic but this does not justify an interpretation of the novel as a social satire. In two articles W.B. Stein

argues that the narrator is a parody of late Victorian social hypocrisy.[17] Stein shows convincingly that The Sacred Fount demonstrates (but not parodies) many qualities typical of the turn of the century but it is far too introverted a work to be described as a satire, since it has very little direct social reference.

The narrator, as I have been arguing, becomes obsessed with his theory and his obsession becomes the novel's subject. Many critics have agreed that his single-minded pursuit of 'evidence' is freakish in the extreme, and that he tends towards solipsism.[18] By the end of the novel his theory has become so flexible that it is capable of accommodating even the most contradictory material. As his projection of imaginary speech suggests, the narrator becomes almost indifferent to external evidence. James offers no background psychological information that would explain his motives in this tendency, but the novel does make it clear that the narrator gains confidence by taking upon himself the prerogatives of an artist, particularly of a novelist, thereby reducing his surroundings to disposable material.

At the beginning of this discussion I suggested that Follett and Blackmur were mistaken to identify the narrator of The Sacred Fount too closely with James. And yet similarities do exist. At times the narrator adopts the practices of a Jamesian novelist in particular. Firstly, like James in his criticism and prefaces, he refers to his narrating activities through an analogy with painting. He describes himself as the 'painter of my state' (p.93) and puts a general stress on the visual throughout the novel. The visual however is his point of departure, since he is constantly trying to formulate the law which lies behind people's relationships. Since the 'fount-relationship' is in turn hidden by social decorum the narrator can only ascertain his law at two removes. This is an exaggerated form of James's own practice since in 'The Art of Fiction' he praised the method of suggesting the whole from selective details, and in the preface to The Ambassadors he returns to his search for the 'unseen' in terminology which

echoes the narrator's own:

> No privilege of the teller of tales and the handler of puppets is more delightful, or has more of the suspense and thrill of a game of difficulty breathlessly played, than just this business of looking for the unseen and the occult, in a scheme half-grasped, by the light or, so to speak, by the clinging scent, of the gage already in hand.[19]

James is here describing a method of composition which deliberately - by limitation to Lambert Strether's consciousness - raises difficulties for himself by not presenting material directly. The description could equally well apply to the narrator's activities. He tries to see everything, but to his intense frustration characters typically present their backs to him or talk with companions who are just out of his line of vision. Plainly James hopes to engage the reader of The Ambassadors in a kind of deduction, filling out the narrative from suggestions, and this is also what the narrator of The Sacred Fount does. As E.P. Schrero has pointed out, his vocabulary is full of semi-scientific terms like 'hypothesis' and 'phenomenon'.[20] But in fact the narrator uses a strange amalgam of terms borrowed from detective fiction, the law (here similar to the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw'), science and organicism.

The latter takes us to a particularly strong link between The Sacred Fount and James's prefaces. Several critics have noted a general similarity in language but only Bernard Richards has indicated that the narrator's language of gestation (as his theory grows) parallels James's description of the growth of his fictional subjects.[21] The theory of the sacred fount begins with a chance fragment of conversation just as many of James's works had their 'germ' in purely accidental origins. In both cases the germ grows to a full artistic structure and the narrator's care over his growing idea is paralleled by James's solicitude for his subjects. He is concerned for instance with symmetry as, on the Sunday evening at Newmarch, he sees Mrs. Briss and Long deep in conversation. His immediate impulse is to balance them with the pair of victims, but then he realizes that this symmetry is perhaps factitious and untrue to life:

> These opposed couples balanced like bronze groups at two ends of a chimney-piece, and the most I could say to myself...was that I mustn't take them equally for granted merely because they balanced. Things in the real had a way of not balancing; it was all an affair, this fine symmetry, of artificial proportion. (p.181)

Despite this caution to himself, the narrator does not give up his desire for pattern, and it is the latter's aesthetic appeal which drives him on towards confirmation. Similarly James himself set high store by balance, and saw the 'precious element of contrast and antithesis' as invaluable for increasing the drama of a work.[22] Indeed he altered the basic idea for The Sacred Fount to include two couples for precisely this reason - to intensify its drama.[23] Lastly the narrator takes a partly structural attitude towards other characters. When he sees Gilbert Long wandering alone he reflects: 'It had for my imagination a value' (p.201); and the criterion of value is of course that the impression fits in with the narrator's theory. In a similar way James relishes the centrality of Fleda Vetch in The Spoils or the usefulness of Maria Gostrey. In both cases they help the structure of the novels to attain symmetry.

If these similarities between the narrator's method and James's own exist, we must next ask whether there are any differences and what critical consequences the similarities carry for the novel as a whole. One difference between the two is that the narrator is indulging in speculation which can never be completed, whereas in the prefaces James gives us retrospective narratives of how he formed his subjects. The prefaces do not demonstrate a calmness about the creative process since James is constantly alert to its difficulty and its consumption of imaginative energy.[24] But he does at least have all the available information before him. The narrator of The Sacred Fount, on the other hand, never can conclude his search; he can only add hypothesis to hypothesis. Indeed he has doubts about the validity of his whole enterprise, referring to it as his 'obsession' or 'private madness'. The very thought of explaining his theory to one of the other characters makes him nervous, especially as it grows more complex:

> ...I suddenly found myself thinking with a kind of horror of any accident by which I might have to expose to the world, to defend against the world, to share with the world, that now so complex tangle of hypotheses that I have had for convenience to speak of as my theory. (p.172)

These qualifications of his activity are, like those of the governess in 'The Turn of the Screw', only tokens. They are a way of forestalling criticism and do not denote any greater self-awareness on his part. C.T. Samuels argues quite rightly that the narrator is nervous about social exclusion, not about his own imaginative ability:

> ...the narrator's fear is based not so much on his consciousness that imagination has its limits as on his suspicion that society's sheer vigor and sensuous display make imagination irrelevant and can end by shutting it out.[25]

In the passage quoted the narrator implicitly differentiates between 'the world' and the reader. Throughout the central chapters he maintains a confidential intimacy with the reader as if he is sure that the latter will understand what he is doing, even when he affects to dismiss his theory as an 'airy structure' (p.143). The absence of clear qualifying ironies - except the fundamental one that he is a character in the novel and not a creative artist - enhances the narrator's authority. He hesitates to find the right words and apologetically admits that it is difficult to recall all his thoughts in retrospect, which are all gestures suggesting spontaneity and sincerity on his part. In practice the difference between the time of events and the time of narration has no importance since the narrator is concerned to make his account as immediate as possible.

For these and other reasons it would seem then that James under-estimated the power of conviction that the narrator would carry.[26] And further the narrator sums up in his style the worst tendencies in James's fiction of the period under discussion. His variety of metaphors is confusing. His hypotheses are absurdly tentative ('That I consistently escaped being might indeed have been the meaning most market in our mute recognitions': p.92), or convoluted ('...the words one might have guessed her to wish to use were she able to use any': pp.148-149). In the central chapters of Maisie, In the

Cage and in 'The Turn of the Screw' a tendency was noted for the narrative to shift away from the protagonist's idiom towards a uniformly complex prose style. The protagonists all begin to sound, in varying degrees, like James himself. The Sacred Fount marks the ultimate point in this tendency, and it was a tendency which James was aware of. Shortly before he embarked on the novel he wrote to Sidney Colvin to confess that his style was at times too complex:-

> ....you are quite right - wholly - about my being in places too entortillé. I am always in places too entortille - and the effort of my scant remaining years is to make the places fewer.[27]

And in a letter to W.D. Howells he admitted that the subject of The Sacred Fount was grossly overworked: 'given the tenuity of the idea, the large quantity of treatment hadn't been aimed at'.[28]

The similarities between the narrator and James examined above suggest further that, as the novel progressed, James lost control of the ironic frame he had initially cast around the protagonist and finished, as P.M. Weinstein proposes, by dramatizing the liabilities in his calling as a novelist.[29] Weinstein cautions against identifying the narrator with James but in the central sections it is extremely difficult to decide where one stops and the other begins. It is to an extent self-parody, but there is little internal evidence to demonstrate that the parody is conscious.

The narrator becomes as self-absorbed as Miles Coverdale, the narrator in Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance with this difference: Coverdale becomes more and more anxious about the morality of observing others:-

> It is not, I apprehend, a healthy kind of mental occupation, to devote ourselves too exclusively to the study of men and women. If the person under examination be one's self, the result is pretty certain to be diseased action of the heart, almost before we can snatch a second glance.[30]

Coverdale's great fear is morbidity. James's narrator, on the other hand, glances at this possibility only to dismiss it. His introspection grows out of his narcissistic fascination with the workings of his mind, although he makes as big a display of scruple as does Coverdale. The two novels are

similar in that both authors become interested in the status and procedure of their narrators as observers.[31] In his study of Hawthorne James showed a predictable sympathy for Coverdale and described him as 'a picture of the contemplative, analytical nature, nursing its fancies'.[32] He makes no mention of his mannerisms or scruples, but it is the latter as much as his contemplative nature which links him with the narrator of The Sacred Fount.

It now remains to consider the concluding scenes of the novel and to examine their bearing on those critical approaches which deny that the narrator is self-deluded.

(iii)

The theory of the sacred fount is inherently melodramatic because of the narrator's exaggerated sense of social surface. Society, from his viewpoint, is in collusion to preserve unruffled manners whereas below the surface characters' vital energies are being drained by a form of vampirism (Dracula had appeared as recently as 1897). The main subject of this melodrama is May Server who figures to the narrator as a lonely tragic heroine. He describes her plight in violent sensational language grotesquely at odds with his usual analytical stance:

> I saw as I had never seen before what consuming passion can make of the marked mortal on whom, with fixed beak and claws, it has settled as on a prey. She reminded me of a sponge wrung dry with fine pores agape. Voided and scraped of everything, her shell was merely crushable. (p.135)

May is presented as a walking corpse and her facial expressions freeze, in the

narrator's description, into death-grins. Similarly, in an even more grotesque way, 'poor Briss' (the other victim) seems to age with bewildering speed during the novel.

In In the Cage the telegraphist's romantic melodrama can be explained as compensation for her hum-drum existence. In 'The Turn of the Screw' we can explain the governess's version of events partly in terms of her thirst for experience. But in The Sacred Fount we see the effect without any real motivation. And the effect is absurd because the notion of vampirism is too much at odds with the nature of Newmarch society.[33]

The concluding scenes of the novel bring the narrator back to earth with a rude jolt. His conversation with Obert shows that the latter has been watching the narrator and suggests that he is a victim, not of vampirism but of delusion. There are even hints in an early conversation with Mrs. Brissenden that he is participating in the fount process without realizing it. He tells her '"I feel drained - I feel dry!"' (p.80); which ironically predicts her victory over him the the concluding scene. During that confrontation she tells him roundly that he is 'crazy'. She brings to the surface his unjustified assumption that change in one character must be caused by another and ironically throws his scruples back at him by explaining that she has to worry about his effect on others. Even more important she brings his speculations back to a normal level of experience by stating that Long and Lady John are simply lovers. In one fell swoop she tramples roughshod over his symmetrical pattern and gives a common-sense explanation of the various manoeuverings in which the guests have been engaged. They could simply have been forming different liaisons.

When Mrs. Humphry Ward asked James about this ending he made his most extended comment on the novel to her:

> Mrs. Server is not 'made happy' at the end - what in the world has put it into your head? As I give but the phantasmagoric, I have, for clearness, to make it evidential, and the Ford Obert evidence

> all bears (indirectly) upon Brissenden, supplies the motive for Mrs. B.'s terror and her re-nailing down of the coffin. I had to testify to Mrs. S.'s sense of a common fate with B. and the only way I could do so was by making O. see her as temporarily pacified. I had to give a meaning to the vision of Gilbert L. out on the terrace in the darkness, and the appearance of a sensible detachment on her part was my imposed way of giving it. Mrs. S. is back in the coffin at the end, by the same stroke by which Briss is - Mrs. B.'s last interview with the narrator being all an ironic exposure of her own false plausibility, of course.[34]

This statement makes no mention at all of the narrator's credibility and astonishingly it suggests that James intended the sacred fount theory to be accepted. Mrs. Brissenden's words at the end do not demonstrate a 'false plausibility' but articulate the reader's own impatience with the narrator's theorising. It is at this point that he compares himself to Ludwig II of Bavaria, the monomaniac king who ordered private performances of Wagner in his palace. The suggestion of madness coincides too strongly with Mrs. Brissenden's accusation to be dismissed. Furthermore James's description of the novel implies that any self-parody was unconscious on his part.

Despite this ending and despite the confusion and freakishness of the central chapters, several critics have persisted in attributing more weight to the novel than it can bear. Leon Edel argues that its theme of vampirism is serious because it is treated seriously in other novels such as The Wings of the Dove, but says little about the method of treatment.[35] Dorothea Krook and J.C. Reaney give the subject a philosophical weight by suggesting that the novel deals with the nature of understanding.[36] Edward Sackville-West admits that the narrator is perhaps 'nosy' but accepts the evil he finds.[37] And Sidney Finkelstein denies that the narrator is subjective or even that he makes any judgement at all.[38] More recently A.W. Bellringer has maintained that James achieved objectivity in the narrative and that the narrator is neither unreliable nor ambiguous.[39]

The inadequacy of these approaches stems partly from their refusal to recognize that the framing scenes at the beginning and end of the novel imply that the narrator is to some degree self-deluded. He has many of the typical

characteristics of James's unreliable narrators: he is oblivious to his effect on others, engrossed in his own purpose, arrogant and patronizing. The hints that this is so come out in other characters' comments and in the style and procedure of his narration. His unreliability is further confirmed by the dismissive ending. The critics surveyed above gloss over the contradictions within the narrator's method and the clear evidence of his false pride.

What prevents a definite conclusion that the narrator is the ironic victim, is the fact that in the central sections his idiom blurs into James's own and his method overlaps with James's own practice. Furthermore, despite the suggestions that the narrator is deluded, his activities are presented at inordinate length. Without some base of character, however slender (as in 'The Turn of the Screw' or In the Cage), his quest becomes grotesquely and tediously abstract. If his style is virtually his only defining characteristic, and if it approaches James's own, then James is indeed at times parodying himself.

The novel's ending leads one to suppose that James wanted to bring back the narrator under dramatic control. But the very dismissiveness of the ending suggests further that James had lost faith (and perhaps patience) in the novel. His comments about The Sacred Fount in his letters bear this out. He describes it as a 'mere tormenting trifle' and a 'small fantasticality' (to Mrs. Ward); as 'chaff in the mouth' (to W.D. Howells); and as a 'profitless labyrinth' (to the Duchess of Sutherland).[40] In the letters to Howells and Mrs. Ward he explains that he wanted to abandon the book but couldn't for financial reasons and because he had a temperamental aversion to leaving any work unfinished. It represents a purging of the worst tendencies in his works from the late 1890's prior to embarking on The Wings of the Dove.

Conclusion

In the period of James's fiction from 1896 to 1901 we see a reduction in the narrator's activities. Description, comment, background information are only supplied where they are essential and directly relevant to the novels' situation. But even in The Awkward Age James still retains, on a much smaller scale, most of the traditional prerogatives of a narrator whereby he can enter characters' minds, summarize the action, etc.

Not only is the narrator's role reduced, but it is also changed. In The Portrait of a Lady he described himself as 'our heroine's biographer', but this editorial or quasi-historical stance was rejected for good after James's experiments in the theatre.[1] After 1895 he no longer produces fiction dealing with public issues like political unrest (The Princess Casamassima) or the national importance of a theatre (The Tragic Muse). The novels of the late 1890's are built on situations and create contexts within which the narrator purports to be an especially alert observer. He interprets appearances by offering hypotheses which the reader himself could draw, providing he has sufficient moral and social intelligence to do so. However the narrator, especially the impersonal narrator, carries a tone of authority which reduces the speculative dimension of his comments, especially as the latter are usually confirmed by subsequent events within the novels. The sources of this authority are various. He displays an ironic poise and a social awareness which imply a breadth of experience beyond that of the average reader; and he shows a hospitality towards the values of honesty, idealism and loyalty which has virtually a polemical force within the milieus of novels such as The Awkward Age and What Maisie Knew.

The fact that few categorical interpretations are offered puts a heavy burden on the reader since he cannot just respond emotionally to the protagonist's experiences. He must also balance varying possibilities against each other in order to understand the narrative. The references to a hypothetical observer, particularly obtrusive in The Other House and The Awkward Age, form

part of a prolonged effort on James's part to put the reader into the narrator's position. This in effect suggests that the narrator is not unique in his insights and this is further borne out by the fact that in several of the novels he divides his interpreting role with the characters within the fiction.

Characters also tend to embody certain contrasting qualities. On the one hand we find irony, social awareness and good taste focused in such characters as Mrs. Gereth, Sir Claude and Mrs. Brookenham. On the other honesty, simplicity and loyalty are embodied in Fleda Vetch, Maisie or Mr. Longdon. It constantly seems as if it is only the narrator who can contain these different areas of value.

Throughout the late 1890's James displays an increasing fascination with analysis which is the predictable result of his interpretative method. At times analysis can be carried to such lengths that it begins to damage the realism of the characters. One of the most blatant examples of this tendency comes in Chapter 20 of What Maisie Knew where James temporarily loses a sense of proportion as to how much Maisie herself can understand. In the first-person fiction of this period and in In the Cage (which lies between first- and third-person narration), the protagonists also demonstrate an interest in considering alternative interpretations of events. This results rather paradoxically in their showing an intermittent critical awareness of themselves while at the same time they reveal themselves unconsciously in their narratives. The danger here is that at times they come to sound like James himself and if firm dramatic control is not exercised within the fiction they actually begin to blur into him. This is precisely what happens in The Sacred Fount where the narrator is defined exclusively through his styles and procedures. As the latter converge on James's own methods the narrator loses his identity as a character.

In The Spoils particularly, but throughout the whole period, James makes increasing use of 'free indirect speech' whereby a character's thoughts, feelings, etc. are superimposed on the narrator's rhetoric. The fact that narration still takes place in the third-person shows that the narrator retains

the ultimate authority in recounting events. It means also that it can become very difficult to locate where the narrator stops and the character begins, since the one shades into the other. This further suggests that critical terminology such as 'intrusion' or 'violation' is far too crude to describe the new relation of narrator to character. In free indirect speech comment becomes a matter of nuance and syntactical inflection; and attention to such stylistic details is impossible if we only discuss the novels in terms of 'act' and 'scene'. The dramatic analogy can be a positive hindrance here.

Seymour Chatman has argued that James's later style in general moves away from the dramatic:

> ...the style moves away from, not toward, drama. For acts become nominalized, and their predicate is the copula, the verb form for exposition, for a listing of particulars and propositions. Instead of actors performing on a stage, there are increasing numbers of statements of the existence of things.[2]

This is another consequence of James's interest in analysis. His later style becomes dense with hypotheses, as already noted, hypostatized perceptions and scrutiny of the results of events rather than the events themselves.

There is however the danger of overlap once again in the method of free indirect speech. If the narrator stands so close to a leading character, the latter risks losing his autonomy. And Leo Bersani has argued very cogently that in The Wings of the Dove characters' points of view are gradually assimilated into the narrator's. This is consciously not an evaluative argument but Bersani points out that the method's consequence for the characters is that they tend to become projections of moral alternatives.[3] This suggests in turn that they are rhetorically dominated by the narrator. As characters lose individual idioms they all begin to sound like James himself. So what the method might gain in intimacy or detail, it risks losing in autonomy.

There are possible external reasons for this development. One could be, as A.R. Gard suggests, the cumulative effect of hostile reviews on James which made him turn for appreciation to a small circle of friends. Gard summarizes the period in James's career immediately following the publication of The Spoils as follows:

> After years of indifference the balance of reviews, at least superficially, swung in his favour just at the moment when his style was becoming more and more difficult, more and more the proper possession of his specialized admirers.[4]

He goes on to say that this swing came too late and was too short-lived to have any real effect on James. Accordingly his growing use of an idiom which exacted more and more from his readers could have been the result of James turning towards a select circle of friends and associates as the only kind of appreciative audience he could expect. We may add also the failure of 'Guy Domville' in 1895 which, Leon Edel argues, inflicted a deep and lasting wound on James.[5] Also his withdrawal from the London scene to take up residence at Lamb House must have been a third factor helping to explain the growing inwardness of his fiction during this period.

In so far as the narrator's scope was limited in this period, James has moved some considerable distance away from Victorian omniscience. But before we pronounce him a precursor of modernism it is as well to bear in mind that the difference between his practice and traditional omniscience is only one of degree and that the latter's prerogatives are never abandoned. The Awkward Age demonstrates this quite clearly. During his survey of contemporary fiction in 1914 James particularly praised Conrad for his use of Marlow, a device which helped to create the 'atmosphere of authenticity'. And yet Conrad's use of a dramatized narrator (or 'reciter' as James calls him) didn't rule out omniscience. On the contrary:

> ...the omniscience, remaining indeed nameless, though constantly active, which sets Marlow's omniscience in motion from the very first page, insisting on a reciprocity with it throughout, this original omniscience invites consideration of itself only in a degree less than that in which Marlow's own invites it.[6]

James had reservations about Marlow's omniscience because it made him appear too obviously a delegate of Conrad himself.

His comments in this article are focused mainly on Chance, and Ian Watt has summarized his criticisms as follows:

> James's main objection to the narrative method of Chance is that it compromises the reader's sense of the reality of the events by drawing attention to the narrators rather than to the narrative.[7]

This is true to a certain extent. But James also had doubts about Marlow because his knowledge seemed too broad. In his own fiction of this period (1896-1901) he is scrupulous about showing the main basis of his own narrators' knowledge. This is why he continually refers interpretative comment to the appearances of situations or characters. Also James implicitly agreed with Conrad that authenticity was created in ways other than laborious documentation. The narrator for both writers played an important part in achieving this effect.

Throughout James's fiction of the late 1890's the narrator continued to exert a strong moral presence although his scope had been reduced. The amount of description supplied in these novels was reduced to a minimum but the description which remained was strongly evaluative. In The Spoils and The Awkward Age the narrator describes the main locations in a way which combines topographical contrast with a moral assessment of the characters who inhabit those settings. Similarly in What Maisie Knew and The Awkward Age the narrator satirizes minor characters through a method of visual caricature. In all these cases the narrator goes far beyond interpreting appearances. He places the characters in a moral hierarchy and draws on all his resources of wit and parody in order to persuade the reader to adopt his perspective.

Since this persuasion depends upon such traditional rhetorical resources as metaphor and under-statement, the procedure once again cannot be explained by reference to the dramatic analogy. If there is no narrator admitted, then plainly there cannot be any verbal humour generated by his voice. And it is this humour, whether verbal or situational, which James most consistently neglected in his prefaces. Through the narrator's ironies James could express his indignation at contemporary social tendencies. So he exposes the mercenary nature of the society surrounding Maisie and the exaggerated and hypocritical attention to social manner which characterizes Mrs. Brookenham's set. The metaphorical language of the fiction does not always have such a serious purpose, however. It might be lightly comical as in The Spoils or grotesque as in The Sacred Fount where the figurative references to works of art look forward to the ornate and Wagnerian metaphors of The Golden Bowl. In most cases the

narrator's humour is closely related to appearances, if only as a point of departure.

In this period the narrator demonstrates a concern for his protagonists which usually contrasts markedly with their treatment at the hands of the other characters. So he allows Fleda Vetch more freedom than does Mrs. Gereth and he demonstrates more care for Maisie and Nanda than their parents ever show. This solicitude emerges not through explicit statements of compassion, but through the cumulative effect of the narrator's procedures. For instance, in the case of Maisie, he allows her to grow by granting her more freedom and treating her in a more disinterested way than any of the other characters. By so doing he practises the values which are implied as alternatives to Maisie's society. A considerable intimacy is generated by the narrator's concern for many of the protagonists and this is underlined by the fact that James retained such phrases as 'our heroine' within the narrative, even when it is rather ironic as in the case of In the Cage. Indeed Louis Rubin has pointed out that in a work as late as The Ambassadors James uses the expression 'our friend' to suggest a uniquely close relationship between Strether and the narrator.[8] Such intimacy is further reinforced by James's use of free indirect speech since this is a formal privilege only extended to some of the protagonists of this period. If at times the free indirect speech appears to compromise a character's autonomy that is largely a rhetorical effect, and one which should be offset by the broader moral effects discussed above.

One last theme to emerge in this period is that James's narrators make recurring use of melodrama either to demonstrate their own or the protagonist's desire for romance (The Spoils, In the Cage) or sense of violent forces operating beneath the level of social life (The Other House, 'The Turn of the Screw', The Sacred Fount). Ronald Wallace has argued that James evolved what he calls a 'parodicomic form' to negotiate his sense that the forms of romance no longer harmonized with reality.[9] In his discussion 'paradicomic' runs the risk of becoming a catch-all term but his diagnosis of James's attitude to reality in this period is directly relevant to the notion of melodrama. When the latter

is framed dramatically within a character it can create humour by contrast with the way things really happen. Such is the interplay between the narrator's voice and the telegraphist's romantic yearnings in In the Cage.

However at other times James does not strike a satisfactory balance and the narrator's language splits into two disparate halves - a social ironic voice and one expressing the emotional intensities of passion or stereotyped romance. This happens in The Other House and (briefly) in The Spoils. It was not until The Golden Bowl and The Wings of the Dove that James achieved a formally balanced presentation of melodramatic forces acting below social intercourse. In these cases the melodrama is not imported through ghosts or theories of vampirism, but through characters' heightened sense of horror at the gap between their associates' actions and stated sentiments.

Closely linked with melodrama, James also dramatizes his protagonists' self-delusion in terms of novelistic privilege. What the telegraphist, the governess and the narrator of The Sacred Fount all have in common is that they assume the prerogatives of a creative artist in their attitudes to other characters. Clearly these assumptions bring them into ironic contrast with James himself or his persona, if the novel uses an impersonal narrator. But there is a danger of James depicting certain weaknesses through recourse to one paradigm which discounts psychological variation. The Sacred Fount marks a predictable culmination to this practice since the narrator's hubristic depiction of the other characters at Newmarch overlaps so much with James's own method that his dramatization becomes irretrievably blurred.

1896-1901 has rightly been called a period of experimentation in James's career. The fiction of these years shows an unnevenness of texture caused partly no doubt by the fact that the novels were all planned originally as short stories. In these works James was trying out new fictional methods which of course varied the role which the narrator was to have in them. In every case the narrator played an important and integral part in the moral and psychological effect of these works. His limited role places James's practice at a transitional point between Victorian omniscience on the one hand and

naturalistic objectivity on the other.

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Note

The following conventions have been used in this bibliography. For the sake of clarity it has been subdivided into appropriate sections containing manuscript collections consulted, primary materials, etc. First editions of the primary texts have been used. Wherever works of fiction by other writers have been used the edition has been specified. Where reprints of secondary James texts have superseded the original printings to become the standard editions these have been cited. The bibliographies of criticism on the main primary texts are as exhaustive as possible and are given in their entirety as having a bibliographical value in their own right.

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